

Independent, strong and prosperous Belarus: country's historical choice

Among top 50

By 2015, Belarus should be among the top 50 states regarding the Human Development Index. The President stresses that plans for the future are much more ambitious than in the past. The next five year period will become one of renovation, aimed at promoting new development countrywide. "The strategic goal is to join the top 50 countries showing the highest Human Development Index. High living standards for Belarusian citizens are not just a goal, but the essence of our state policy. The quality of people's lives is defined by five important components: stable family, health, education, real income and comfort of living. The programme for the next five years should take into account all these components," asserts Mr. Lukashenko, speaking at the 4th All-Belarus People's Congress.

Investments into the economy

Over the past decade and a half, the country has proven its political and economic independence. In the last five years, Belarus' average annual pace of economic development has reached around 8 percent; only twelve highly developed states worldwide boast higher results.

In the last five years, 185 new enterprises have been set up in the country, with over 320 drastically modernised. Belarus' export of goods and services brings in revenue of over \$25bn a year, while its output of innovative products has more than quadrupled. Over this period, our domestic plants have modernised their lines (with many seeing multiple updates). This great job has been the work of engineers, designers, scientists, workers and officers. In the coming five years, \$72bn is to be invested into Belarus' economy (against \$20bn injected over the past five years).

"This is one of the most characteristic features of the Belarusian socio-economic model. We've spent earnings on development, investing into our own economy, rather than taking money abroad or embezzling funds in the form of dividends," noted Mr. Lukashenko.

European level

By 2016, Belarus' GDP per capita should reach the average European level. The country's 2011-2015 Socio-Economic Development Programme has set extremely intensive performance goals, which are supposed to considerably increase living standards for Belarusians. "Within the next five years, GDP

growth rate should reach 162-168 percent. Our GDP per capita should reach the average European level by 2016. It will be the highest pace of growth in the history of independent Belarus. Moreover, it will stand against an existing background of high achievement," stresses Mr. Lukashenko. Energy security, import substitution, pharmaceutical security, balanced foreign trade and rising exports are priority goals for the Belarusian economy. The government is aiming for Belarus to receive over 30 percent of its energy needs from domestic resources by 2015, while the

be entitled to loans on preferential terms. I recently signed a decree to reduce the interest rate on preferential loans granted for housing construction: to just 1 percent in towns whose population is less than 50,000 people. These are unique conditions; nothing similar exists elsewhere in the world," Mr. Lukashenko notes.

Exporting healthcare

Belarus should start exporting its healthcare services. The nation's health remains a top priority for the state. Even during the global financial

needs a true breakthrough: including new 'smart' drugs, modern facilities and the latest medicines. Mr. Lukashenko believes that Belarus boasts the necessary scientific and production opportunities to make this possible.

Education as a strategic resource

The quality of education needs serious attention, being a strategic resource for Belarus; our wellbeing depends on technology and foreign markets. Mr. Lukashenko is convinced that it's necessary to change the structure of personnel training, orienting

production per capita. It is also among the global leaders for producing milk, potato and flax. This is the result of its far-sighted policy, which has enabled the country to make a breakthrough in its agricultural development.

"I should admit that, on adopting the rural revival programme, I was thinking not of food security alone — although this was very important at the time. I was much guided by an aspiration to save the foundation of our country and its soul: villages. In these, Belarus' hard work and wisdom are rooted. It is where our culture and na-

tem has withstood the global economic crisis and extreme weather conditions. The hard, even heroic, labour of our farmers deserves admiration. It has enabled us to create a solid foundation for shifting agriculture into a highly-advanced and export-oriented branch of the economy," the President explains.

Salaries to grow

Wages in Belarus should reach \$1,000 monthly (in equivalent) by 2015. In turn, the minimum pension is to be strictly tied to the living wage, growing at the same pace as salaries. Additionally, the retirement age won't be increased. The Head of State admits that \$500 or, even, \$1,000 salaries are lower than those seen elsewhere in Europe. "However, the state has taken responsibility for a significant part of the expenses relating to social welfare, on a voluntary basis," he asserts.

