

Green light for diplomats

Presentation of credentials ceremony, by foreign ambassadors to the President of Belarus, hosted at Independence Palace for the first time

By Vasily Kharitonov

A special hall was allocated for this procedure. Everything is symbolic here; the bas-reliefs on the walls with lines from the Constitution, the Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Frantsisk Skorina. Between these lines, the most important can be read — we honour our cultural and historical heritage while appreciating our present, so we expect respectable attitude from our partners — the attitude which Belarusians always demonstrate towards their friends. In this atmosphere Mr. Lukashenko accepted credentials from diplomats from Australia, Greece, Italy, Cambodia, China, Serbia, Sudan and the Czech Republic.

New ambassadors have been somewhat lucky, as they assume their office just after we've celebrated a great holiday — Victory Day. Also, the IIHF World Championship also commenced on this day. The President noted that these events will help them understand the character of the Belarusian people. Our invaluable contribution in the defeat of fascism enables us to move forward along the chosen way with our heads held high. Numerous victims,



At the presentation of credentials ceremony

brought to the altar of victory, testify our rejection of violence, as well as to our desire to live in peace and harmony with our neighbours and distant partners while defending our interests in the international arena. As far as the World Championship is concerned, what else can say more about Belarusian hospitality, friendship and amiability?

The President addressed each of the diplomats in turn. Everything is clear with China even without words — an all-round strategic partnership

is an example of the highest level of interaction. We need only to continue reinforcing it. Mr. Lukashenko said he plans to tackle this issue as soon as possible with his big friend, President of China, Xi Jinping.

"I would like to emphasise that we place great hopes on the further strengthening of co-operation with the People's Republic of China. The collaboration between our countries has grown into a comprehensive strategic partnership. It's distinguished by an active political dia-

Alexander Lukashenko:

You represent countries which are located on various continents and which have different histories and traditions. Meanwhile, we're united by a natural desire to make our states more prosperous and the world around us more stable and fair. It is this approach which can become a solid foundation for efficient bilateral co-operation, as well as equal and constructive dialogue.

logue at the high and top levels," said Mr. Lukashenko.

Cambodia is a repetitive of the region that Belarus continues to actively master — the South East Asia. A joint venture producing Belarusian tractors is already functioning here. "Our business co-operation continues to gain momentum, but we already see good prospects. I'm convinced that the joint facility to manufacture Belarusian tractors that opened in the country this year will be the first step towards closer, mutually beneficial ties," said the Belarusian leader. The prospects of co-operation will be tackled during the visit by the President of Belarus

to this state, which will be scheduled soon.

Visits are also planned to a range of African states, as was noted by the President during his conversation with the Sudanese diplomat. This region is very promising.

Australia is also very interesting, but in order to strengthen interaction it's necessary to learn about each other better. With this aim a Belarusian diplomatic representation will be opened this year in Canberra.

Belarus also boasts good relations with its old European partners. Italy was one of the first to provide assistance to Belarus in recuperating children from the Chernobyl-affected regions. This can't be forgotten and is a guarantee of success for future joint projects. This is especially vital if we take into account that in H2 2014, Italy will take over the presidency of the European Union and from 2015 the Eurasian Economic Union will become operational. This is a good reason to enhance the level of bilateral dialogue, as well as with Europe as a whole. This was already tackled in dialogue with the ambassadors from Serbia, the Czech Republic and Greece.

Banks offered proposals

In a meeting between the President, the Chairman of VTB Bank's Management Board and a member of the Supervisory Council, Andrey Kostin, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko suggested that the VTB Group expand their co-operation in new fields, including in the defence sector

By Veniamin Mishin

"Today this is also very important for Russia. We can also do something additionally. With proper financing we can modernise and launch the production of certain products for the needs of the defence sector of the Russian Federation, alongside Belarus, since we have a common army. We have a combined force grouping here in the western direction, and it will be also a contribution to the Belarusian defence sector," noted the Head of the Belarusian state.

