

# Conversation held to discuss issues of national concern

Conceptual questions of the development of the country were discussed at the meeting of the President with heads of leading mass media outlets

By Vasily Nikiforov

The conversation of President Alexander Lukashenko with the heads of the largest Belarusian mass-media outlets continued for more than 5 hours. The heads of both state and non-state mass media outlets were invited to the meeting. The questions concerned all aspects of life of Belarusian society — from youth policy, culture and sport to the modernisation of enterprises, the situation in bank industry and foreign policy.

## Mass media

The President charged with learning the necessity to change the order of distribution of printed periodical press in the country. In particular, Mr. Lukashenko's attention was focused on increasing the competition of print editions with Internet resources which can react to one or another event more effectively. At the same time printed editions, for example, do not have possibilities to be issued on Mondays, and accordingly to inform readers on events which occurred at the week-end.

"I cannot say, whether it is possible to make it quickly, how much it will cost if we really need it in general," noted the President. In this connection, Mr. Lukashenko charged the Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, Pavel Yakubovich, the head of the leading printed edition in the country, with organising the study of this question with all interested parties. "You should gather and develop an unequivocal opinion and then tell me what to do. After that, I will invite certain people and give them specific tasks," charged the President.

Referring to his personal attitude to this theme, Mr. Lukashenko said that, in spite of the possibility of using Internet versions of editions, he regularly looks through printed publications.

## Local Council elections

"The present election campaign is an indicator of the level of consciousness of our people," noted Mr. Lukashenko, who then asked Belarusians to display activity on the forthcoming elections to local Councils of Deputies.

"I want to ask, and I wish that people will come to these elections; that they do not think that the deputies of local Councils do nothing, and solve nothing. Yes, they are not so visible; maybe, because they do not solve global issues which are solved here, on a higher level. But it does not mean that they are less important for life of the average person."

Alexander Lukashenko emphasised that everyone will make their choice independently. "Vote for whom you want. If you want to

protest, to vote for members of the opposition, so vote, if you stand for constructivism, for the policy which is pursued in the state, then vote for the state person. It is your right. The only thing that you should do... is come."

## Modernisation

One of the main tasks today was the active development of those manufactures which are focused on local resources and raw materials. It

requirements. Our quality is not worse than in Europe. So tell us simply that you protect your own market and do not let others in'. However, several Vitebsk or Grodno enterprises have received permission for European delivery, while quality standards are really mad there. Even in Russia, it is already quite difficult to sell something. That is what modernisation means. If we were not engaged in it, we would not speak about it today," noted Mr. Lukashenko.

of highly effective enterprises which will produce car parts," said the President.

## Income

The President paid attention to the fact that last year, having a small growth of GDP of 1 percent, the average salary of the population grew in the country. "Growth of salary is good, but prices also grew in our country. I cannot say that we drove people into a corner, but neverthe-

this year," said the President. "It is a strategy to scale up the salaries of low-paid workers."

Alexander Lukashenko was also asked about the support of pensioners and the possibility of indemnification of their losses because of the devaluation which occurred in 2011. The President assured everyone that the state will continue to take measures to increase the income of pensioners.

## The fulfilment of debt obligations

Sometimes today, a lot of criticism is thrown at the debts of Belarus. But, as it is said, cognition comes through comparison. "Our total debt is about 50 percent of GDP. For example, in the USA it is 101 percent, or \$17 trillion, in the Russian Federation, it's nearly \$800bn. Italy, Greece, Ireland and Portugal have debts totalling more than they produce a year — over 100 percent of GDP. As for our state debt, it is only 18-19 percent of GDP, \$12bn," said Alexander Lukashenko.

"Obviously, it is better for us not to have it at all. But that is impossible, especially for an economy such as ours. We do not have those volumes of oil, such natural resources like natural gas, but the prices on them still keep steady. However we are compelled to buy all these, therefore we hardly will do without all these," noted the Head of State.

