

# Hope strengthens faith for the better

## Alexander Lukashenko welcomes Cardinal Kurt Koch, from the Vatican, to his Residence

By Vladimir Vasiliev

Cardinal Koch, who chairs the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, has told the President that he sees Belarus as a country where unity has been achieved. Waiting in the Blue Hall, he was joined by the Metropolitan of Minsk and Slutsk Filaret and the Archbishop Metropolitan of Minsk and Mogilev, Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz. The President welcomed his guests in the Christian way, by kissing each three times on the cheek.

The conversation began by discussing the state of relations between the Orthodox and Roman Catho-

lic churches in Belarus. Mr. Lukashenko informed his Vatican guest that, during his presidency, he has no recollection of any disagreements between the two confessions, let alone conflicts.

"This is mostly to their merit," noted the President, nodding to Archbishop Kondrusiewicz and Metropolitan Filaret. "I, as a representative of the state, have done all I can to ensure better conditions for both confessions."

He added that Belarus is an example of mutual understanding between religious confessions. "We have no problems relating to religion, ethnicity or faith. We have a peaceful and calm life."

"Amen!" answered the

Metropolitan Filaret, summing up the President's words. Everyone smiled and the Belarusian President repeated loudly, "Amen!"

Everyone was in high spirits and a common language was easily found, although Cardinal Koch spoke Italian while the others at the meeting spoke Russian. However, at one particular moment, it seemed that understanding transcended words. The interpreter was doing her best, as appreciated by the President and the Cardinal. Mr. Lukashenko expressed his opinion that the translation was perhaps sounding better than the original, provoking a smile from everyone present. However, the conversation



During a meeting in Minsk

turned serious when Mr. Lukashenko began to speak of politics, noting his hopes for the Roman Catholic Church not only in Heaven but on Earth, especially in the West.

"We don't accept the policy currently pursued by Europe towards Belarus. It isn't normal," asserted the Belarusian leader. "We are awaiting more from the Roman Catholic Church and personally from Pope Benedict XVI in

protecting our interests, especially in the West."

The President explained why he was addressing the spiritual leaders with secular issues, saying, "The Church is surely the fairest and most peaceful body in this prevalently unjust world. I'd like it to lend its weight towards protecting justice."

Mr. Lukashenko recollected his meeting with Pope Benedict XVI, which took

place in 2009. The Belarusian President asked Cardinal Koch to pass on his thanks to the Pope for the Holy See's support of Belarus, 'including within the international arena.'

"Of course, I'll pass on your words and everything I've seen here to the Vatican," promised the Chair of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Cardinal Koch also noted that his presence in Minsk allowed him to join an international conference for issues of Orthodox-Catholic dialogue. He noted that dialogue between the two denominations was well established in Belarus, while communications between the state and each confession are well developed. He especially thanked the Belarusian President for this.

Finally, he expressed his joy at 'seeing Catholic and Orthodox churches full of people.' "This shows that religion is alive in Belarus, as is faith among the population." He plans to pass the good news on to the Vatican.

## Spiritual legacy widely discussed

Grodno Region's Mir hosts EurAsEC Integration Committee Cultural Council

Representatives of the culture ministries of Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan attended the forum, which tackled issues of humanitarian collaboration and joint cultural projects. Reports were read on the achievements of the 2nd Cultural Council to date and a draft agreement on cultural co-operation between EurAsEC member states was discussed. Another report dealt with the 2nd Culture Festival of EurAsEC Nations and special attention was drawn to how best to protect our spiritual heritage.

## Following heart's call

First hybrid operating room — unique in Belarus and the CIS — being equipped at Grodno Regional Cardiological Dispensary, enabling heart and vascular surgery

The new facility will allow patients to remain in one location for both surgical interventions, although the equipment is mobile and can move depending on the nature of the surgery. If necessary, cardio-surgeons can be replaced with vascular surgeons. After reconstruction, the Regional Cardiology Dispensary is to be transformed into a cardio centre.

# Able to reach top fifty

## Belarus ahead of CIS states in Human Development Index



Belarus is ranked among those with high Human Development Index

By Lyudmila Gorovaya

The Human Development Index is released two years after the national statistical services disclose their information, since such information is sensitive. In the 21st UN Human Development Report, our country has moved from 61st place to 65th. However, 18 more countries have joined last year's 169. We have outstripped 14 rivals and are still ranked among those with a high Human Development Index, boasting a rating of 0.756 — the most desirable of all CIS states. Only Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia are ahead of us among

the former Soviet republics.

Just a thousandth of a point can separate countries. For instance, Canada and Germany are divided by only 0.003, while Lichtenstein and Sweden are just 0.001 apart. Norway leads again, boasting long life expectancy and high average income per capita, coupled with low inflation and unemployment. However, the cost of living there is among the most expensive. The value of the rankings is debatable, since Cuba is ahead of Belarus simply by having a longer average life expectancy — while being behind in terms of income and education (the latter is an area in

which Belarus is ranked very highly).

Professor of Economics Bryan Caplan is a little cynical, noting that immortality and endless GDP would still leave a country with a lower HDI than, for example, Tajikistan if its population was illiterate. All rating systems have their weaknesses and this is only one among many. Analysing the last five years, Antonius Broek, the UN Resident Coordinator / UNDP Resident Representative, sees Belarus' position in the Human Development Index as a 'rather good achievement'. If we look back, we can certainly give several arguments worth more than

simple statistics.

The medical element has been especially fruitful for Belarus. In late 2006, we had to admit that completing just eight kidney transplantations within a year was a poor result. At that time, we could only dream of liver transplantation, while heart transplants were unthinkable and cardiovascular operations were performed by just two clinics. Cancer screening — used extensively in many countries — was too expensive for general use; now, the situation is drastically different. Over the five months alone, 86 kidney transplants, 20 liver transplants and 14 heart transplants have been

conducted, with six out of ten cardiovascular operations performed in the regions. Now, our oncologists doubt the efficiency of preventive medical examinations and use cancer screening as their corner stone. Finally, life expectancy has increased by two years, with the expectation of more if the new national programme for demographic security is followed. Good intentions are being made tangible.

There's still a long way to go to reach the top fifty countries within the Human Development Index but, of course, ratings exist to encourage states to better themselves. The process is endless, since rankings compare one country with another. As one progresses, so everyone else must also do so. The ranking systems include the Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI), the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), the Vanderford-Riley Well-Being Schedule and the Economist Intelligence Unit, but others also exist. In terms of happiness, Denmark has always been a leader, rather than Norway. Famous demographer Sergey Shcherbov explains that the Danes enjoy Europe's highest employment coefficient, covering all age groups. Happiness stems from feeling useful, although feeling at peace with oneself does have its role to play. Such emotions can hardly be measured of course, whatever mathematical formula is applied.