

Diplomats have the opportunity to worthily distinguish themselves

President Alexander Lukashenko accepts credentials from ambassadors of ten countries

By Igor Slavinsky

A credential is usually a letter, signed by the head of a foreign state, vouching for the bearer. The diplomats' official mission in Belarus begins from the moment they present their credentials to the President, with ceremonies taking place at the Palace of the Republic several times annually. The Belarusian President gives a speech and chats with diplomats, using the event to accent the directions of our foreign policy. This time, much was spoken about Minsk-Warsaw relations. Addressing the new Polish Ambassador, H.E. Mr. Leszek Szerepka, Mr. Lukashenko noted, "I'd like us to improve our relations, with your participation; we're ready for this." The renewal of parity and respectful interaction with Poland is a priority for Belarusian foreign policy.

Noting the professional qualities of the diplomat, Mr. Lukashenko requested 'that his mission should not be a waste of time'. He then explained that he doesn't hope the new head of the Polish



Ambassadors from ten states receive accreditation in Minsk, after presenting their credentials

diplomatic mission would 'open the eyes' of some politicians in Poland, who are well aware of Belarus and of the processes happening here. "I'd like it if you, as a respected person, could add your own good word, making a positive contribution to the development of co-operation between the fraternal nations of Belarus and Poland," noted

the President, adding, "It is very important."

According to Mr. Lukashenko, at present, relations with our neighbour are darkened by political intrigue and negative stereotypes towards Belarus. Explaining his priorities, he stressed the sovereignty and independence of Belarus, "We've proven ourselves to be a sovereign independ-

ent state; we're determined to protect our sovereignty and independence at any cost, even if we remain isolated. Saying this, nobody is alone in this world. If Poland and other countries understand what is most important to us, we'll always be able to build relations in other spheres."

The President also tackled the issue of the Belarusian di-

aspura. "We have many Poles in our country. I've often told your Foreign Minister and your former leaders that these are my Poles, the citizens of my country and people who've always supported me. We aren't against you supporting and helping ethnic Poles in Belarus and we'd be grateful if you would also support and assist our Bela-

rusians in Poland," noted Mr. Lukashenko.

The simplification of the border crossing regime, recently agreed by Minsk and Warsaw, is an important issue for both Poles and Belarusians. "We need to make this border between us transparent, since we are almost one nation. We used to live as one state, so we have much to recollect and great future prospects in our relationship," asserted Mr. Lukashenko. Mr. Szerepka promised that, as a diplomat, he would endeavour to find ways to promote mutually beneficial relations. "We aren't fighting," he underlined. Journalists and other diplomats listened attentively during the exchange.

The ambassadors of South Korea, Kyrgyzstan and Palestine begin their diplomatic missions in our country, in addition to those from Ghana, Kenya, Mauritania, Nicaragua, Paraguay and the South African Republic. "We're trying to establish good, trusting relations with each state but won't accept discrimination in any form," Mr. Lukashenko emphasised.

Shaped by realities of life



House of Representatives opens spring season of sessions

By Denis Kryat

Regular sessions of Parliamentary houses begin

The National Assembly's House of Representatives has begun to ratify a whole range of documents relating to the Customs Union. One deals with the operation of free economic zones, causing much discussion. Economy Minister Nikolai Snopkov notes that a compromise has been achieved which should improve the work of Belarusian free economic zones.

Residents registered by 2012 will retain their customs privileges until 2017. After this, the system will be replaced in favour of a revised tax regime, with legislation governing free economic zones updated and some functions overseen by the Customs Committee. The latter shall, for example, decide whether goods are produced by the Customs Union. Residents' efforts will be made more effi-

cient, while orienting them towards exports and competitiveness. The Economy Ministry is now preparing corresponding changes to the law.

The Chairman of the State Customs Committee, Alexander Shpilevsky, attended the session at the Oval Hall. The deputies questioned him on why there are still such long queues at the Belarusian-Lithuanian border and he replied that demand for imported passenger cars is to blame. "In the first three months of the year, more cars were imported into the country than during all of 2010. We've employed more staff and are working closely with our Lithuanian colleagues but, of course, our infrastructure was unprepared," he explains, adding that the situation is likely to end after July 1st, when duties on imported cars rise.

The draft law 'On Applications of Citizens and Legal Entities' has also received much consideration. On the one hand, it generalises previ-

ously adopted laws but, on the other, it proposes some new ideas. Citizens will, in future, be held accountable for unjustified complaints. Meanwhile, all electronic applications will receive a reply in the language in which they are written. At its second reading, obligations will be decided.

The Council of the Republic devoted its first working day to personnel matters, with the Editor-in-Chief of *SB* newspaper, Pavel Yakubovich, admitted as a member of the Council of the Republic. He will now be part of the Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs and National Security.

The parliamentarians' work focuses largely on improving the foreign trade balance, explains the Chairman of the Council of the Republic, Anatoly Rubinov. Legislation to aid sales of services and goods is required, while international co-operation is vital. Mr. Rubinov notes, "We're interested in developing good relations with other states and wish our bilateral contacts to be based on international law, via mutually beneficial dialogue. Belarus is interested in activating relations with the Council of Europe, the European Union and the OSCE." He is convinced that all current problems regarding international mutual relations are temporary. "As soon as the current wave of anti-Belarusian feeling ends, we'll strive to renew good relations, including within the *Eastern Partnership* initiative," he adds.

Long term assurance

IMF sees no problem with Belarus' solvency

"I think Belarus will be able to meet its foreign debt payments, with no problems regarding financing," asserts Chris Jarvis, the Head of the IMF Mission to Belarus. He adds, "Obviously, foreign creditors and investors are worried about this but I think they should feel confident, seeing Belarus' payments last month. The Government and the National Bank have declared that servicing the foreign debt will be a top priority."

Mr. Jarvis believes the matter to be very important since Belarus

needs to attract new resources and take out new loans in the long term. "This is why Belarus is interested in maintaining good relations with investors and creditors," he stresses. "I believe that the National Bank of Belarus is solvent and has considerable currency reserves. It has managed to prevent considerable losses to its reserves, particularly during the past month. The fact that the National Bank has suspended interventions on the currency market indicates that the Bank and the Government have taken a 'time-out' to elaborate an economic solution to the existing problems."

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