

Information shared in Minsk on eve of December session in Moscow

President Alexander Lukashenko meets representatives of Collective Security Treaty Organisation's Parliamentary Assembly Council

By Igor Slavinsky

Participants unanimously proclaimed that the CSTO is 'the most successful integration structure within the post-Soviet space' ('not taking into account the Union State', added Mr. Lukashenko). However, it was evident that Uzbekistani parliamentarians were not present at the negotiating table. Clearly, for a military-political block — as the CSTO positions itself — it's not appropriate to move out of step. It's hardly possible to imagine such a situation within a classical alliance such as NATO.

In recent times, the organisation has faced other challenges. Accordingly, a range of important measures are being decided, aiming to consolidate and strengthen the CSTO. Over the past year, Minsk has been co-ordinating this major work, as Belarus is chairing the organisation. Mr. Lukashenko has announced proposals for debate by six — or even seven — states at the December meeting. "Minsk always takes rational and profitable decisions regarding integration," he noted without any false modesty. Of course, the idea of establishing the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly was born at a Minsk summit in 2006.

The Belarusian Head of State admits that recent global events are pushing countries in our region towards closer integration — especially in the 'sacred' sphere of security, as he calls it. The CSTO is responsible for this sphere within the post-Soviet space. Mr. Lukashenko noted, "I cannot say that we've achieved the



Meeting of the participants of CSTO Parliamentary Assembly Council

desired effect within the organisation but we've done more than any other organisation."

In Astana, a draft of further reforms was compiled by the heads of state during a casual meeting. With help from the CSTO Secretariat (the President of Belarus has perhaps met its General Secretary, Nikolai Bordyuzha, more often in recent months than some other top officials), Minsk has set out its proposals in a final document, sending it to other capitals ahead of time to avoid 'surprises' in Moscow this winter. Some have already been made pub-

lic and, as Mr. Lukashenko admits, these have caused a stir in the global community. In particular, the initiative to 'counteract attempts to destabilise civil society through the Internet and social networks' is the cause of hot debate. "I've been blamed for everything — as if Lukashenko is afraid of any 'revolution,'" the President stresses. "These were our common ideas!"

Mr. Lukashenko has a two-sided attitude towards 'Internet revolutions'. "We should not think that these matters are distant and do not affect us. However, nor should we be

afraid of these networks..." he explained, sharing his experience with the foreign parliamentarians. "This year, we've witnessed attempts to destabilise our society by means of social networking. We've learnt how to fight this evil. We certainly won't close the Internet or blogs. You're welcome to discuss anything you like but we'll take measures if your actions are illegal."

Mr. Lukashenko views the recent 'Arab spring' as having had a negative effect. He notes that recent elections in 'the most advanced African country' — Tunisia — led to a win by

'the most radical Islamists'. What is next for Egypt and Libya?

Against these events, the CSTO is 'making its body stronger while augmenting its muscles'. The Collective Rapid Response Forces are being formed and equipped, while their status and mechanism of application are being defined. The Belarusian Constitution, for example, prohibits using armed forces on the territories of other states. Following the bloody events in Kyrgyzstan, the CSTO is developing ways of reacting to similar situations, in response to requests from the legal authorities of any member state. "We are not talking about interference but reaction," emphasises Mr. Lukashenko.

Nobody doubts that the military-political block — headed by Russia — will be busy. By 2013, the USA is due to leave Afghanistan. The Chairman of the State Duma, Boris Gryzlov, is convinced, "The situation will destabilise afterwards. I don't say that it's perfect now but it will go downhill." He refers both to drug trafficking and terrorism. In hard times, the CSTO needs to demonstrate unity rather than discord. Mr. Gryzlov pointed out that an American military base has opened in Kyrgyzstan and Mr. Lukashenko noted that the 'trilateral play of Uzbekistan prevents it from being present within the CSTO'.

The presidents' agenda at the Moscow summit is to focus on all these issues, testing the CSTO's effectiveness. Mr. Lukashenko believes that the December CSTO Collective Security Council will be adopting some 'serious decisions'.

Capturing the attention of readers is a true challenge

On meeting members of the Writers' Union of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko discussed life, literature, politics and free creativity, noting that the state doesn't want to dictate what and how to write. The most vital aspect is that worthy books appear

By Victor Vasiliev

Nikolay Cherginets, the Chairman of the Writers' Union of Belarus, told the Belarusian President that, over the last five years, the Union 'has gained 442 new members', giving a total of 567 members. These include laureates of the State Award and Special Presidential Award, as well as honoured figures of culture. Speaking of the latest editions, writer Cherginets excitedly noted, "We've managed to capture the attention of our colleagues in other states!" Journalists ironically noted that the only step remaining is to win the attention of our own readers.

"There's nothing more precious to me than a book. Without learning, I'd never

have become president," noted Mr. Lukashenko. "I was living in a village, so books were a window to the world for me." The President shared an interesting page from his younger years, revealing that he wrote poetry at school and submitted it to a district newspaper for publication. Their harsh assessment disappointed him and, probably, shaped his sharp perception of the true quality of literature.

"I'm bringing the Presidential library into order as I do like to have something to 'boast' of in front of other presidents!" smiled Mr. Lukashenko. He repeated several times that he has no 'creative framework' for writers. "There's no need to please everyone," he warned Mr.

Cherginets. "Let them write what they wish. Just look how much is written about me!" Mr. Cherginets noted that the same can be said of him. "I don't need to use the Union of Writers politically and I won't ever 'break' the intelligentsia," continued Mr. Lukashenko, adding that, "We have bread, factories and plants, yet we lack soul."

The President invited all the writers at the meeting to express their opinions. Olga Koval, a member of the Writers' Union of Belarus, who teaches at the Belarusian State Technological University and writes poetry in her free time, gave an interesting response. "Most agree that we need state support, but I'd like to suggest an alternative," she noted in-

triguingly. She reminded those present that Yanka Kupala, a Belarusian literary legend, paid for the publication of his first books and found his own sponsors. Ms. Koval is confident that the state should support literature, but would rather not see money directly allocated for publication, since this could lead to favouritism of those well-placed. She would like to see talent supported in other ways.

Ms. Koval's speech confirmed that the Union of Writers enjoys many differing views — a sign of freedom of speech. The President agreed with the young poetess, saying, "Great masterpieces were created by those who had nothing." On hearing these words, the writers showed signs of anxiety but



A good book will always find its reader

Mr. Lukashenko explained, "I don't believe you should endure poverty."

Clearly, the state plans to continue supporting literature, but the President is eager to only finance the publication of those editions which will enjoy true demand.

Taking his leave, Mr. Lukashenko promised that he'd try to find time to meet with the writers again this year — perhaps in an editorial office of a literary magazine. He said, "I don't bid farewell but say goodbye." Members of the Writers' Union of Belarus still have some time to write bestsellers.