

Old and new themes remain fascinating to everyone

President of Belarus meets members of Club of Editors-in-Chief of the CIS, Baltic States and Georgia



President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko meets Club of Editors-in-Chief of the CIS, Baltic States and Georgia

By Kirill Dovlatov

The conversation began on an academic note, with Mr. Lukashenko making a brief opening speech. He stressed the weighty role of the media in today's information society, the impact of the media on the process of Eurasian integration and the particular importance of professionalism, responsibility, honesty and integrity from journalists. This was followed by two short guest speeches.

No one could have foreseen that the journalistic forum would discuss matters so deeply. This was perhaps because, unlike most media conferences, this gathered editors rather than just journalists. While the latter are, without doubt, professionals, they must follow the strategies laid out by their editorial offices. This time, the National Library hosted those who determine editorial policy.

Many of the statements made by the President of Be-

larus had been heard before: his central views on domestic and foreign policy, alongside his vision for socio-economic development and our international business connections. New topics did arise however and someone even asked why the President wears a watch on his right hand. He smiled, admitting that he'd done so since childhood, when he learned to play the accordion and found it uncomfortable to feel it rubbing against the strap.

Such simple, personal answers kept the atmosphere relaxed, despite the discussion of serious issues, and the President ensured that all questions received detailed answers.

Nuances of integration

The Customs Union, the Common Economic Space and the future Eurasian Economic Union present us with a series of concessions and compromises. Of course, not only advantages but some disadvantages are inevitable.

However, the overall result is beneficial. The whole world is moving in a similar direction, so nothing is amiss. No authority is lost in forming unions. Rather, people's standard of living is improved by the country gaining better access to investment and sales markets. Citizens, governments and business organisations all have their part to play.

Belarusian model

Using traditional concepts, I'd like us to build a kind of socialism: not that seen in Soviet times, as I learned from textbooks, but that seen in France. The Socialist Party of France appeals to me... Why do I speak of this? The roots of socialism are founded in a socially oriented economy. Human labour is at its heart.

Balance of oil supplies from Russia

I think we've agreed upon 23 million tonnes. There is

only one problem, which is technical. Can such an amount be supplied via pipeline? About 22 million tonnes is possible, while another million could come by rail — although it's more costly. We'll sell this gasoline to the West, where prices are higher, so it's still profitable.

'Successor'

Some speculate that I'll only retire when Kolya is ready to take over but, truly, that's not really a possibility. Some like to speculate idly in this way but our country is more scrupulous than this. The 'fifth column' spreads such rumours, which don't warrant any contemplation. They're nonsense! I'll be dead by the time my younger son can even attempt to run for President. Of course, he's only 8 years old, so it's just talk. It will be at least another 30 years before he can truly contemplate such a move. I'd be 90! I don't plan to live that long, unless it's by the grace of God.

Nagorno-Karabakh

Is this conflict profitable to anyone? I'd say only to those wishing to 'divide and rule'. The two presidents need to sit down and resolve the issue. Political will is required to allow people to live normally. Neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan benefits from a scorched earth policy. I'm convinced that a solution can be found.

Parliamentary dimension of Eurasian integration

We may one day decide that we need this parliamentary dimension but it's not the most important thing today. We shouldn't hurry, and I retain a reserved attitude, being an ardent opponent of creating new structures. These are costly and unnecessary.

European Union

It seems to be a bulwark of democracy, being advanced in terms of human rights, but accuses us of violating such

rights. The EU destroys entire states. Why does it care about Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria or other countries? Has it improved anything there? It's simply ruined thousands of people's lives! What human rights are these?

Freight and ports

60 million tonnes of cargo have been transported through Baltic ports. How can you vote for sanctions against Belarus? We've agreed with Vladimir Putin to create rates and prepare ports in Russia. For a start, we'll transfer 20 million tonnes. Lithuania and Latvia form one third of their budget thanks to us. I don't understand why the EU is fighting with us; it's a purely practical issue. We'd like to ship our goods via Ukrainian ports, as well as through those in Lithuania, Latvia and Russia. Today, we listen to the experts and won't do anything to harm the economy.

Why not grow by a billion

Government sees opportunity to triple exports via new markets

In addition to supplying its traditional markets, the country is ever developing its trade, investment and sci-tech partnership more distantly — in China, India, Venezuela, Bangladesh, Myanmar and elsewhere. There, our domestic producers compete with global corporations but the Government and businesses are working together seamlessly to achieve ambitious goals. Accordingly, they are optimistic, as demonstrated at the Minsk International Forum for the Business Community, devoted to the 60th anniversary of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce.

"The Belarusian Government sees potential for tripling its exports

to new and non-traditional markets next year," noted the Prime Minister, Mikhail Myasnikov, opening the forum. "We can grow our export revenue by at least a billion US dollars," he emphasised. The partnership work of our Chambers of Commerce, business matchmaking sessions, joint forums and conferences is vital, since Belarusian goods need promotion. Via industrial co-operation and in creating joint ventures, we can share our technologies and expertise. "The EU and the Common Economic Space have enormous potential for partnership on principles of free trade, non-discrimination and mutual respect," noted the PM.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Makey, asserted that the Belarusian Foreign Ministry will

provide the county's Chamber of Commerce with any and all support to aid the development of foreign economic relations. Belarus' foreign institutions have already begun such work although the Russian sector requires less help, since business relations are already long established between our Chambers of Commerce and Industry, currently headed by Mikhail Myatlikov and Sergey Katyrin.

"Belarus has a good geographical position and developed infrastructure," noted Dirk Vantghem, the Director for International Co-operation at the Association of Chambers of Commerce of European Countries: Eurochamber. "Your business climate improves each year, which shows that you have a great future."

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