

Diplomats continue dialogue

Ambassadors of 11 countries presented their credentials to the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko

By Igor Slavinsky

The diplomats arrived at the Palace of the Republic in limousines without any distinguishing signs except for state number plates. When they departed, the flags of their countries were already fixed on the bonnet. Only after presenting their credentials can foreign diplomats become official ambassadors of their states. Welcoming the expansion of the diplomatic corps, Mr. Lukashenko noted, "The current meeting is taking place in an important period. Belarus is preparing for a crucial political event — presidential elections. As the current President I'd like to assure you that I'll make every possible effort to ensure the elections take place in line with national legislation and world standards."

The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Germany to Belarus, H.E. Mr. Christof Weil, was first in a row of newly arrived diplomats, although his first place on the carpet can be easily explained by mere alphabetical order. When addressing the German diplomat, the Belarusian President called Germany Belarus' key part-

ner in Europe. It's not by coincidence that the Belarusian Investment Forum is to take place in Frankfurt-am-Main on November 17th. "We hope that this event will open up new business prospects while promoting the attraction of serious investments into the Belarusian economy from abroad," asserted Mr. Lukashenko. "Belarus is prepared at the highest level for dialogue with Germany, covering cooperation in all areas."

The diplomat noted that he has spoken much on the subject of the Investment Forum with German businessmen, who are very interested in this event. "It's very important that the Belarusian delegation details exact conditions for investing into your country," stressed Mr. Weil. As far as the 'dialogue about cooperation' is concerned, the German Ambassador is confident that 'the EU and Belarus have huge potential to develop relations not only in the economic sphere'. According to Mr. Weil, 'we should fulfil this task together, each taking their own part'.

Special attention at the ceremony was paid to representatives from Latvia and Estonia. Addressing the Am-



Alexander Lukashenko accepts credentials from German Ambassador, Mr. Weil

bassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Latvia to Belarus, H.E. Mr. Mikhail Popkovs, the Belarusian President noted that the development of bilateral ties with this country acquires special meaning in Belarus' foreign political activities. "We have many common interests, primarily, in the sphere of energy security and transit," believes Mr. Lukashenko. He thinks it's necessary to develop a strategy of joint projects, covering diverse areas, since 'the stability and prosperity of the whole region depends greatly upon its neighbours'.

In this context, Estonia is also a promising partner for Belarus, with its ports located close to our borders. The Belarusian leader believes that Belarusian-Estonian dialogue should be filled with concrete agreements. The two countries have recently managed to bring their relationships to a new level. Minsk welcomes the enhancement of the level of Estonia's diplomatic representative office to a fully-fledged embassy, with Mr. Jaak Lensment appointed as the Head of the Mission.

Mr. Lukashenko underlined at the ceremony that

Belarus attaches great importance to the development of relations with Denmark. The Head of State confirmed his readiness for constructive communication in political, economical, investment and sci-tech areas with this European country. "Opportunities for interaction in power engineering deserve special attention," emphasised Mr. Lukashenko when accepting the credentials of the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Denmark to Russia and Belarus (on concurrent), H.E. Mr. Tom Risdahl Jensen.

Stable future relies on reasonable economy

By Roman Astapenko

Belarusians spending more on leisure and cars

For the last 15 years, Belarusians have been spending a falling share of their income on food (1.5 times less over the period) and more on non-food goods and services. "People have more money now, so can spend more on leisure and relaxation," explains the Dean of the Belarusian State University's Economy Department, Mikhail Kovalev. "Almost each of us has a mobile phone and we're spending far more on cars, furniture, computers and other 'investment' purchases."

According to Mr. Kovalev, this trend is likely to continue, with expenditure on food products falling as incomes rise. The Professor notes that Belarusian residents are eating as well as those from EU states these days, while spending less on their utility bills. To ensure a stable future, we must learn how to save money, since Belarusians save slightly less than their counterparts in some other countries.

Financial plan outlined

By Dmitry Krymov

Signed law on country's budget for next year brings much good news

Social expenditure is to rise by 40 percent on 2010. The budget for 2011 boasts three major trends: changing tax legislation, reducing the tax burden and considerably simplifying tax administration. The social package is to be extended while supporting the economy and stimulating innovative development. It raises social allowances, scholarships and pensions and targets social assistance.

"We are seeing unprecedented growth in spending," comments Maxim Yermolovich, who heads the Chief Budget Policy Department at the Belarusian Finance Ministry. "Social allowances are rising, as are pensions, scholarships and targeted social assistance. This is connected with the subsidy of utilities, transport and housing repair financing. The 2011 budget envisages significant salary rises for state employees, continuing moves made in this direction this year; teachers and doctors' wages have already risen. The annual average salary in Belarus' budgetary sphere in 2011 will increase by 35 percent on 2010."

Children's allowances in Belarus are also to be gradually increased, with the Minister of Labour and So-



2011 budget envisages great expenditure for housing construction

cial Protection, Marianna Shchetkina, noting that the rise (and differentiation depending on the number of children in a family) is envisaged by programmes currently in force. Additionally, the state is focusing on providing housing to those in need.

The development of infrastructure is another element affecting families with children, since kindergartens, polyclinics and schools are being constructed in residential suburbs. Around 90 percent of boys and girls of preschool age already attend kindergartens in our republic — against just 70 percent

in Russia and Ukraine.

The state also aims to ensure long-term and better mobility and access for invalids, the physically weak and mothers with young children, since this should improve their quality of life. Commenting on the 2011 budget of the State Extra-budgetary Fund for Social Protection of Population at the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Ms. Shchetkina notes that 80.3 percent of all expenditure is being directed towards financing pension payments, with plans foreseeing future rises in pensions and allowances.

International experts make assessments

Belarus ahead of Germany, Great Britain and Japan in education index

According to the Human Development Report 2009, Belarus was ranked 68th among 182 countries and territories and was among the countries boasting a high human development index.

In terms of the education index, Belarus shares 26th position with Latvia (0.961) and is ahead of some European countries: Switzerland (0.936), the Czech Republic (0.938), Germany (0.954), Poland (0.952), Bulgaria (0.930), Russia (0.933), Japan (0.949), Israel (0.947) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (0.957).

The level of education in Belarus has been continuously increasing. According to the 2009 census, 90 percent of Belarusians had higher, secondary and basic education degrees (against 77 percent registered in 1989, and 85 percent in 1999). The level of education of rural residents increased significantly. The share of people with higher, secondary and basic education degrees was 68 percent among rural residents in 1999 but, according to the 2009 census, this share increased to 82 percent. This index remained unchanged for urban residents — 93 percent.

In the past five years, the pre-school education development index has been one of the highest among the CIS countries. Belarus has ensured 100 percent enrolment of five year olds in various forms of pre-school learning.



From education to science

According to international experts, Belarus invests heavily in pre-school education — around 1 percent of GDP (Russia — 0.7 percent, Moldova — 0.8 percent, Ukraine — 0.6 percent). This indicator is one of the highest in Europe and North America (Denmark — 1.3 percent, France — 1 percent, Sweden — 1 percent, Norway — 0.8 percent, the USA — 0.35 percent, and Canada — 0.2 percent).

In 2009, Belarus' expenses on education made up 4.9 percent of the national GDP. In Russia, this index was equal to 4.6 percent while Kazakhstan spent 4.2 percent.