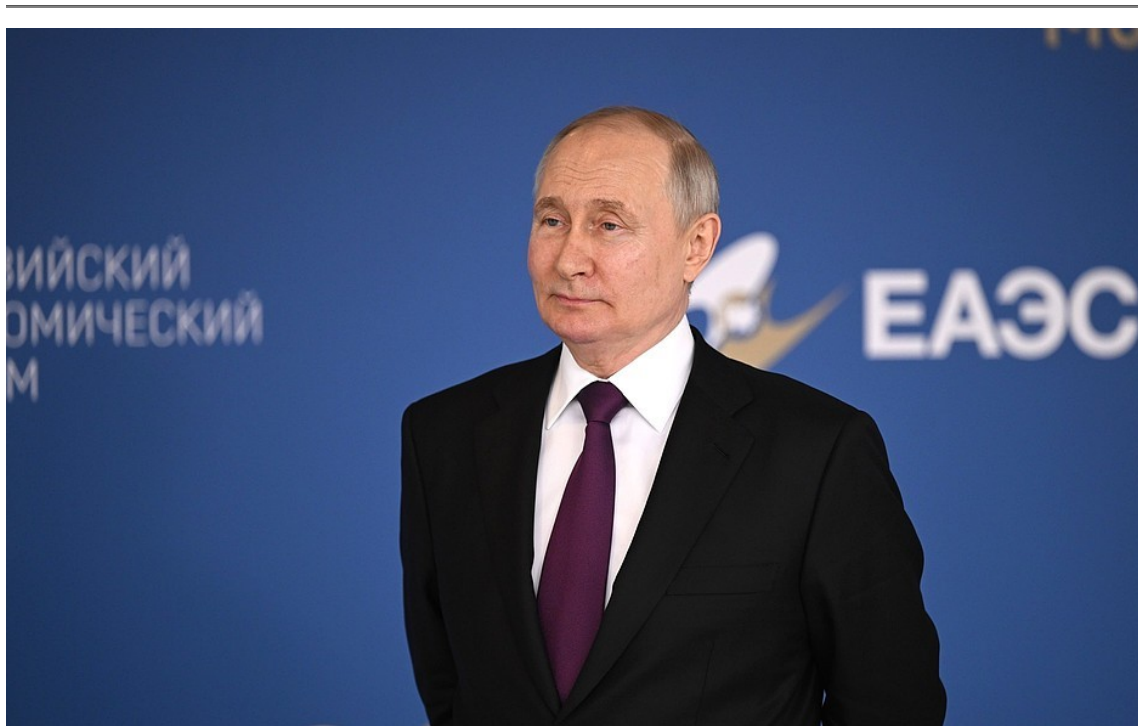


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Plenary session of the Eurasian Economic Forum

68–86 minutes



5 of 15

Plenary session of the Eurasian Economic Forum. Photo:
Grigoriy Sisoiev, RIA Novosti

Other notable attendees included President of Belarus [Alexander Lukashenko](#), President of Kazakhstan [Kassym-Jomart Tokayev](#), President of Kyrgyzstan [Sadyr Japarov](#), Deputy Prime Minister of Armenia Mher Grigoryan, and Chairman of the Eurasian Economic Commission Board Mikhail Myasnikovich. President of the People's Republic of China [Xi Jinping](#) sent a video address to plenary session participants and guests. The plenary discussion was moderated by [Alexander Shokhin](#), President of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs.

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President of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RSPP) Alexander Shokhin: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to begin by welcoming the leaders of the EAEU member states. As you may be aware, this is the second Eurasian Economic Forum. The first one was held in Bishkek last year. Without a doubt, our forum is improving its status largely due to the fact that the leaders of the EAEU member states are taking part in the plenary session.

Despite the challenging international situation, the EAEU continues to evolve, which can be seen in the numbers. Mutual trade is up by over 10 percent to over 80 billion conventional currency units (US dollars) in 2022. Some countries have shown an increase by orders of magnitude, which even got the attention of certain authorities in the United States and the European Commission. Investment has been expanding

dynamically as well. According to the Eurasian Development Bank's estimates, mutual foreign direct investment exceeded \$26 billion in mid-2022.

Nevertheless, it is important to consolidate these positive trends. To do so, we must put together the efforts of all key participants, including government agencies, society, the expert community and the business community.

The forum participants covered this extensively today. Numerous panels were held to discuss key issues, including a panel by the EAEU Business Council. The RSPP chairs the EAEU Business Council this year, and a panel titled "Business as a driver of Eurasian economic integration" gave us extra opportunities to see where we stand and what needs to be done. Importantly, we should base our efforts on comprehensively planned approaches as a basic approach, that combines a comprehensive approach and a planned approach.

Mr President, you were critical of me two months ago at the RSPP congress for always coming up with new terms. This time, I suggest legitimising this term – comprehensively planned approach – in one way or the other.

According to major business, it is of the essence today to attain the objectives and implement the development plans set out in key documents and, above all, in the Strategic Development Guidelines for Eurasian Economic Integration until 2025. Mr Putin, in your address to the leaders of the EAEU states, you spoke about the importance of making a balanced assessment and analysis of the work that has been done. This was also noted at the previous meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, by Mr Tokayev and other leaders. Our

experience shows that completing this work successfully will take more than the leaders and member states' commitment; the Eurasian Economic Commission will need to have greater powers in relation to the already agreed sections of the Strategy 2025 – from scientific and technical cooperation, education, healthcare, technical regulations and digitalisation, to sports and tourism.

No less important is the launch of the institutions and instruments that businesses are waiting for, such as the Eurasian Reinsurance Company and the financing of Eurasian industrial cooperation by the EAEU.

Businesses, represented by the EAEU Business Council and our member organisations, are ready to help finetune the Eurasian economic integration strategy and adapt it to changing international conditions, as well as to adjust current plans.

At the same time, it is important to understand what the further medium- and long-term guidelines of the Union's development will be in the context of the emerging multipolar world.

I would like to address the President of Russia as Chairman of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council. Mr Putin, in your address to the heads of the EAEU member states in your capacity as Chairman of the Supreme Eurasian Council, you also proposed to draft new long-term planning documents that will set out the guidelines for our integration cooperation for the period to 2030 and even to 2045. As far as we understand, these horizons are based on an understanding that the Strategy 2025 will be fully implemented.

