

Movement along bridge, which unites two nations

This year, we celebrate the 20th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Belarus and Kazakhstan: a solid period showing the mutual benefits of business friendship

By Vasily Tikhomirov

Each year, relations between our two states become more substantial and diverse, with turnover rising ever closer towards \$1bn. The scale of our co-operation has reached a new level, with Belarus eagerly sharing its latest technologies and setting up joint enterprises to maintain, repair and assemble high-tech goods in Kazakhstan: BelAZ quarry dump trucks, diesel engines and energy-intensive agricultural machinery. Dozens of projects are being jointly implemented by scientists, with universities liaising, alongside our cultural, foreign political and defence departments. All form part of our strategic level of interaction.

Alexander Lukashenko has twice visited Kazakhstan officially, and often meets the President of Kazakhstan at international summits. Nursultan Nazarbayev recently made his second official visit to Belarus, spending some time in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha with Mr. Lukashenko. The honorary guest, who has headed Kazakhstan since 1991, has seen many different countries but couldn't conceal his adoration for Belarusian nature. He also admired our well-cared-for farmlands and villages.

He noted that Belarusian-Kazakh relations are truly brotherly, tied by blood and human fate; 76 repre-

sentatives of Kazakhstan were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union while liberating our land and many died here. Meanwhile, 100,000 Belarus-born people and their descendants are involved in trade, science and culture in Kazakhstan. There is a bridge uniting our two nations.

The official part of the visit by the Kazakh leader took place at the Residence of the Belarusian President. "I'm glad you've come to see us," smiled Mr. Lukashenko, addressing his guest. "Kazakhstan is ranked third among Belarus' foreign trade partners within the CIS. I'm grateful to you for your inclusion of Belarusian produce within your state programmes, as this has enabled us to raise turnover. This is being promoted further through the newly formed Customs Union and the Single Economic Space. We have an absolutely identical approach and the SES has a great future."

"We've arrived with a desire to discuss a whole range of co-operative issues," Nursultan Nazarbayev asserted. "The dynamics of our meetings have enabled us to form a vast programme of interaction. Belarus is our strategic partner, our close friend and an ally. We pin great hopes on the Customs Union and the Single Economic Space, as they bring our countries closer. There is no closer union than that of Russia, Kaza-

khstan and Belarus within the CIS, and that's that."

Since 2009, Belarus and Kazakhstan have been implementing a programme of economic co-operation — running until 2016. It is a detailed road map indicating areas of joint work and the results are already seen. In 2011, Belarusian exports to Kazakhstan rose by almost 36 percent while, in the first three months of 2012, exports increased by almost 50 percent (compared to the same period of the previous year). Meanwhile, the heads of our two states have agreed that more potential exists. Soon, turnover may double, as we'll enjoy joint participation in various global projects.

Kazakhstan is known to be interested in selling its oil and oil products to the European region, so Mr. Lukashenko repeated that Belarus is ready to act as a foothold in this direction for Kazakhstan. Meanwhile, joint projects on Kazakh territory would allow us to enter other Central Asian markets. Belarus is also keen to explore Kazakh investment opportunities.

Mr. Nazarbayev has proposed that we activate the transit opportunities of our two countries. His country is completing construction of its section of a road from Western China to Europe, stretching 2,700km. This transport corridor will reduce travel time for international road cargo from



Ceremony of official meeting with President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev

one month or more to a mere two weeks. Within the Single Economic Space, the eastern economic border of Belarus will almost meet the eastern border of Kazakhstan and vice versa, opening yet more doors. Mr. Nazarbayev emphasises that the development of the agrarian sector is another priority for Kazakhstan, which is eager to learn from Belarusian experience regarding the meat and dairy industries. The social improvement of villages and other areas are also of interest.

Many of these issues are detailed in documents signed during the top level meeting.

Primarily, these include a joint statement by the two presidents. Moreover, agreements have been made between our agrarian ministries, the Belarusian State Concern on Oil and Chemistry and KazMunaiGAZ JSC, and between Agat — Control Systems JSC and Kazakhstan Engineering National Company. An agreement has also been signed to allocate land lots for diplomatic offices.

Much of these plans are oriented towards the Customs Union and the Single Economic Space (which should transform into the Eurasian Economic Union in

the nearest future). Mr. Lukashenko underlined that Mr. Nazarbayev is an ideologist of Eurasian integration and that our two countries have no disagreements regarding the strategy of its development — or in any other areas of international collaboration.

After their meeting, the two leaders flew to Moscow, meeting again at the CSTO jubilee session, dedicated to the 10th anniversary of this organisation — and at an informal session of the CIS Council of Heads of State. Both our countries have almost identical view points on issues of collective security.

Border guards take on new functions

State Border Committee acting to reduce queues at checkpoints

The Chairman of the State Border Committee of Belarus, Igor Rachkovsky, has told a session of the Council of Ministers Presidium that excessive concentration of control services at the border increases the time citizens and vehicles spend at checkpoints. "Border checkpoints should be places to check the presence of necessary documents instead of places to collect fees, store goods, issue certificates and

so on," he stressed, proposing to cut the number of control services at the border, while transferring their functions to the customs and border services.

The decision is guided by international experience. "As part of the Customs Union, Russia and Kazakhstan have legislated for the customs service to take over responsibility for inspection of transport — including veterinary and phytosanitary inspections. Practical realisation has been launched," Mr. Rachko-

vsky notes. The State Border Committee will require vehicle owners to take out civil liability insurance. Moreover, it was proposed to empower border service authorities to control entry of vehicles depending on their technical condition.

According to Mr. Rachkovsky, the present infrastructure cannot reduce queues at the border, which are largely governed by a dramatic rise in passenger and vehicle traffic. In view of the unfolding economic processes within

the Customs Union and the enforcement of the border traffic agreement, the Belarusian border service expects volumes of people and traffic crossing the border to rise further, particularly across the Belarusian-Lithuanian border. "The existing international checkpoints are not able to handle increasing passenger and transport flow, so the State Border Committee is keen to revise the status and working hours of existing simple checkpoints to Lithuania," he adds.

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