

Frantsisk Skorina Order awarded to departing Chinese Ambassador is a true symbol of two countries' friendship

President meets Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of China to Belarus, H.E. Mr. Lu Guicheng, whose mission in Minsk is close to completion

By Igor Slavinsky

Alexander Lukashenko invited the diplomat to his residence to say farewell, to thank him and to speak about relations between our two countries. Belarus highly appreciates China's contribution to the Belarusian economy but hopes to see even more investments. "We'd like China to come to the centre of Europe with its investments — neither hampering nor opposing anyone," the President stated. "It is already acting in this way, moving carefully."

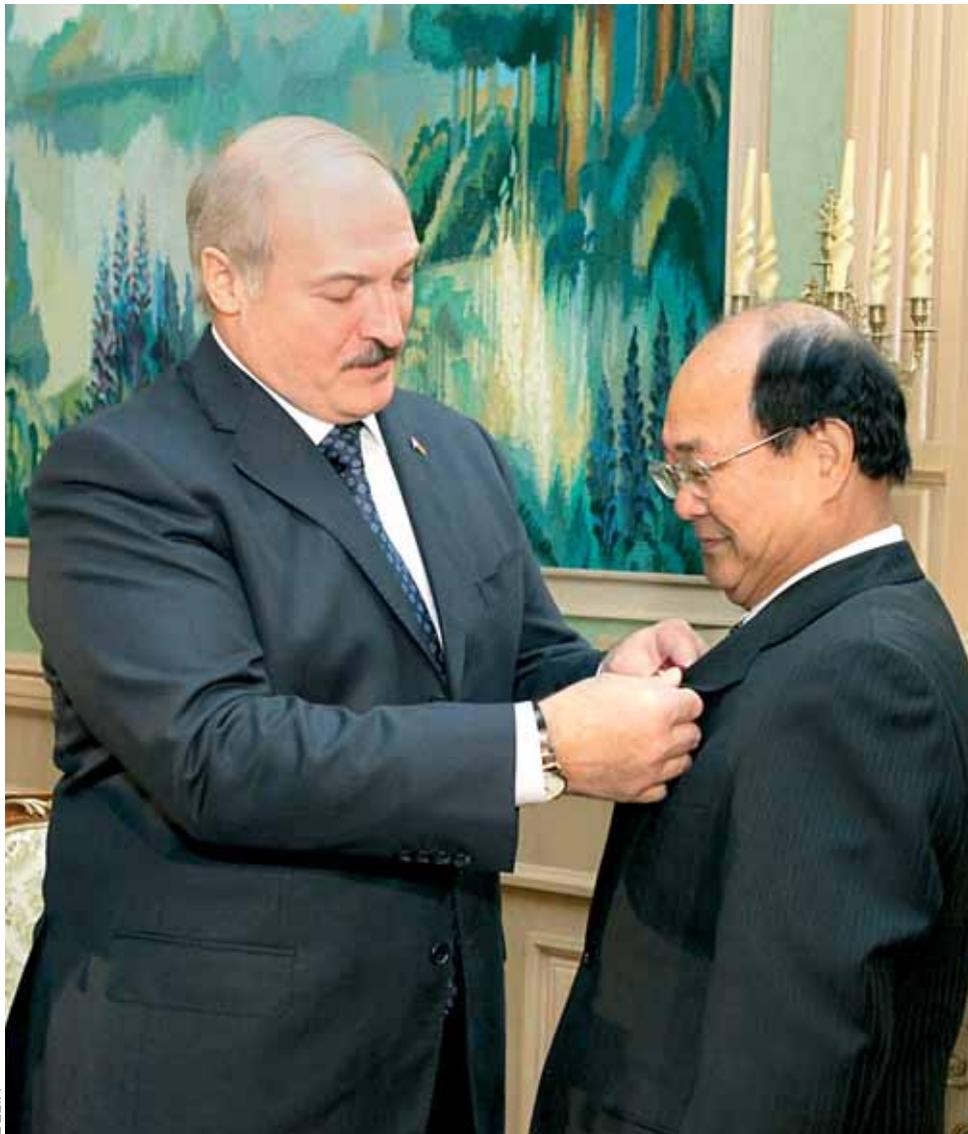
Mr. Lukashenko was sad to see Mr. Guicheng depart and noted, "It's not good when friends leave. However, we hope that friendly China will keep to its course, sending people to our country who are ready to guide politics in the same way as you and your predecessors."