I would also like to ask you a question that has to do with the changing global geoeconomic situation. The international

system is going through a major transformation and transition to a multipolar world. This, of course, affects the economic situation, economic relations, and not only geopolitics. Mr Putin, how do you assess these events, these historic tectonic shifts in regard to economic problems, in the context of the role and place of the EAEU in these processes?

I would like to give the floor to Mr President now.

Let's welcome the President of Russia.

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Mr Shokhin, friends, ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to welcome you all. I will try to answer the questions posed by our moderator. I would like to note that the forum we are attending today will now be convened regularly; my colleagues and I agreed on this in Bishkek in December last year.

The wide scope of participants present here today – officials, business leaders, experts, representatives of public organisations from the EAEU and from other countries – shows that the role of our association is increasing, growing, and this speaks of the rapidly changing world that Mr Shokhin mentioned, the successful development of Eurasian integration and the growing interest that our organisation creates abroad.

I think the theme of the forum – Eurasian Integration in a Multipolar World – is highly relevant. It spans the most important issues the Eurasian Union is addressing today when it comes to creating favourable conditions for the EAEU economies and the development of cooperation throughout Eurasia.

We can see truly deep and fundamental changes taking place

on the global stage. More and more states are taking a course towards strengthening national sovereignty, pursuing an independent domestic and foreign policy, and adhering to their own development model. All of them are in favour of building a new, more equitable architecture of international economic relations, striving to constructively influence world processes, expand the network of partnerships based on mutual benefit, respect and consideration of each other's interests.

It sounds a little trivial, or like a cliché, but it is actually happening, in practice, in reality, in real life.

It is important that the majority of participants in international communication agree with these approaches – I would like to emphasise this. And these are not empty words; they really do agree with this approach. We actively cooperate with major international associations, such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, as well as multilateral organisations in Latin America and Africa.

And our country, the Russian Federation, which is hosting this forum today, certainly shares this approach, and all our partners in the Eurasian Economic Union also do. We are genuinely interested in honest, productive and pragmatic interaction.

Everyone – and I want to emphasise this, directly answering our moderator's question – everyone who acts, thinks and does otherwise is damaging the global economy, in fact, shooting themselves in the foot, and the foot of those who are still forced to obey their dictates.

And, by the way, in this sense, they are only strengthening the downward trend of their own development, and this is something that international experts, including experts from

the United States, have been bluntly writing. Their economic policy is, if anything, slowing their own growth. Like I said, they are just shooting themselves in the foot.

But this is their choice; we are ready to cooperate with anyone who wants to work with us on the principles I mentioned, at any second, at any time.

As it is, cooperation based on these principles is fully beneficial to the EAEU members – now I want to return to our association – the figures speak for themselves.

By the way, the figures also speak about the downward trend in the development of the still powerful global economic centres. These figures are provided by international organisations, which, by the way, are under their control. They are objectively revealing these trends in the world. Also, the figures show the trends in the economies where countries stick to other principles in relations.

So, the figures speak for themselves: despite significant manifestations of crisis in the global economy and trade, considerable geopolitical risks and uncertainties, the total GDP of the Eurasian Union member states in 2022 decreased by only 1.6 percent. When some experts “across the pond,” as they say, had predicted a very different scenario, a landslide recession. Nothing of the kind has happened or is happening now – and clearly will not happen at all. Let me remind you that our analysts, and international analysts as well, are already predicting GDP growth in Russia. At first, they talked about 0.7 percent. Let me remind you that the experts expect a decline in the leading EU economies this year. As for Russia, earlier forecasts said plus 0.7, now they are saying plus 1.5, and maybe even closer to 2 percent. And that says a lot.

In general, trade in the EAEU is growing at a fairly steady pace, which is also an important indicator of the effectiveness of our joint work. In 2022, trade grew by 14 percent, to \$83.3 billion.

It is no secret that our Western opponents are trying to compel many of our partners to curtail beneficial cooperation with Russia through persuasion and with various promises and blackmail. In the process, they do not care one bit about the losses to be sustained by these states and their peoples.

I would like to note in this context that Russia has always taken a responsible and genuine approach to interaction with all countries. We fulfil in full – I would like to emphasise this – in full and on time – the agreements signed in the Eurasian Economic Union. We fully carry out all of our agreements.

I do not want to return now to what our opponents were talking a lot about. I am referring to the energy crisis in Europe, but I would like to ask once again – who is to blame for this? Yes, there was a crisis, but now, fortunately, energy prices are becoming economically substantiated. But who is to blame for what happened? The Nord Stream pipelines were blown up. Nord Stream-2 was not launched. Poland closed the Yamal-Europe gas route via its territory. Did we do this? No, they did. There were two main gas pipelines through Ukraine. Ukraine closed one of them. We didn't. Incidentally, we are supplying Europe with gas via the second line while Ukraine is safely cashing the money for transit despite calling us the aggressor. We fulfil all of our commitments. I would like to emphasise this. And, of course, we are doing and will be doing this primarily as regards the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union.

I would like to make a special mention about the transport-and-logistics situation. Obviously, today there is a higher need

to build new and sustainable logistics chains and develop international corridors at an expedited pace. We believe this work is very important for both the EAEU and beyond it, including the North-South corridor.

In the past few days, we signed an agreement on laying the Resht-Astara railway with our Iranian colleagues. This will make it possible to link Russian ports in the Baltic with Iranian ports on the coasts of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Construction of the new line will get underway this year.

We are closely cooperating with Azerbaijan in the context of this corridor. We hope for early drafting and signing of the relevant trilateral documents with Azerbaijan's participation, notably, the agreement on cooperation to develop railway infrastructure and freight shipments on the North-South Corridor.

Full operation of this route will allow us to ensure annual shipment volumes of up to 30 million tonnes of cargo. This railway will be in a position to compete for freight traffic with traditional trade routes. It will facilitate new regional transport hubs and production centres throughout Eurasia, allowing us to create tens of thousands of jobs and open up more opportunities for the development of all EAEU member-countries.

Sweeping changes are underway in international finance as well. I am pleased to note that Russia has managed to not only adapt to the circumstances, but to become a leader in these processes as well. We are pursuing a policy of reducing the share of unfriendly countries' currencies in mutual transactions and planning to expand our activities with our partners around the world, including the EAEU, in order to complete the transition to national currencies.

Many fast-developing economies, including China, India, and the Latin American countries, are switching to national currencies in their foreign trade settlements. It is important to coordinate our efforts to create a new and decentralised global financial system. Of course, the stability of global finance will largely depend on how this decentralisation goes. The more decentralised the system, the better it will be for the global economy, since it will be less dependent on crises in the countries that still enjoy an advantage in the form of world reserve currencies. This will boost the security of not only transaction settlements, but the entire global economy as well, and will remove politics from the economic sphere.

