

Room for further legislative improvement

President meets Chairman of Constitutional Court, Piotr Miklashevich

Alexander Lukashenko believes that the role of the Constitutional Court needs gradual enhancement. Addressing Mr. Miklashevich, he noted, "The most experienced and literate lawyers work with you. However, the Constitutional Court is yet to play its true role. It seems to me its role should be increased gradually, as we previously agreed. I want you not only to unmask shortcomings but, in enhancing

the role of the Constitutional Court, more vigorously influence relevant subjects of our public life regarding constitutionality of their actions, bringing order to the law. This is vital."

Mr. Lukashenko expressed a wish for the Constitutional Court to more actively participate in the work of international organisations. He is keen to discuss the role of the Constitutional Court, including improvements to its activity and judicial proceedings in their widest sense, with participation of judges and specialists.

Mr. Miklashevich noted that, in June 2008, a Presidential Decree

expanded the Constitutional Court's authority, granting the right to check the constitutionality of laws adopted by the National Assembly (before they are signed by the President). "No other European Constitutional Court boasts such authority," he added.

In recent times, the Constitutional Court has done much in this direction, checking 444 laws adopted by Parliament. All were recognised as meeting the Constitution. Mr. Miklashevich believes that this proves that the law making process of the country enjoys a high level. Moreover, laws are thoroughly prepared,

being agreed by corresponding state bodies. Respect for the major law of the country — the Constitution — is evident.

Certain shortcomings have been detected by the Constitutional Court, which has worked out over one hundred legal views to point out law gaps, to explain the essence of laws and to respond to questions of legal practitioners in order to avoid distortion of the constitutional legal essence of the law.

The President has been informed that, last year, the Constitutional Court made a decision to assess whether the 'Pole's Card' meets international norms

and principles. As a result, some changes have been introduced. As regards the application of the law, Mr. Miklashevich stressed that the country has elaborated a mechanism to allow citizens indirect access to constitutional justice — through plenipotentiary bodies: the Government, the House of Representatives, the Council of the Republic, the Supreme and Higher Economic Courts and the President.

During the meeting, it was agreed to further discuss the setting up of an institution monitoring human rights relating to the Constitution, which could address the Constitutional Court.

Urbanisation in its widest sense and manifestation

Around 74 percent of Belarusian citizens live in cities: the highest figure within post-Soviet space

By Lyudmila Konovalova

According to the UNFPA's Resource Centre of Belarus, around the same percentage of people live in cities in the Czech Republic and Switzerland. Over all, the country's inner migration reflects a global tendency for urbanisation. In recent decades, Minsk has been enjoying especial popularity among Belarusians, becoming home to 20 percent of the Republic's residents. Even if we take into account the number of students from rural areas entering universities in regional centres, Brest, Grodno, Vitebsk, Mogilev and Gomel are certainly 'losing' their population aged 15-19 (compared to Minsk). Residents from other districts of the country are also arriving to the Minsk Region.



According to sociological surveys, fifth of all residents choose to live in Minsk in recent time

Chip with complete information

By Andrey Anufriev

Belarus to launch smartcards for use as identification, payment and discount cards to receive goods and services

The creation of identification system of individuals and businesses is envisaged by the National Programme of Accelerated Development of Services in Information and Communication Technologies for 2011-2015. It aims to introduce identification (social) cards — as used widely across Europe. The cards are multi-functional, acting as an ID card (which may be used to restrict entry to night clubs and casinos for minors), as well as for use on public transport and for payment of goods and services. The card can even be used to receive discounts — such as when buying medicines at a pharmacy.

Belarus' Deputy Minister for Communications and Informatisation, Nikolay Strukov, tells us that the card will give access to services, having an information chip. It will resemble a contemporary driving license and will be extremely difficult to fake, as it will include data on the owner and a cryptographic code.

Border area residents make a move

Belarus and Latvia begin issue of permits to simplify border crossing, as envisaged by agreement for residents of border areas

An inter-governmental agreement was signed in Riga on August 23rd, 2010. Later, on December 1st, 2011, Vitebsk's Regional Executive Committee exchanged written notifications with Latvia, to allow the inter-state document to enter into force. Since then, local authorities have been compiling lists of border area residents who qualify for permits.

The State Border Committee of Belarus has created a special Internet site (www.traffic.gpk.gov.by) defining the exact border territories to which the new system applies, as well as listing the documents needed to cross the border. Residents of border areas of Belarus and Latvia will be able to visit corresponding border territories without the need for a visa, if they hold a permit for 'local border traf-

fic'. These will be issued to residents of border territories: by the General Consulate in Daugavpils for those wishing to visit Belarus and by the

parents, grandparents and children under the age of 18). The new permits cost 20 Euros, but pensioners, invalids and children under 18 may be exempt



Both countries' diplomats have done much to support agreement

Consulate in Vitebsk for those wishing to visit Latvia.

Residents must have permanently resided in the border territory for at least one year to qualify — or must be part of a joint household (spouses,

from payment. Each permit will last between one and five years but no longer than the expiry date of the valid travel document and the total period of stay in the other state cannot exceed 90 days within six months.

Rent for symbolic fee

Belarus and Azerbaijan to 'exchange' land lots for placing diplomatic representative offices

Belarus and Azerbaijan are granting each other land lots for placing diplomatic representative offices, with conditions of 'exchange' stipulated in an inter-governmental agreement. A draft was recently discussed at a session of the House of Representatives' Standing Committee for International Affairs and Links with the CIS.

According to the agreement, Belarus will be able to lease a 0.5 square hectare area in a central Baku district (Khatainsky District, Rafiev Street, 1210 block). A complex of buildings is to be built on the site for the Belarusian Embassy to Azerbaijan explains Vitaly Busko, Chairman of the Standing Committee for International Affairs and Links with the CIS. He adds, "Construction is to be launched this year and should

be finished by mid-2013."

Meanwhile, Belarus is to lease Azerbaijan two land lots (0.25 square hectares each) in Minsk, near Starovilensky Tract for the Azerbaijani Embassy to Belarus and near Skorina Street for the residence of the head of this diplomatic mission.

Mr. Busko notes that the agreement envisages allocation of land lots on lease terms for a 99 year period for a symbolic fee of \$1 per year. He tells us that the agreement was signed on July 8th, 2011, in Baku, during an official visit by the Belarusian parliamentary delegation to Azerbaijan. It will enter into force once both sides fulfil necessary inter-state procedures. According to the Foreign Ministry, Azerbaijan has already notified Belarus of the fulfilment of inter-state procedures. Belarusian deputies plan to ratify the agreement during the forthcoming spring session.