

## SPECIFIC INTENTIONS

# MORE THAN JUST PARTNERS

**A delegation of Republika Srpska of Bosnia and Herzegovina visited Minsk on a working visit. Over three days, the guests held a number of meetings and negotiations and visited leading industrial enterprises. The central event was the meeting of the President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko with the President of Republika Srpska of Bosnia and Herzegovina Milorad Dodik.**

### **"You can count on us"**

This was not the first time for Milorad Dodik to visit Belarus. In June 2019, he already met with Aleksandr Lukashenko in Minsk while visiting the 2nd European Games. True, then in the position of Chairman of the Presidium of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This time he brought with him a solid delegation, the composition of which alone made it possible to judge what interests the Balkan partners in Belarus most of all. The ministers of scientific and technological development and higher education, health and social protection, agriculture, forestry and water management arrived in Minsk. In a word, the visit programme was very eventful. Everywhere guests were greeted warmly, including at the highest level.

"The ageless Milorad," Aleksandr Lukashenko greeted his colleague with a smile. "You should know the main thing: if something in Belarus suits you in terms of technology and other issues in agriculture, industry, healthcare, we are always happy to provide you with help and support."

Aleksandr Lukashenko also stated that Belarus is closely monitoring the situation in the Balkans, "You know my attitude well. On all the cases and issues that exist, on the events that took place in our friendly Yugoslavia, when it was simply dismembered into parts. You know my position and attitude towards you in the most difficult times. I mean

Serbia when it was bombed. You know the relations that we are building with Bosnia and Herzegovina. We know that sometimes it's not easy for you there. But you fight bravely. We welcome this. Only courage, resilience and strength today, unfortunately, can determine the future of a particular country, region, territory. I think that you are steadfastly hanging in there, representing the interests of Orthodox people and people who trust and believe in you. We are on your side in this regard, and you can count on us. In a word, you have come to see your friends."

### **"We remained consistent in our decision"**

Milorad Dodik also warmly greeted the President of Belarus, "I personally perceive you as a friend of our people and, more to say, as a brother." The President of Republika Srpska of Bosnia and Herzegovina recalled that his first meeting with Aleksandr Lukashenko took place back in 2000 at the celebration of the 2000th anniversary of Christianity in Jerusalem. Milorad Dodik added that the entire leadership of Republika Srpska is today under British and American sanctions, "Despite all the challenges, our friendship continues. I know that your country is also under pressure and sanctions from the West. We in Republika Srpska did not allow Bosnia and Herzegovina to vote for sanctions. Of course, it was not easy for us to



overcome the pressure from both Brussels and Washington. But we remained consistent in our decision.”

Later, in a conversation with journalists, the President of Republika Srpska noted that the meeting with the President of Belarus had been ‘exceptional’. According to Milorad Dodik, this was also an opportunity to personally thank Aleksandr Lukashenko for his support and cooperation. And not only today. The Serbian people still remember the visit of the President of Belarus to Belgrade in 1999. The country at the time was under NATO bombing, which the alliance called Operation Angel of Mercy. But the only one who showed mercy and calls for peace then was Aleksandr Lukashenko, who flew to Belgrade without any security guarantees from the West. “He was the only leader who supported and understood my people in 1999,” Milorad Dodik says now, emphasising his deep respect for the President of Belarus. “It was an act of personal courage, and we Serbs will never forget it. Your President is a living legend, he is a witness of the difficult times that Belarusians, Russians and Serbs went through.”

### **“We always talk about mutual assistance”**

Many Belarusians do not separate Serbia and the Republika Srpska in any way. And indeed, until 1991 they were part of a united Yugoslavia. However, now these are actually two

different government entities. Moreover, Republika Srpska is an integral part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Today, these picturesque places attract more and more tourists. As one Serbian diplomat so emphatically said, they do not have five-star hotels, but they have five-star nature. And 270 sunny days a year and the most fertile soils allow successful farming.