Importantly, in our activities within the EAEU, we invariably support the initiatives coming from investors and business people in general. To give you an example, I will cite the launch – Mr Shokhin mentioned this earlier – of the Eurasian Reinsurance Company, which will make it possible to boost investment in EAEU markets and in other countries. We welcome the efforts to create a Eurasian consortium of national development institutions, which will become a platform for sharing experiences and best practices, provide support to entrepreneurs from our countries, and allow us to develop common approaches to promoting promising cooperation projects.

We believe one of the union's priorities is to ensure technological sovereignty. Our countries boast of sufficient scientific, human resource and industrial potential to produce high-quality high-tech products that can compete in global markets. We fully realise that this is probably one of the most important aspects today, because ensuring technological independence, in fact, lies at the heart of economic, and,

therefore, political independence.

As integration deepens, mutual interest in training highly skilled specialists and personnel grows as well. The convergence of academic and education programmes within the EAEU has taken on a new sense of importance. We are talking about the unification of education standards and the development of independent Eurasian knowledge-intensive systems and libraries that can be accessed by researchers from all our countries.

Our association is also supportive of other initiatives that are designed to promote growth throughout Eurasia. In particular, we continue to work with the People's Republic of China to align the integration processes, which are unfolding within the EAEU, and the Belt and Road Initiative advanced by our Chinese friends. This is our way of consistently implementing the ambitious idea of building a major Eurasian partnership.

The Eurasian Union is also working hard to expand friendly ties with other countries in the near abroad, Asia, India, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, which represent the absolute majority of the world's population and drive global growth. Today, these global economic growth drivers represent key investment attraction points and new transport route hubs.

Over the past year, talks were held to create free trade zones with Iran and Egypt; similar consultations have been held with the United Arab Emirates and Indonesia. A substantive dialogue is underway as part of the efforts to implement international agreements with China, Vietnam, Serbia and other trading partners. The dialogue mechanisms operated by the Eurasian Economic Commission have expanded as well.

Colleagues!

Tomorrow, we will join efforts with the leaders of the five states present here to hold a meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, adopt resolutions on the further deepening of integration, focus on ensuring energy and food security and technological and financial independence, accelerating the digital transformation, eliminating regulatory and trade barriers, and developing transport infrastructure, something I mentioned earlier.

I would like to underscore once again that we highly appreciate the engagement of our EAEU partners in aligning cooperation. I am positive that our integration experience can be used to promote existing and create new interaction formats throughout Eurasia and the world at large.

I would like to close by wishing Eurasian Economic Forum participants every success in their work and productive communication. I am confident that, as I said earlier, the starting ground that we create today for regular contacts of this nature and level will bring us success.

Thank you very much.

Alexander Shokhin: Mr President, thank you for your pithy and deep remarks. I wish good luck to everyone at tomorrow's Supreme Eurasian Economic Council meeting.

President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko is our next speaker.

Mr Lukashenko, I am not sure whether you had the chance to hear or to see the video that was shown before the meeting. It said that Eurasian integration began in 1994 with a speech by Nursultan Nazarbayev at Moscow University. I remember your first inauguration ceremony. I headed the Russian delegation that attended it. I think it was in July of 1994. It is

safe to say that you are the patriarch of integration processes in the post-Soviet space, no less than President Nazarbayev.

Since you were at the origins of integration processes, I remember you striving to preserve economic ties in the post-Soviet space. In this regard, you are well-positioned to assess what was done and what was not.

What is your assessment of the current phase of Eurasian integration, in particular, with account taken for the specifics of the Belarusian economy? What is the role of industrial cooperation in ensuring the technological security and sovereignty of the EAEU countries? What areas will Belarus prioritise in the near future?

President of the Republic of Belarus [Alexander Lukashenko](#):

Mr Shokhin, thank you for taking us deep into the history of our Eurasianism. Frankly, as someone who has been around and witnessed the origins of many processes, I must tell you that our Eurasianism and the current EAEU started out in President Putin's kitchen. That is how it was. He is here to confirm my words, and the idea was good back then. I remember him inviting us over to his place.

The fact is that Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma, was with us back then. Even though I told my colleague we were unlikely to accomplish anything good due to the situation that had begun to take shape in the post-Soviet space and in our region back then, but still we drafted as many as 28, I think, documents, Mr Putin, in conjunction with Ukraine. Later, as I thought it would, Ukraine withdrew from this process.

Nursultan Nazarbayev deserves credit for the fact that no matter how hard we tried, especially Russia back then, to impart a certain political overtone to our union, perhaps even a military-

political overtone, Mr Nazarbayev always kept us within the framework of the economic union. Not a single step to the left or to the right: we are creating an economic union, he said, so this is only about the economy. Since resolutions were always adopted by consensus, we ended up with what we have today.

Mr Shokhin, this is how things were. Since you brought it up, I thought it was the right thing to say.

Friends, ladies and gentlemen,

I believe that all those present are major specialists, economists, advocates for our Eurasianism. I am saying this sincerely. There are those who think differently and focus on their national frameworks but nevertheless this new hall has gathered interested people.

As the previous speaker – the President of Russia – said, timing the Eurasian Economic Forum to the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council has already become a tradition, and it is a good new tradition.

Recently, the world has been living in an atmosphere of constant tension and uncertainty. This is natural for a period of transition from an old era to a new era, for which we are striving. It is called multi-polarity. Financial, pandemic and geopolitical crises have been coming at us so fast that people simply have no time to take a breath and, unfortunately, can lose confidence in the future.

A stable economy is always a powerful anchor in extraordinary conditions. However, today, the economic borders of any state are so transparent and their trade networks so intertwined that achieving economic sustainability single-handedly is almost an impossible goal for any country. Therefore, every country is

interested in taking part in powerful regional and international associations, such as the EAEU, the SCO, BRICS and ASEAN.

Being on the platform of the Eurasian Economic Forum, we will talk today about current problems related to the integration agenda. And the word suggested by our moderator – a four-letter word – also sets the tone for this direction. So, we will stick to this line.

In this context, the first thing I would like to mention is the international positioning of our union. Since the moment we gained independence, Belarus has always been in the vanguard of integration processes, as Mr Shokhin just said.

