

Looking into the future

By Vladimir Khromov

Military development within CSTO discussed by Alexander Lukashenko and Collective Security Treaty Organisation's General Secretary, Nikolay Bordyuzha

Mr. Lukashenko explained, "We are moving along the correct path. I've arrived from a remote and rather inaccessible region of South-East Asia and, while holding talks and meeting state officials, I noticed that all proudly spoke of their unions: trade and trade-economic. Where joint interests exist, political unions naturally follow,

to ensure the defence of interests, including through military approaches. Nations around the globe are uniting in similar organisations — not simply in South-East Asia. Visiting the Persian Gulf, meeting local officials, I kept hearing the same view: the Gulf States are agreeing to share a common customs space and single economic policy, now being elaborated. Their example of collective defence was evident in Bahrain, where Saudi Arabia and other countries stepped in to help with a situation of disorder. We need not be ashamed of admitting that we share a military organisation; we'll continue strengthening it in all

possible ways. I think our planned informal meeting in Kyrgyzstan should be held under this slogan."

Mr. Bordyuzha reported to the President on the progress of CSTO decisions adopted in December 2012 and on the work of the organisation's constituent bodies. "We're now realising decisions taken by our presidents last December, including the reform of military co-operation to attain a new level."

Mr. Bordyuzha recalled the decision to establish Collective Rapid Reaction Forces which would unite various CSTO military structures. "We've completed preparations to es-

tablish Collective Air Forces — as an additional component of the CSTO; this will enable us to ensure aviation screening for possible operations while being able to redeploy certain forces of the organisation (to solve security related tasks). At present, we're working on the possible establishment of Special Operation Collective Forces," added Mr. Bordyuzha. He gave the President a report on preparations for the next CSTO informal summit, being hosted by Kyrgyzstan in May. They then debated issues for presidential discussion and shared opinions on the development of the situation within the CSTO space.

From balance of interests to balance of trade

Belarus and Turkey need to balance trade and build co-operation, stresses President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko on meeting Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu

Mr. Lukashenko believes that Belarus' bilateral trade with Turkey is quite meagre, in the face of huge possibilities. He noted, "We vigorously co-operate with countries in the 'far arc' and have very few problems in trade or politics with neighbouring countries in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. However, we're eager to diversify our markets and find interesting areas in countries further afield." Mentioning his recent visit to South-East Asia, he commented to his colleague, "As a result of that visit, we've signed contracts worth \$0.5bn. We lack such figures with Turkey although it's situated closer; you must admit that it's far from normal. I say this with a certain sadness and bitterness, as we enjoy very good political relations and there are no acute problems between the Turkish and Belarusian authorities."

The President emphasised that Belarus places great significance on the visit of the Turkish Foreign Minister. He added, "These are not traditional words. Your visit to Minsk is very important to us and I strongly hope that we'll outline a number of avenues of co-operation (perhaps five or six) to help forge trade and economic ties and boost trade turnover, while promoting interaction across all areas. Let us put this into practice."

Visas abolished as unnecessary

Belarusian-Turkish agreements on visa abolition and re-admission signed in Minsk

An inter-governmental agreement on visa-free travel has been signed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus, Vladimir Makei, and his Turkish colleague, Ahmet Davutoğlu. Another intergovernmental agreement on re-admission has been signed by Belarus' Interior Minister, Igor Shunevich, and the Turkish Foreign Minister.

Mr. Makei notes that the two agreements were initiated after the visit of the President of Belarus to Turkey in October 2010. He explains, "These two important agreements will benefit the people of our two countries." The agreement on visa-free travel will allow citizens from our two countries to travel between Belarus and Turkey without the need for a visa, for up to 90 days a year or up to 30 days in one trip.

It's hoped that the move will inspire tourist flow in both directions and, as the Turkish Foreign Minister emphasises, facilitate business contacts.

