

instructions. We should have taken such measures to raise the honour of the military — those who wear shoulder boards — at least a little by the end of the year.

Wider possibilities for housing will be created for those who have money and are able to earn it: mortgages, residential construction savings and other instruments.

I'd like to touch on a serious problem, which is our poor attitude towards cultivable soil. We need farms but why build them 10km from a settlement on the most fertile soil? Ten or even twenty hectares have been cut down in the Grodno, Brest and Gomel regions for farms. They then laid asphalt roads to these farms, alongside pipes for water, electricity and natural gas. Of course, this makes each farm twice as expensive and spoils ten hectares of fertile soil.

Industrial construction in villages has doubled in cost and our good leaders have acted with the same 'daylight robbery' regarding investments around Minsk. I had to return rights over agricultural lands to the President, taking away the function from governors, as they couldn't cope. They were starting to harm the country with their work. Today, it's not possible to take even one hectare of agricultural soil for other purposes without the President's permission. I warn everyone that this is the most serious crime if it happens without my knowledge. We have prohibited the use of agricultural lands for industrial construction — whether for agricultural purposes or the building of factories or similar. I'm not afraid of this decision hampering our development as we have so much land not in use. There will be enough for all American and European investors.

The state won't ignore problems of housing construction and will grant privileges such as tax deductions, attractive conditions for commercial lending and free land for individual construction — for those who need them.

Local authorities should create the right conditions for this, with **terms for free land lots of no more than three months**. We should create a civilised market of **lease housing** countrywide, with all employment contracts transparent and clear.

I entrust the Government, together with Minsk City Executive Committee and regional executive committees to provide a state **lease housing fund**, while protecting the rights of long-term leasers via contract.

Dear citizens!

If we can solve problems in these directions, we'll be able to forget the shortcomings of the last year within 12 months. Our economic strategy is clear. We need only to introduce it enthusiastically, creatively and wisely.

Now, about democracy, freedom and state responsibility.

Belarus is often criticised from abroad for 'improper' democracy. Such charges became commonplace long ago. We are blamed for not living democratically and are told that we live badly — that everything is awful in general. Speaking of the conflict with the European Union ambassadors, we observed carefully what happened and chatted to embassy staff. When I read the report, I was surprised and pleased to see that none of the foreign diplomats who left our country had wanted to do so. The main feeling was that this is a wonderful and civilised European

country with good people and peaceful streets. You can relax here as you would in Germany and elsewhere.

What am I telling you this? In order to persuade you that, although they criticise us publically, they actually love our country. They appreciate it and say that the level of democracy here in Belarus is the equal of that elsewhere. We know this ourselves from seeing them use tear gas and water cannons to disperse crowds (including women and children). Have we ever done such things in the history of our 'non-democratic' Belarus — even though we are still learning democracy from them? No, we haven't. So, what do they accuse us of? That we lead elections according to the law — to the Constitution? We do not accuse others of this. After the elections in France, I immediately congratulated the President

for several years, maintaining social dialogue and providing transparent and open conditions for elections, with full freedom for candidates.

How have these opportunities been used? The last elections, in 2010, showed that they were not used to public benefit. There have been abuses of the country and Government on TV, with violence in the streets, and agitation to terror and outrage. Every Belarusian has been able to see the real face of the opposition and its candidates. It's difficult to think of better agitation for the benefit of the ruling power.

After the elections of 2010, we intended to extend dialogue with Europe and the USA, developing civil society and dialogue relating to domestic policy, to improve the political system.

However, the West and our 'fifth

vital to the establishment of a democratic Belarus.

The current convocation of Parliament has played an important role in strengthening the state. The wisdom of our deputies and members of the Council of the Republic promotes social stability. Your knowledge and professional competence help create progressive legislation, without which we could not move ahead.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you all, dear parliamentarians, for your sincere and fruitful service to your country. We'll undertake regular parliamentary elections this autumn.

Of course, continuity is important to the country. If some of you return as members of the new Parliament, we'll create conditions to continue our hard work to improve state legislation.



In the hall

of France, as the French people had made their decision. Why should we interfere? Others should behave in a similar fashion.

Very few people realise the historical way of our Belarusian people; they don't know our mentality or traditions. Radical liberalisation was declined in the 1990s — not due to Lukashenko's will but in accordance with clamorous public demand. The Belarusian people preferred a calm entrance into the hard world of market competition, which was new to them.

We decided that state policy should remain steady and calm. Of course, we are for privatisation (I've detailed the principles). Of course, we are not against free pricing. However, we wish to retain state control until we are fully ready to address competition. Not only myself but the Belarusian people were not ready for the 'shock' of privatisation. We worked on a new policy and laws in this hall together, building a new path of development for our Belarus. Did we make a mistake? No, we didn't.

We've already travelled some way on this path, today boasting a mixed economy. Private firms occupy leading positions in many branches (from trade to programming) and are commercially viable.

