

Day of strategic decisions

Post-Soviet integration progressing well as May ends

By Dmitry Kryat

Immediately after the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council session had ended in Astana, Minsk hosted the CIS Heads of Government Council, as the CIS Chair. A day of intense work began with the understanding that the talks begun in the Kazakh capital would continue. Before the session, the President of Belarus spoke to the delegation leaders not only of general CIS prospects but of the principles guiding the further development of the Customs Union and the Single Economic Space — and their evolution into the Eurasian Economic Union.

The three states of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan are evidently gaining momentum in their integration, with many documents — agreed upon in Astana — signed in Minsk to help guide the Customs Union, the Single Economic Space and the future Eurasian Economic Union [named the EEU by journalists] — to include Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan.

Before the meeting, President Lukashenko held a bilateral meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister of Turkmenistan, Annamuhmet Gochyev, noting the significant progress made in our two states' interaction. In the coming future, the two presidents plan to discuss all prospects of co-operation in detail.

Of course, bilateral relations support multi-lateral integration. Talking to the delegation leaders of the CIS Heads of Government Council, the President noted the key results of the recent Astana summit. Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan have expressed their desire to become observer members within the future Eurasian Union (to be formed in 2015) and have been invited to take part in an active dialogue. Mr. Lukashenko emphasised, "They'll be invited to all sessions. We are open to them and they'll take part in all discussions. We've guaranteed that, if they wish to join the Single Economic Space and our Economic Union, they'll pass this path without any restrictions. They'll have to join all our agreements existing by that time."

The benefits of this alliance



During the expanded format meeting of the Council of CIS Heads of Government

are clear to all. As Mr. Lukashenko noted, the Eurasian Economic Union's launch will see all tariff restrictions between member states lifted — including in the sphere of oil-and-gas. He explained, "We still have many tariff and non-tariff regulations to tackle — even within the SEC. Admittedly, Russia has taken a serious step forward in announcing that, in 12 to 18 months (no later than January 1st, 2015) it will have lifted all its tariff restrictions — including in the sphere of oil-and-gas. However, it has warned all members and invited observers that this will only be possible if we unify our economies. By 2015, when a Union treaty should have been signed, all the ideas currently on paper should be operational."

Mr. Lukashenko then added, "We've agreed that the Union would be economic while the political problems — which might hamper its development — would be solved. We shouldn't focus exclusively on economic co-operation since this is affected by

politics, diplomacy and defence. We've agreed to solve these issues gradually."

Evidently, the Customs Union, the Single Economic Space and the Eurasian Economic Union are an example of multi-lateral interaction for all former Soviet republics to follow. An advanced interstate union would be impossible were it not for the CIS. Mr. Lukashenko admitted, "Political transformation, which was painful for most post-Soviet states, involved the overcoming of financial-economic difficulties. The CIS has managed to preserve its key principles of trusting relations between nations, spiritual kinship and close cultural and trade-economic ties."

Of course, economics must remain at the heart of the CIS. "Taking into consideration the significant role of service exports in our states' economic relations, we must act promptly to facilitate the creation of our free trade zone for services," the President stressed.

The key initiatives behind Be-

larus' chairing of the CIS in 2013 were explained by Mr. Lukashenko, who noted, "We could have proposed an even more profound agenda as I know that some CIS states are interested in strengthening integration as much as ourselves. However, we have chosen ideas which can be realised..."

The CIS Heads of Government Council met at the recently launched President Hotel and Belarus' initiative on co-operation in the field of environmental protection was passed by a solid vote. In addition, education and sports related decisions were made and eleven joint projects were signed in the fields of IT, transport and medicine — alongside other documents.

On the same day, Minsk-Arena hosted the SEC Business Forum, gathering around 600 participants — including top managers of large companies, bankers and economists. They focused on practical issues regarding our three states' economic interaction, with the day ending in several important deci-

sions; memorandums were signed by Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, to enhance their co-operation with the Eurasian Economic Commission, as Ukraine's Prime Minister, Mykola Azarov, noted. "The Customs Union is our top partner. The decision — sealed with our signatures — indicates that Ukraine wishes to co-operate with the SEC as closely as possible," he asserted.

The First Deputy Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan, Dzhoormart Otorbayev, said, "This step will serve our state interests, enabling us to improve the competitiveness of our businessmen and the investment climate."

Other CIS states also appear interested in the Belarus-Russia-Kazakhstan tri-lateral union or, to be more precise, the '2+3' alliance. Later that day, prospects for the latter, as well as the results of the CIS summit and Belarusian-Russian Union State issues, were discussed by Mr. Lukashenko and Russian PM Dmitry Medvedev, at the Zaslavl state residence.

Authoritative voice against human trafficking

Deputy UN Secretary General visits Minsk

By Yury Pinchuk

On meeting Yury Fedotov, the Deputy Secretary General and Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Belarusian President stressed, "In truth, Belarus has tried to do much in the spheres which fall under your competency." Mr. Lukashenko noted that, around 12 or 13 years ago, the country began its battle against all forms of human trafficking — including sexual violence against women and organ robbery. The President added

that Belarus has accumulated certain experience and much advanced in some directions. "We are proud of this, believing that such actions are inadmissible in our modern world," he emphasised. The President noted that Belarus' position at the centre of East-West transit places it in a unique position: advantageous for trade yet exposing it to certain problems — the smug-



Yury Fedotov

gling of 'migrants, drugs and radioactive particles.' "Willingly or not, we must fight fiercely against these manifestations," the President admitted.

On addressing Mr. Fedotov, the Head of State stressed that Belarus has much to report on areas supervised by the UNODC. Minsk recently hosted a conference for representatives of law enforcement bodies — from member states of the Group of Friends United

against Human Trafficking. Mr. Lukashenko feels confident that the organisation's work will only benefit the global community.

Mr. Fedotov thanked the Belarusian President for his constant support over the years, aiding the UN in its efforts to combat human trafficking. He noted that Belarus initiated the UN Group of Friends United against Human Trafficking and the global plan of action to combat trafficking in human beings (adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2010). He stressed that the UN attaches

great importance to these issues. In particular, two weeks ago, New York hosted high level events to discuss ways of increasing the efficiency of international co-operation in fighting human trafficking.

"Belarus' voice is active and authoritative and, so, is taken into account. This promotes the country's image on the world arena — as part of the UN," Mr. Fedotov said, adding that the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, asked to convey to Belarus his highest appreciation of its efforts in this area.