One of the priorities for our country and our entire Eurasian Union is to strengthen regional and continental alliances. These are new centres, forces in the multipolar world that is in the process of being formed. They are willing to uphold their interests and their own development paths.

The centre of the global economy is inevitably shifting to the developing nations. This is only natural; this is where development will primarily take place. These are the countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. They are no longer willing to be raw material appendages and cheap sources of labour. They want, and quite rightly so, to take a full part in the international division of labour and to achieve decent compensation for their work. Everyone understands this.

Look, Russia probably understood this sooner than others and began to make active contact with the African states. We are also trying to cooperate with them. Everyone rushed into Africa and look at how the West and the United States reacted to this. The Russian Foreign Ministry and other agencies involved in politics know how hard the Americans are trying

to impede this process and prevent Russia from making their way into Africa. You probably understand that China is already there.

There is fighting over these countries, and this is why it is where the most active future development pole will be. This does not mean we will not continue to develop.

In our view, the pooling of integration efforts in the EAEU, the SCO and BRICS formats will facilitate the creation of the biggest interstate coalition. This will happen if we don't miss it, if we don't sleep through it, as people say.

Here's an example. Mr Putin, today, BRICS received probably a dozen or more applications – these countries want to join BRICS. They want to unite and see their future in this.

The same is taking place in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Well, we are in the SCO and they are in BRICS (Russia is a member of BRICS) – what? This is where it stops. Everything is left to the officials that are supposedly managing these organisations.

But now we need to run, not walk, to select as soon as possible those who want to join – I'll put it straight. If BRICS turned around, if the SCO turned around – look, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation already includes almost 40 percent of the world's economic potential. Look at its population. If these organisations had acted faster, the United Nations would have pursued a completely different policy. We are criticising it more and more often but unfortunately, there is nothing to replace it today. But we must move faster in this direction, not for replacement but to see what will happen next. This does not apply so much to us, Belarus, as to the big states in BRICS and the SCO. If we waste time, we will never make up for it. So,

we must pool our integration efforts. I am raising this issue for a reason.

Mr President, Russia should not bow its head because of the current situation. Russia can become a very powerful driver in both the SCO and BRICS. It can impart momentum to the development of these organisations and possibly fulfil the dream of a progressive humanity – unite them in the future.

Russia must be very active. Its prestige is great despite all the anti-Russia yelling in the Western media. Russia has taken a risk in challenging the unipolar world. Russia is in the vanguard of this process and we are nearby.

Therefore, we must act in this regard. In doing this, we must not be guided by momentary considerations or the situation that is taking place in the world today. We must act in the most peaceful and constructive manner. There will be a union of countries brought together by their striving for economic and political stability and for a new international security system. This is even more natural since some CIS and EAEU countries are SCO and BRICS members at the same time, which creates a durable foundation for successful progress towards the goal we want to reach.

To develop full-scale relations between the EAEU and the most significant regional associations and friendly third countries, it is important to meet each other halfway and to overcome national egoism, as we often say. We must learn to make compromises, promote agreements on the gradual liberalisation of conditions for mutual trade, remove obstacles, move to national currencies in mutual settlements and expand free trade zones. This process – transitioning to national currencies and free trade zones – and its development will not attain its goal without

strengthening BRICS, the SCO and the EAEU and possibly their integration. This is what I wanted to say about the EAEU's path forward.

The second issue has to do with industrial and technological security, which our moderator has mentioned.

Industrial cooperation will help us manufacture products under Eurasian brands with maximum localisation and coordinate new import substitution projects. Over 25 percent of annual industrial imports to the EAEU worth approximately \$70 billion can be replaced with locally produced goods. This is ambitious work, which we will hopefully implement.

The fourth industrial revolution has offered us a chance to effectively implement import substitution initiatives in the real economy at the regional level. Regardless of the future dynamics of our relations with the so-called Western partners, technological sovereignty and the substitution of critically important imports will constitute the basis for the further development of our union.

As for Belarus, it will have the following priorities. I am answering the moderator's question about Belarus. So, about Belarus's priorities.

Its first priority is the development of precision machinery with modern microchips and software.

Next, it should implement joint projects in the electronic and optical products sector and increase attention to the manufacturing of microchips and integrated circuits, autonomous driving technology, and automation and robotics in manufacturing. We are doing this jointly with the Russian Federation. We have lost many capabilities in the microchip sector, which we pointed out on many occasions, but we have

also done a great deal to remedy the situation. You have noted that they have been trying to force us down over the past two years, but our aircraft are flying, explosives are blowing up, and so on. This means that we are capable of doing a lot, and we are doing it.

The next objective has to do with manufacturing electromechanical systems, including mechatronic and electronic components, robotic systems, CNC [computer numerical control] equipment, and lithium-ion batteries – you know what we need this for. This is our high-tech development outlook.

You know, when I travel abroad and even here, I see that many people think that Belarus is not a country that can do this, that this capability is a thing of the future. I am not talking about the future; I am talking about what we are doing right now. Why is that? The explanation is not that we and those who are working jointly with us are so good, but that we are relying on what was created in the Soviet Union. Belarus developed as a high-tech republic with its own electronics, optics, mathematics and the like, and is now producing drones and electronic warfare systems, when it comes to the army. The Soviet Union developed these sectors in Belarus. What we, including myself, did is that we have preserved them in the most difficult periods. It is true that we are lagging behind a bit. I often say – I often meet with the President of Russia, and he keeps talking about microelectronics and 0.7 nanometre chips...

Vladimir Putin: We cannot produce them now, but we will.

Alexander Lukashenko: I am saying that they are produced in the world.

Vladimir Putin: Yes, they are.

Alexander Lukashenko: And he tells me that they have 0.7 nm chips, but we do not. I reply that we will join our forces and do it as well. We are joining our efforts with Russia and doing a great deal together.

I met with designers and told them that the President of Russia has taken us to task, and that we must produce this but we do not. One of these designers – I cannot vouch for that, but that is what he told me – told me to ask the President of Russia if he wanted our aircraft and missiles to be based on our chips. I said that yes, this is what we must do, because the Americans would not sell their chips. He replied that our chips are a bit larger, but we can squeeze them – that is what he said, literally – in aircraft wings, which are flying now and will continue flying. It was a man who created these chips, who knows how to do it. That is how he answered my question. I started to dig deeper, and I found out that what he said was true. So, do not fret that we are lagging behind in some sectors; we must start running to catch up, to create our own products.

We have coordinated this path with the President of Russia, for example, in microelectronics and everything else I have mentioned. But to succeed we must learn to trust each other, to work jointly and become closer to each other. This is what the Eurasian Economic Union was created for.

