

High level supports importance of common topics

Alexander Lukashenko meeting representatives of Russia and Kazakhstan more often

By Igor Slavinsky

A higher level of integration between Minsk, Moscow and Astana is inspiring more frequent meetings. Not long ago, the President met the Chairman of the Majilis — the lower house of the Kazakh Parliament — Ural Muhamedzhanov, and VTB Chairman and CEO Andrei Kostin.

On welcoming his guest from Astana, Mr. Lukashenko called our three Customs Union states 'the closest countries in the world'. As if stressing this proximity, he hugged Mr. Muhamedzhanov in greeting. Taking exports as a benchmark, Kazakhstan is our third largest trading partner in the CIS — behind Russia and Ukraine. However, in recent years, trade with this Central Asian republic has sharply enhanced. In 2010, Belarus dispatched 50 percent more products and services to Kazakhstan than in 2009 (though imports rose by an incredible 500 percent — on account of Kazakh oil-fuel). This was largely possible due to the Customs Union, as the Presi-

dent explains, "Huge opportunities will open up to us when the



VTB Bank's head office in the Belarusian capital

Single Economic Space becomes operational in two months' time. Of course, we'll face certain difficulties and criticism — as has already emerged. We'll also fail to avoid open competition and resistance. This is natural but we are determined to pass this path with dignity."

Mr. Lukashenko wished the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, good health — so that 'he'll be working for the benefit of our integration for many years'. In turn, Mr. Muhamedzhanov thanked the President for his warm reception. Moreover, he found Minsk's weather in October warm. According to the guest, 'our countries experience no problems'; rather, 'some issues exist which need solution and these are successfully being realised'.

The initial part of the meeting was held in front of journalists and did not tackle concrete Belarusian-Kazakh projects but Mr. Lukashenko stressed that there are several dozen, all gradually being realised. He added that Astana can fully rely on Belarus to support its interests in Eu-

rope.

Projects were announced during a meeting between Belarus' Prime Minister, Mikhail Myasnikov, and Mr. Muhamedzhanov. It became clear that Kazakh businesses are showing interest in developing the Petrikov deposit of potash salts. Belarus is inviting them to buy the state share in a mobile communication operator and to build a branch of the Astana-St. Petersburg transport corridor (currently under construction) with the aim of connecting our three states even more closely.

Joint projects in the banking sphere — discussed by Mr. Lukashenko and the Chairman of VTB (Russia's second financial group in terms of assets) — were also under focus. The Moscow banker announced his interest in the development of co-operation with Belarus 'in the field of credit' in such spheres as petrochemistry, machine building, agriculture and construction. According to Mr. Kostin, VTB is satisfied with Belarus' stability. "As regards financial problems, these

exist not only in Russia and Belarus," he said, adding, "Sadly, the West — Europe — also experiences real financial problems at present, which are coming to us from there. However, we are able to settle them. I think that closer co-operation will enable us to do this." The President promised this co-operation with VTB.

According to Mr. Lukashenko, some commercial banks are holding aloof from solving problems on the Belarusian foreign currency market. He believes it to be necessary 'to have their faces turned towards the state'. "The present situation is an acid test for our relations with banks — including those from Russia," Mr. Lukashenko emphasised. "Your bank is behaving worthily, assisting our enterprises with loans and helping other banks with resources. We're ready to extend our serious relations with you and will do our best to give your bank certain advantages over those who do not understand us so well."

The rest of their discussion was held behind closed doors.

Scientists join orbit of absolutely new research

Minsk hosts 5th International Space Congress

By Vladimir Bibikov

Belarus still lacks its own satellite orbiting the Earth, yet has claim to the title of being a cosmic state. Several Belarusians have been into space, while the country boasts a strong space industry, supplying Russian satellites with materials and components. Belarus has signed intergovernmental agreements with Russia and Ukraine, envisaging the peaceful mastering of the cosmos. Joint sci-tech programmes have been realised for several years, with a Belarusian-Russian orbital group of satellites and land infrastructure for its servicing crowning the process.

Many of these topics were covered by almost 150 reports delivered at Minsk's Congress, by outstanding scientists and heads

of Belarusian, Russian, Ukrainian and other states' space enterprises. In particular, they discussed how best to use satellite data: to prevent natural disasters resulting from earthquakes and tsunamis; to observe forests and fields; to prepare weather forecasts; and to foresee technogenic disasters.

The launch of a Belarusian satellite — designed and produced by domestic scientists — remains a key issue. It differs from rivals in being smaller and lighter, while having a longer operating life and boasting higher resolution. Jointly with Russian 'Kanopus-B', the Belarusian satellite is to monitor Belarus, warning a terrestrial centre of possible emergencies.

Importantly, the Earth based infrastructure is ready. "The



Exhibition as part of Space Congress

Belarusian satellite is undergoing pre-flight tests now, with the launch planned for 2012,"

explains the First Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences' Presidium,

Piotr Vityaz. "It will be a new stage in our sci-tech progress, as Belarus is currently giving birth to a whole new industry of Earth and cosmic studies, using its knowledge in various spheres of the economy."

Hundreds of exhibits were on show at the Congress as part of an exhibition demonstrating the latest sci-tech achievements. Visitors could see how Belarus plans to use its first satellite to warn of forest fire and illegal timber cutting — in real time. Prompt measures can be taken where situations occur. Moreover, the state of peat deposits (a natural treasure of Belarus) can be observed from above, as can new oil deposits — in Belarus and beyond. Congress participants noted that the Belarusian satellite's data could easily be sold abroad.