During Mr. Guicheng's

recent three years of work in Minsk, Belarus and China have realised joint projects worth many millions of Dollars. Not only grand plans but real results are evident from the bilateral collaboration. These achievements include the reconstruction of heating stations in Minsk, and the construction of cement plants, the building of Lebyazhy residential district, and the electrification of sections of railway. Work is either complete or is underway.

Beijing has opened a credit line for Minsk (worth billions of Dollars), clearly indicating that it has long term interests in the Republic. The Ambassador noted the fact when voicing China's official assessment of its co-operation with Belarus.

China remains a region of stability during today's global economic transformations. Its GDP is steady



President awards Chinese Ambassador with Frantsisk Skorina Order

at 10 percent annually or more, making it a driving force worldwide — a geopolitical super-state, whose

opinion is considered vital to international decision making. Mr. Lukashenko believes that China's rise

in status levels out the balance of power, helping create a multi-polar world. Moreover, its influence is

expected to keep rising.

"We feel proud that — even before the process began — we established very close friendly relations. We also view it as a success that, two decades ago, we correctly defined the direction of our relations with China, understanding that huge prospects lay ahead," the President told Mr. Guicheng. Mr. Lukashenko is also proud that 'the Chinese are coming to Belarus' — meaning their investments. However, he immediately added that Minsk is expecting 'even more'.

Mr. Guicheng stressed that, during his three years at the embassy in Minsk, Belarus and China have significantly advanced in almost every avenue of bilateral co-operation. He agreed that the potential is greater, with much more to be done. This will be the job of the new ambassador sent by Beijing to Minsk.

During their parting meeting, Mr. Lukashenko bestowed the leaving Chinese Ambassador with the Frantsisk Skorina Order. Foreigners are rarely honoured with such significant state awards. As Mr. Guicheng said, 'this is a true symbol of friendship between China and Belarus'.

Good opportunities arise for neighbours to meet more often

Governmental agreement between Belarus and Latvia enters into force, simplifying trips for residents of border areas

The ambassadors of our two countries announced the agreement recently, after exchanging official notifications in Vitebsk. From next year, over 250,000 Latvians and Belarusians will be able to cross the border without the usual visa requirements.

A third of all families in Belarusian Braslav, located 45km from Daugavpils, have relatives in Latvia. In Soviet times, young residents of the district centre would also study at institutes in the Latvian town. It was also more convenient to find a job there than in Minsk or Vitebsk, as the route to Daugavpils is five times shorter. After the col-



Ambassadors explain idea of the agreement

lapse of the USSR, some families remained in Latvia, leaving loved ones divided by the border. Nadezhda Yurkevich, a teacher at the Braslav gymnasium, visits Daugavpils monthly to see her 60 year old father. She receives a visa free of charge for the purpose, but has to visit the Latvian Consulate in Vitebsk twice, travelling

over a thousand kilometres.

"As a child, I spent each summer with my aunt in a remote village near Daugavpils," recalls Svetlana Matskevich, a colleague of Nadezhda. "We spent whole days with my cousins by the river. However, after Belarus and Latvia became sovereign states, we've met only two times. We still want to

see each other often and hope that the agreement entering into force will promote this."

"The agreement aims to benefit people," notes the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Belarus to Latvia, H.E. Mr. Alexander Gerasimenko. "Just one visit to the Consulate is enough to receive permission, costing 20 Euros. Pensioners, those with disabilities and children under 18 receive it free of charge."

Belarusian diplomats are working on similar agreements with Lithuania and Poland. According to Alexander Ostrovsky, the Head of the Foreign Ministry's Chief Consular Department, Warsaw has taken recent steps to hinder work in this direction. However, Vilnius is keen to move forward.

NEW DIMENSION

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