The third issue concerns energy security. The development and deepening of integration cooperation in energy and the strengthening of the EAEU's positions in the context of global energy security remain our key priorities. I am sure that effective functioning of our countries' economies is unthinkable without our companies' equal access to energy resources, infrastructure and transportation. We must ensure non-discriminatory approaches in the area of setting prices

for the natural monopolies' services throughout the EAEU, come what may.

The fourth issue has to do with information security. The EAEU's digital agenda must be seriously adjusted. This concerns, first of all, the integration information system on which the joint work of public information resources and systems is based in our union. We must create and control them ourselves, without letting the Americans and the West, the Europeans do this as they did before. We have skilled personnel and the necessary material and technical resources. Our people are ready to work in this area.

It is necessary to start developing a Eurasian information security agenda. Let me note that the information policy issues are not yet regulated by the EAEU Treaty. This is a shortcoming and we must remove it.

The fifth issue is food security, a core matter. The Eurasian region has a unique potential for building up food production and exports. We have managed to preserve free product circulation and avoid introducing restrictions on mutual supplies of socially important commodities.

The EAEU's self-reliance level in most products – the President of Russia recently provided some Russian statistics – is between 80 and 95 percent already today: the figure for grain is 132 percent, oil crops are at 151 percent, etc. Surpluses are snapped up on the world markets; there is a huge demand for food and it continues to grow.

The following tasks need to be addressed in this sphere.

First, to make a list of critical imported commodities for the food market of the EAEU member states, based on the capabilities of their own operating production facilities, their expansion

or creation of new ones.

Second, to ensure an alignment of interstate agricultural support and the legal foundations for its rendering with account taken of the member states' national interests.

Third, to rapidly digitalise production processes in crop growing and animal husbandry.

The sixth issue concerns environmental security. The so-called green agenda is actively used by our counterparts in the West as a tool of pressure to contain our countries' economic development. The economic and environmental standards in effect today – Euro-5, Euro-6, and all the subsequent ones – have nothing to do with environmental protection. As distinct from the EU, all EAEU countries have approved national green sustainable development strategies that place no restrictions on anyone. These primarily imply the need to modernise our economies, create hi-tech joint ventures, practice resource friendliness and proper waste treatment, and enhance general environmental awareness and responsibility of businesses. It is in this spirit, we believe, that we should proceed.

Colleagues,

In conclusion, I want to emphasise once again that we are promoting integration for purposes other than confrontation, as President Putin has often said. We want to create a multipolar, equitable and safe space for living. If we fail to do that, we will lag behind and others will constantly wipe their boots on us. This is our common goal and we are ready to work hard to put it into practice as soon as possible.

But let me emphasise it once again: time is the most important thing today. The time is running out, fast. We cannot and must not fall behind. The Eurasian Economic Union can play a great

role in this regard, because it has a huge potential, which, I would even say, is not inferior to that of the SCO and BRICS taken separately. Much needs to be done, therefore, but we are moving in the right direction. Patience, time – and speed!

I wish all forum participants successful work and, most importantly, productive contacts.

Thank you.

Alexander Shokhin: I would like to draw your attention to an idea that was voiced by President Lukashenko. His remarks contained many ideas on how to align our positions in the EAEU, the SCO and BRICS. As a business community, we are now also trying to draft proposals on ways to consolidate our positions at all platforms. We have the EAEU Business Council, the BRICS Business Council and the SCO Business Council. As G20 members, we are working proactively in various target groups, etc.

Mr Putin, you will laugh, but there is a document on precisely this issue in my briefcase. I would like to offer it to you; the document aims to determine the best ways to consolidate businesses' work in this area.

I would now like to turn to another issue linked with the EAEU's unique geographic location and development level which give the EAEU a considerable potential to make more rapid progress in a number of promising spheres. First of all, this includes infrastructure connectivity, as well as the North-South and East-West corridors. It would be good to link these corridors, too. This implies interaction with third-party countries.

Tomorrow, members of our Business Council are planning to discuss the creation of specialised working bodies in the field of transport, logistics, infrastructure and technical regulation. We

to update various goals and tasks.

In my opinion, I believe that the forum participants and my colleagues will agree that the Strategy itself is a very serious and well-thought-out document. I would like to use this opportunity to thank the President of Russia for this initiative because I know that he personally worked on the contents of the Strategy.

Of course, taking into account the colossal geography of the Eurasian Union, developing infrastructure connectivity has been and remains one of the top priorities. This is a two-tier job: inside the union through integration of transport and communications, and internationally, through cooperation with third countries in transport and logistics.

In view of the rapidly changing patterns of global commodity flows, it is critically important to monitor and create, when possible, new capacities across the region. To the east of Russia, one of the largest and most prominent initiatives in the field of continental strategic connectivity is the Belt and Road project of the People's Republic of China.

The demand for trade and economic cooperation between the North and the South has multiplied as well.

We are essentially at the centre of these processes and the role we will play in this new global economic reality depends on our efforts. The events of the past year clearly demonstrated the importance of developing the North – South transport corridor as a key element of new global logistics. This longitudinal corridor is coordinated with the latitudinal Trans-Caspian International Transport Route. Therefore, we see significant synergy in the coordinated and system-wide development of both routes.

It is not just a point of growth for industrial production, transport and the economy. These routes can fundamentally change the level of cooperation across the vast territory of Eurasia. I have reasons to speak about this because transport and logistics are coming to the fore of international cooperation. As a matter of fact, competitors on the international market are fighting for control over transport routes, logistics, and so on. It is a profitable business for all countries. I believe the Eurasian Economic Union must play an important and positive role in this sector.

We consider it extremely important to build effective cooperation with the union's key political partner, the People's Republic of China. It should be noted that China is both the largest freight forwarder and the largest recipient.

Last week, I paid a state visit to this country. During this visit, we launched construction of Kazakhstan's logistic centre at Xi'an Dry Port. We expect this port to become the main hub for sending container trains to Central Asia, Europe, Turkiye and Iran. There are also plans to launch railway traffic in the Bakhty-Ayagoz sector and to build an independent border checkpoint in China. In this connection, we are hoping for fruitful cooperation with Russia because the project considerably reduces the distance and freight delivery times from Kazakhstan and West Siberia to China.

