

Time will tell where genuine success lies

Speaking at the session, discussing problems in the civil construction industry and improvements in the work of executive staff, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko announces that top level meetings, tackling problematic issues in various branches, are to be held at least once every 6 months

By Vasily Tikhomirov

Mr. Lukashenko has noted, "Such a format and large number of participants is needed — both due to the urgency of the theme and the need for comprehensive discussion of vital fields of activity relating to every region and organisation." He believes that such meetings should occur at least once every 6 months, in order to bring to light problems and tackle their solution. He asserts that, until recently, such a format did not exist at the highest level. He adds, "We've lost even the decisions made by the former Presidential Administration so, in the long term, such meetings will become the norm."

The President has entrusted the Government, together with the Presidential Administration, to submit items for the agenda. He is keen to see problems relating to housing and communal services highlighted, alongside the development of the agro-industrial complex.

The forthcoming agenda includes two urgent issues: development of the construction branch, and the need to improve the work of managerial personnel. Mr. Lukashenko explains that there have been many complaints against the construction sphere. "There has been so much spoken negatively that we need to take decisive action at all levels of management, including at the highest level." He notes that the people depend upon the construction branch as a whole and housing construction in particular. "In Soviet times, people would say that life is given to us once, and an apartment was even rarer! Since then, much time has passed and the country has changed, as has the world. However, accommodation remains our major way of measuring standards of living for individuals and families. In order to afford a house or an apartment, people give all

they have. For the ordinary man, huge financial means are required, requiring a lifetime of saving or debt, with repayment of a loan."

According to the President, the construction industry's main problems centre on housing, with subjective and objective reasons affecting progress. He comments, "Most problems have been created by managers, designers and builders, as well as ourselves. In order to overcome the negative aspects, we need an interdepartmental group, with major powers. I emphasise that it should be interdepartmental, since previous lack of co-ordination,



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indiscipline, mutual claims by various structures and the serving of narrow corporate interests have caused damage to the construction sphere." Formerly, the task was set to monitor all stages of the investment process, using international experience to plan the development of the construction branch in the near and medium-term. According to Government plans, of 2.5 million square metres of accommodation being made available in 2014 with state support, about a third — 800,000 square metres — will be constructed to state order. The cost of each square metre of such accommodation will equal the av-

erage monthly salary, with some adjustment relating to actual date of availability.

"Our state order to construct accommodation with state support should prevent the occurrence of 'problem houses,'" the President underlines. "People will be saved from purgatory, knocking on every door. They'll be able to buy accommodation at a clear price, making it easier for them to plan their budget, and taking into account any preferential terms offered under law." The President is entrusting the Government to prepare corresponding documents in the near future, so that the system can become

operational.

Mr. Lukashenko considers it a crime to start construction without adequately calculating the economic feasibility and efficiency of investments. Concerning planning and substantiation of investments, he notes that much bungling occurs. "A lack of forethought regarding technical and economic aspects of construction can raise final costs significantly," the President laments, noting that we don't have to look far for examples. The Head of State believes that the major source of problems in the sphere of forestry is the absence of initial in-depth substantiation of investments.



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As a result, the planned modernisation of separate technological lines turned into the construction of new enterprises, while the amount of funds required for that rose nearly 4-fold. He admits that many similar examples also exist in the sphere of housing construction.

Concerning the provision of plots for construction, the Head of the State empha-

sises that a great volume has been given free of charge, to reduce the cost of construction. However in practice, building companies have failed to reduce the price per square metre, choosing to rather pocket the profit. The President views such practise as swindling. Meanwhile, the Head of State noted that the distribution of land plots free of charge was designed to stimulate the creation of new productions and cheap housing construction, so Mr. Lukashenko demanded that auctions should be the major instrument of assigning land plots. The President wishes to see those carrying out technical supervision

checking everything: from documentation to the quality and quantity of executed works. "We need our best experts to undertake this, so we need to look at their training, salaries and selection methods, taking into account their moral fibre," he stresses. "No site should be included in the state investment programme without my agreement. I warn the Government and Governors that it is inadmissible to misuse state funds; I'll suppress this in the strictest way."

The second part of the meeting was devoted to increasing the prestige of the civil service in Belarusian society. Amendments to legislation are being prepared, with the President asserting, "I'm informed that successful heads of enterprises do not want to be in power, due to low salaries, great demand and enormous responsibility. In days gone by, people wanted such positions not for the size of salary, but for the status and opportunity. These days, I'm told that such high-ranking positions are perceived by some as a burden and a source of anxiety."

The President is convinced that the activity of civil servants should be absolutely transparent, with no closed topics for criticism in the work of state authorities, otherwise stagnation will appear. He also notes that criticism should be constructive rather than turning into ill-natured criticism.

According to the Head of the Presidential Administration, Andrei Kobaykov, contemporary Government officials should be creative thinkers, taking ideas beyond the usual solutions. Statistically, only a small number of people have such aptitude.

Mr. Kobaykov notes, "Our problem is to find them, choosing people who can make and execute administrative decisions, involving them fully in administrative organisations and in the civil service." Regarding raising the prestige of the civil service, he believes that increased salaries are not the answer — only that wages should be adequate to support a family. He feels that there's no need for salaries to equal those paid to people engaged in highly profitable businesses, since state officials enjoy alternative advantages — such as a high level of job security and guaranteed earnings.

Innovative approach

The President remains less than happy with the work of managerial personnel, saying, "Often, in the civil service, we aren't seeing the sort of people we need. Rather, we have employees who are afraid to show initiative, or make decisions independently, while taking responsibility for the results. It is necessary to understand the root of a problem. Numbing bureaucracy in state machinery can only impede our development."

The Head of the State asked those present how more authoritative, talented, creative thinkers might be attracted into the civil service and tasked the Government and Presidential Administration with this long-term goal. He considers that the system has some advantages, since many good managers and professionals do exist within the ranks of the civil service.

Republican meetings will now be held at least every six months, examining the most acute social issues. The results will then be evident.