

**"BelarusHastheCapacityToBecomeaBridgeheadforKoreanInvestors"**

July 3rd is the main holiday of Belarus – the Independence Day of the Republic of Belarus, or the Day of the Republic. This year, we celebrate the Independence Day and the 60th Anniversary of the Victory over the Germanfascist aggressor. This war was not just a war of the armed forces of two parties. For Belarus, it became a nationwide "Patriotic War" against the menace of the fascist enslavement and physical annihilation of the people.

Belarus is a young independent state that progressively makes her way from developing to a well-established democracy and from a planned to market economy. At the same time, the Belarusian statehood has its deep roots. They go back to the ancient times of the "Polatsk Principality and the Great Principality of Lithuania."

The ideas of the Belarusian statehood are intertwined with the ideas of Slavonic unity, fraternity and cooperation of the nations. They are reflected in selfless activity of many famous sons of Belarus, embodied in creative work of poets and writers, public figures and scientists.

Today, as a country with a vast Soviet past extending over seventy years, Belarus has plenty of hurdles to overcome. Nevertheless, she has a lot of societal assets inherited from the same past, especially in the area of social security, education and medical care. It is noteworthy that over the recent years, Belarus has been dynamically developing and, in fact, is one of the most advanced CIS member states. In January~April 2005, the GDP growth was 9.5% year-on-year and the GDP amounted to 111% in 2004.

Belarus is proud of her developed science and technology infrastructure for R&D work in various branches of theoretical and applied science. Belarusian scientists are internationally recognized for their breakthroughs in laser and nuclear physics, nuclear energy, powder metallurgy, optics, software and biotechnology.

Over 300 scientific institutions, universities, and large production enterprises are engaged in scientific research and development. There are around 30,000 people, including 17,700 researchers, 8,200 technicians and other personnel involved in such activities. On Dec. 5, 2005, Belarus is planning to launch her own advanced satellite named BelKA (Belarusian space apparatus) that has only a few foreign analogues.

Our current state policy is to create a socially-oriented market economy with appropriate infrastructure, efficient mechanism of state, and market regulation. This approach corresponds to the maximum degree to traditions of the Belarusian people and the interests of citizens. The message of the President of the Republic of Belarus determines the following state priorities for the next five years:

- All-round harmonious development of a person (health, education, increase of standard of living) and the guarantee of the principle of social justice;

- Innovational way of development of the national economy;
- Increase of export potential on the basis of goods and services competitiveness rising;
- Energy and resource saving; and
- Development of the agroindustrial complex and social restoration of countryside.

Belarus and Korea have a lot in common. Both countries have highly developed and export-oriented industries, a rich culture and time-honored spiritual traditions. Like Korea, Belarus has been always surrounded by bigger and more powerful countries. Her land lured others from a geopolitical viewpoint.

Also, the economic structures of our countries are akin: Belarus, like Korea, has scarce mineral and energy resources. That is what we import to bring out goods and sell them abroad. Ours is a strongly marked export-oriented economy, just like Korea. In 2004, the exports to GDP ratio for Belarus was over 60% compared to that of 38.5% for Korea, which testifies to the fact our economy is very open.

Amongst the CIS countries, Belarus ranks the first in the production of tractors, lorries, wheeled trucks, TV sets, refrigerators, bicycles etc. Some Belarusian goods take considerable shares on the world market, e.g. Belarus produces 13.1% of the world output of potassium fertilizers, 8% (tractors), 1.3% (refrigerators), etc. Regrettably, the trade turnover between Belarus and Korea is not as high as it could be, but it has been constantly growing.

Last year, trade turnover increased by 80.7% year-on-year. The major articles are hitech industrial goods. Electronic integrated circuits and microassemblies account for 41% of the Belarusian export to Korea, while 14% of Korean goods bound for Belarus are parts of transmission apparatus. About 12% are computers, etc.

The diplomatic relations between the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of Korea were established on February 10, 1992. On April 21-23, 1997, the President of Belarus paid an official visit to Korea. Eight months later in December, the Embassy of Belarus in Seoul was opened.

To be successful in our relations, we should know more about each other, our countries, customs and mentality. We make every effort to utilize a so-called cultural diplomacy to the fullest extent possible.

Belarus has much to be proud of. Our national culture has deep roots going back into ancient times. Belarusian people have accumulated a great spiritual wealth, reflecting all diversity of their life in intellectual, moral, aesthetic and other manifestations.

Belarus has always stood at the crossroads of two worlds, two cultures and ideologies, being an area of tolerant interaction of the Orthodox-Byzantine and Catholic-Roman civilizations. This has defined her unique cultural and historical position in Europe.

Many achievements of the Belarusian culture serve the symbols of the national originality. The Cross of Euphrosyne of Polotsk, artistic works by Marc Shagal, Kazimir Malevitch and Slutsk belts are vivid evidence of Belarus contribution to the world's culture. We have been striving to make these cultural values available to the Koreans.

More and more Korean companies are now casting their eyes toward the European region. Belarus is favorably located at the junction of rail and road routes, oil, gas and commodity pipelines, and communications systems linking Western Europe with Russia and Asia. In that regard, Belarus has the capacity to become a bridgehead for Korean investors seeking to conquer emerging markets throughout the CIS.

Belarus has been recently paid much attention to, mainly in the context of wellknown events in Georgia, Ukraine and the Kyrgyz Republic. Observing burning social cataclysms and conflicts of these countries, many political scientists and analysts try to find out the reasons and secrets of our stability. But, we make no secret of them. The President of the Republic of Belarus, A. Lukashenko, stressed in his message that the stability we have is due to the strong and efficient power that works for the welfare of people. That power does not allow anarchy, ethnic and political conflicts.

The stable economy helps us to increase the standard of living, along with the internal state policy that consolidates society and mobilizes it to build a prosperous country. This is due to the firm basis of civil society Councils of Deputies, mass youth, trade union, and veteran organizations that unite wide groups of the society. These components are our strengths. ★