At the same time, Belarus fulfils its debt obligations and will continue to fulfil them this year. Alexander Lukashenko thanked the management of Russia, which had supported Belarus during these hard times. "And not only Russia supported us during that time. We were also supported by China, and also international organisations including the Eurasian Bank," said the President. "There have been offers which are very favourable for us, on crediting of our economy, on the granting of financial means to our country. But we already control that it will not increase by more than 5 percent. There are offers even at 3 percent interest. China, for example offers loans at nearly 3 percent interest."

## Credit interest rates

"45 percent is a crazy rate. It is not normal. And we see that we have all possibilities to reduce this rate. We cannot credit the real sector at such interest rates," said Mr. Lukashenko.

He reminded that, in due time, there was no other way out other than to raise the interest rate on credit. "As there was such feverish demand, and we did not have big gold reserves, we were compelled to take this unpopular step. However, gradually, as long as there are no problems, we will come to normal state of things," said the President.



concerns agriculture, woodworking and a number of other directions. "We will more and more orientate our economy towards local materials, let them be even poor," noted the President.

"If we ambitiously declare that we, Belarusians, want to be sovereign and independent, and we do not engage in modernisation of life and manufacturing, we will never be such people, but will end up wearing bast shoes. It is impossible to live without development today," noted Mr. Lukashenko.

The peculiarity of modernisation in Belarus also consists of a restricted approach to this process. First of all, priority will be given to highly profitable projects, though to some extent all enterprises should be involved in modernisation. "We will not allow anyone to sleep. Restricted modernisation with active state support did and will always exist. The ones who give more to the state and its people will receive greater support from us," said the President.

Citing the agricultural sector as an example, the President noted that, as a result of its development, the volumes of export and quality of production grow. "Today, the European Union cannot carp at us. We press them — 'why you do not allow us to deliver dairy products to your market? After all there is a demand for them. The quality meets your re-

## Car manufacturing

"It has been my presidential dream for a long time. We produce buses and heavy haulers but we cannot make a good car for our people," noted the President.

He explained in detail about how the idea to create such manufacture appeared, and how the negotiations with the Chinese were carried out. As a result, the joint assembly was opened in the Borisov District. Within several months, it is planned to construct the whole plant with a capacity of 120 thousand cars a year.

These cars are acceptable both in price and quality, as is shown by the number of large world companies that have moved to China. "I have approved this car, and currently we are holding the strongest conversations with Russia and others in order to have possibility of selling this car without difficulties. No one wants to let us into their own territory. It is very difficult to squeeze into this oversaturated market," noted the President. "We will gradually move towards this 120 thousand production goal. But for me, it is important that we will offer a new car to our people. A thoughtful person, who is able to save, will buy this car."

Besides, the creation of corresponding manufacture in Belarus will stimulate the development of other enterprises. "This car will contribute to the work of a dozen

less salary grew out of accordance with labour productivity. These are objective and recognised data," said the Head of State. Last year, the welfare of citizens has improved; income of the population has grown more than by 17 percent, having exceeded the plan almost three times (6.5 percent), the real rate of growth of income of the population by pre-crisis 2010 reached 140 percent.

"Some do not have that average salary of \$580. I recognise that. For example, the salary in the budgetary sphere is about \$120 less. This is inadmissible. But I cannot raise the salary of state employees to 90 percent of the real sector all at once, as it was usually accepted in our country, even in our best years. Certainly, we will gradually raise them. And we are doing this today. But all of this depends on the economy," noted the President.

"We should not forget that, according to statistics, every second family in our country has a car, and some more than one. And here we have even overtaken rich Russia," said Alexander Lukashenko. "In our country, with \$100 we can buy more than in Russia, because the standard of living and prices have great value here. These are official data. We have left rich Russia behind."

The government is also instructed to study the possibility of increasing the incomes of law-paid workers. "We will make it calmly