

# Baku greets us warmly

Belarus and Azerbaijan determine promising areas of co-operation and reaffirm their desire to deepen traditional friendship, following official negotiations between President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko and President Ilham Aliyev

By Vasily Kharitonov

Belarusian-Azerbaijani diplomatic relations were established 20 years ago but gained true impetus in 2006, when our embassies opened. These have inspired sincere and trusting dialogue at all levels, in an atmosphere of friendship and mutual understanding. The same tone exists between our Heads of State, who are connected not only by mutual political interests, but by warm relations.

Minsk and Baku regularly exchange visits at various levels: from the highest governmental to those by business delegations. Last year alone, the Belarusian Embassy in Azerbaijan organised well over a hundred visits. Of these, 120 were devoted to the development of trade and economic co-operation, where interaction is ever growing. Since the opening of embassies in Minsk and Baku, trade between our countries has increased six-fold, reaching almost \$250 million.

More than 250 companies are involved in mutual trade, supplying around 400 varieties of goods. About 40 Azerbaijani companies act as dealerships for Belarusian goods — including tractors, trucks, refrigerators, washing machines, road construction equipment, elevators, machine tools, motors, food, medicine, tires, wood products and ceramic tiles. The list is extensive. Moreover, our liaisons extend beyond trade, as Belarusian journalists saw personally during their tours of several Azerbaijani enterprises.

On arrival in Baku, as well as paying tribute to the national shrines of Azerbaijan, Alexander Lukashenko visited the new Belarusian Embassy building, meeting President Ilham Aliyev

in order to open it officially together. One of the most beautiful buildings in the city has opened in one of the most promising areas of the Azerbaijani capital.

Mr. Lukashenko then joined Mr. Aliyev at the residence of the President



Belarusian Embassy in Baku

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of Azerbaijan for talks: first face-to-face, and then in an extended format. One of the main topics was further development of industrial co-operation and joint production for sale to third countries, as well as enhanced investment co-operation. Mr. Lukashenko noted good momentum in trade and economic co-operation between Belarus and Azerbaijan, as evidenced by increased turnover. He emphasised, “We have plenty of opportunities, and can increase volumes by creating joint ventures, rather than purely assembly plants. Of course, we can



Alexander Lukashenko and Ilham Aliyev plant two olive trees near the Belarusian Embassy in Azerbaijan

produce much in Azerbaijan but we don't need to rely on the local market buying all our goods; it's important for us to trade together with third countries, entering international markets and selling products from our joint ventures, to gain full benefit.”

chemical industry and pharmaceuticals, according to Mr. Lukashenko.

The Belarusian President stressed that co-operation across various spheres would be impossible without paying attention to education. About 150 Azerbaijani stu-

relationship, reaching a very high level in trade, industrial production, energy and the humanitarian sphere. These years of active interaction have brought us closer, so that Belarus and Azerbaijan are perceived as close and friendly in the region and worldwide. Our relations are based on sincerity, mutual respect and support, allowing us to build a solid foundation for our relations.”

Mr. Aliyev believes that enterprises implementing investment projects and sharing experience are expanding their liaisons, embracing serious content in many areas. However, trade negotiators have agreed to step up efforts to promote co-operation in existing areas and those new and promising. “Among the new themes in our bilateral relations are investment opportunities, and the participation of Azerbaijani companies in privatization within Belarus, as well as joint export to the markets of third countries for our shared ventures. We'll strive to ensure that these areas are part of our extensive bilateral agenda,” said Mr. Aliyev.

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the military, technology, tourism, science, education and culture, health and the environment.

The Presidents noted our shared position on various international issues, stressing the importance of deepening co-operation in the international arena, including within the UN, the OSCE, the Non-Aligned Movement and the *Eastern Partnership*. They noted the importance of a speedy resolution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, following generally recognised principles and norms of international law.

The joint declaration praises Azerbaijan as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the period 2012-2013, and states the importance of strengthening the UN's role in strategic issues of international security and sustainable development.

During his official visit to Azerbaijan, Alexander Lukashenko signed a package of documents on co-operation in various fields between our two countries. The legal base for inter-regional co-operation was developed, with agreements concluded between the cities of Gomel and Ganja, and between the Oshmyany District Executive Committee of Grodno Region and the executive authorities of Shamakhi District. Mr. Lukashenko invited Ilham Aliyev to once more pay an official visit to Belarus. “We enjoy a trusting relationship with the President of Azerbaijan, and I'm sure we'll see such relationships between our countries. We've created a foundation for our relationships, but are faced with the problem inspiring dynamics, so that we move forward. We are ready and I see that our colleagues from Azerbaijan are also ready,” concluded the President of Belarus.

dents are currently studying in Belarus, noted Mr. Lukashenko, saying, “These professionals pour into the economy of Azerbaijan annually, bringing significant results. Without this, there can be no true co-operation.” He added that our countries are successfully co-operating in the cultural and humanitarian spheres.

President Aliyev underlined that Azerbaijan highly values its relationship with Belarus, and relies on its further development. He emphasised, “Over the past few years, Belarus and Azerbaijan have strengthened their

President Lukashenko proposed establishing a working group on industrial co-operation within the existing intergovernmental commission, explaining, “This visit is characterised by our finding new areas of co-operation. We've received support from the President of Azerbaijan for wider investment in projects, which may arouse interest from the Azerbaijani government and from businesses in Belarus. We are ready, waiting with offers for you.” Promising spheres for Azerbaijani investments include the petrochemical industry, agriculture, the