

those employed.

The Council of Ministers and the National Bank have been directed towards some key areas of concern: preservation of export sales (hitting \$60bn) to ensure high rates of economic growth; comparable loan rates for Belarusian Roubles and foreign currencies; new sources of funding, such as foreign loans on beneficial terms; the direction of funding towards modernisation; encouragement of entrepreneurial activity; and the raising of incomes through linking economic efficiency to salaries.

Mr. Lukashenko asserts that every enterprise's modernisation plan should be reinforced by an effective business plan. He notes that the state will provide support to such projects. He believes that entrepreneurial initiative should benefit the state and private sectors alike. Meanwhile, he is certain that industrial salaries should only rise where they reflect 'value' in terms of labour efficiency. He is keen to see real incomes grow, but not at the expense of inflation and only where they are deserved.

2013 is to be the Year of Thriftiness; the Head of State is confident that every sphere has room for improvement regarding efficient use of resources.

Understanding tasks ahead

Prime Minister Mikhail Myasnikovich gave his own report, followed by the Head of the National Bank, Nadezhda Yermakova, the Chairman of the State Control Committee, Alexander Yakobson, the Deputy Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers and governors. Problems needing elimination were listed, alongside possible solutions, initiating discussion. The PM's mention of Br134 trillion being needed to be spent on modernisation brought raised eyebrows from the President, who questioned whether the amount had been derived from requests from enterprises or whether it was founded in more consolidated data.

Mr. Yakobson mentioned that those running large enterprises may spend time 'feathering their nest' in readiness for later years, preparing a place for themselves in the private sector. The President has asked that the current places of employment of former officials be explored, to ensure that no underhand dealing is found.

The Government has been given clear advice: to hold fewer meetings and show more action! All principal issues were discussed at the Council of Ministers' session chaired by the President, allowing all those wishing to speak to do so. He warned again, towards the end of the session, "I'd like everyone to keep in mind that, if you fail this year, you will have to retire."

The head of each enterprise will have much to ponder in the coming weeks and months.

Green light for business

Alexander Lukashenko believes Council for Entrepreneurship Development should drive forward constructive ideas, while helping realise business potential

By Vladimir Khromov

Speaking at a Council session, Mr. Lukashenko stressed that its major task is to advise entrepreneurs of state policy, to ensure that the interests of society are met and that civilised market relations are supported. The President added that economic modernisation is a focus for the private sector as well as the state sector, with investors sought from Belarus and further afield.

"The Council was established to help entrepreneurs realise their full potential, supporting efficient market structures and solving acute problems in a business-like manner — without red-tape," the Head of State emphasised. Mr. Lukashenko noted that he is eager to listen to businessmen's ideas on enhancing efficiency. "The decisions we make now must drastically improve the Council's work; it should absolutely meet modern requirements."

Mr. Lukashenko asserts that the Council for Entrepreneurship Development is virtually the only such council set up under the auspices of the President. He explained, "Confusion abounded, with too many officers within law enforcement bodies and government agencies wishing to line their pockets. This was pretty commonplace but I hope things have changed by now. I was unhappy with the situation of so many people wanting to intimidate, harass and jail businessmen, which is utterly unacceptable. It's important for me to help new businessmen: our policy is simple — to make life easier for them and all those who work with them. I want everything to be fair and honest. We need to know what is going on in the business com-



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Participants of meeting find sufficient food for thought

munity, so I want to be kept informed."

Mr. Lukashenko admits that he often failed to receive such information from entrepreneurs. "Accordingly, I've appointed someone close to me, who can voice their position openly and honestly — even if it differs from the opinions of others," the President noted.

Mr. Lukashenko stresses that businessmen do not need overprotection or privileges. "You are not disabled or pensioners. You began a business to try and make a profit, so it's fair to pay taxes, which feed the state budget, helping those who cannot earn as much. Nobody is suggesting that we strip businessmen of all they have. We should be generous but we don't need

to give away money for nothing. Everybody should work but, if you would like to help an orphanage, or essential spheres like sports, health-care or education, let's team up," the President said. "You cannot accuse me of forcing businessmen to help the state. If you can help, then do so; if you cannot, that's up to you, although the attitude of the state, and my own, towards you may be affected," he added.

