

Belarus is eager to develop integration processes

By Vladimir Khromov

On meeting with heads of CIS media, Alexander Lukashenko emphasises that CIS must be encouraged as single ground for dialogue and elaboration of joint decisions

The press conference took place in the run-up to the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (at the level of heads of state) and the CIS Heads of State Council. Belarus is clearly eager to develop integration processes and views its current chairmanship of the CIS as a great responsibility. Media interest is understandable, so it was no surprise to see those from across the CIS keen to ask questions to the Head of the Belarusian state. The meeting with the President was attended by the Chairman of the Mir Interstate TV and Radio Company, alongside editors-in-chief and directors of leading media from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Ukraine. Leaders of major Belarusian media were

also present for the planned 1.5 hour conference, which the President allowed to continue for three hours.

Mr. Lukashenko spoke with editors about integration processes in the context of the contemporary international situation, where integration is a leading trend politically and economically. It seems that the CIS, the Customs Union, the Single Economic Space and the Eurasian Economic Union will soon become a serious driving force within the international arena. The President of Belarus covered various topics for the press, on the eve of the top level meetings.

The CIS

Some have questioned the relevance of the CIS in a world of so many centres of power. Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus are building the Eurasian Economic Union while Ukraine, Moldova and, partially, Armenia are keen to expand their ties with the EU. Of course, China, in Central Asia, is rapidly becoming the world's leading force. Paradoxically, CIS mem-



ber states continue to pursue diverse policies while, at the same time, realising the need to join forces; accordingly, a common venue for dialogue is vital.

Interaction

Considering the willingness of a number of countries to join the future Eurasian Economic Union, it should gain equal status on the global geopolitical chessboard with the EU. Interests must be balanced, showing that the integration of integrations is a viable idea. By negotiating together with united Europe, more fruit will be borne than through separate talks by each separate CIS member state. Individually, talks are often conducted on humiliating terms but, together, we are a force with

which to be reckoned.

Sovereignty

In creating the Eurasian Economic Commission, we have already compromised our sovereignty, to some extent. As far as Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia are concerned, no problems exist. However, we must appreciate which aspects of sovereignty can be transferred to supranational bodies comprising our Kazakh, Belarusian and Russian people. We've created a corresponding body from our people and entrusted it to govern. Yes, we are an independent and sovereign state but, if we see something we desire, and are willing to pay the price, we'll pursue it. We've given much thought and hesitated, as Russia and Kazakhstan have done, seeing the true advantages: economic and financial.

Principles of state construction

All states should value their own people. A state for the people is our motto: a social state, rather than socialist. We don't reject planning and each

country has its own budget. We are setting 12 major spheres of development: from GDP to employment. Moreover, the All-Belarus People's Assembly meets once every five years to approve the concept and promising developments for at least the coming five years... We don't reject any of this but it's different from the planning of Soviet days, with the main difference being competition. We have to accept it without a second thought and, where it is fair, there will be no stagnation in society or the economy.

Abolishing restrictions across the Customs Union

If we agree, then let's create a real single economy, removing any restrictions. For example, if the Kazakhs would like to pump oil through Belarus, using shared pipes, then let's have equal access. If Kazakhstan would like to supply its produce to Belarus and Europe using the railways of Kazakhstan and Russia, we should enjoy equal conditions. So far, we've had

many withdrawals, as you're well aware.

Oil, natural gas, special regimes and withdrawals are important for Russia. But why should Russia be afraid of Belarus? Will we knock you down or eat you? Our economy accounts for only 5-7 percent of that of Russia. We do have several issues with Russia but we'll remove them from January 1st.

Common values of post-Soviet states

It's good to share common values, and they do exist. Nevertheless, we are yet to speak of our common values. Maybe, we're too bashful but I do believe that we have truer values than those of the West. You know where Western values are turned... What about our high spiritual culture? Our tolerance? Our sincerity and humanity? I think these stem from our common Soviet period, when we sought to appear better than the West. Why don't we speak about this? I think we'll return to it one day.

CIS confirms its high status

During CIS Heads of State Council meeting, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko proposes additional mechanisms to bolster economic co-operation

By Vladimir Khromov

Alexander Lukashenko has remarked that, as part of its chairmanship, Belarus is focused on goals in line with 'integration for public benefit'. With this in mind, Belarus has successfully implemented several initiatives within the spheres of security, ecology, green technologies, expansion of interregional and trans-boundary co-operation, and cultural dialogue. Economic partnerships have also been widely supported.

Mr. Lukashenko pointed out that negotiations began this year to draft an interstate treaty on a new free trade zone for services, aiming to support innovation-driven co-operation; it is now being filled with content.

The Belarusian President stressed at the session of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council that the doors of new associations are open to everyone. "It is time for us to think together about additional mechanisms to bolster economic co-operation within the CIS," he asserted. "Taking into account the activation of integration processes across post-Soviet space, I believe that our Commonwealth, as the oldest integration association, should not lag behind."

President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko is also



CIS Heads of State Council session in focused format

calling on CIS partners to strengthen co-ordination in the international arena. "Sometimes, our countries don't speak from a single position. Unfortunately, this is seen even at the UN. Sometimes, our partners support decisions aimed against the Commonwealth or individual members. This practice can hardly be considered efficient," stressed the Belarusian leader. "Belarus cannot imagine its sovereignty and independence without the closest collaboration with members of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Moreover,

we won't be successful unless we interact with those nations with whom we've been living as a single family for the past century," he emphasised, stressing that this is Belarus' principle position, to which it is firmly committed. "Sovereignty, independence and national prosperity can be maintained only in unity with CIS states."

President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich believes that, after signing an agreement with the European Union, Ukraine will find a compromise in its interaction with the Customs Union. He

told those present at the session, "We should take a close look at the last two years of trade relations between CIS states, especially the Customs Union, as I think we'll find compromises and reveal new opportunities for the promotion of goods to joint markets."

President Putin noted that the CIS can shape its own development agenda, regardless of the wider global market, but is keen to see more attention paid to the economic sphere. CIS growth in 2012 totalled 3.4 percent and is set to reach only 1.8 percent by

the end of 2013. "The same can be said of investments, which have significantly reduced," noted the Russian President. He also noted the importance of joint preparations to mark the 70th anniversary of Great Patriotic War victory, saying, "Our common duty to the generation of victors is to worthily celebrate this jubilee."

Heads of state and representatives of other states agree unanimously on the importance of preserving memories of the Great Patriotic War, so that future generations know about and cannot forget the

Great Victory. In particular, the session included discussions on declaring 2015 to be the CIS Year of Veterans of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945; inter-state commemorative awards, dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the Victory of the Soviet people, would then be issued.

Mr. Lukashenko remarked that Belarus has seriously prepared for this event, in order to demonstrate that independence and national wellbeing depends primarily on co-operation with CIS states. The President believes that Belarus will always feel this way and underlines that CIS states should work hard to secure tighter collaboration in all spheres. "We must not lose each other in this turbulent world," he warned.

The Belarusian Head of State noted that the motto of the Belarusian chairmanship was 'integration for public benefit' and informed his colleagues of the status of the Belarusian chairmanship of the Commonwealth. "Much has been done, and Belarus has fulfilled all of your instructions and implemented a plan of definite action," he added.

Mr. Lukashenko explained that, during its CIS chairmanship, Belarus has tried to inspire dynamic interaction between CIS countries on all fronts.