The middle class of society has already been formed in the country. At present, the number of those seeing themselves as having an average income has reached two-thirds — against the figures registered five years ago (half of the present number). This is an undisputable fact.

At the same time, our country can boast a significant victory: we have no strong social segregation. The President emphasises, "Belarus is now among the top ten states boasting the lowest social inequality: we have less than five times difference between the highest and lowest earners — like those in Germany, Austria or Sweden. In Russia, the rich hold 20 times more assets than the poor."

Belarus' policy aims to raise the number of prosperous people, with the incomes of other layers of society also proportionally rising.

Strong labour rights

According to Mr. Lukashenko, unemployment in Belarus stands at less than one percent — much lower than in many developed countries. In comparison, Germany's unemployment rate stands at 7.5 percent. In the UK, it is over 5 percent, while Japan boasts unemployment of 4 percent. The figure is 10 percent in the USA and over 20 percent in Spain.

"Without false modesty, we can be proud of preventing mass layoffs at a time when hundreds of millions of people across the globe have been left jobless as a result of the crisis. Our insignificant layoffs have been compensated for by a greater number of jobs made available in a



At the 4th All-Belarus People's Congress

remaining 70 percent should be diversified in terms of suppliers and types of energy.

Additionally, Belarus should reach European levels of energy efficiency over the next five years.

Accommodation under the index of accessibility

In the coming five years, accommodation should become more accessible and of higher quality. Much has already been done in this sphere, with Belarus leading the CIS in terms of the number of new apartments built per 10,000 people. The country is now showing among the highest results worldwide.

Work is to continue. By 2015, 42m square metres of housing will have been built in Belarus: up 1.6-fold on the previous five year period. Planned salary rises should make housing construction affordable for the majority of people by 2016. People will be able to construct apartments using their own funds and via loans.

"At least 50 percent of housing will be built for those in need of social protection. Meanwhile, more people will

crisis, Belarus did not reduce funds spent on this sphere.

The country has identified all areas of healthcare development and conducted the necessary reforms. Today, there are more than five doctors per 1,000 people: more than in leading European countries such as France, Germany and Austria. However, the President believes that not all targets have been met. "Medical help should be prompt, of high quality and affordable — regardless of whether a person lives in a city or a village. In the coming two years, all medical institutions countrywide will become equipped with modern equipment, while avoiding excessive expenditure. The issue of polyclinics and hospitals being understaffed should be resolved. This problem — as well as the problem of queues at polyclinics — should be left in the past," the Head of State stresses.

In terms of scientific and medical technology, Belarus already matches world levels, with our doctors conducting unique operations. The number one task is to start exporting medical services. Apart from this, the country's pharmaceutical branch also

towards the needs and demands of our economy.

Education is the third component defining quality of life. Belarus already occupies 23rd position on the Legatum Prosperity Index's education sub-ranking, which is also a great achievement.

All children receive secondary education in our country, with wide possibilities open for higher education. "Perhaps, at no other time in Belarus' modern history have we seen so many university students or those with higher education," notes the President, stressing that the republic's major success is that it has managed to ensure equal access to higher education and fairness of enrolment for all those who try: from cities or villages.

Much attention is to be paid in future to further strengthening financial support for students and pupils, in addition to provision of hostels and good living conditions. Other topical problems for students are to be addressed.

Country's soul resides in villages

Belarus is ranked first in the CIS regarding food pro-

duction. Our Slavonic state could not exist without them," stresses the President.

Gradually, without any revolution, Belarus has been moving towards village revival. From 1996-2000, food security was ensured and, from 2001-2005, the country increased its production and entered foreign markets. In the current five year period, further innovative development of production and the social sphere in rural areas has continued. Technical and technological independence for agriculture has been ensured, with over 80 percent of the machinery used in our fields being manufactured domestically. In the next five years, exports of agricultural products and food should rise, to reach \$7bn.

The President notes that, in 2010, the State Programme for Rural Revival and Development is to complete. Its major result is that Belarusians are now self-sufficient in most locally grown foods, with a strong foothold on global agrarian markets. "Today, our food is sold in 63 countries. This year, we are about to export \$2bn of farm products. Our agricultural sys-