Mr. Lukashenko stressed that businesses' participation in social programmes is really quite essential. "Only then will people respect you, no longer badmouthing businessmen as being self-seeking," the Head of State emphasised.

Mr. Lukashenko has set

up the Council to operate without the participation of state officers — except for its Chairman — to avoid corrupt practices. "You are business people, so it's extremely important for me to hear your opinions on the most topical issues of our social-economic policy. I'm especially interested in alternative views, which differ from the position of the Government and other state officials," said the President, adding, "Piotr Prokopovich has been appointed Council Chairman and has direct contact with the Head of State. I hope to see you working actively to ensure the country gains real benefits."

Deputy Prime Minister Piotr Prokopovich notes that the goals of the new Council are primarily related to en-

trepreneurial ventures, as defined by Belarus' 2011-2015 programme for social-economic development. Small and medium-sized businesses are expected to account for at least 30 percent of GDP by 2015, with the Council aiming to reduce the amount of bureaucracy.

Mr. Prokopovich believes it's vital to seriously alter the structure of small and medium-sized businesses, which primarily focus on retail trade and imports at present. "We should move towards industrial production and services, since these spheres are in demand and, ultimately, are responsible for the country's fate," he said.

The creation of new jobs in the private sector was another focus of the session, with at least 300,000 jobs sought over the coming three years. Mr. Prokopovich notes that the Government is developing a package of measures to ensure state support of entrepreneurship, with a document soon to be studied by the Council of Ministers' Presidium.

Mr. Lukashenko stressed that his contacts with private businesses are guided by state interests. "I'm in touch with everybody. I'm not afraid that some might say that businessmen are gathering around me. They are my citizens and I must support them for the single reason that they can benefit our state," he asserts.

Mr. Lukashenko assured those present that the state is ready to support promising and interesting projects but notes the importance of business responsibility. "Don't attempt to swindle," the President warns. "If you make promises, you must keep your word. If you can't do so, then don't come. Your word is all in business."

To outline new plan of co-operation

Headquarters of Republican Public Association Belaya Rus hosts meeting with Lech Kuropatwiński, who heads Poland's Self-defence Party. Belaya Rus and Self-defence sign agreement on co-operation.

The Chairman of Belaya Rus, Alexander Radkov, has been liaising with the Polish political party for many years, drawing attention to common interests. He explains, "We'll be stronger if we nurture our relations with other countries around the world, including those in Europe, respecting their sovereignty and policies,



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Meeting in Minsk is fruitful for all parties

while promoting our own interests: political, commercial and economic. We consider Self-defence to be a reliable partner, representing the interests of ordinary people intent on working to support their families. Everyone has the right to this."

The agreement defines the

main directions of co-operation, with youth policy at the forefront and educational exchanges between Poland and Belarus planned. Mr. Kuropatwiński notes, "We like the attitude of Belaya Rus to youth policy. We'd like to see every young Pole able to find employment in their

own country. Young people should feel that they have a vital role to play, as they do in Belarus. We can learn from you."

The Polish party is also keen to learn from Belarusian agriculture, as Self-defence is positioning itself as the Agrarian Party. Mr. Kuropatwiński emphasises, "It is important that we have the same approach to solving global issues of economic, educational and cultural co-operation. Returning home, we'll share all we've learnt"

"Minsk is growing fast, with construction sites everywhere. You see the same cars as travel the streets of Poland — maybe even better. Your farming is very well devel-

oped, as we saw on visiting Zdanovichi Agro-combine, where up to 90kg of tomatoes are gathered per square metre. You are a developed European country worthy of admiration. You also have a strong processing industry, as we saw at a dairy plant, which makes a wider range of products than we have in Poland. In addition, we'd like our farmers to start buying Belarusian tractors."

In the meantime, the organisation plans to share experience, organising thematic conferences and discussions. Joint youth and cultural exchanges are scheduled, while business circles will be liaising.