True drama theatre begins with sincerity

By Dmitry Kryat and Victoria Popova

Mr. Lukashenko toured the updated halls, which boast everything necessary — including the troupe's wonderful new rehearsal stage, which is the same size as the main stage and with much of the same equipment. In fact, TV employees are already making requests to film drama at the new venue; this could generate extra funds for the Theatre, helping it become self-sustaining, as the President pointed out. In support of this, the Theatre is exempt from taxation, while still receiving state attention.

Mr. Lukashenko attended the premiere of the traditional performance of *Paulinka*, which annually opens the season.

Despite repairs to the Kupala Theatre building in recent years, the troupe has maintained its high level and number of performances, showing that it can work under any conditions. While resident in the House of Officers and the Palace of Trade Unions, the company welcomed full houses and extended its repertoire to include *The Abduction of Europe*, or *Ursula Radziwill's Theatre* and a new staging of Martin McDonagh's *Lonesome West* — a tragicomedy. Its premieres included Gogol's *Night Before Christmas* (a comedic work close to the literary original) and Yelena Popova's staging of *Leaf Fall*. Andersen, Alexander Gartsuev's *People of the Marsh* (based on Ivan Melezh's story), the ironic *Local Cabaret* and the fashionable yet perceptive *Office* have all joined the repertoire.

Few would argue that the Kupala Theatre sets the standard for others to follow, having so many times proven its talent and enduring success over these years of disruption.

The Theatre's Artistic Leader, Nikolay Pinigin, notes, "I'm a traditional person and don't believe that drama is synonymous with high-technology. Theatre is about more than light entertainment: it portrays real human emotions. We'll never rival Broadway, which generates millions of dollars and has similar amounts invested in its performances, reproducing swimming pools, palaces, fire and lava. We certainly



Paulinka performance staged successfully at Kupala Theatre for seven years

have some innovations to share with theatre goers though. We'll surely always enjoy full houses. Our temporary halls seated thousands while there are only 360 seats in our own auditorium."

In April, three performances are showing on the Kupala Theatre's new stage: *Paulinka*, *Dinner with Nuts* and *Pinsk Gentry*. The House of Officers, the House of Trade Unions and Minsk Concert Hall will also continue staging performances.

The premiere in the newly opened building was a clear success. After the curtains fell, applause resounded for some time, showing the audience's admiration. Actors from all over the country attended, alongside famous cultural figures and the President, who was received by the theatrical troupe on stage. Mr. Lukashenko took a microphone from centre stage to the edge, to avoid obscuring the artistes, as the 'true' hosts. It was obvious that their performance had moved and impressed him.

He admitted, "On the eve of coming here, I felt as anxious as a schoolboy. I've spent half of my life in politics, often speaking in public, but it's been a long time since I've been to the theatre. A special occasion was needed after such a long period." Of course, surely, no better occasion than the opening of the renewed Kupala Theatre could be found.

Work continues and Mr. Lukashenko has promised to see renovations completed within the next 18 months. He noted the large funds spent on reconstruction but believes that the investment will help the troupe give their best, bringing pleasure to the public. "If you continue to give performances of this calibre, all expenditure will be fully compensated. The public, whose taxes we've spent on this restoration, will become your audience," the Head of State added.

Naturally, other theatres await renovation and the President has asserted that state support will be

forthcoming. He expressed his sincere gratitude to the troupe, saying, "Thank you for bringing me to the theatre after a long break. Now, I can attend any theatre."

Once the hall had emptied, the President chatted with the troupe, and was requested to visit more often. Mr. Lukashenko couldn't promise to visit once a month — as asked — but has promised to attend premieres.

His warm, informal conversation tackled many aspects: elevated and earthly, including the role of art and drama within society and its particular significance in Belarus. Naturally, the subject of funding arose. Fortunately, Belarusian theatre is quite well provided for but some issues will always exist. However, these are solvable: through the theatre's own effort and with steady state support. It was promised that support from the state will continue but the troupe is asked to keep staging thrilling performances, such as *Paulinka*, to encourage full houses.