

Meeting in Kiev opens up new opportunities for neighbours

Belarus and Ukraine ever closer in spheres of economics and politics

By Vasily Kharitonov

Among the topics tackled during the negotiations in Kiev, between the presidents of Belarus and Ukraine, Alexander Lukashenko and Viktor Yanukovich, were border demarcation, joint steps towards Eurasian integration, the expansion of economic collaboration, production co-operation, and the establishment of joint ventures for agricultural machine building.

Upon arrival in Kiev, Mr. Lukashenko attended the Park of Eternal Glory, where the most valiant and tragic pages of Ukrainian history are marked. The Belarusian President laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, while honouring the memory of Holocaust victims.

Since independence for Belarus and Ukraine, our relations have been respectful and constructive, showing the wisdom of living peaceably with neighbours. High level contacts between Minsk and Kiev have helped expand economic ties between business circles, making Ukraine Belarus' third largest trade partner. For Ukraine, Belarus ranks fourth (after Russia, China and Germany). Moreover, Minsk boasts a stable foreign trade surplus with Kiev.

Last year, our mutual turnover reached a record \$8bn, with Belarusian exports accounting for \$5.6bn. Over a hundred commodity distribution networks are functioning in Ukraine, promoting our produce within the neighbouring market. Their number is constantly growing and positive dynamics are evident in many other spheres, including that of Eurasian integration, in which Minsk is playing an important role. Naturally, discussion of Belarusian-Ukrainian



Alexander Lukashenko meets Ukrainian colleague Viktor Yanukovich during solemn ceremony in Kiev

relations was high on the agenda during Mr. Lukashenko's visit to Kiev.

Integration

"There's a lot of talk today about the Single Economic Space and the position of Ukraine. Once again, I'd like to stress our common position with Russia and Kazakhstan: we'd very much like to see Ukraine join the Single Economic Space and the Eurasian Union," said the Belarusian leader, after negotiations with his Ukrainian colleague.

Mr. Lukashenko added, "There is nothing extraordinary about Ukraine being engaged in talks with the EU. Russia is discussing a new agreement with the European Union, as is Kazakhstan, and Ukraine," noted Mr. Lukashenko. "However, we wouldn't want Ukraine to sign any agreement with another organisation if this would deter it

from integrating into the Single Economic Space and the future Eurasian Economic Union."

Mr. Yanukovich noted that the Customs Union was formed without Ukraine's membership and has since moved forward greatly. He now believes that it's necessary to create instruments to allow Ukraine to join the Customs Union and the first step was taken on May 31st, in Minsk, when a memorandum was signed on intensified interaction between Ukraine and the Eurasian Economic Commission. "This decision is dictated exclusively by the economic interests of Ukraine and traditional relations between Customs Union states and Ukraine," underlined Mr. Yanukovich.

Border issues

As part of Mr. Lukashenko's official visit to Ukraine, a protocol was signed on the exchange of instruments to ratify the

Belarus-Ukraine state border agreement, signed on May 12th, 1997, which launched the demarcation of our shared border. Mr. Yanukovich is keen to see the process completed speedily, to promote inter-regional border interaction.

Mutual trade

During his extended talks with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich noted that his country is keen to see Belarus join the WTO as soon as possible. Speaking about bilateral trade, Mr. Yanukovich stressed that Belarus and Ukraine boast significant, yet unfulfilled, potential. Mr. Lukashenko responded that our countries have moved on from simple trade, embracing the creation of joint enterprises, and emphasised that Belarus is ready to set up more such joint ventures in Ukraine, taking

part in agricultural revival programmes: supplying agricultural machinery and establishing modern joint agro-enterprises.

Mr. Lukashenko believes it advantageous for Belarus and Ukraine to collaborate in the sphere of road, railway and sea transportation. He noted that he and Mr. Yanukovich have agreed to activate advanced ties in the sphere of production co-operation, developing joint ventures for agricultural machine building and the production of urban passenger transport. He also underlined that energy interaction is a priority, with joint plans to train experts for the nuclear power industry: especially topical for Belarus, in view of its first nuclear power station being soon launched.

