

Belarus' path: patriotism, intellect, progress

everything. If something catches on fire or explodes or the Belarusian currency fails to satisfy everyone, the President is to blame. In this case, maybe, parties will be responsible for something; they should exist. Not the President, the Government nor Parliament will be able to artificially throw away responsibility.

Belarus doesn't need **revolutions and upheavals**, which lead to chaos, breakdown and blood.

We should remember that a true civil society can't exist without a citizen. Meanwhile, a citizen is a person who is well aware of their rights and obligations. This is a person who feels their own responsibility for themselves and the whole country, for the present and the future.

I think that those who advocate freedom in Belarus most loudly aren't ready for this freedom themselves.

True democracy is the power of right-minded citizens, who respect laws — rather than those who attack buildings, sympathise with terrorists and call on riot. The problems of society should be discussed within the walls of Parliament rather than on squares and at public meetings. Where meetings are organised, they should be planned properly, as in many western states — which are a stronghold of democracy.

The state can and should give maximum freedom.

Even the great Dostoevsky wrote that freedom is the most unbearable thing for us. This sincere writer was right. In receiving freedom, we suddenly understand that we have shouldered the heaviest burden, as freedom brings responsibility. We should make decisions ourselves and take responsibility for these decisions.

Maybe, the time has come to alter our attitude towards life, ourselves and the state.

Our partners in the West should understand that civil society and democracy aren't born with the stroke of a pen by presidential decree. These notions grow and are born from the minds of millions of responsible people.

It can't happen overnight — it takes years. However, Belarus is firmly approaching this goal. It's senseless to try to urge us on too quickly.

Now, a few words on our information society.

For thousands of years, the **Earth** was the major wealth of humanity. As soon as the era of capitalism arrived, preference was given to **money**. However, in the final 25 years of the last century, humanity entered a new age — that of the **information society**.

The Internet has brought a revolution to various spheres of life — from financial and trade to mass media and entertainments.

For Belarus, the rapid development of the Internet and information and communication technologies opens up brilliant prospects. The intellect of our people — especially the younger generation — has already begun to bring tangible revenue into the country. In future, this branch may and should become one of the key areas in our economy.

Several years ago, we discovered a gap, which we dealt with seriously; over the last two years, we've managed to advance significantly in this area.

According to UN data, Belarus

has made a true breakthrough in the development of telecommunication infrastructure — shifting from **84th to 48th** place in world rankings. Strangely, Belarus is constantly registered as an enemy of the Internet but, in truth, all our restrictive measures are almost 'copied' from the American and European approach. We haven't invented anything new; we simply took from the Europeans and Americans.

Our concerns regarding the Internet are similar to those in the West: hacker attacks, electronic fraud and violation of authors' rights. Yes, we've already seen how 'they' tried to explode our country via the Internet.

This succeeded in Arab countries and, partially, in Russia and Kazakhstan. However, all these 'revolutions through social networks' were damned to complete failure in Belarus — as we recently witnessed. Moreover, we didn't block anything. We've given a worthy answer to this 'blasting' work on the Internet, including using new IT. We'll continue to act in this way, believing that the Internet should be used for peaceful purposes!

In fact, we view the Internet as **an ideal venue for communication: of power and citizens**. A system governing public applications to state authorities has been launched via the Internet, allowing prompt response; work in this direction will continue. I won't mention virtual government

within strictly legal limits regarding ordinary citizens, entrepreneurs and state officials. There shouldn't be any outrageous situations, any 'raids', any 'executions', or settling of personal scores; there won't be any of these things. All these distorted phenomena will be rooted out mercilessly.

There's no need to hide behind the struggle against corruption. Under this veil, bold and independent managers could be 'punished' for failing to bow to others. We could see the settling of personal scores and 'protection rackets'. We might witness the paid 'execution' of one businessman by another.

One of the most vital tasks of the recently established Investigative Committee is to counteract all these elements. If a manager is being deliberately persecuted at someone's order, you shouldn't remain uninvolved! Take such people under protection! I say this to the heads of the Investigative Committee and to investigators.

We've already assured ourselves that its establishment is the best way forward. It is the first but not the last decision regarding the gradual and consecutive reform of our law enforcement system.

It's no secret that the Interior Ministry is next in line. Over the next year — or even earlier — we'll completely reform our Interior Ministry, carefully and with consideration, without offending anyone.

We need to humanise criminal

The imminent adoption of the Law On Investments is an important step in this direction. I ask all deputies to consider this document carefully. The investment environment in Belarus should be among the best in the world, guaranteeing bona fide investors absolutely. The law should contain rules of direct action, clear and understandable to everyone, so that there will be no need to write instructions or adopt Governmental decisions for every rule of this law.

and receptions, as you've already heard about this and are well aware.

Belarus should occupy first place in terms of access to electronic services and their diversity.

Breathing new life into High-Tech Park.

Undoubtedly, its activity has given real impetus to the development of IT, counteracting the brain-drain and ensuring employment for young programmers.

The Park is now registering companies wishing to receive privileges, which is good but is not enough. New tasks should be set for the Park: primarily, the attraction of venture investors and the latest technologies — as needed by our economy.

I charge the Government and the Presidential Administration to prepare and submit a draft for a corresponding decree.

Today, the time has come to take a new step: **we need to move from the usual offshore programming to true high technologies**, and not only in the IT sphere. This relates to the High-Tech Park and to all other players on this market. Competition should exist.

