

Expressive peculiarities of beneficial collaboration

Belarus and Venezuela soon to elaborate new 'road map' of bilateral relations

By Vladimir Khromov

The first official visit of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro to Minsk saw wide-ranging negotiations on a range of issues relating to Belarusian-Venezuelan liaisons. Trade, economic and political co-operation were on the agenda, with Mr. Lukashenko discussing joint projects and promising areas of co-operation. President Lukashenko stressed that Belarus is ready for further Belarusian-Venezuelan co-operation, following on from the achievements seen during Hugo Chávez's presidency.

"We've already established friendly relations — not only with our common friend, who is sadly not with us today, but with you — the closest and among the most trusted person known to Hugo Chávez," Mr. Lukashenko noted, welcoming Nicolás Maduro. "We hope and are absolutely certain that the policy carried out by you and Hugo Chávez will continue. Not only me and the leadership of Belarus but all Belarusian people associate you with Chávez's policy," underlined Mr. Lukashenko.

The President of Belarus also noted that relations with Venezuela already have firm foundations, making their further extension logical and natural. He added, "I'm sure that, in memory of that great person, you and I will do our best to carry out everything once thought and dreamt about by him. We regard Nicolás Maduro's first official visit as acknowledgement of our countries' course of strategic partnership. We felt this during today's negotiations and are determined to implement everything previously planned."

The President of Belarus emphasised that the incumbent President of Venezuela took part in all negotiations and arrangements during Hugo Chávez's presidency. "Therefore, he knows perfectly all the problems of Belarusian-Venezuelan rela-



President of Venezuela is pleased with his visit to Belarus

tions and the issues which need to be solved. He directly participated in

the foundation of our relations," said the President, adding that the Presi-

dent of Venezuela gave his people a global task of economic diversification and modernisation. "We can give essential support and take part in this enormous historical process," Mr. Lukashenko asserted.

The Belarusian President stressed that he sees Venezuela as a gateway to Latin America in general and to specific states. "Our plan was determined during Chávez's presidency and I'm grateful to the President of Venezuela for his promised support in that area. We'd like to co-operate with Venezuela economically, trading with the larger states of Latin America," he explained. "Venezuela has always supported us in hard times: selflessly, in friendship and despite its own problems. I've promised the President of Venezuela that Belarusians won't leave such favours unanswered. Everything that we can

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President Lukashenko added that Belarus highly appreciates its friendship with Venezuela: one of the most influential and authoritative states in Latin America. "We have much in common, including an identical attitude towards international problems. In recent years, we've managed to create a strong foundation for our relations," he asserted. He underlined that official visits are not just a matter of protocol but bring concrete results. He admits that, while much has been achieved, a great deal more is possible.

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tions, revisiting areas which remain problematic and developing a new 'road map' for our relations," Mr. Lukashenko commented. He also added that the sides have agreed that on 4 August at the latest a Belarusian-Venezuelan joint commission will sit in Minsk to work out concrete proposals regarding the 'road map' and then the proposals will be submitted for consideration of the presidents of Belarus and Venezuela.

The Belarusian Head of State remarked that the implementation of this programme will be closely monitored by the two presidents. "The revision of our relations, the development of a 'road map' for the future, as well as strict fulfilment of its measures and control by the presidents — all of it was suggested by the President of Venezuela," added Mr. Lukashenko.

Mr. Maduro noted the timing of his visit, which took place on the main state holiday in Belarus: the Independence Day. "We've confirmed brotherly relations between Belarus and Venezuela and will elaborate a 'road map' based upon friendship and co-operation," said the President of Venezuela. He emphasised that the strong relationship nurtured by Alexander Lukashenko and Hugo Chávez was based on friendship and that his task is to build upon this, ensuring that previous arrangements with Belarus are met. He commented, "The late President Chávez was a man of ideas and a major supporter of strengthening co-operation with Belarus in many spheres. We are now entering a new phase, of new successes. You can count on us as devoted friends and followers of Hugo Chávez."

Blessings from the Pope of Rome

By Victor Khmelevsky

Belarus securing inter-confessional peace and consent, announces President Lukashenko on meeting with the President of Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, Jean-Louis Tauran

Mr. Lukashenko focused on the fact that Belarus is home to 25 peacefully co-existing confessions. He expressed satisfaction that the two leading churches, Orthodox and Catholic, 'have found ways to develop co-operation' and characterised these relations as constructive and useful to the state. He added that, recently, the state has built several churches, including one Roman

Catholic, and the Catholic Educational Centre.

"No issues are unsolvable. I'd like to ask you to tell the Pope that the Catholic confession will always enjoy a worthy place in Belarus," said the President, emphasising that our citizens will continue to enjoy their right to exercise their religious beliefs. Cardinal Tauran conveyed the Pope's blessings to all Belarusians, saying, "I met with the Pope before coming to your country and he conveyed his best wishes and blessings to all Belarusians."

The cardinal emphasised that his diplomatic career has lasted for 28 years, giving him the chance to meet representatives of many countries. "It is important

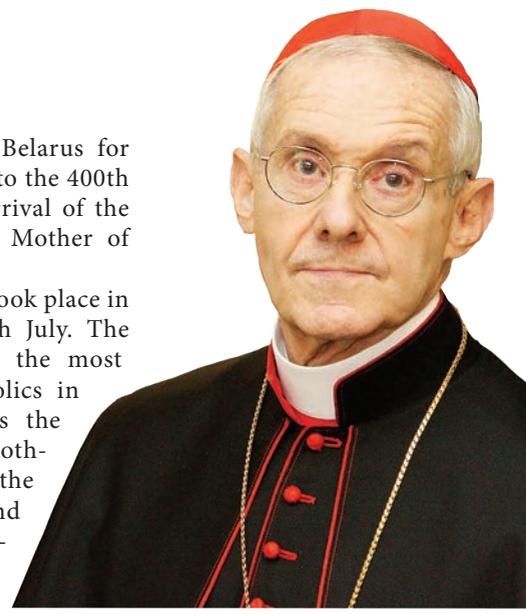
to have meaningful dialogue between representatives of confessions and states," noted the Cardinal. "Therefore, we are glad to hear that all confessions co-exist in peace and consent in Belarus. It is vital to have religion in our hearts in today's world, because citizens of any country have two main obligations: as citizens and as church members."

The President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue emphasised that this was his first trip to Belarus and that he was finding it fascinating to discover the real situation in the country and to see dialogue between confessions in Belarus.

Jean-Louis Tauran is a well-known and respected Papal leg-

ate, who arrived in Belarus for celebrations devoted to the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the Budslav Icon of the Mother of God in Belarus.

The celebrations took place in Budslav from 5th-6th July. The holiday has become the most significant for Catholics in Belarus this year, as the Budslav Icon of the Mother of God is one of the most revered icons and is famous for its miracles. Every year, pilgrims from Belarus and abroad come to see this icon. The state gave much support to the Catholic Church in making holiday preparations, with funds allocated to restore



Jean-Louis Tauran

the Roman Catholic Church in Budslav. Additional trains were launched for pilgrims, and a special stamp is to be introduced.