

Playing a truly clean game

Alexander Lukashenko has charged the Government with maintaining close contact with entrepreneurs in creating the draft decree 'On Questions of Selling Goods by Individual Entrepreneurs and Other Individuals'. He is eager to see the document consider the interests of all parties, creating equal conditions for everyone and promoting transparent and civilised trade conditions.

By Vasily Kharitonov

President Lukashenko notes that the decree will, foremost, benefit domestic consumers, followed by Belarusian state and, only thirdly, entrepreneurs. The Head of State recognises that their work is challenging, noting that it's often necessary to travel to Moscow, haggle about discounts, and endure all weathers. He is adamant that all conditions concerning the sale of goods should be 'civilised', and emphasises that it is inadmissible to 'play' with the Government to delay decision-making. "No temporary half-decisions are possible; we have already made our decisions," he asserts.

Belarus' Deputy Prime Minister Piotr Prokopovich has reported that the draft decree requires individual entrepreneurs (payers of single tax) from July 1st, to provide documentary evidence of products sold, for duty purposes. This allows us to fulfil the international obligations of the Customs Union regarding product safety and protection of consumer rights. He believes this should also encourage sales of domestically produced goods and reduce the share of imported goods on the local market, creating equal conditions for entrepreneurial activity.

Mr. Prokopovich suggests that the change should not negatively impact the work of individual entrepreneurs, although it concerns the volume of tax revenue trans-



Many businessmen 'registered' at Minsk's Stolitsa public shopping centre

ferred into the budget, and the possible exit from the market of some entrepreneurs. He explains, "Most entrepreneurs are involved in retail trade, bringing oversaturation. It will take a few more years before we reach the optimum level."

The Deputy Prime Minister adds that several thousand new individual entrepreneurs are registered annually and is keen to see those working outside retail trade supported. He would like to see more individual manufacturers and those involved in tourism, including hotel and restaurant businesses.

The recent meeting was attended by representatives of the entrepreneurial sphere, who stated the challenges

they face and suggested paths of solution. The Chairman of the Belarusian Union of Entrepreneurs, Alexander Kalinin, emphasised that, formerly, the tax regime was attractive and simple and that some entrepreneurs feel inadequately prepared for change. The absence of uniform requirements presents a problem for those purchasing abroad, for example from Moscow, where documentation may not meet Belarusian requirements, containing the absolute minimum of information. Mr. Kalinin notes, "From the point of view of tax departments, these documents do not correspond to our requirements. In order to solve the problem of processing documents, we need to achieve uniform

requirements for processing of primary documentation within the Single Economic Space — including for cash transactions."

His suggestion is that individual entrepreneurs be once more allowed to hire workers outside of their own family. "Since there are often not enough relatives, people are forced to work alone, making it difficult for the entrepreneur to find time to seek out certification," notes the Chairman of the Belarusian Union of Entrepreneurs. Mr. Kalinin would like to see the planned transition occur in stages, across various groups of goods, over a period of up to two years.

A member of the Council of Entrepreneurs, from a

Minsk shopping centre, Zhanna Yatkova, feels burdened by bureaucratic difficulties over goods deliveries. "We used to gain customs clearance within a single day, with documents in our hands. Now, if you import goods into Belarus, it takes a full month for clearance and another month for certification. By the time we have them, who needs such goods — out of season? We lack enough funds to buy too much in advance," she notes.

Summing up the meeting, Mr. Lukashenko charged the Government with keeping close contact with entrepreneurs while completing the draft decree, detailing clear terms and taking into account the interests of all parties. He urged that 'trade should be

civilised and transparent', and that the system should operate without delays. He noted that the Government and entrepreneurs are 'ready' and that only those benefitting from delay were causing it. He added that 'nobody should be offended in all suggestions being considered'. Rather, he wishes to see clear criteria set, to ensure 'equal conditions and transparent, civilised trade — from which all else proceeds'.

The Head of State has charged the Minister of Trade, together with other members of the Government and governors, with creating wholesale depots for each region, by July 1st. Mr. Lukashenko has no desire to stir ill-will among entrepreneurs but asserts that they do not define state policy, regardless of their personal feelings. "I can sign any decree and endure a revolt by nine or ten thousand entrepreneurs," he admits. "However, I do not want this tension or even two entrepreneurs to speak badly of me. I am your President, regardless of whether you voted for me. Therefore, I do not want to offend you."

At the same, Mr. Lukashenko has warned that 'striking' will not be tolerated and that avoidance of the workplace will result in people being asked not to return. He emphasises, "I will make a decision: those who pointedly close their own square metres, window or stall, will not be allowed to return or to rent areas in Minsk or elsewhere in the country."

Zone of CSTO responsibility

Meeting of President with CSTO Secretary General, Nikolai Bordyuzha, discusses zone of responsibility of Collective Security Treaty Organisation

Opening the meeting, the Head of State suggested discussing new issues as well as looking at the implementation of existing decisions. He noted, "We agreed that we would regularly observe how divisions within the Collective Rapid Response Force of the CSTO are functioning; we have a number of activities in this direction."

Mr. Lukashenko believes that, as chair of the CSTO at present, Russia should suggest a near-term plan and co-ordinate with other members of the CSTO. Speaking of the situation on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border, he emphasised, "I'm grateful to you for the regular information updates which you send, from your



Nikolai Bordyuzha

position at the epicentre of these events." He added, "During this meeting of heads of member states of the CSTO, we should consider and decide upon basic avenues of CSTO functioning."

Mr. Bordyuzha praised Belarus' fulfilment of its obligations, saying, "We're currently supervising several decisions taken earlier by presidents, including regarding the rendering of assistance to Tajikistan in protecting

the Tajik-Afghan border — following military withdrawal from Afghanistan of NATO contingents. Belarus was one of the first to offer assistance. We've received corresponding information on the nomenclature allocated to border guards in Tajikistan."

Mr. Bordyuzha explained that hardware is being directed towards the Tajik-Afghan border. "Everything so far allocated by Belarus has arrived and is being used by border guards in Tajikistan. I can express only gratitude for this vital help, in response to a difficult situation on the border and across all Afghanistan," he added.

The meeting also tackled the development of the military component of the CSTO: the creation of collective aviation forces and special operations units and the Council's decision to help equip the Collective Rapid Response Force.

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