

Soft landing and benevolent meeting

The country's major air terminal acquires a makeover worthy of its high status

By Vasily Kharitonov

The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, is pleased with the work in the reconstruction of the current terminal of Minsk National Airport. "At first sight, everything looks dazzling, and beautiful. This is good. However, quality and reliability must be also prioritised," stressed the Head of state, whilst familiarising himself with the reconstruction process of the air terminal and the organisation of passenger handling. During his visit, the President toured the arrival areas, including the border checkpoint, the luggage collection area, the customs control station, the arrival and passenger registration areas, the departure lounge, and the territory around the passenger terminal. The Head of state took the opportunity to examine the operation of both private and state-run duty-free shops, with the comparison not being in favour of the state run enterprise. Mr. Lukashenko also reminded the workers about their social responsibility.

Mr. Lukashenko wondered in detail about working conditions and was assured that the airport will have no problems with welcoming guests to the forthcoming Ice Hockey World Championship that will take place in the Belarusian capital in May, or with welcoming of other passengers.

Minsk National Airport, totaling nearly 80,000 square metres, was commissioned over 30 years ago and is the country's main airport, handling the vast majority of the country's passenger and air freight traffic. Earlier this year, the airport completed the reconstruction of the VIP-lounge and the complex dedicated to operations dealing with the Ice Hockey World Championship. The total area of the arrival lounges has been increased, and additional check-in desks for passenger registration have been opened. Moreover, additional workstations for insurance agents have been installed, as well as eleven border control and customs control stations. Communications and equipment to sort luggage has also been installed.



National Airport air terminal

Due to this reconstruction, the airport will be able to service almost 6 million passengers each year, and about 29,000 passengers per day at peak capacity. The airport now has two customs control areas, enabling it to service up to 1,000 passengers from six aircrafts at the same time. One check-in area for passenger registration with 22 workstations is now available as well. Since last February, the Minsk airport office of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry can issue visas to foreigners regardless of whether the departure country has a Belarusian diplomatic mission or not.

FIGURES:

As a result of reconstruction, the airport will be able to service up to 5.8 million passengers annually and around 29,000 passengers daily during peak times. In 2012, Minsk airport serviced 1.84 million passengers. This figure rose to 2.19 million last year. January-March of this year has shown the continuation of this growth trend, with passenger flow increasing by a further 10 percent.

Mr. Lukashenko was informed that, over the last few years, the number of passengers and the volume of cargo that the airport services have been rising. In 2013, the airport serviced slightly over 2 million passengers and this figure increased by 10 percent during January-March 2014. Passengers are transported to

the Minsk National Airport from Tsentralny Bus Station, with the bus schedules matching with the time of aircraft arrivals. From November 2014, there are plans to transport air passengers to the airport via trains from the Minsk-Passazhirsky station. Three new types of train, have already been purchased by the Belarusian Railway, will be running along this route, with travel time being fewer than 50 minutes.

"I didn't set out to audit this facility and find any shortcomings. There are other people who will do that. However, time will tell what has been done right and what is lacking," said the Head of state, summing up the results of his visit to the airport.

At the same time, the President mentioned that people responsible for drawbacks will have to 'answer all the way, because nothing new has been invented here.' "There are very advanced airports in the world, super-advanced airports, as well as average ones. You just have to pick one variant and work on it," noted Mr. Lukashenko. "It seems to me you've seriously examined all the options, chose the best one and tried to accomplish something with our own abilities and conditions in mind."

The Belarusian leader warned the general contractor in charge of the reconstruction — Grodnopromstroy JSC — that the rest of the work must be done as impeccably. Meanwhile, the



Flight check-in

President emphasised that this should be done at a reasonable cost.

"The airport's modernisation should be completed this year," noted the Head of state. "The buildings and the territory are to be accomplished by the end of the year."