Now, about law enforcement and judicial systems.

We've launched serious improvements to the work of our law enforcement system and to our security overall.

Security agencies should act

legislation and the law governing economic crimes.

Imprisonment isn't always the adequate measure of punishment and re-education.

The General Prosecutor's Office and the Investigative Committee need to thoroughly analyse the effectiveness of custodial placement, which is the dominant punishment at present. Why should we separate energetic and capable people from the world for breaking the law when they haven't endangered or injured citizens? Give them bail or place them under parole but don't throw them onto a plank bed. Only the courts deliver a verdict but we should make sure that people can't run away, requiring us to spend a great deal of money searching for them — as often happens.

I charge the Government to promptly prepare a draft law on amnesty — to coincide with our major state holiday of Independence Day. I've already spoken about this: dignified people suffer in prison while we release scoundrels (under pressure or otherwise)...

It's necessary **to overcome the accusatory emphasis of our law enforcement officers.**

A positive trend has been recently observed in the judicial system, so we should reinforce and develop this further. We shouldn't forget that independence and adherence to the principles of the judicial system directly

influence the economy. The court shouldn't stand aside but be always guided solely by the law and deliver a fair decision.

We should move towards models already being used elsewhere in the world: **trial jury and administrative courts**. The latter are especially important for citizens, since they can deliver a quick verdict, saving years of searching for the truth in state bodies. Such courts are designed to solve disputes between citizens and state officials. As world experience shows, they help break the notion of 'one hand washing the other' where state officials are concerned, protecting the rights of ordinary people.

We have failed to yet achieve a decision regarding **control activity**. The number of checks is too great and they remain of a punitive rather than of a warning character. The most offensive thing is that we often fail to check those whom we should and do go not go where we should.

In recent times, we've seen a rise in disgraceful behaviour by the heads of enterprises — primarily state-run. This mostly refers to the Government and ministers. I've personally taken up this issue now and, God forbid, I'm reported something significant regarding this issue. At our trade houses and commodity distribution networks, we've been selling our tractors almost free of charge. In Russia, we have a joint trade house with the Russians where they earn profit and

divide it between themselves — while our enterprises receive almost nothing. Other schemes may be also invented.

Ordinary individuals have been unable to buy a tyre, tractor or vehicle via advance payment. Sellers won't take advanced payments, yet are giving goods to trade houses for 90 days without any advance payment. People have appealed to ministers but have failed to receive answers. You have only yourself to blame, as I've warned you! I've already spoken about this in Volkovysk and am now tired of listening to these complaints. I warn heads of enterprises ahead of time.

They have almost given our annual stock of tractors and automobiles to these trade chains. Now, we'll see the results at our Tractor Works and other enterprises. Why don't you sell with advance payments, since demand for tractors is so great at present? What are you waiting for? The Government is keeping silence, meaning that the situation exists because we have market relations...

The Government, the Presidential Administration and the State Control Committee need to elaborate additional measures in the first half of this year to optimise monitoring countrywide.

We've adhered to the **proverb 'trust but verify'** for many years but the time has come to change the position of words.

Now, about Belarus in the world.

The 21st century world is developing differently to how it did in the last century: incomparably more rapidly and on a larger scale, while often being unpredictable.

The world's leaders are changing. The Eastern Asia is throwing down a challenge to old Europe but we aren't seeing a struggle by the centres of power — as was traditional in the 20th century. This is because the **global economy has made all countries interdependent**.

There are no winners or losers in this system. Everyone benefits from the economic boom, as everyone loses from an economic crisis.

The new world order is mostly brightly seen in the example of two giants: the USA and China. Their economies are symbiotic: each relies on the other. Unfortunately, world policy seriously lags behind world economy. Politicians still speak in the language of force, wars and threats. Humanity has failed to elaborate reliable mechanisms of ensuring security.

The temptation to cut rather than to untie the 'Gordian knot' of world policy remains strong among the leading countries of the world. We cannot change this, so Belarus must adapt towards the world order which is forming (mostly regardless of our will).

I've asserted many times that Belarus has no geopolitical ambitions but we should clearly see our place in the world and protect our national interests — by all possible means.

I want to tell the Europeans and Americans that it's impossible to break us; they should understand this. I speak not only of Lukashenko and, as they say, his security bloc — or the Government. No, it's impossible to artificially break us, Belarusians. They might bury us, allowing them to do as they wish with our country, but it's unpromising to break, bend or step on us — with a knee or the whole leg. Let's live in friendship and speak to one another. Dialogue is the only way to succeed together. There's no other way.

I've often noted that our national interests are very simple. Speaking plainly, **we want to live peacefully and in a friendly fashion with everyone, to trade freely and sincerely co-operate in all spheres of interest to us and to our partners.**

Unfortunately, it's easier to say than to do, as there are many who don't agree.

A range of countries reject Belarus' right to decide its own national interests. Some view our country either as a 'sanitary cordon' or a 'sanitary zone'. Some believe that they have the right to dictate to the Belarusian nation on how it should live and develop. Naturally, such approaches are always doomed to failure.

We'll never tire of repeating that Belarus is interested in calm relations with its close and distant neighbours and in the closest integration in all possible directions.

Integration is our conscious choice. We understand well that only countries with huge domestic markets (of at least several hundred million people) and those which **form such market by joining integration associations** can survive under contemporary conditions.