

Right to choose this autumn

Elections to the Parliament will take place in September

By Kirill Dovlatov

President Alexander Lukashenko tells National Assembly that elections to the House of Representatives will take place on September 23rd while the Council of the Republic will be formed by end September.

Of course, there is plenty of time for candidates to come forward: their nomination begins 70 days before the election date and, by this time, district and divisional election commissions should be already formed. Those with serious intentions should remember the most vital aspect, as stipulated by Mr. Lukashenko in his State of the Nation Address to the Belarusian people and the National Assembly, 'I guarantee that the forthcoming election campaign will be held at the highest level and in strict compliance with the laws and Constitution of our country.' Mr. Lukashenko specified tasks during the session.

The President has called the elections the most vital political event in the country, being a test for those in power, especially local authorities, as our people will be examining them. Obviously, they must be conducted under strict conditions. Elections are our internal — family — affair, since we must abide by the results. In this respect, the Belarusian President warns, 'We won't be aiming to please anyone from outside; the elections are organised for the Belarusian nation, exclusively to serve its interests. Belarus is a sovereign state and won't ac-

cept any interference. We need to have one goal in mind: holding elections in strict compliance with national legislation, fairly, openly and ensuring the will of the Belarusian nation. During preparations for the parliamentary elections, we need cohesion, organised actions and exclusive mobility. A calm and constructive atmosphere is required, with mutual understanding from all participants in the electoral process. We've learnt how to hold elections as a holiday for the Belarusian people. Let's organise this holiday once again; it should be a holiday for our people.'

Mr. Lukashenko demands a thorough approach towards the formation of election commissions, noting, 'The adoption of decisions on their formation should be made in line with the law, involving political parties and public organisations. Representatives of all parties (regardless of their political views) who worthily proved themselves at previous election campaigns should be included on election commissions. Those who have previously assisted in disrupting elections shouldn't receive a second chance.'

He adds, 'Of course, there should be no restrictions on the registration of candidates for the role of deputy. All those who have the right to be registered should be registered. Every citizen of the country should be granted the full opportunity to realise their rights to elect and be elected.'

Local authorities should guarantee pre-election public events to



match those of the Presidential elections in 2010, with attention paid to impartiality and transparency within the electoral process. The President has asked that international observers be given every assistance, yet notes, 'We won't "drag" international observers into the country — as we did before. At the same time, we should grant the right to see how elections are taking place in Belarus to all those who wish it.'

According to the President, the forthcoming elections should see observers from constructive political parties, trade unions, youth and veteran organisations, and labour groups taking the foremost role. 'This will enable us to reinforce civil control over the process of parliamentary elections, while making them more transparent,' he asserts.

He is keen to see the election campaign comply strictly with the

law, and hopes that participants will behave responsibly, observing the principle of equal rights, responsibilities and obligations. Mr. Lukashenko warns, 'Illegal actions and political provocations aiming to destabilise the country should be stopped immediately, while those guilty should bear responsibility. Everyone should respect the law since, without this, no deputy of parliaments can exist.'

Clearly, the pre-election campaign cannot operate via mass street events. Law enforcement authorities will be acting to prevent pre-election meetings turning into such events, as law and order should be ensured everywhere.

The Chair of the Central Election Commission, Lidia Yermoshina, advises the organisers of local elections to fulfil their obligations carefully, saying, 'The atmosphere of the elections is determined by public feeling.'

People usually have a healthy respect for elections when they believe all is fair. We need to do all we can to inspire confidence in equality of access, with no special preferences.'

According to Ms. Yermoshina, the first stage of the campaign — the formation of the district election commissions — should be completed by July 9th. She stresses the importance of informing all those wishing to take part in the work of election commissions in a timely manner, openly and publicly, as required by law.

These will be the first parliamentary elections held under recently amended legislation, with a new form of signature collection allowed: picketing (proven popular during the Presidential elections). The Chair of the Central Election Commission believes that a list of places should be drawn up where picketing is unambiguously prohibited. Also, printing enterprises need time to prepare in advance.

