

Opinion better formed after seeing with one's own eyes

Experts representing large analytical centres of USA visit Belarus

By Oleg Slavinsky

Myths abound about Belarus, so it was important for the experts to see the truth with their own eyes, forming their own opinion. The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, met the analysts, passing on a clear message: Minsk is ready to normalise relations with Washington. "We'll respond to a respectful attitude with enthusiasm. Most importantly, we want to be seen as a partner. Putting aside stereotypes and narrow-mindedness, we can solve the most complicated problems via mutually respectful dialogue," he stressed.

The sentiments are hardly new: Minsk has been signalling the necessity to turn a page in our bilateral relations, starting anew, for some time. The message gained an airing during the Astana meeting of the US State Secretary Hillary Clinton and Belarus' Foreign Minister, Sergei Martynov.

Recently, the US Charge d'Affaires in Minsk, Michael Scanlan, gathered journalists to explain the essence of the joint Belarusian-American announcement. Its text is exact — even without Mr. Scanlan's explanation; the essence is simple. Belarus has pledged to liquidate all its stocks of highly enriched uranium. The USA, in turn, has announced its support for Belarus' building of a nuclear power station. "We highly appreciate this move from the American side," said the Belarusian President. Simultaneously, our two parties confirmed that 'demonstrations of great respect for democracy and



American analysts meet President of Belarus in Minsk

human rights remain of primary importance for the improvement of bilateral relations...'

Ariel Cohen, of the Heritage Foundation, is well-known as a specialist regarding the post-Soviet space and believes Belarus is at a turning point. He sees a wonderful time approaching for the Belarusian foreign policy to 'spread its second wing'. Minsk is now trying to conduct a multi-vector policy, approaching each global centre of power equally: the EU, China, Russia and the USA. Another participant of the meet-

ing, Janusz Bugajski, Programme Director at the Centre of Strategic and International Studies, explains that the visit to Minsk primarily focused on gaining acquaintance with modern Belarus, 'seeing how the announced equal focus on various centres of power is being shifted towards practical application'.

Mr. Lukashenko expressed his assurance that, on thorough analysis, the American experts should see how many of Washington's interests coincide with those of Minsk. "Being a member of the

Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, we are rendering all assistance in our power to solving the Afghan problem, providing our infrastructure for NATO cargo transit shipment," he noted.

On meeting the American analysts in Minsk, Mr. Lukashenko was given a letter from the former Senator, Sam Nunn — a landmark figure in the American establishment. His words of gratitude to the President for leading nuclear non-proliferation showed that Washington appreciates Minsk's efforts.

Status gives rights and specifies obligations

824 people from 13 countries recognised as refugees in Belarus

According to the International Evolutio Public Association for Scientific Research, Information and Educational Programmes, refugees from non-CIS states account for the greatest share, primarily from Afghanistan (528 people). They are joined by those from Georgia (134 — particularly those arriving from Abkhazia), Tajikistan (32), Azerbaijan (29), Ethiopia (23), Palestine (9), Iran (8) and India (2). Armenia, Iraq, Ruanda, Cameroon and Liberia each have one citizen staying as a refugee in Belarus.

National legislation on refugees is constantly being improved, with a new law 'On the Granting of Refugee Status, Subsidiary and Temporary Protection to Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Republic of Belarus' entering into force last year. This envisages subsidiary protection for foreign citizens in our country, with such protection already being rendered to three foreigners.

Worldwide, 10.4m people are registered as refugees, displaced because of conflict or persecution. Those displaced within their own country stand at 27m, with 15.6m receiving assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In 2009, just 250,000 refugees returned to their native homes: a quarter of the annual average figure over the last ten years. According to the UNHCR, forced displacement, statelessness and complex migration flow remain the greatest global challenges for the foreseeable future.

Strategic ideas valued in practice

Belarus' Foreign Minister, Sergei Martynov, participates in ministerial meeting of Eastern Partnership initiative in Brussels

In his speech, Mr. Martynov pointed out the need to step up practical co-operation within the Eastern Partnership programme. To achieve this, Belarus suggests organising a Forum of Eastern Development to unite all interested companies, associations and government agencies and to act as the key element

in business co-operation and in contacts between governments and businesses.

As part of preparations for the Eastern Partnership Summit (scheduled for May 2011, in Budapest), Belarus has proposed to prepare a list of strategic projects, in addition to compiling a roadmap for operations over the coming two years. Mr. Martynov is keen to enhance the project component of multilateral co-operation within the Eastern Partnership initiative, including col-

laboration in energy security and wider participation of third-party countries in projects under the Eastern Partnership aegis.

The meeting was chaired by Catherine Ashton, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Štefan Füle, the European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, and foreign ministers of six partner states and EU member states also participated.

From UN rostrum

CSTO advocates peacekeeping potential

The CSTO has potential to be used within UN operations, maintaining peace and security, noted Zoya Kolontai, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Belarus to the UN, speaking at the 65th session of the UN General Assembly, on behalf of CSTO member states.

The CSTO has possessed observer status at the UN General Assembly since 2004, with a Joint Declaration on UN/CSTO Secretariat Co-operation signed in March 2010, giving new impetus to development.

The Belarusian representative underlined that the CSTO has proven its potential to interact with the UN, based on principles of partnership and complementary efforts. "Taking into account the increasing importance of new challenges, as well as the UN's eagerness to develop comprehensive co-operation with regional organisations, we believe that the adoption of the General Assembly Resolution on collaboration between the UN and CSTO is vital," asserted Ms. Kolontai. She spoke on behalf of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.



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