

Anyone can make a mistake, but not all mistakes are equal

Alexander Lukashenko demands battle against corruption, emphasising personal responsibility

By Vasily Kharitonov

The President has bid law-enforcement agencies to renew efforts to fight corruption and economic crimes, saying, "From my point of view, these are the main challenges of our country. There is nothing more frightening for us today, as we can say that we've successfully overcome other challenges."

The number of cases of corruption and economic crimes has been falling for the last three years in Belarus. "Regardless of European and American attitudes, or those of other states, they unanimously acknowledge that the authorities of Belarus are doing their best to hinder the path to corruption. Nobody is untouchable, as Russians, Poles, Ukrainians and others agree, as well as those from states further afield," said the President.

The international image of the Republic of Belarus on these issues has improved. "This, on the whole, affirms the efficiency of state actions, especially those which are preventive. Corruption remains an acute theme, requiring constant attention and systemic work — from law-enforcement agencies and wider society," emphasises Mr. Lukashenko.

The President admits that more could be done to prevent corruption and economic crime but asserts that existing anticorruption legislation should be adequate, without further reform. Speaking at a meeting on the issue, he noted, "It is evident that the main reasons for the current situation are complacency and inactivity from some directors of subdivisions of law enforcement and controlling agencies. We cannot look for scapegoats; responsibility lies with those seated at this table. If you do not have inner commitment to root out this dreadful disease in the country, eradicating it at all levels, we'll never defeat corruption. I want you to understand that I'm unafraid of taking decisive steps, including towards



Meeting tackles efficiency of fight against corruption and economic crime

high officials." Having warned subdivision heads present at the meeting about their personal responsibility for corruption and economic crime, he added, "I emphasise that work should be systematic, goal-oriented and continuous."

Mr. Lukashenko is keen to launch action against a whole range of corruption and economic crime, urging the General Prosecutor's Office to co-ordinate the work of all law-enforcement agencies in this battle. He asserts, "The time of clicking our heels is over. We need to resolutely struggle against this evil." He believes that regional and, especially, district prosecutors, should take on more responsibility in identifying key problems and taking action. The President stressed at his recent meeting, "I notice a conspiracy of silence at the level of regions, cities and districts. They are starting to follow their own laws. Perhaps those in the centre will follow suit. If you believe you can manage this situa-

tion do so; if not, then we'll have to consider employing new people or changing the system."

The President regrets that law enforcement agencies often fail to work well together, pooling resources and expertise. He explained, "It's troubling that prosecutors haven't taken real measures to eliminate inefficiency in their liaisons. Field services and investigative units need to assess evidence of economic crimes together, to avoid delay or cases being thrown out unnecessarily." Speaking of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, he noted with disappointment, "Despite the greatest potential and the necessary capabilities, the department has an incomprehensible wait-and-see attitude."

The President considers countermeasures concerning pseudo-entrepreneurship to be inadequate, noting, "Measures taken by law-enforcement and controlling agencies countrywide should prevent pseudo-entrepreneurship. More

importantly, they should eliminate this highly remunerative form of criminal business immediately." Mr. Lukashenko pointed out that most violations relate to tax avoidance, via pseudo-entrepreneurial structures, with state losses rising annually. He laments that the number of cases investigated is declining steadily, resulting in losses to the state budget of over Br700 billion last year.

The President has now tasked the Ministry for Taxes and Duties to take additional measures to restore proper order to retail trade. "Involve the Ministry of Trade and return it to the real world. We need unconditional fulfilment of tax obligations by all entities. In addition, we need co-operation with interested parties in implementing a range of measures, including economic, to prevent the illegal movement of goods across the state border."

The President added, "Law enforcement and controlling agencies should have every department and

sphere of activity involved in maintaining the strategic interests of the state on their radar, ensuring they represent the interest of citizens."

"We often hear that 'anyone can make a mistake'; however, mistakes vary in severity. They shouldn't become a regular occurrence and money should not be flowing from public to private pockets. Mistakes must be corrected and criminals punished. The police need to distinguish between a mistake and a crime."

The President tasked the Prosecutor General and the Chairman of the Investigating Committee with personal responsibility for observing the law in investigating criminal cases, especially those associated with economic crimes. "The perpetrator of each crime must make full compensation for the loss and undergo punishment. This issue should be under your constant supervision, with money stolen from the state or society repaid triple or five-fold."

Status to rise to maximum level

Three of today's simplified checkpoints on Belarusian-Lithuanian border to become international

At the end of July, Kamenny Log checkpoint hosted a meeting of representatives of customs and excise authorities from Belarus and Lithuania. The main objective of the meeting was to discuss the creation of favourable conditions for movement of goods and vehicles across the Belarusian-Lithuanian border.

Naturally, everyone wishes to reduce queues at checkpoints and one solution is to increase the



number of checkpoints along the Belarusian-Lithuanian border. Belarusian and Lithuanian customs officers have agreed to transform some simple checkpoints into international crossing points: Vidzy-Tverechius, Moldevichi-Adutiškis and Losha-Šumskas.

Losha-Šumskas will be

the first to launch, next year, while Kamenny Log is revamped, bringing diverted travellers to the next nearest checkpoint.

Queues at the border have been growing due to increased cargo and passenger flow. Over the first six months of this year, volumes of passenger traffic

on the Belarusian-Lithuanian border increased by 11 percent (on 2012). International contacts are growing, while infrastructure at checkpoints, and numbers of personnel, remain the same.

New technologies can be used to process vehicles more quickly, and less busy internal customs officers can be transferred to the major border checkpoints, to speed up service. Green corridors are to be used for those with no goods to declare while border control will be tightened where necessary. This should eliminate problems with queues.

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