Here is another important aspect: Apart from developing the physical infrastructure, it is highly important to prioritise the creation of a "soft" infrastructure, specifically, digitalisation, simplification of customs procedures and the reduction of the administrative burden. On the whole, it is no exaggeration to say that we are now forging a new Eurasian transport framework that has never existed before. We will be able

to obtain substantial economic and even political dividends if we address this issue meticulously and jointly. In this context, I believe that we have reached a consensus that full-fledged and constructive international cooperation is highly important. In this connection, I agree with the President of Russia and the President of Belarus that international cooperation is quite topical.

I am delighted to see the heads of numerous international organisations here. In general, the EAEU should prioritise the development of international cooperation, it should make itself more recognisable and, of course, it should boost its authority and prestige in the international economic community.

Naturally, the very authority and prestige of the Eurasian Economic Union should rest on the specific results of our joint work in this organisation. Consequently, active interaction with China, India, Vietnam, Iran, Egypt, Israel, Serbia and other partners is an important indicator of the union's maturity and trade and economic attractiveness.

In 2022, we began negotiations aimed at the signing of a free trade agreement with Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates. I see these aspects as highly important, and therefore, I expect the Eurasian Commission to continue working efficiently in this field.

Now I would like to dwell on the second part of your question, Mr Moderator. I am referring to the necessity and expediency of defining new development priorities for the union.

There is no doubt that in every business it is always necessary not only to deal with the current problems but also to plan the work for the future. It is also necessary to respond properly to changes in the ambiance. All of this should be based

on a firm foundation – the more solid the foundation, the stronger and more durable an edifice you will build.

So, what is the foundation of our union? The key element was and remains the full-scale implementation of the EAEU Treaty. I want to underscore once again that Kazakhstan is totally committed to integration on the basis of the 2015 Treaty, that is committed to implementing the four freedoms and basic principles, such as a non-discriminatory access to infrastructure, fair competition, equality, and regard for national interests.

These are the basic principles of our joint work. Kazakhstan will promote precisely these principles of our joint work. I think that the prospects are good. All these issues certainly demand close attention.

I don't think it is the right time or place to list numerous facts regarding mutual barriers and restrictions that regularly keep arising. I am not in favour of dramatising this situation but, in principle, problems should be solved as they emerge. The stakes are very high here. As I said, this concerns the prestige of the organisation itself, of our union. We should primarily show to our peoples that the union is viable and effective, for which purpose precise and correct solutions are needed.

I understand that integration is a very complicated process, a meticulous effort to reduce all national interests to a common denominator, but we should do this work in a coordinated manner, for otherwise, as the President of Belarus convincingly said, the time is irrevocably receding into the future, there is just a little bit of time left, and we need concrete results.

We will have to create a full-fledged, seamless collaboration ambiance on the EAEU market. The member states are yet

define each of the formats: which organisation should take some specific action to make appropriate decisions. We should not be squandering resources, including intellectual resources, under any circumstances.

There is one more sensitive aspect, a conceptual reality, so to speak, or a circumstance that we need to take into account. I am referring to an entity within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union – the Union State of Belarus and Russia. The conceptual, ideological foundation underlying this union is quite serious – it is the mutual recognition of the historical commonality of the Belarusian and Russian peoples, the recognition of a shared cultural, linguistic, and religious identity, that is, the recognition of the existence of one people: one nation – one state.

We have a Union State within the Eurasian Economic Union, which is a unique precedent in world political history, a phenomenon, if you like, an entity relying on a “two countries – one state” formula, a single political, legal, military, economic, monetary, cultural and humanitarian space. It is a single union government, a single union parliament, sorry, and even our nuclear weapons are for the two of us now.

On the other hand, there is a different level of integration, represented by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia, and we need to reckon with this reality. How will we work in these conditions? This is a conceptual issue. I think we need to discuss this problem, including at this economic forum.

Now, as concerns the economic union, it is most important to single out major interests and aspirations in the economic, industrial and trade agendas and bring them to a common denominator. It is an incredibly challenging and ambitious job,

without exaggeration, that requires utmost qualification, diplomatic skill and most importantly, a constructive attitude and consideration for the interests of one's partners. Therefore, we pay great attention to the activity of the Eurasian Economic Commission.

I believe that highly qualified officials representing governments of our countries and the most knowledgeable experts in respective areas must work in the Eurasian Economic Commission. Of course, we should also consider improving their social benefits and providing other incentives.

I assume that, if this issue is raised, the heads of state will agree with this proposal. We need to think about making the work in the Eurasian Economic Commission and the administration of the Eurasian Economic Union more appealing to the best candidates who would be willing to demonstrate their best skills.

Finally, I want to thank, once again, the Russian Federation, President Putin personally and the Commission for organising this event and developing a substantive agenda. We still have plenty of work ahead. It will be a busy day tomorrow. Once again, this forum is very beneficial.

Thank you.

Alexander Shokhin: Because right now, we are in the middle of the Eurasian five-year planning period and it is still exactly two and a half years until 2025, I hope that many objectives specified in the Strategy will be fulfilled, in compliance with the 2015 Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union. Therefore, we hope that old objectives will be adapted and corrected, and that new objectives will be set, to ensure that the goals envisioned when the EAEU was established are achieved.

Speaking about new instruments and institutions, time is

passing by. Almost ten years have passed. Now we are talking about such new instruments as the Eurasian Reinsurance Company. A decision was made last year to establish it. There is a demand for other new institutions such as the Eurasian rating agency.

Last year, during a plenary session of the 1st Eurasian Economic Forum, we spoke about Eurasian trading houses as another instrument. We are making progress in these matters and businesses are actively involved. Let's hope these initiatives become reality.

My next question is for President of the Kyrgyz Republic Sadyr Japarov.

Mr Japarov, what steps should we take to develop Eurasian institutions? What newly-established spheres should we support, and what new aspects meeting the interests of businesses and society in our countries do you see?

By the way, when Mr Japarov paid his first visit to the Russian Federation as President of Kyrgyzstan, he met with Russian business leaders at the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. The meeting was attended by the authorities and businesspeople from Kyrgyzstan. I suggest making this practice more widespread.

President of the Kyrgyz Republic [Sadyr Japarov](#): Thank you, Mr Shokhin.

Before answering your question, I would like to cordially greet all participants in the Eurasian Economic Forum and to thank the President of Russia for the high level of organisation of this event.

Although this is only the second forum to date, it has proved

highly relevant and significant for discussing important and topical issues of Eurasian economic integration.

Regarding the first part of your question about steps for developing Eurasian institutions, I would like to note that Kyrgyzstan invariably prioritises efforts to strengthen the role of the Eurasian Economic Commission and the EAEU Court in eliminating barriers on the domestic market of our association.