Mr. Lukashenko believes that inter-regional contacts have great potential and is keen to reinforce existing partnership ties between Belarusian regions

and the 24 regions of Ukraine, as well as with the Crimea, Kiev and Sevastopol.

Interaction in the cultural and humanitarian spheres was the second most important topic during negotiations, with Ukraine hosting the Days of Belarusian Culture in 2014, followed by Belarus welcoming the Days of Ukrainian Culture in 2015.

The President of Belarus noted constructive and open dialogue with his Ukrainian colleague on a wide range of bilateral issues.

Bilateral prospects

Many points of coincidence exist, as Mr. Yanukovich emphasised to journalists, speaking about modernisation being essential for both our nations. Talks tackled a major revival programme for Ukrainian agriculture, following in Belarus' footsteps.

Naturally, Belarus is ready to offer its expertise and technology, as well as its transit potential, to Ukraine. Mutually beneficial projects are being developed, alongside trans-border trade in electricity and oil, and transportation of goods between the ports of the Black and Baltic seas. There are great opportunities for logistics ventures and, of course, we need to shift from simple trade to closer production collaboration.

A range of existing enterprises are keen to promote logistics and business circles on both sides are eager to collaborate. The presidents also noted their intention to encourage military-technical liaisons, charging their governments to develop definite projects.

After his negotiations with Mr. Yanukovich, Mr. Lukashenko met the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada, Vladimir Rybak, whose comments echoed those of the presidents.

Useful exchange

Telephone conversation between Lukashenko and Putin

Bilateral issues and those relating to integration were on the agenda of the call, looking at how to further spur forward integration processes and promote unity between the Slavonic nations of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.

The President of Russia informed Mr. Lukashenko of his participation in the G8 Summit in Northern Ireland while the Head of the Belarusian state told his Russian colleague about the results of Kiev negotiations and agreements made.

Discussing ambitious plans and projects

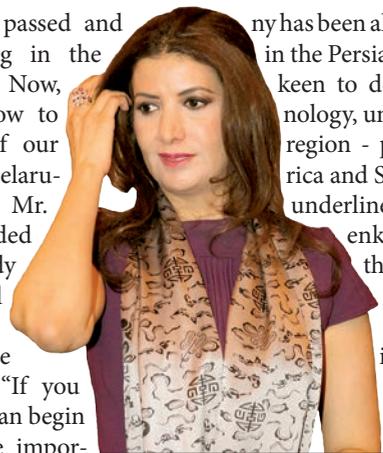
By Veniamin Mikheev

Belarus and Riyada Holding launch joint projects, including supply of Belarusian technology to Persian Gulf region

President Alexander Lukashenko recently met Shaikha Dheya bint Ebrahim Al-Khalifa, the President of the Riyada Group of Companies, whose first visit to Belarus took place in 2007.

During talks, the two confirmed mutual interest in developing collaboration, echoing the thoughts of the last meeting, hosted by Singapore in March.

"Some time has passed and we've begun moving in the necessary direction. Now, we're considering how to tackle the supply of our technology beyond Belarusian borders," noted Mr. Lukashenko. He added that Belarus is ready for close and fruitful co-operation in all spheres covered at the Singapore meeting. "If you meet us halfway, we can begin work." He noted the importance of the Riyada Pal Awali joint venture being already established in Bahrain. "I know that a joint compa-



ny has been already registered in the Persian Gulf, which is keen to deliver our technology, under lease, to the region - probably, to Africa and Saudi Arabia," he underlined. Mr. Lukashenko emphasised that proposals in other areas are being studied, including to supply milk and heavy-duty trucks. "We've very ambitious plans and, if all goes to plan, should see a real breakthrough."

Shaikha Dheya bint Ebrahim Al-Khalifa noted, "We're delighted to have created a joint venture." She praises Belarusian specialists, saying, "We're pleased with their professionalism and level of expertise." She commented on a number of other joint projects which have already been launched.

Riyada Group is involved in diverse projects in the spheres of oil and gas extraction and the processing and extraction of mineral fertilisers. It also constructs social infrastructure and railway lines and offers financial, insurance and consulting services across the Persian Gulf and Middle East.