

Counting on broad and chain reaction

Parliament returns draft law 'On Telecommunications' for further revision and improvements, with great public reaction on Internet

By Vitaly Vasiliev

Beltelecom, the national telecommunications operator, is to lose its exclusive right over external channels of communications, according to the new law. The document aims to end the monopoly of the operator over the telecommunications market but private Internet providers are far from satisfied. "Monopoly over international traffic and joining the networks of foreign states is removed but operators can still only connect through Beltelecom," explains Andrey Nareiko, Chairman of Belinfocom Association (speaking on www.providers.by).

According to Mr. Nareiko, at present, mobile operators and providers cannot directly interact with each other, but 'must find a junction with the Beltelecom network and reroute their traffic'. He believes that this is leading to increased tariffs for subscribers and slower development of the telecommunications network.

Lawyers also have serious concerns over the draft law 'On Telecommunications'. The House of Representatives explains that the document doesn't take into account the norms of the Presidential De-

creed 'On Some Measures to Develop Data Transfer Networks in the Republic of Belarus'. According to Sergei Semashko, the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the House of Representatives for Industry, Fuel and Energy Complex, Transport and Communications, the draft law should be 'reconsidered more drastically' once the Decree has been released. Law-makers have decided not to adopt the document only to introduce amendments, wishing to polish it initially.

The decision is good, but I'd like to note that today's consumers of telecommunications services (we primarily refer to the Internet) aren't very keen on the law-making process. These consumers, especially youngsters, are more concerned about access and the speed of the Internet. The topic was widely discussed during the *Question to the President* campaign, with Alexander Lukashenko. Students from Brest have also raised this issue.

It is a topical issue. Clearly a good law 'On Telecommunications' is needed to bring accelerated 'Internetisation'. However, a single law is unlikely to solve all problems. Technical difficulties are also evident, as the Communications and



Internet users value accessibility and speed most of all

Informatisation Ministry admits. Belarus currently lags behind in its width of exterior Internet gateway per capita and great funds are needed to expand the system. Investments will arrive as soon as demand for Internet services rises. Access to the Internet should allow people to make online doctors appointments, receive consultations from state authorities and conveniently download official documents.

The more issues that can be solved using the Internet, the higher demand will be for broadband Internet access. In turn, this will stimulate the expansion of the external gateway, while increasing speed and improving the quality of services. There will be a positive chain reaction, which can be inspired by state institutions while shifting from archaic paperwork to electronic services.

Higher and higher

By Yevgeny Kononov

Belarus ahead of all CIS states in Human Development Index

Over the last year, the country has jumped seven places in the UN's annual report, moving from 68th to 61st place. It now confidently nestles among those states boasting a high human development index, above Russia (65th), Kazakhstan (66th) and Ukraine (69th).

"The human development index shows how economic growth influences the standard of living and the prosperity of the population," explains Alexander Zaborovsky, Candidate of Economic Sciences. The rating covers three major components, enabling citizens to realise a full and satisfying life: rates of economic growth, levels of education and average life expectancy. Belarus demonstrates good dynamics in each and is one of the few states whose economy did not collapse during the global crisis. In fact, our economy is expected to grow 6-7 percent this year. Our country is also a leader in terms of economic reform and is among the top thirty countries for its high sci-tech potential.

X-ray technology sees all

By Nikolay Zhdanov

New scanners used for transport customs inspections at Novaya Guta, in Gomel district

Belarus' customs agencies have now received mobile Eagle M4507 inspection machines, paid for from the EU's international technical aid budget. Gomel customs officers note that these new devices enable vehicles to be scanned in just 15 minutes, allowing cargo to be assessed for content, quantity and quality. Of course, the unique x-ray system is safe, protecting cars and goods from the negative influence of ionising radiation.

The novelty has already proven efficient, helping customs' officers



New scanners have proven their efficiency at border checkpoint

to discover concealed goods. One car travelling from Ukraine to Belarus was found to be transporting over 100 jars of coffee in hidden locations, alongside almost the same quantity of a toxic substance.

Business climate improves

Belarus now among top three worldwide for reformed business conditions

According to an annual report by the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation — *Doing Business-2011* — Belarus has become a leader in business reform, looking at five years of cumulative change, from 2006 to 2011. The

country has been placed third, creating a more favourable regulatory environment for domestic entrepreneurs over the last five years.

The new report reflects the changes occurring in the regulation of entrepreneurial activity in 174 countries covered by *Doing Business* reports from 2006 to 2011. According to its authors, the rankings show

the prevailing character of each country's internal advancement against itself. According to World Bank experts, Belarus' leading position is a great achievement.

The World Bank believes that the reforms so far successfully realised in Belarus, in addition to further liberalisation plans, should improve the business climate.

Learning from one another

Nature protection agencies of Lithuania and Belarus agree co-operation

The Head of the State Environmental Protection Inspectorate of Lithuania's Ministry for the Environment, Raimondas Sakalauskas, has led a delegation to Minsk. On meeting Belarusian colleagues, he noted that collaboration between our two states' nature protection agencies has been taking place unofficially for several years already. It's now time to formalise our relations, since Belarus and Lithuania share many common concerns.

For the past five years, Lithuania has been realising a programme to restore its population of valuable salmon. The fish move upstream, including along the River Vilia, entering Belarusian territory; here, poachers could have spoiled all attempts to revive the fish population.

"We note with satisfaction that there are no discrepancies in our nature protection legislation," smiled Mr. Sakalauskas, adding, "Minor nuances could be synchronised, such as the level of punishment for misdemeanours. We are much impressed by the severity of such punishments in Belarus; Lithuania has been discussing stricter penalties, so we can learn from one another."

Hotels to be united under single network

By Valeria Timofeeva

A national system of online booking is to be launched countrywide, giving information on hotels within a single tourist-information network

The database will keep information not only on the most prestigious Minsk hotels but on regional hotels, with sanatoriums and rural farmsteads added later. "The project should enable Belarusian hotels to use globally acknowledged standards of booking," stresses the Head of Marketing and Publishing Activity Department at the National Tourism Agency, Valery Boldyrev. "Belarusian hotels will become available to hundreds of thousands of foreign tourist operators and tourists."

The system avoids intermediaries, who charge additional fees and time. Hotels will be able to independently register with the database, allowing potential guests to see real prices. Booking a room by card payment online will be no problem.

The system is already popular worldwide, with online booking chosen by more than half of all Europeans. Soon, a Belarusian tourist-information network will join the international database of hotels, with access available from any connected computer, telephone or terminal: to be set up at airports, railways stations and trade centres. If the system proves popular, bookings for transfer services, tours and excursions will also become possible.