



Meeting to discuss foreign policy issues tackles pragmatic building of mutual relations with countries around the globe

Mechanism of mutual relations follows clear logic

Presidential Residence hosts detailed talks on foreign policy

By Kirill Dmitriev

Recent talks continue on from reports made by regional heads regarding domestic policy. Alexander Lukashenko reminded those present that parliamentary elections lie ahead and, on the eve of this significant event, state officials should not relax, as it will be a test before the nation. Moreover, our Western neighbours are showing interest, planning to assess the elections by their own criteria.

The President describes the task, saying, "We should pass this exam — the parliamentary elections — worthily. They will be an indicator of the present authority's rating."

On beginning the session, Mr. Lukashenko shortly analysed the state of our foreign policy in various directions. He is convinced that the country's progress in the eastern direction is pleasing: Russia, Kazakhstan and China are the major players. "We

observe quite positive trends there. Certainly, we should not relax, rather enhancing our capabilities," concluded Mr. Lukashenko.

Belarus is actively developing liaisons with the Latin American, African, Asian and Arab states, while relations with its southern neighbour Ukraine are being built in a business-like manner. "What's the difference between the West and the South in this respect? If we have problems here, we sit down and negotiate. We try to resolve them and reach an agreement via normal dialogue. The same cannot be said about the West..." the President added.

Really, it is quite odd that Belarus can build trustworthy and mutually beneficial relations with the whole world, with the exception of the West. The President explained, "Belarus is not the reason. The reason is pressure and blackmail from Western European countries. Certainly, we cannot but respond to

Western states' policy against us. Moreover, we shouldn't respond calmly to sanctions imposed on our people and enterprises. Of course, we shouldn't be rash; our reaction should be appropriate rather than excessive. It should not harm our economy or our relations with normal Europeans. Europe is diverse, filled with various people — including public officials and whole countries."

He continued, "We understand that some countries, let's say Lithuania and Latvia, would be unhappy to see us leave their markets. However, we also understand that they are under huge pressure. We understand this perfectly well but, nevertheless, should work vigorously, without hawkish intentions. Europeans should know that we are not against normal relations with them but pressure and blackmail are out of the question."

The President thoroughly shared his views on those issues upon which the West

most often reproaches Belarus. There has been much talk about the return of European ambassadors, with speculation that Mr. Lukashenko won't allow them to re-enter the country. "Openly, I've never considered this problem from that angle. We did not expel the European ambassadors from here. It was their own choice to go and they left, making a certain statement. At the time, it brought damage to our Foreign Ministry (at least) and to our state (to the utmost)."

However, we reacted calmly, as they wished to leave and they left. As regards their return, we'll see how they go about it. Do we need to talk? Yes. These European states sent their ambassadors here, as a sign of recognition and respect, acknowledging the dignity of our state. As they chose to behave this way, we'll now give some consideration to the issue. With the Foreign Minister, we've agreed to consider each country and each

ambassador individually as regards their return to Belarus. However, I'd like to stress again: this has nothing to do with any desire to counteract the return of ambassadors. We'll be conducting a business-like policy regarding the return of European ambassadors to Belarus," the President said.

Another hot topic is 'political prisoners'. "I'd like to stress again: our Criminal Code has no political articles," emphasised the President, adding, "Even the opposition mass media openly state that it is useless to put pressure on Lukashenko. This is correct. However, they are wrong in saying that if I'm placed under pressure, I'll act contrarily. It's total nonsense. I act as the Constitution and laws guide me. However, in asking for anything (or demanding) people should behave more decently, especially when addressing the President."

Some analysts have hurriedly concluded that Belarus

only dares behave this way as it feels under Russian protection. The President commented, "This is too primitive. You know my policy. Processes should be diversified. We enjoy extensive relations with the East, especially with our fraternal Russia. These will continue strengthening. I've talked to the newly elected President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, and we've unambiguously agreed that our own relations and those with Kazakhstan and Ukraine (within the free trade zone regime) will expand. We'll strengthen our union, as we know how things progress on our own. We do not treat the co-operation with the EU negatively. Why should we fight? They are our God-given neighbours, so we need to build relations with them. We'll be happy to enjoy equally close relations with the West and the East. To say that we'll fight because we are under Russia's wing is just silly. It's primitivism."

EU diplomacy should be reasonable and understandable

European Union ambassadors' return to Belarus should be sensible, notes Foreign Minister Sergei Martynov after meeting with President — devoted to issues of foreign policy, BELTA informs

"If they [EU ambassadors — BelTA] return now and sanctions are again applied in April, then what kind of dialogue would you call that!?" wonders Mr. Martynov. He underlines that Belarus has always been in favour of dialogue, including regarding relations with the European Union. "Ambassadors are a key channel for dialogue in any situation: be it calm or other-

wise," he asserts.

"By the way, we didn't ask the ambassadors of EU member states to leave the country. We suggested that two specific ambassadors should leave for a week, perhaps for consultations. The response of the European Union was disproportional; it was massive. It was their initiative," he explains. "Now, the European Union is asking if they may return their ambassadors. In truth, we shrug and say we did not send you away and we are not against your return. However, it should be done sensibly, in a way which people can understand," adds Mr. Martynov.

The Minister underlines that ambassadors should work

to benefit inter-country relations. Asked whether Belarus is considering taking reciprocal measures in response to European Union sanctions, Mr. Martynov notes, "If this policy and these actions continue, we'll assert that such actions are inappropriate, thereby provoking a similar response."

Mr. Martynov believes that the pardoning of 'political prisoners' has nothing to do with relations with the EU. "This is connected with domestic law enforcement measures which were taken," he notes. "The issue has its own dynamics of development. Several people have submitted petitions for pardon and there is a procedure for dealing with such

petitions. This procedure was somewhat complicated by allegations that people have been allegedly coerced to write petitions for pardon."

The procedure to verify whether these allegations are true has now been completed. According to the Minister, it took some time, as legal procedures are always complicated and sometimes bureaucratic. "The results of these procedures reveal that there was no element of pressure," Mr. Martynov stresses. "The decision will be made on the basis of the country's domestic legal procedures that have nothing to do with the European Union, Australia, Antarctica or any other," he emphasises.

NEW DIMENSION

BELARUS

Das Wort, das Buch, Belaja Wesha

2011 BELA 61. FRANKFURTER MESSE WIRD BELARUS WIEBER AHOI BITTEN BÜCHERZEIGUNGS PRÄSENTIEREN

www.belarus-magazine.by