

Greatly interested in benefits of integration development

Recently, Vladimir Putin announced that Belarus would be visited by the heads of both houses of the Russian Parliament. In proof of his words, Valentina Matvienko, the Chair of the Federation Council of Russia's Federal Assembly, paid an official visit to Belarus.

By Kirill Dymov

Ms. Matvienko began by meeting her colleague — the Chairman of the Council of the Republic, Anatoly Rubinov (the Speaker of the Upper House). He assured her, "We believe that this visit is a landmark event marking a new stage in the development of relations between the Belarusian and Russian parliaments. They need to play a more vital, enhanced role. Sometimes, difficulties arise between states but parliaments stand back rather than helping our leaders solve these problems."

Ms. Matvienko agreed, adding, "Parliaments should play an important role in developing bilateral and integration processes." She believes they should primarily be working to provide legislation to accompany agreements reached by heads of state.

Ms. Matvienko also noted that Russia highly appreciates the results of Vladimir Putin's visit to Minsk, recalling the joint statement by the two presidents, which she believes is an entirely new page in the development of our relations. Like Mr. Putin, she stressed the special character of our relations, saying, "This is a strategic partnership which relies on shared history and Slavonic roots. Russia plans to further develop this strategic partnership. We don't have any problematic issues."

At the end of the meeting, the speakers signed an agreement on co-operation between our upper houses of parliament, which replaces a similar document which was valid for around a decade. Of course, circumstances change, as should be taken into account. In this respect, Ms. Matvienko explained, "Times are different now, with Belarus and Russia opening a new page of collaboration. Our two states have entered a whole new stage. We are strategic partners developing relations within the framework



The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, meets the Chair of the Federation Council, Valentina Matvienko

of bilateral interaction and the Union State, as well as within integration unions within the post-Soviet space. This opens up new opportunities for strengthening co-operation."

Ms. Matvienko also met Belarus' Prime Minister, Mikhail Myasnikovich, before concluding her two day visit by meeting with the President of Belarus. They began by chatting about St. Petersburg — headed by Ms. Matvienko for eight years. Mostly due to her support, Belarusian collaboration with the city over the River Neva has improved, as also noted during a recent visit by the current Governor of St. Petersburg, Georgy Poltavchenko.

Belarus continues to focus attention on co-operation with Rus-

sian regions, as the President openly admitted, commenting, "There have been times when the position of our Union (Belarus and Russia) has been very shaky but collaboration with the regions has saved our relations."

The range of Russian governors' recent visits testifies to the fact that a whole new level of liaison is born. Previously, we primarily only spoke of trade; now, closer interaction of enterprises, as well as the establishment of joint ventures and holdings, is on the agenda. The Belarusian President invited Ms. Matvienko to personally support these processes, since the Federation Council offers territorial representation, uniting Russian regions. Mr. Lukashenko told his guest, "We'd like you to join this process of co-operation between Belarus and the regions. You'll be able to help us preserve the basis for our relationships. We're ready to co-operate with you at any level, including at my level (as I was the first to propose collaboration with Russian regions). I'll co-operate with you in every way if you agree to this initiative."

Mr. Lukashenko noted that he had discussed this topic with the Russian

President and Prime Minister, "They approve so, if you take this under your control (being knowledgeable on the topic), you'd help us greatly in bringing our states closer."

The President of Belarus also highly appreciates liaisons with the Russian Federation Council, adding, "Members of the Federation Council have always supported us at every level, for which we're very grateful, as well as for your support within the international arena. Even ahead of Belarus, you've tried to protect us from attack. You're aware of the sources and the basis for the West's position towards us."

Ms. Matvienko's words about the development of co-operation echoed those of Mr. Lukashenko. She believes that our parliaments' role is of great importance, since they provide legislation to guide our integration. She is convinced, "We need to further reinforce co-operation, alongside economic interaction."

There is evident background for this. Ms. Matvienko noted that the Federation Council delegation arrived in Minsk almost immediately after the landmark visit of Vladimir Putin. "The fact that the President of Russia

made his first visit here says a great deal. Belarus has been and continues to be our strategic partner, ally and brotherly nation."

The Eurasian Economic Union is another central topic, as Ms. Matvienko told journalists after the meeting. She believes that the Union would need its own parliament, saying, "Its deputies would need to be publically elected rather than delegated, empowered with authority by the residents of member states, working fully and efficiently. This is my personal point of view. Other viewpoints also exist, so it's difficult to say which will dominate. However, I speak for direct voting, ensuring that we have not a quasi-parliament but a true parliament, elected by the population."

The 'integration of integrations' from Lisbon to Vladivostok is also under discussion. Ms. Matvienko believes that the intersection of various integration unions would support development.

After the visit, the guest consolidated her conviction that the leaders of both states enjoy a shared political will and desire to strengthen and expand ties between Russia and Belarus.

Relations enter new dimension

Foreign Ministry of Cuba hosts solemn ceremony of cancellation of Belarusian and Cuban postage stamps, released to mark 20th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our two states

The event took place during a working visit by the Belarusian delegation to Havana and included inter-ministerial

consultations. Belarus was represented by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Aleinik while the Cubans were headed by the Deputy Foreign Minister of Cuba, Dagoberto Rodríguez Barrera. Participants discussed a wide range of issues of bilateral co-operation, while co-ordinating the positions of our two states at international forums. Opinions were also shared regarding developmental trends within the post-Soviet

space and in Latin America. Mr. Aleinik and the Cuban Foreign Minister, Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, discussed key aspects of Belarusian-Cuban political dialogue, while agreeing future goals. Meanwhile, the Belarusian delegation met Cuban partners from the ministries of Industry, Construction, Energy and Mining, and well as from foreign trade companies: Technoimport, Transimport, Khimimport and EIGT.

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