These institutions should become effective supranational bodies capable of quickly resolving contentious situations as regards the movement of goods. For this purpose, they should have the authority to investigate violations by EAEU member states, to establish clear deadlines for eliminating these violations, and to file lawsuits concerning the failure of member states to fulfil intra-EAEU decisions at the EAEU Court. Considering the current situation, including various restrictions, the institutions noted by you, including the Eurasian Rating Agency and trading companies, as well as real-life requirements of Eurasian and other exporters and manufacturers, are also becoming particularly topical for financial and state institutions.

The Eurasian Economic Union is becoming an independent and self-sufficient pole of economic development, and it can independently meet the requirements of parties to foreign economic operations. The establishment of the Eurasian Rating Agency, as well as the elimination of restrictions with regard to businesses, would make it possible to increase financial independence of the Eurasian region's countries and to invigorate investment activities.

I am confident that the protection of business interests and their support by the state is a priority task in all EAEU countries.

In this context, I consider it necessary to discuss the advisability of establishing the institution of the Union's business rights commissioner. In my opinion, the creation of this institution helps strengthen the potential of businesses, heed their opinions and protect the rights of businesses. In the long run, this institution will help us minimise barriers on the Union's domestic market and to create a mechanism for resolving arising issues out of court.

As for the second issue regarding support to businesses and society, I want to emphasise that the main goal of the Eurasian Economic Union is to create an environment that fosters a stable development of its member states' economies in the interests of improving the quality of life of their people, as well as comprehensive modernisation, cooperation and greater competitiveness of national economies.

Our union sets people as the top priority. That is, everyone, every citizen should feel at home in any member state, and to this end, it is necessary to ensure the freedom of movement, provide them with equal rights for employment, education, additional training, healthcare and sports. In this regard, we believe it is important to implement union-wide projects and programmes in these and other areas.

As for providing support to businesses, all of us use various kinds and mechanisms of support at our national levels.

At the same time, due to the different institutional and financial capabilities of each country, the development of such institutions is at various stages of establishment and advancement, and differs a lot in terms of volume and level of support.

Therefore, the union is developing various mechanisms of financial and non-financial support for businesses, including producers and exporters. Tomorrow, at the meeting

of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, we will discuss providing financial support to joint cooperation projects in the industrial sectors with a concrete source of funding. It will help to increase the volume of joint production, give a boost to investment and create additional jobs.

I am sure that we need to continue expanding the mechanism being created with the use of stable sources of financing, including revenue from import customs duties. This tool can be used to provide assistance in the implementation of projects in other sectors of the economy, for instance, the development of transport and logistics infrastructure, introduction of new technologies and innovation, as well as in the energy sector.

Another important issue is the incorporation of systems of strategic planning in the member states to develop the necessary programmes and projects. In this regard, I think, we need to create an EAEU supra-national development institute that will prepare, provide analytical support for and finance integration projects drawing on the example of the Agency for Strategic Initiatives of the Russian Federation.

The EAEU Business Council, as the consolidating structure for all Eurasian businesses, should not only actively participate in all integration processes, but also bring forward initiatives that are necessary for boosting the potential of our business communities.

Thank you.

Alexander Shokhin: Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to move on to a connecting topic – between the economy and the social and labour sphere.

Although the President of Kazakhstan said that we should solve

purely economic problems in accordance with the basic agreement, there are topics that also relate to the economy – these are personnel, the labour market, employment, professional skills – and at the same time, this is an essential part of social issues.

I would like to address Deputy Prime Minister Grigoryan, who represents the Republic of Armenia at our session.

As far as I understand, Mr Pashinyan will join the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council tomorrow, so today, Mr Grigoryan, this question is for you. Above all, how do you see the development of human capital in the Eurasian Union, taking into account Armenia's position. Please take the floor.

Deputy Prime Minister of Armenia Mher Grigoryan: Mr Shokhin, thank you very much.

President Putin, heads of state,

The territory of our union is one of the richest in the world in terms of natural resources and minerals. But, of course, our most valuable asset is people. Without any doubt, it is people and their motivation that determine how effectively we achieve goals and maintain our competitive advantage. The main purpose of our integration, taking into account all formal definitions, is the development of human capital as the primary potential and future of Eurasia.

Unfortunately, despite the huge scientific potential of the union and the high level of education of our citizens, we still cannot say that our countries remain the leaders in world technological and technical progress. A radically changing world and high rates of development require a continuous stream of innovative ideas and a modern creative approach to effectively address global challenges. Moreover, valuable innovative ideas are

in demand all over the world and, of course, migrate to the most favourable environment. Therefore, it is necessary to create such an environment in the union. According to experts, in countries with the most developed economies, some 60 percent of the increase in national income is determined by the increase in modern knowledge, skills and the level of quality education.

The issue of realising human potential is relevant in any geo-economic reality. It is obvious that today, professionalism and professional competence of our citizens must be advanced both in terms of quality and volume.

Investment in education and science in a global sense is currently considered the most profitable and justifiable, and this relates to state, private and mixed investments that are promoted by the state. A professional is the most in-demand asset in today's world. The current high rate of technological development, the level and pace of digitalisation of processes are changing the traditional mode of employment and workplace, the systems of human professional development and their career growth.

We need to take into account the new competitive environment, a new logic of personnel mobility and workplace structure, new freelance environment and new opportunities to implement knowledge, all of which provide additional guarantees of sustainable development of states and integration associations.

Of course, citizens' social guarantees, their health and quality of life will continue to dominate this list of priority tasks. The development of healthcare and social protection in our countries should be in line with the global development pace.

It is obvious that in the nearest future, the markets of education and healthcare services will become global and will increase their share in the global services trade. From this point of view, we need to start using and expanding their export potential, which will make it possible to correctly assess the quality of these services in the Union and their competitiveness.

What other steps should be made? First of all, we need to remember that all of us have different tax systems, energy prices, logistics capabilities, sources of budget revenue, capacity to protect ourselves from global crises and negative events, and tools to support business. Accordingly, our strategic and economic interaction should be done with regard to these fundamental factors. We need to bear in mind that technological progress is the foundation of the economic growth today. The importance of research, technological, innovative and education policy is growing.

Given these factors, we first of all need to permanently and systematically identify and describe the consolidated economic benefits of our interaction and point at their obvious domination. With this approach, our strategies for developing human resources will become more productive, synchronised and better in their quality, which will bring us closer to the main strategic goal: health, education, material wellbeing and – why not? – a happy and safe life of our citizens.