Serbian farmers have known Belarusian technology since Soviet times. They are still interested in it. Milorad Dodik told reporters about specific agreements, “We are planning to purchase your equipment: electric buses, agricultural machines for a total amount of about 10 million dollars. We will be working on these issues in the near future.”

Belarusian experience in medicine is also in demand among guests. The leader of Republika Srpska especially thanked the Belarusian side for providing medical care to the citizens of his country at the Minsk Scientific and Practical Centre for Surgery and Transplantology. More than 20 people were treated here, including three children. The international agenda was also discussed at the meeting at the Palace of Independence. And here both countries are in a similar situation, since they are experiencing sanctions pressure from the West, the leader of Republika Srpska emphasised, “Therefore, we have mutual understanding without words. There is no need to explain much to each

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other here. President Aleksandr Lukashenko is a rare leader who is familiar with all the details and understands us, and we always talk about mutual assistance.”

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs spoke in detail about the intensification of bilateral cooperation. The head of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry Sergei Aleinik met with the leader of the Republika Srpska. The interlocutors discussed ways to intensify interaction in various fields, including industry, healthcare, education and scientific and technical cooperation. Current topics on the international agenda, including regional security, were also touched upon.

“I really appreciate your efforts.”

So, Milorad Dodik visited Belarus for the first time in 2019. Then he expressed his sincere admiration for what he saw and, turning to Aleksandr Lukashenko, said, “I really appreciate your efforts to make your country stable and successful.” During his current visit to Belarus, the President of Republika Srpska spoke about how the Bosnian region responded to sanctions against our country. The politician’s words are quoted by RT, “Bosnia and Herzegovina did not join the sanctions. Republika Srpska has not given consent, although the other part of Bosnia and Herzegovina wants it. I applaud the way Belarus is functioning despite the sanctions. Republika Srpska is in similar circumstances, but with a clear vision and decisive leadership, progress is being made.”

## PLANS ARE DETERMINED TO COME TRUE

Belarus, as a country with powerful industrial potential, is ready to contribute to the development of the Republika Srpska. This was stated by the Prime Minister of Belarus Roman Golovchenko during a meeting with the President of Republika Srpska of Bosnia and Herzegovina Milorad Dodik. The parties discussed bilateral cooperation, as well as areas of development and collaboration.

The Head of the Belarusian Government noted that in the current difficult geopolitical situation, openness to dialogue and mutual trust are the main incentive for the development of bilateral cooperation. Speaking about specific areas of development of bilateral cooperation, the Prime Minister noted agricultural engineering, “We know that Belarusian tractor equipment has long proven itself in your republic. We have not stopped deliveries in recent years, despite the increasingly complex logistics and difficulties in concluding deals and contracts. In 2023 and the year before last, we supplied tractors to Republika Srpska and believe that their number can be significantly increased. Unlike many other manufacturers, we have not lost our competencies; on the contrary, we have reached a new qualitative level of development and produce more than 45 thousand tractors per year.”

The second area of interaction that the Prime Minister focused on was passenger transport, “We follow and know how much attention you pay to ensuring that the lives of citizens in Republika Srpska are comfortable. Therefore, we would be very happy to establish cooperation in the supply of passenger transport to your republic. You know that we have some experience in cooperation with other constituent entities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Belarusian public transport is also supplied to the city of Sarajevo.”

The Prime Minister also noted that members of the delegation visited Belarusian institutions and organisations, including the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and the Ministry of Education, “We hope to intensify cooperation in these areas. In my opinion, it is necessary to more actively use the potential of chambers of commerce and industry, business circles, and hold as many bilateral events as possible. I would like to propose forming and sending delegations from the Republika Srpska to our main exhibition events that will take place this year. This is the Belagro international exhibition in June, which is dedicated to the agro-industrial complex, as well as the Belarusian industrial and investment forum, which will take place in September.”

Roman Golovchenko expressed confidence that Milorad Dodik has a comprehensive vision of how further bilateral cooperation needs to be developed.

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Photo by BelTA