

Setting the agenda to solve significant issues

By Veniamin Mishin

Agenda for forthcoming session of Supreme State Council of the Union State of Belarus and Russia discussed at meeting between President of Belarus, the Chairman of the Supreme State Council Alexander Lukashenko and State Secretary of the Union State Grigory Rapota



Grigory Rapota

Mr. Lukashenko believes that some issues can be solved

only by the Supreme State Council and has asked Mr. Rapota to keep him informed of preparations for the agenda of the forthcoming session of the Supreme State Council. He noted, "Is there a mismatch or is there anything needing co-ordination? Is there a need for the intervention of presidents in order to reduce dispute within the Supreme State

Council?" asked Mr. Lukashenko. He was also interested in preparations for the session of the Union State Council of Ministers. "This is our basic working body, where all questions are decided and brought to the Supreme State Council," noted the President.

He told Mr. Rapota, "I'd like to hear your views on Belarusian-Russian relations

in the context of problems arising today regarding the EU's conflict with Ukraine, and how it can be interpreted regarding our relations. What lessons should we learn and what conclusions should we draw?"

Mr. Rapota commented that final planning is underway for the session of the Supreme State Council, which

meets at the end of December. The agenda has several segments, including discussion of the results of budgetary policy for this year and adoption of the budget for 2014. Other items include a report on economic policy, including the results of trade and economic co-operation between our two countries in 2013.

Our editorial office received this material from the UN Representation Office in Belarus and we view its theme as acute, so we offer this publication for your attention



Break Barriers, Open Doors: for an inclusive society and development for all

True partnership reinforced by business

By Vyacheslav Ivanov

Belarus ready to start negotiations with EU regarding simplification of visa procedures

The Eastern Partnership Summit, hosted by Vilnius, saw much discussion regarding our Belarus-EU neighbourhood. Belarus' Foreign Minister, Vladimir Makei, who represented our country at this major forum, is pleased with the results of the summit, saying, "At least, we all gathered together, which is no mean feat: it's an important joint achievement. The summit is worthless unless it embodies equality, unity and solidarity."

According to the Mr. Makei, Belarus is a bridge between the SES and the EU, viewing these two integration processes as complementary and, in the long-term, convergent. "We'll continue to uphold the idea of an 'integration of integrations', aiming to create a common economic space 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok'. We're convinced that this is the only way to avoid new divisions and tense situations in Europe and the region," notes Mr. Makei.

Speaking to journalists after the summit, Mr. Makei commented on the need to simplify the visa regime between Belarus and the EU. He believes that the issue could be quickly solved by mutual desire. "If there's truly a decision to constructively solve the issues, it will take only a short time; if not — then longer. However, I believe that, within a rather short period of time, we could conclude a corresponding agreement. I'd like to underline that a constructive approach is needed on both sides. We're ready for such an approach and believe that dialogue and a constructive approach are principles which should be used to develop our relations with the European Union," Mr. Makei emphasised.

An estimated 1 billion people or about 15 percent of the world's population live with disabilities. They are the world's largest minority and among the most disadvantaged. This figure is steadily increasing through population growth, medical advances and the ageing process. Many of the world's disabled are excluded from access to vital services and resources such as education, employment, healthcare and social support systems. Ninety percent of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school. The global literacy rate for adults with disabilities is as low as 3 percent, and 1 percent for women with disabilities. Mortality for children with disabilities is as high as 80 percent in countries where under-five mortality as a whole has decreased below 20 percent.

Unemployment among persons with disabilities is about 80 percent in many countries. This is despite the fact most people with disabilities would like to work if they can find jobs and even though when people with disabilities are hired, their retention rates are much higher, reducing the cost of staff turnover for employers. However, often employers assume that persons with disabilities are unable to work or that they would have to spend on costly special facilities.

At the same time, it isn't easy for people with disabilities to be self-employed because it is much more difficult for them to access credit. Although where they have been able to obtain loans, many people with disabilities are successful owners of small and medium businesses around the world.

These figures graphically demonstrate the persistent marginalisation of people with disabilities around the world. To compound matters, comparative studies on disability legislation show that only 45 countries have anti-discrimination and other disability-specific laws.

The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 was a breakthrough event. To date 138 countries are party to the Convention. Several more have signed and are expected to ratify soon.

The Convention does not confer new rights of persons with disabilities but is deeply rooted in the goals of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It ensures that the rights recognised in existing human rights instruments are also applied to people with disabilities. It is the culmination of many years of concerted efforts by the United Nations to change attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities. It moves away from 'view-

ing persons with disabilities as 'objects' of charity, medical treatment and social protection towards viewing persons with disabilities as 'subjects' with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent' while being active members of society.

More than half a million people live with disabilities in Belarus. While the country is ahead of some others in the

with disabilities in different areas of social life, be it employment, education, healthcare, cultural life or any other area accessible to people without disabilities. In this respect, the Convention sets not only international standards in these different areas but also gives guidance on how they can be achieved through national implementation and monitoring frameworks.

The United Nations Development

to do from a human rights perspective, but it will also help a significant number of Belarusians living with disabilities achieve their full potential. It will allow them access to opportunities that will in turn help them to contribute to their families, their communities and society as a whole. It will help to change attitudes, fight discrimination and dispel stigma. A fully inclusive society can only be a stronger society.



Actors from Illstyle & Peace hold Minsk master class in hip-hop for less-physically-abled children

region in dealing with the specific challenges of people with disabilities, it unfortunately remains the only country in Europe that has not yet acceded to the Convention.

Today we have gathered and studied a lot of experiences in its implementation by other countries, in particular, just a few days ago the United Nations Development Programme published a study (available online at: bit.ly/18dBMHA) which summarises the experiences of several CIS countries in ratifying and implementing the Convention and which can be used for guidance by countries that are considering the accession to the Convention.

Belarus is already implementing a wide range of measures aimed at improving different aspects of the life of people with disabilities, in particular, in the framework of the 2011-2015 programmes on disability prevention and rehabilitation of people with disabilities and establishment of the barrier-free environment. Overall, the system of social protection of people with disabilities remains one of the strongest in the region.

The next step would be to work further to enhance the inclusion of people

Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the International Labour Organisation together with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus recently implemented a joint project aimed at helping Belarus attain international standards in respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of people with disabilities. During this initiative and in subsequent conversations we have had with many senior state officials, we are convinced that acceding to the Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities remains a priority for the Government of Belarus.

According to the National Midterm report on the implementation of the Universal Periodic Review recommendations presented by the Government of Belarus to the UN Human Rights Committee in 2012, the draft law on the accession of Belarus to the Convention is currently undergoing an internal review.

Analysis of the national legislation for compliance with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reveals that Belarus could join this Convention.

We firmly believe that joining the Convention is not only the right thing

On December 3rd, we have marked the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. World leaders have decided that the theme this year should be 'Break Barriers, Open Doors: for an Inclusive Society and Development for All. We believe this reflects the strong commitment of the international community to help realise the full and equal participation of the world's largest and most disadvantaged group in society.

In the coming year, as Belarus plays an important role on the international stage in helping to shape a new, sustainable and inclusive development agenda post-2015, we hope that it will also be the year that the country decides to become a party to this first human rights convention of the 21st century. And should that be the case, the United Nations family stands ready to assist the Government and people of Belarus in this critically important joint endeavour — one that removes all types of barriers for all people.

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