Thank you.

Alexander Shokhin: Thank you, Mr Grigoryan.

Practically all the speakers – the President of the Russian Federation, the President of the Republic of Belarus and the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan – emphasised that one of the main areas of the EAEU's activity

on the international track is cooperation with partners from third countries. No doubt, the People's Republic of China occupies a special place in this respect. This was described in detail today. We are working together on alignment – this term was specially introduced to describe EAEU-China cooperation – the alignment of the Belt and Road initiative and Eurasian economic integration.

The EAEU and the PRC have signed a non-preferential agreement on trade and economic cooperation and the business community is on this track as well.

As the EAEU Business Council, we are now holding consultations with our Chinese partners on establishing EAEU-China business dialogue. As we see it, we have no doubt that China is also interested in cooperation with our union.

Participants in yesterday's Russian-Chinese business forum in Shanghai, attended by the Prime Minister of Russia, focused not only on bilateral Russian-Chinese projects but also projects of interest to the EAEU countries, including those related to infrastructure, logistics and so on.

In this context, it would probably be interesting for you to hear the message by PRC President Xi Jinping to our forum today. Run it, please.

President of China [Xi Jinping](#) (retranslated): President Putin, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, friends,

I am very happy to join you at the second Eurasian Economic Forum via videoconference. I am grateful to President Putin for his kind invitation.

Unprecedentedly deep changes are taking place in the modern world. They are characterised by the formation of a multipolar world order and the irreversible trend of economic globalisation.

During my state visit to Russia in March, President Putin and I reached new agreements on cooperation on the alignment of the Belt and Road initiative with the EAEU.

China is sincerely interested in deepening cooperation in this area and making it more concrete. It is willing to pool efforts and promote new prospects for cooperation in Eurasia.

In the second part of this year, China will host the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. Together with our Belt and Road associates and EAEU members, we want to share opportunities, together overcome challenges and open new horizons in the name of progress and civilisations of the emerging multipolar world. We want to do this in the spirit of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit.

Thank you.

Alexander Shokhin: As we can see from the remarks of President Xi Jinping, the majority of countries and international institutions are interested in partner relations with Russia despite pressure from many foreign states.

Let's hope the implementation of the projects on the alignment of Eurasian integration with the Belt and Road initiative of our Chinese partners will enhance the appeal of the EAEU as well.

We are witnessing the development of quite a few network – I would even say macro- and interregional integration platforms. Among these, we certainly cannot but mention the Greater Eurasian Partnership, an initiative that President of Russia put forward back in 2015.

In this connection, I would like to ask Mr Myasnikov, Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission, to share his ideas on what needs to be done for the EAEU

to become an 'integration point' and a driver of the Greater Eurasia project, how to strengthen the EAEU's international positions, how to make Eurasian integration more useful for our countries, businesses and people, and more attractive to foreign partners.

Over to you, Mr Myasnikovich.

Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic

Commission Mikhail Myasnikovich: Thank you for asking this question. I will try to set forth certain approaches. But first of all, I would like to address the heads of state on behalf of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission and thank you, state leaders, from the bottom of my heart for attending the second Eurasian Economic Forum in person. Thank you very much!

We have a packed forum agenda: 35 panel discussions and seven thematic areas. Nearly 3,000 participants from all EAEU member states and 50 foreign countries have arrived.

What is new at the 2023 forum? Participants discuss numerous issues but it is a vision for the EAEU's future that prevails.

The Eurasian Economic Union is embarking on a full-scale economic development drive. This means that there is trust and confidence in the viability of allied relations.

Regions of our countries are participating in the forum for the first time. Representatives of the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, chambers of industry and commerce and just young people have come up with interesting proposals.

Heads of state,

You always assign a high operating pace to the Eurasian Economic Union and take important strategic decisions.

The state authorities, businesses and citizens of our states

greatly appreciate the work we do. For example, we follow the climate agenda at your instructions. At the forum today, we summed up the results of the Green Eurasia contest. There are 293 applications from large, medium-sized and small companies from all EAEU states. Regions have presented many projects as well. Forum participants propose specific projects to follow on the initiatives and proposals of the EAEU heads of state and government. Your ideas and the instructions issued by this plenary session are accepted for unconditional implementation.

Colleagues,

Investment activity is a key long-term development factor. There is a need for a union-wide import substitution programme. Technological sovereignty implies that we meet large-scale challenges to develop electronic engineering, machine-tool industry and production of pharmaceuticals, creating chemical and biological factories and high technologies.

For these purposes, it is necessary to define sources of financing and motivation mechanisms. Our countries have the relevant expertise. We ask the heads of state to issue instructions to address these tasks through joint efforts. The Commission can organise this work and will be actively involved in it.

Joint investment activities and the establishment of powerful trans-Eurasian companies based on market and mutually beneficial principles will enhance the competitiveness of the EAEU economies and strengthen its member states' integration owing to the commercial benefits shared by all participants.

Putting in place a global transport and logistics system is a crucial factor for sustainable economic development. I think

that the EAEU should have a unified single-control transport system, formed with account taken of member states' sovereign involvement.

This approach will make it possible not only to remove obstacles in the EAEU internal market but also to create, jointly with the SCO countries, a transcontinental logistics mega-project that will fill with practical meaning the Belt and Road Initiative and the East-West and North-South transport corridors.

Colleagues,

The high level of mutual trade and production relations in the Eurasian Economic Union paves the way for the next step in integration cooperation. I am referring to a system-wide and practical implementation of the idea to create a Greater Eurasian Partnership. This proposal is based on the following.

First, the documents already approved by the SCO Heads of State Council imply the formation of the basic structure of the Greater Eurasian Partnership. The Eurasian Economic Commission and the SCO Secretariat have developed, within the scope of their competence, a plan of action for 2023–2025.

Second, a certain window of opportunity is opening up in the sphere of customs regulation and control. The Eurasian Economic Commission is banking on the creation of a joint customs transit system in the Eurasian Economic Union. This will make it possible to start working with third countries in order to integrate their national transit systems and that of our Union.

The third crucial issue is technical regulation norms regarding sanitary, veterinary and phytosanitary control. The Eurasian Economic Union has standardised them on a modern basis, and it is possible to offer these norms to all Eurasian states for subsequent harmonisation and for the effective mutual

its contribution to addressing all these tasks.

Thank you for your work, colleagues.