

Change as befits today

There's possibility of adopting new Constitution for the Republic of Belarus in future

By Vladimir Khmelevsky

Speaking about developing the constitutional foundations of the Belarusian state with the judges of the Constitutional Court, President Alexander Lukashenko doesn't exclude that changes could be made, meeting the spirit of the day and reflecting society's needs. "Sooner or later, we'll pass a new constitution. Not for the short-term but for a well-developed Belarusian state," the President asserts. "If we have to create one, I'd like the judges of the Constitutional Court and the entire court to be involved, as well as citizens."

The President notes that his date of meeting with the judges was chosen as coinciding with the 20th anniversary of the Constitution of Be-



New Constitutional Court mediator Natalia Karpovich takes her oath

larus. "For our very young state, the Major Law was a starting document in forming our national legal system, while guaranteeing the observation of rights and legal interests of citizens," the President emphasises. He notes that, in 1996, the Republican referendum ensured the strengthening of the state power system and the establishment of efficient public and political instruments.

The Head of State believes that the Constitution is of paramount importance for Belarus on its path to sovereign development. "It's vital that citizens trust the state, so I'd like to assure the Belarusian nation that we've always supported and will continue to support all those who make a significant contribution to build-

ing a strong, stable and flourishing Belarus." We don't need convulsions and revolutions, and we won't allow extremism of any kind in the country. Our people can live in peace, studying and working. The State will continue creating conditions to allow people to fulfil their potential in a free and worthy environment, while ensuring law and order."

Mr. Lukashenko particularly underlines that the country's stability relies on the support of the majority. This year, Belarus is to hold elections to the local Council of Deputies of the 27th convocation: scheduled for March 23rd.

The Head of State also notes that 2014 is a jubilee for the Constitutional Court, which was established two decades ago and now occupies a worthy place in the state system. In 2008, the Constitutional Court's role was reinforced through the expansion of its powers, which gave it preliminary control over the constitutionality of laws. In 2014, the legislator gave it the most important legal instrument: the law 'On Constitutional Legal Proceedings.'

Common destiny closely united

By Veniamin Mishin

Mordovia offered co-operation on manufacture of hi-tech competitive Belarusian-Russian products

Wide co-operation with Russian regions remains a major priority for Belarus, as was noted by President Alexander Lukashenko on meeting the Head of the Republic of Mordovia of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Volkov. He emphasised, "Our direct contacts, without exaggeration, are the basis of trade and economic relations between our two countries."

The economies of Belarus and Mordovia are similar and, in many respects, supplemental. "Our main directions, as far as I know, are industrial co-operation, agriculture, building and innovative manufacturing," said the President. He noted that volumes of mutual trade between Belarus and Mordovia more than halved last year (in comparison with 2012) — to reach about \$50m. In the pre-crisis year of 2008, the figure stood at about \$170m. Mr. Lukashenko is convinced that negative trends can be overcome, with trade and economic relations renewed. "It's our main task," he underlined.

Belarus is ready to provide its Mordovian partners with a wide spectrum of goods and services: automobiles — including public passenger transport, road-building equipment, and municipal and agricultural machinery. It also offers a range of financing and leasing options, building upon its existing relationship with Mordovia. In 2007, assembly manufacture of 'Belarus' tractors began at Sarex JSC: one of the largest enterprises in Mordovia. However, in recent years, the volume of machinery assembled there has fallen. "It's a situation we need to change," asserts Mr. Lukashenko. "It's vital to find solutions which benefit both Mordovia and Belarus and there's no sense in limiting ourselves to a single co-operative project."

According to the Head of State, agricultural liaisons hold much promise and are developing well, with exchange of high technologies and scientific expertise — to mutual benefit. Belarus is ready to share its experience of cattle breeding, building vegetable storehouses, milk processing and dairy complexes.

Of course, in May 2014, Minsk will host the Ice Hockey World Championship. Meanwhile, Mordovia is to host matches for the 2018 World Football Championship. Mr. Lukashenko believes that Mordovia could make use of Belarusian building expertise and could purchase Belarusian building materials, as well as our high-tech lifts.

President Lukashenko is keen to see humanitarian ties develop also, saying, "You aren't strangers to us: we are connected by common culture and history." More than 120 Mordovian citizens helped in the liberation of Belarus in WWII from Fascist occupiers; accordingly, they (or their families) are to be presented with medals marking the 70th anniversary of that date.

Open access to education

Every family awaits news of the new regulations regarding admission into higher and specialised secondary educational institutions. Each year, more than 100,000 young people try to enter such institutions, creating a time of worry for their parents, teachers, friends and relatives. As the entrance campaign begins, the whole country plunges into a mood of expectation. New regulations were discussed in December but are yet to be made law.

By Vladimir Khromov

The current entry system is effective, fair and transparent, admired by other nations near and far. In polls, over 60 percent of applicants and parents convey satisfaction. However, they are also afraid of change. President Alexander Lukashenko noted at a recent meeting that public opinion should be used to guide decision-making in this sphere.

Many would argue that there is little to gain in adapting an existing, effective system but the President assures us that any change will be far from revolutionary. The core system will remain as it was, simply updated to allow more control. The last changes to the system were made eight years ago, yet specialised education has become more focused, with hours of study at higher education institutions reduced for non-major disciplines. Those graduating are often offered practical experience via internships, allowing them to gain invaluable skills, better fitting them for the work environment. Progress in this direction continues, so that studies are vocationally appropriate.

Higher education is becoming

ever more accessible, responding to the times. Mr. Lukashenko is aware that industry requires graduates to have relevant hi-tech knowledge and, preferably, experience: an element sadly lacking in the past. While the number of school leavers may fall in coming years, demand for experts grows. Clearly, it's important that our graduates are able to satisfy the needs of the economy. For this reason, admission regulations are being updated.

It is proposed that applicants who have already shown talent for a specific sphere of study should receive a smoother path of entry: winners of subject Olympiads, medallists and notable athletes. At the same time, entry requirements may be eased for certain situations. For instance, to enter higher institutions of military specialisation, applicants should be physically fit, with good morals and basic education. If they lack one grade in a language subject, they should not perhaps be denied the chance to earn their cadet shoulder straps. Targeted intake also needs correction — especially for agrarian and pedagogical education. Privileges are to be reconsidered, in order to make entrance fairer. Meanwhile,



Higher education in Belarus open to ever-wider circle

there will be a campaign to encourage young people to apply for specialised secondary education.

The greatest victory of our entry system to higher and specialised secondary education is that it almost completely excludes corruption — at all levels: high and low. The President is unequivocal in saying that this condition, at the heart of the system, must remain unchanged, regardless of other considerations. He recommends learning from Ukraine, where 'economic disintegration and corruption have led to national breakdown.' He stresses,

"Here are two elements which have destroyed the state."

The uncompromising struggle with corruption will continue at the hub of all legislation. The President notes that teachers are the treasure of the education system and that quality graduates need to be encouraged into the profession. He is saddened that increased salaries and reduced workload are yet to produce the desired result. He has now charged the Government with using all available reserves to raise teachers' salaries in the next school year.