Mr. Lukashenko thanked Mr. Kostin for the financial support

the VTB Bank provides to the Belarusian economy. In his words, during 2013, the bank's loans amounted to around \$300m. "A giant such as the VTB Group is capable of more. That is why we suggest expanding our co-operation in new areas, including in the defence sector," added the President of Belarus.

In his turn, Mr. Kostin stressed that the VTB Bank had already been working in Belarus for six years. "We are satisfied with this work. Belarus has the right bank-



Andrey Kostin

ing culture, the culture of not only lending but also returning the money," he said, adding that the VTB Bank has been increasing its service in every area, providing loans for the government, companies and individuals.

Mr. Kostin congratulated the Belarusians on their hosting of the IIHF World Championship. According to him, the successful organisation and hosting of such an important event will show the world the potential of a contemporary Belarus.

'We want to see a strong Ukraine'

By Veniamin Mishin

Belarus wants to see a strong Ukraine, Alexander Lukashenko said as he met with Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to Belarus, Mr. Mikhail Yezhel



Mikhail Yezhel

The President noted that this meeting is symbolic in many ways. "This is natural, because I've made numerous statements about Ukraine and our involvement in the processes that are going on. Maybe, there is nothing that Ukraine, its people and authorities, can blame me for. We tried to stick to a careful and well-balanced position, simultaneously saying that our government and I care about Ukraine," noted the Belarusian leader.

Mr. Lukashenko wished that the events, which are still taking place in Ukraine and are having a negative effect, ended as soon as possible. "We wish Ukraine developed as a single state, we wish it were our dear Ukraine. We have never imagined that Ukraine might take a hostile position towards Belarus. I openly spoke my mind on the issues that bother us, including the issues related to NATO."

"Ukraine should be Ukraine. This is a country of 45 million, a friendly nation to us. It's a self-sufficient country. If we help it, instead of meddling, this will be a very influential country. Maybe, somebody does not want the country to be strong and influential. However, this is not my position or

the position of the Belarusian people. We want to see a strong Ukraine, with which we can cooperate and trade, as we've done over the past years," emphasised the Belarusian President.

Mr. Lukashenko reminded the diplomat about his meeting with Ukraine's Acting President, Alexander Turchinov, "I've answered many of his confidential questions and concerns unambiguously, in a friendly way. I honour the arrangements reached with the Ukrainian authorities at the Pripjat," added Mr. Lukashenko. "If you need any help (except for mediating, because I cannot stand it), I'm ready to lend a hand to Ukraine at any time, because I take the developments in Ukraine close to my heart."

In his turn, Mikhail Yezhel thanked the Belarusian Head of State for his very consistent and honest position. "In this situation, every kind word is a good support for Ukraine," he said.

The Ukrainian diplomat noted that five or six points voiced by the Belarusian President in his interview with the Ukrainian TV show *Shuster Live* were 100 percent supported by the viewers, because this position echoes the sentiments of the Ukrainian people in general. "It rarely happens that politicians get 100 percent support. This speaks volumes. We felt Belarus' attitude," noted the Ambassador.

Observers preparing for elections at neighbours

By Alexander Velikhov

The Central Election Commission of Belarus was invited to take part in observing presidential elections in Ukraine

It was decided that, from the Belarusian side, the unscheduled presidential elections will be observed by the Secretary of the Central Election Commission, Nikolay Lozovik,

and CEC Deputy Chairman and Director of the National Centre of Legislation and Legal Research, Vadim Ipatov.

"We're preparing for this trip," notes Mr. Lozovik. "Everything depends now on whether the situation in Ukraine will change. We're ready to get acquainted with the practice of preparation and organisation of the elections under such difficult socio-political conditions in the country.

The Central Election Commission in Ukraine is working intensively and the working conditions are very hard. Nevertheless, the elections are being prepared and we'd like their organisation to somehow reduce the degree of political heat."

The Belarusian observers plan to fly to Ukraine on May 23rd, while the unscheduled presidential elections in Ukraine will take place on May 25th.