

It's time to accelerate

Belarus returns to negotiating process on joining World Trade Organization



Minsk's Titan trade centre already oriented towards international trade standards

By Yulia Ivieva

“We hope that our joint work with the UNDP and its support will help accelerate Belarus’ ability to join the WTO, becoming a fully-fledged member of this international trade system,” noted Alexander Gurianov, Belarus’ Deputy Foreign Minister, speaking at an international round table discussion dedicated to Belarus’ joining of the WTO.

Initially, Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan were planning to join the WTO together as a Customs Union. However, each state has its own degree of readiness. For example, Russia can become a member this year while our country has far to go, with trade contracts signed with ten countries.

Negotiations are underway with 12 states and any of the 153 WTO member countries can announce its interest in bilateral relations. Of course, it’s logical that if one of our trio enters the WTO, the others should also join.

On one hand, joining this organisation would further liberalise trade relations. However, WTO membership isn’t a goal in itself. Some states have received a ‘pass’ within 24 hours, yet their national interests have been sacrificed, bringing negative results. It’s vital for Belarus to join under its own terms.

How will this be co-ordinated with the Customs Union? The Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Scientific-Industrial Association, analyst Georgy Grits, notes

that Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan have come to an agreement regarding all commodity positions. “Each state is holding its own negotiations, setting common conditions; accordingly our decision to enter separately is correct. One drop wears away a stone while three drops are much more efficient. Our three presidents have clearly outlined that the Single Economic Space will be based on WTO principles. This means that if one country, such as Russia, joins the organisation earlier than the other two, it won’t affect our work within the Single Economic Space.”

He is confident that the WTO needs reforming and notes that its founder — the EU — is now turning away from WTO principles. Mr.

Grits explains, “Relations between the EU and Russia and the EU and Ukraine are being initiated with trade barriers applied: tariffs and quotas. This is because the world economy cannot follow one set of rules, even though it established them itself. Leading countries are becoming uncompetitive and China’s joining of the WTO has led to bankruptcy for thousands of light industry enterprises in Europe. The USA and the EU are thus trying to vary rules relating to individual countries and regions.

In November, Belarus should complete its general report, enabling WTO members to learn about changes to our legislation (especially those relating to foreign trade). The negotiation process will then continue.

Eurasian Union: Nazarbayev’s opinion

By Igor Korolev

The discussion on the possible creation and development of the Eurasian Union continues. Following Vladimir Putin and Alexander Lukashenko, President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev has published an article in *Izvestiya* newspaper, completing the mosaic of our three countries’ views on this global geopolitical project

The Kazakh President notes that the idea has always been based on a ‘pragmatic approach, which denies any violence of policy over economics’. He sees the Eurasian Union as an open project, requiring interaction with the EU and other associations. Moreover, he stresses, “There won’t be any ‘restoration’ or ‘reincarnation’ of the USSR. These are only the phantoms of the past and idle speculation. In this respect, our views coincide with those of the leadership of Russia, Belarus and other states.”

According to Mr. Nazarbayev, the Single Economic Space of the three countries, which is to launch in 2012, will form a steady foundation for transition to a higher level of integration: the Eurasian Economic Union. He states that, “This will be a powerful association. The aggregate gross domestic product of our three states totals almost \$2 trillion while our industrial potential is estimated at \$600bn. Our total output of agricultural produce stands at about \$112bn while our consumer markets exceed 165 million people.” The President of Kazakhstan has called the Eurasian Union a mega-project in the scope of its complexity.

Neighbouring Minsk-Arena

Time capsule laid in foundations of Slavyanka Hotel in Minsk

The contemporary 17 storey building will have 120 rooms of various levels of comfort, and will boast a business centre, a conference hall, a restaurant and bar, a dining room, a hair salon, a sauna and laundry facilities. Parking for 150 cars will be available on site.

The Slavyanka Hotel is to be part of a hotel and residential complex planned for the prestigious district beside Minsk-Arena, with other high-rise buildings built nearby in the same style, with all construction work complete by late 2013. During the solemn ceremony of laying the capsule, Nikolai Ladutko, Chairman of the Minsk City Executive Committee, noted that the site aims to raise Minsk’s facilities in readiness for the 2014 IIHF World Championship. Several similar hotel complexes are to appear across the Belarusian capital. “Minsk is actively preparing for the championship, so that it may be organised at the highest level,” stresses Mr. Ladutko.

Images always speak louder than words

By Yelena Timofeyeva

Fiodor Silenkov wins *UNiTE to End Violence against Women competition, going to UN headquarters in New York to receive his award*

“I learnt about the competition two days before the deadline for submissions. I thought over the idea, then spent the whole night drawing my design. I sent it in just two hours before closing,” notes Fiodor.

The jury spent a month viewing submissions, with social networks used to attract attention to the contest and the problem of domestic violence. Fiodor uploaded a video clip on his Internet page, where the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon calls on to knock at a door where a woman’s shouts are heard and ask the time. This simple yet efficient action can interrupt the violence, giving the woman the opportunity to run away.

Fiodor’s work, called *A Fragile Woman*, proved popular. He would rather that people drew their own conclusions on the topic, explaining, “The greatest results are seen when a person grasps the meaning independently. They then feel that they’ve arrived at the idea themselves. This gives satisfaction and is more likely to be remembered. Most advertisements, including social ads, use this principle. Initially, I had no thought of winning, as there were too many applications: 385 in all. I just liked the idea that the other entrants and I were raising awareness of domestic violence.”

Minsk’s Institute of Management, where Fiodor is a fourth year student of ‘interior design’, is very proud of his win but won’t make concessions regarding his end-of-semester exams. Fiodor’s design currently only exists in electronic form but he hopes to soon see it appear on a T-shirt.

