



Presidents of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan sign Declaration on Eurasian Economic Integration after trilateral meeting in Moscow

Path to Eurasian Economic Union becoming reality

By Vladimir Vasiliev

In Moscow, Alexander Lukashenko, Dmitry Medvedev and Nursultan Nazarbayev have signed the Declaration on Eurasian Economic Integration, stating that the Customs Union is a success and that, on January 1st, 2012, the next integration stage is to be launched: the Single Economic Space. The three presidents signed an agreement on the Eurasian Economic Commission and approved regulations for its operation.

As previously mentioned, these documents are well timed and topical. Accordingly, when the presidents brought them into legal force at the Kremlin's Andreevsky Hall, all journalists present had no doubt that a transition from the Customs Union to the Single Economic Space (and further to the Eurasian Economic Union) is now truly irreversible.

The three presidents have been long preparing for this important event. In late October, Mr. Medvedev, Mr. Lukashenko and Mr. Nazarbayev had a telephone conversation regarding the future of the Single Economic Space and issues which should be left in the past. In addition, the Russian Prime Minister and the Belarusian and Kazakh presidents published articles in *Izvestia* newspaper. Mr. Medvedev also made a related announcement on the eve of the summit, speaking to Russian pensioners and veterans, calling the move 'a great event'. He promised, "We're already close to each other but will become even closer."

The question of national sovereignty concerns some but a representative of the Belarusian delegation stresses, "The closest possible integration will be unable to destroy the sovereignty of our states

— as all parties perfectly understand. Within the Single Economic Space, nobody needs to steal from others or independently refute a flag, anthem, coat of arms or other attributes of independence." Kremlin sources also assert that the Single Economic Space is founded on voluntary participation, equal rights and mutual respect. Decision making within this new

egration explains, this aims to enhance the competitiveness of our national economies and, consequently, people's well-being. This is a key element of integration. "In future, large salaries are to be available, while well-paid jobs will be more common," notes the Belarusian Ambassador to Russia, H.E. Mr. Andrei Kobayakov. He has been working on Eurasian integra-

idea since the mid-1990s. The Russian Head of State also thanked Mr. Lukashenko for his 'insistent work on integration' and for his 'acceleration of the integration processes'. Mr. Nazarbayev noted the Belarusian President's 'powerful pressure' and 'good administrative capabilities'.

It is clear that the Russian and Kazakh presidents view the launch of the Single Eco-

prochement should not slow'. The European Union can act as a model, as it has advanced further than the Minsk-Moscow-Astana project. The Belarusian delegation also notes that the Eurasian Economic Union and the European Union may integrate in the future, though much work would lie ahead.

The presidents' focus is intense; they even continued working in front of journalists. During the press conference, Mr. Medvedev signed a letter to Russia's State Duma, requesting the ratification of the adopted documents. Mr. Lukashenko noted that he would sign a similar letter to the National Assembly after returning to Minsk.

Afterwards, the floor

opened to journalists and I asked the Belarusian President about the future of the Union State. Will it 'dissolve' into the larger integration project — the Eurasian Union? Mr. Lukashenko expressed hope that the projects could rival each other but noted that, if the Single Economic Space sees greater integration than the Union State, Belarus and Russia may decide to abandon the 'duplication'. So far, integration within the Union State has advanced further. Mr. Lukashenko added that Minsk and Moscow have created equal conditions for citizens, who share a single defence space, as well as allowing free trade. "We've considerably advanced in this respect," he summed up.

The three presidents have been long preparing for this important event. In late October, Mr. Medvedev, Mr. Lukashenko and Mr. Nazarbayev had a telephone conversation regarding the future of the Single Economic Space and issues which should be left in the past

integrated union excludes the domination of any state.

Belarusian and Kazakh sources explain that, for Moscow, the establishment of the Single Economic Space (and then the Eurasian Economic Union — similar to the European Union) is a priority, as has never been hidden. Much is being staked on the political map. Naturally, in supporting the Moscow initiative, Minsk and Astana hope that the Single Economic Space will end them as weighty a 'voice' as that of Moscow and that the sovereignty of their countries will not suffer from integration. As I understand, this principal has been fully met in the final version of the documents signed in Moscow — as journalists of the old school would say: 'to the mutual satisfaction of all sides'.

While preserving independence, our three states are now mutually dependant. The Declaration on Eurasian Economic Integration envisages 'co-ordinated economic policy and the parameters of basic macroeconomic figures' and 'the strengthening of co-operation in the currency sphere'. As the Belarusian del-

egation explains, this aims to enhance the competitiveness of our national economies and, consequently, people's well-being. This is a key element of integration. "In future, large salaries are to be available, while well-paid jobs will be more common," notes the Belarusian Ambassador to Russia, H.E. Mr. Andrei Kobayakov. He has been working on Eurasian integra-

tion issues for many years, so his words have worth. He explains that the Single Economic Space should facilitate people's search for employment and allow entrepreneurs more opportunities. Mr. Medvedev, Mr. Lukashenko and Mr. Nazarbayev told journalists even more than they expected to hear, entering Andreevsky Hall smiling and patting each other on the shoulder — as men behave on achieving a hard-won victory. After signing the documents, Mr. Lukashenko shook hands with Mr. Medvedev and Mr. Nazarbayev and, afterwards, the presidents folded their hands in a symbolic trinity.

As the summit host, Mr. Medvedev delivered his speech first. "An important event has occurred — another powerful step on the path to the Eurasian Economic Union's formation," he emphasised. "The meeting has fully met our expectations. We can agree, listen and hear each other." The Russian President expressed words of gratitude to Mr. Nazarbayev for suggesting Eurasian integration. He noted that he has been steadily promoting the

economic Space on January 1st, 2012, as an extremely ambitious goal. There was some doubt as to whether the necessary documents would be developed, agreed and adopted in time for the new year launch but Mr. Lukashenko 'accelerated' this common work. Mr. Medvedev and Mr. Nazarbayev believe that the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union by 2015 is achievable, and may even be launched ahead of time. In comparison to similar integration unions worldwide, the present pace of integration between Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan has already broken records.

Mr. Lukashenko noted that 'everything has been settled quickly regarding the Single Economic Space, because Russia — represented by Dmitry Medvedev — has taken practical steps'. He added that Moscow is the centre of integration for the post-Soviet space and events move quickly when Russian leaders shift from words to action.

Eurasian integration is profitable to all of our three states, as Mr. Lukashenko stresses. He believes that 'the pace of our economies' rap-

