

# Precise steps towards Union integration



At the session of the Supreme State Council of the Belarus-Russia Union State in St. Petersburg

By Veniamin Khmelevsky

Speaking at the SSC session, Mr. Lukashenko asserted, “The dynamic development of Union State construction confirms the immutability of our course to deepen integration. This is a conscious choice, with no alternative in a global world economy.”

Mr. Lukashenko recalled that it had been over a year since the last meeting of the SSC and that this period had been filled with hard work by heads of state, parliamentarians and governments working closely, including across the regions.

At the same time, Mr. Lukashenko emphasised that today’s world necessitates that the Union project be realised sooner rather than later. “We shouldn’t disperse forces and means, but focus them on the most important directions for Belarusians and Russians, raising efficiency of Union State work in a new environment and optimising expenditure on programmes to provide maximum impact and results,” the President of Belarus stressed.

Mr. Lukashenko believes that St. Petersburg’s hosting of the SSC meeting is symbolic, since it is at the heart of inter-parliamentary co-operation within the CIS, also hosting the EurAsEC and CSTO. “For our country, St. Petersburg is not only a reliable and promising partner, but remains close to every

Belarusian’s heart. Many of our famous countrymen lived and worked here,” added the Head of State.

The meeting of the SSC of the Union State of Belarus and Russia was held in the Constantine Palace, near St. Petersburg. Of course, its French gardens remain snow-covered, spring being yet to awaken the land. The channel stretching from the palace to the Gulf of Finland is still ice-bound and sculptures in the grounds are hidden behind wooden boards and tight cloths. There isn’t yet much for curious tourists to admire but reporters remain busy, as the Congress Palace, as it is now called, is intensely active.

The complex was restored in the early 2000s, for the 300th anniversary of St. Petersburg, with a view to its further use for major international events. This time it was hosting the meeting of the Supreme State Council of the Union State of Belarus and Russia.

Work began with the two presidents meeting in a tête-à-tête format. They greeted each other warmly and Mr. Lukashenko complimented St. Petersburg’s energetic atmosphere, which is conducive to productive work. He noted the importance of the meeting, saying, “There are dozens of questions which cannot be resolved outside of the State Council.”

Vladimir Putin also noted, “I believe that this good

atmosphere will contribute to positive solutions.”

Both presidents noted the importance and effectiveness of SSC meetings, since they are attended not only by heads of state, but by governmental leaders and ministers. Simultaneous solving of questions at all levels is possible — from political to executive. Symbolically Mr. Lukashenko presented Mr. Putin with the

was held over a year ago: on November 25th, 2011. Much has been achieved since then, promoting Union State construction; our heads of states, governments and parliaments have been busy, as have business circles.

After about an hour, the presidents, prime ministers and other delegates gathered in the Marble Hall for a meeting under an expanded

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highest Belarusian award: the People’s Order of Friendship.

The presidents spoke in the Greek Hall of the Palace, while prime ministers Mikhail Myasnikov and Dmitry Medvedev held talks in the Italian Hall. The Belarusian Prime Minister noted the success of previous meetings, saying, “A lot of material has been worked upon. The situation requires political decisions, including on joint projects.”

Mr. Medvedev agreed and the pair chatted for about an hour and a half before joining their presidents.

The previous SSC meeting

format. As Chairman, Mr. Lukashenko began by noting the significance of trade and economic co-operation between our two countries over the past two years. He gave various statistics but mutual turnover between Belarus and Russia speaks for itself, having risen by almost \$16bn over the last two years, approaching a record \$44bn. Mr. Putin is hopeful that the next milestone will be \$50bn. Mr. Lukashenko stressed, “These results would hardly be possible without using our resources of integration interaction.”

Today’s world necessi-

tates the further evolution of the Union project, as Mr. Lukashenko emphasised. He noted, “We shouldn’t disperse our forces and means, but focus them purposefully on the most important areas, to improve the efficiency of our Union State activities in a new environment and to optimise expenditure from the Union State budget, supporting programmes which will give the maxim results.”

The topic of Union State efficiency acquires special meaning in the context of plans to set up the Eurasian Economic Union. Mr. Putin stressed that, over recent years of Union State construction, Russia and Belarus have accumulated unique experience regarding equal interaction and partnership.

“Co-operation within the Union State is vital to promoting integration processes across the whole CIS,” Mr. Putin asserted. During the tête-à-tête meeting, the presidents confirmed their readiness to move towards the creation of the Eurasian Union State by January 1st, 2015, as he noted.

Budgetary issues and key projects were high on the agenda, with the Supreme State Council approving the Union State budget for this year: worth almost 5bn Russian Roubles. A considerable part is to be directed towards financing 38 joint state programmes and events — in the spheres of industry, pow-

er engineering, agriculture, transport, communications, IT, construction, social facilities and fundamental research.

Speaking to media representatives, the two presidents exchanged brief phrases and smiled from time to time, appearing pleased with the results of their work. Mr. Putin stated, “The Supreme State Council session has been held in a business-like manner, as usual.”

The Russian President noted that positive decisions had been adopted regarding all issues on the agenda. However, he especially underlined agreements on the implementation of projects uniting affiliated organisations from our two states. The most promising named areas of collaboration are automobile building, the development of the Earth remote sensing system (with the control centre in Minsk) and the construction of Belarus’ nuclear power station. Mr. Lukashenko assured journalists, “I think we’ll be able to see progress in all these areas this year.”

The Belarusian President also thanked the Russians for their assistance in constructing the nuclear power station. Like a similar one in the Kaliningrad Region, it boasts a great future. He stressed, “Struggle is struggle. We’re conquering the electricity market, which is giving us definite advantages in getting rid of the energy deficit in the region. Our builders are also learning a great deal and are ahead of schedule. Russian specialists are pleased and we’ll be asking you to try and employ Belarusians at similar sites abroad.”

Here Mr. Putin nodded in agreement. Although our presidents tackled topics with different words, their shared outlook was apparent. Mr. Lukashenko also underlined that the Union State is significant as a driving force for wider post-Soviet integration. However, this is a separate topic for major discussion in May, when the leaders of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan will meet to debate the draft treaty on establishing the Eurasian Economic Union. If it is as successful as the SSC session in St. Petersburg, this trilateral integration union will have firm footings.

The summit achieved much and ended with Mr. Lukashenko giving an exclusive interview to the Russian English-speaking channel Russia Today.