Alongside funds allocated from the budget, candidates are now able to use their own funds (up to 1,000 basic units — equal to Br100m). They also have greater opportunities to produce campaign materials.

Ms. Yermoshina is keen to see people enjoy equal access to standing as candidates and believes that, following the law, we should view registration impartially. Voters should have full access to information on all candidates, with no artificial barriers or restrictions.

How everything began about twenty years ago

Alexander Lukashenko tours exhibition dedicated to the establishment of Belarusian statehood and adds his own curious details



By Vasily Khmelevsky

Even the excursion guide admitted that his stories were new to her. The Museum of Modern Belarusian Statehood is located within the Presidential Residence in 38 Karl Marx Street, in Minsk.

Mr. Lukashenko glanced at the stand devoted to the 1994 elections and interrupted the excursion guide, saying, 'I remember this very well.' He indicated a photo showing him simply sitting on the ground surrounded by people with rakes, scythes and pitchforks, explaining that it was his first visit to Polesie. He went directly to a hayfield in which people were working; they stopped but appeared reserved, being reluctant to engage with anyone they didn't know well. The President suggested that they continue working, which they then did, mowing hard in the hot sun. Locals began to feel tired, while the President left them behind, mowing ahead of them. Eventually, he heard someone

for a heart to heart conversation — as captured in the photograph.

'It put an end to all conversations about a 'Polesie Republic'. At that time, they wanted to divide the country into western Belarus, eastern Belarus and the 'Polesie Republic,'' Mr. Lukashenko explained to those around him. Soon afterwards, major work was launched in laying gas pipelines across Polesie, and in building roads, alongside water purification and deionising units. These days it would be impossible to lure Polesie away from Belarus; local residents would certainly object themselves.

At each stand, the President revealed little known details: how Gomel produced its first harvester; how it was decided to develop BelAZ; how the Slavonic Bazaar was saved; and shortcomings in supporting young talent.

The museum is already fascinating, although the Belarusian leader notes that more is to come. Of course,

mutter 'this is ours', which inspired him to sit down on the grass with them

In the early 1990s, on receiving our chance, we used it fully. In just two decades, we've created a new European country, despite incredible pressure from outside.

Belarus has shown that even a small country can command respect while pursuing an independent foreign political course. Our goal is to create a state of which we, as well as our children, can be proud. The generations which come after us will be the judge. If improvements are apparent, it shows that this was one of the roads we had to cover.

On satisfaction with results

My character is such that I tend to be dissatisfied rather than content; sometimes, I'm too critical. However, if we don't raise the bar ourselves, we'll never progress. We should be straining every nerve.

On responsibility

People say that I'm at the heart of the nation. It's true. You gave birth to me. I came to power from the opposition. Who would allow me to be here were it not for the nation which elected me in 1994? This is sacred to me. I can't overstep my position and would never steal anything from my people. I'll never deceive them or play cat and mouse. I won't grovel to preserve my authority, as this would be alien to me. I came to power at the hands of the nation so I must work for the nation. Over more than 15 years this is already inside me, as it was 17 years ago.

On patriotism

We can imbue this word with much emotion but, simply, when you live somewhere, even if you aren't happy about everything, you set your jaw, aiming to improve living conditions. Patriotism occurs when you truly want to be proud of your country and do all you can to achieve this. It's important.

On SES prospects

Everything should operate as if

we are one state [conditions for the work of economies and equal access to products]. It's not yet clear whether these economic processes will lead to the creation of some other supranational structures, or to changes in policy or state structure. However, we do understand that economy is the basis, forcing politicians to liaise. We'll have to somehow modernise our political system if we really desire serious relations.

On the nuclear power station

There are some powers [those who are against] whose voices have been paid for. Who is crying out? Mostly Lithuania and Poland. However, looking at the situation from another side... don't the Lithuanians construct their own nuclear power station? They plan it within two kilometres of our border. The Poles wish to build two nuclear power stations. The problem is that we've outstripped them in this area. Whoever is ahead wins. We'll be the first to receive electricity, which we'll be able to sell countrywide and to neighbouring states.