"Everything should look ideal because people, who fly to Belarus, will look out of their window to see where they are going to land. Therefore, everything has to be beautiful," said the President. "I want polish before the hockey championship. We have to bring this airport up to standard." Mr. Lukashenko added that, for him, it is a matter of honour, "We shouldn't leave our children with what we inherited when we started ruling the country. The airport was built during Soviet times. Later on, it turned out it was no good at all and we had to struggle to patch it in times when money was in short supply. Later, we followed with massive efforts to fix the buildings," noted the Head of state. Mr. Lukashenko remarked that, in the next few years, the airport will generate profits and will attract more passengers if the conditions it offers are good. The President stressed it was necessary to think about the future while continuing to develop the airport.

A not new, but responsible, endeavour

Alexander Lukashenko suggests the building of a second runway at Minsk National Airport using our own resources

"Sometimes we jump when an investor offers attractive terms. However, we will often pay twice as much for these favourable terms in the future. So maybe, it makes sense to handle this project on our own. A runway is a very serious endeavour. However, is it really that difficult to build it? Are we going to re-invent the wheel or be building something new? People have been building runways for a long time now. There are thousands of them worldwide. So let us choose a good project, find one good engineer, pay him money and let him supervise this project and tell our engineers what to do and how to do it," noted the President.

Alexander Lukashenko reminded everyone that he had instructed them to consider the construction of the new runway and an additional terminal a long time ago. "This is the centre of Europe. If we offer good conditions, we will have a second runway capable of accepting Airbus planes," added the President. "We need to look ahead. I don't say that we will be able to do it tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, but this should be done within the next five-year period."

Profitable projects will always be repaid

Belarus proposes that Iran restores former high level of interaction, including in trade-economic and investment fields

By Vladimir Khromov

The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, has met the Chairman of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ali Larijani, and noted, "We should restore the highest level of co-operation, the way it was before, as soon as possible." He also said that the visit was a landmark one for restoring the intensity of Belarus-Iran relations. "We've always viewed Iran as a promising partner for co-operation. Moreover, we had, and still have very tight and friendly relations," stressed the President.

Meanwhile, Mr. Lukashenko drew attention to the falling level of contacts. "Belarus-Iran trade has dropped recently due to the

external impact on Iran, although we are having a hard time, too. We have started losing some threads of interaction, and your visit is very important for us in this regard," said the President. He believes there is a basis to enter the highest level of collaboration, taking into account the existing huge experience of bilateral liaisons. "I don't have to mention our capabilities," noted the Head of state. "You know Belarus well, while we know Iran. Our capabilities and yours are colossal. It would be a good idea for us to resume co-operation by virtue of our capabilities."

Mr. Lukashenko underlined that Belarus is interested in Iranian investments. "Before sanctions, Iran was ready to invest up to \$1bn in Belarus. We understand that there are

certain difficulties and hardships, including those that private investors experience. We would like the Iranian state to support investors. We can allocate land plots for them, and these are located in prominent areas. Everyone knows that Iran is building logistic and trade centres, as well as houses," noted the Head of Belarusian state.

Yet the President remarked, "I would like to see more movement, I would like you to demonstrate to everyone in the centre of Europe that Iran is alive, will live for a long time and will prosper in spite of our enemies".

Speaking about the importance of Belarusian-Iranian projects, including investment projects, which are being implemented in Bela-

rus, Mr. Lukashenko emphasised, "Those are profitable projects and they will pay for themselves".

The President also said that the visit of the Chairman of Iran's Islamic Consultative Assembly was a landmark for the restoration of the intensity of Belarusian-Iranian relations.

On his side, Mr. Larijani stated that Iran was ready to develop all-round relations with Belarus, based on the existing positive co-operation experience. "We should use our experience and create a new atmosphere for collaboration," he said.

He passed the best wishes to the President of Belarus from his country's authorities. "Iran views Belarus as its friend and partner, and you play a very important role in this,"



Ali Larijani

noted the Chairman. He assured him that the new government and the parliament were 'determined to develop all-round relations with Belarus'.