The role and functions of the state are ever changing. We don't need central direct control of everything today. Rather, the main function of the state is to stimulate progress in all spheres, while providing social guarantees to citizens and creating legislation for society. We have been developing our **civil soci-**

column' made another decision. They not only refused to discuss matters but began to attack our country via pressure and sanctions.

I hope that everybody has now realised that such a path leads nowhere. We've lost much time due to this strange European policy but our position remains constant: we're ready for dialogue.

Of course, we can't sacrifice our basic principles. **Social and state stability is our most vital value.** Many countries envy Belarus for its lack of discord, conflict and political instability. We don't want this and we will not let it happen — by any means.

National stability and unity are our real treasures, which we must preserve to ensure successful economic development and a normal, calm life for our people.

Stability doesn't mean stagnation. We intend to continue consistently and calmly improving the public and political life of Belarus. We understand clearly that a new generation has appeared: the 'Internet generation'. It announces itself loudly in many spheres: sports, business and the high-tech field. It differs from that seen previously, being more accustomed to self-reliance than relying upon the state. This generation is more inclined to take risks to master modern innovations rapidly. This new young generation should surely find a place in determining the future face of the country — their Belarus.

In this regard, I'd like to say some words about **the role of Parliament.** The country needs strong legislative power and a strong Parliament. So, the development of Parliament is

I guarantee that the forthcoming election campaign will be organised at the highest level and in strict compliance with the law and Constitution of our country.

No step to the left, no step to the right. I say this for ambassadors of foreign states and for that part of society which demands an answer from me today on how the parliamentary elections will be held. All those who are literate, take a copy of the Constitution of our country and of our laws regarding the development of Constitutional electoral norms and read. No step to the left, no step to the right. We won't change anything on the eve of the forthcoming parliamentary elections!

If you ask me whether I support proportional representation, I will tell you a thousand times no. People should elect deputies using the majority voting system. A deputy should be close to their district. People should know them by face and vote for them in a particular territory. Then, they won't 'turn away' from their duty. If one candidate fails, the next might take their place but who has elected them, when their name wasn't even on the ballot paper? For example, everyone has seen the 200 candidates listed but none has seen the 201st. What is this system? What are the elections? This contradicts the mentality of the Belarusian nation. I speak against it but nothing can be done. The world is developing in a way that deputies are elected from parties.

Of course, it is desirable to have a choice of parties but show me a single other party which exists in Belarus.

Show me. When we began to check the list of candidates, I asked for silence since some might say that Belarus is underdeveloped, as it has no parties. More than half of the people on the list are deadheads. Then they travel Europe and the USA, with an inflated sense of their own importance. Who do they represent? They represent their own interests; they don't even struggle for power, as they don't need it. They are thrown a suitcase of money each time through Lithuania and Poland and other states. They divide it up between themselves and throw a meagre \$1 to those under them — that's all. This is their way of doing business.

Do you want to place such people in Parliament? I wouldn't like to do so. However, no one bans anyone from anything in Belarus. Come forward in a definite district, fight, win and act.

Naturally, this is not my business. Tell me, please, does the system which currently exists in Belarus create problems in society? No. Is it rejected by our society? No. Does our system create any problems for our neighbours? No. Everyone says that we're peaceful, good and kind, trying to live via our own minds and hands.

If our system hasn't outlived its usefulness and doesn't create any problems, why do we need to change it? Let's improve it calmly and precisely. We should listen to the minority, which does exist in Belarus. It isn't true that the President blatantly ignores them. I hear every 'peep' in every corner of our country, through my heart. However, this doesn't mean that I should go on TV each time to shout. We hear and analyse but are guided by the needs of the dominating majority of our society. It will always be so! This is my answer to electoral legislation and the forthcoming parliamentary elections. We're ready to listen to voices from the EU, the USA and Russia but we'll be guided by our own minds, to the benefit of our residents. We'll be pleased to take from the EU that which is profitable economically and politically for us but everything should be quiet, calm and noble — in favour of the Belarusian nation.

The new Parliament should become a centre of encouraged law making. There shouldn't be any automatism during the adoption of laws. Moreover, if necessary, it's important to overcome outdated approaches, constructively discussing issues with the Government. The quality of legislation should be so high that it can ensure real, long-term stability. We currently have problems with this, and you won't deny this.

Deputies should be down to Earth, able to relate each aspect of the law to real life and the day to day needs of the people. As already mentioned, change is inevitable in every sphere of state and society, evolving with life.

In this respect, **the country needs to further develop its political system.** The role of political parties needs to be strengthened to create a civilised party system. We must take this path.

Probably, as party structures gain power, we'll become mature enough to shift to a mixed electoral system, including that which envisages party-list elections. I hope this will appear in our country. Maybe, fewer people will then point their finger at me, saying that the President is to blame for everything and is responsible for