

'We welcome such changes

Many foreign journalists desire the opportunity to meet and interview the President of Belarus.

Representatives of various media were guests of Mr. Lukashenko's official residence in Minsk's 38 Karl Marx Street: from authoritative editions, agencies and TV channels. Curiously, journalists often ask similar questions, as if trying to personally ensure that they've correctly understood the publications of their predecessors. The interview with Reuters Agency included some familiar questions which the President had already answered in dialogues with other reporters. However, journalists' interest never wavers; each time, they rediscover our country and its leader for themselves.

Reuters Bureau Chief for Russia and the CIS, Tim Heritage, was joined by the chief correspondent for Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, Richard Balmforth, interviewing Mr. Lukashenko for over 90 minutes. Tackling various topics, they showed greatest interest in Belarus' socio-economic development, asking about the situation on the currency market, the influence of the global crisis on the Belarusian economy and how the consequences may be overcome. Privatisation and modernisation were also high on the agenda.

They were also keen to hear about prospects for developing the Belarusian political system and democracy, as well as the President's views on international issues and rela-

tions with the EU.

These are the details of the President's answers during the interview:

Money

August and September saw enhanced demand for foreign currency. The National Bank is trying to support the national currency and the exchange rate but we've agreed that this will be done exclusively via market forces, with no excessive intervention.

During this period, we also saw our Parliamentary elections. As usual, there were enough 'friends' who saw fit to tell the electorate: "There'll be devaluation after the parliamentary elections." People acted to try and secure themselves, fearing that they'd lose something through devaluation. Of course, time has passed and people have seen that no devaluation has occurred. In October, we completely stabilised the monetary situation, with no intervention from the National Bank needed to maintain the exchange rate in October or November. Rather, it has been buying foreign currency — as it did in early 2012.

Devaluation

There's no need for this, as acknowledged even by our critics, opponents and enemies, who admit that there's currently no need to devalue the national currency in Belarus.

Global crisis

Europe is creating the major problem for us, as our



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economy relies on exporting 80 percent of its manufactures; we're dependant on external markets. If you have problems, then we do too. In Europe, customer demand has fallen, as is commonly known. We sell more to the EU than to Russia so, as soon as you fall into difficulties and stop ordering from us, it's immediately reflected in our economy. Of course, we'd like Europe to escape such disturbances.

Servicing external debt

With a GDP of up to \$60bn and a budget of up to \$20bn (from all sources), our debt of \$2.5bn isn't a big problem. Where will we find

the money? We can earn it! Moreover, we have an agreement that, if we are short by \$1bn or so, we can have another loan. We can agree on grace periods. We've already agreed many areas with our creditors.

Privatisation

We shouldn't earn a living by selling our national treasures. Obviously, everyone wants to buy the profitable elements of our state property and we're not against selling. However, I'm categorically against selling just to 'eat' or pay off debt.

I've noted many times that any enterprise can be privatised in Belarus, even the most valuable. Do you know

which of our enterprises is most valuable? One example is Belaruskali. We're ready to privatise even this enterprise if someone will pay a fair price of \$30-32bn. I was originally criticised for this valuation but just one month ago Bloomberg (the world's leading agency of professional financial information) estimated it to be worth \$30-32bn. Everyone has admitted that I was right. Using this price, people can buy a particular number of shares. It's a joint stock company and we'll sell it but not at a price cheaper than that announced.

Why are we insisting that the sale price can't be cheaper? Because we're not in a hurry to sell... It's a very profitable

enterprise paying significant taxes and dividends into the state budget; last year, it earned more than \$3bn. Why should we be in a hurry to sell? If someone is genuinely interested, we'll sit down and discuss terms. We're currently negotiating with five companies — from China, India, two from Europe and an Arab enterprise.

Selling MTS state package

It's the same story... Today, the controlling stock of shares costs slightly over \$1bn: we have confirmation. If you don't want to pay this amount or can't afford \$1bn, we'll wait. Its profitability is high, so there's no hurry. If we lack a buyer, we'll just continue working.

Dialogue with IMF

We're fulfilling all our obligations with the International Monetary Fund, as no other state is doing. They've never reproached us and simply cannot.

If the IMF is purely a financial and economic organisation, we'll be able to agree but if they 'play politics' we'll be long negotiating. I think that, as soon as the IMF rids itself of political clichés and the political criteria in its approach towards Belarus and our economy, we'll agree within 24 hours.

Oil

We've agreed all positions with the Russian Federation. However, we are only currently being given 4-5m tonnes of oil when we'd

Foreign partners highly appreciate strife for dialogue

Representative of Belarus elected Chair of Dialogue Eurasia Platform International Organisation

The First Pro-rector of the Belarusian State Academy of Arts, Professor Svetlana Vinokurova, has been elected to the position of Chair of the Dialogue Eurasia Platform, by the 10th General Assembly, in Antalya, Turkey.

"The election of a representative from Belarus to such a high position by this prestigious international organisation is recognition of our country's achievements in promoting interreligious and international co-operation," asserts



Ms. Vinokurova. She notes that foreign partners truly appreciate the peace and tranquility, which exists in Belarus between

CHAIR OF DIALOGUE EURASIA PLATFORM INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION, SVETLANA VINOKUROVA: 'The election of a representative from Belarus to such a high position by this prestigious international organisation is recognition of our country's achievements in promoting interreligious and international co-operation'

various nationalities and faiths. Ms. Vinokurova believes that the Dialogue Eurasia Platform has seen progress in Belarus in



recent years. She explains, "The central values of the organisation are rationality, dialogue and culture."

Ms. Vinokurova heads the National Committee of the Dialogue Eurasia Platform in Belarus, which was created in 2009. The international organisation was founded in 1998, comprising representatives of 14 countries with the aim of promoting peaceful co-existence by various cultures, peoples and religions. Previously, the post of chairman was occupied by such influential figures as Chingiz Aitmatov (Kyrgyzstan), Harun Tokak (Turkey) and Rostislav Rybakov (Russia).

Never leaving citizens in any kind of trouble

The Foreign Ministry continues to monitor the fate of four Belarusian citizens imprisoned in Libya on the charge of co-operation with Muammar Gaddafi's regime

The Chief of the Asia and Africa Department, Igor Leshchenya, has been discussing the matter with the new Chargé d'Affaires ad Interim of Libya to Belarus, Abubaker Atawil, who recently arrived.

A group of citizens from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine were working legally, by contract, on a construction site this summer when they were arrested and sentenced to prison for ten years. Official Minsk denies that they are guilty of any misdemeanour.

Since their sentencing, the

men have endured unpleasant conditions, being confined to their cells in darkness for the past month, with no access to phone calls. A wall has been built in front of their windows. Our consulate has maintained constant contact and done all in its power to ease their conditions, bringing medication and food. Ukrainian human rights defender Stanislav Selivanov notes that, a week ago, an official address was sent to Libya's Military Prosecutor and, if no response is received, Mr. Selivanov plans to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.

Our consulate is unable to change the conditions of incarceration, since no treaties on such co-operation exist between Belarus and Libya.