

particular region. In the hard crisis year of 2009, the national economy employed 0.7 percent more people than in the successful year of 2008," Mr. Lukashenko notes. He wonders who is more concerned about the observance of basic human rights: those who speak or those who do? Which rights are more important: the right to employment or the right to hold a rally? The answer is absolutely clear to anyone with a brain.

Belarus has created conditions enabling full employment and there are enough vacant positions; the rest depends on will and individual potential. "Those who work longer and harder will earn more; it's no worse than abroad. I faithfully promise this to you. Thank God, we have plenty of work available. There are three times more vacancies than the number of unemployed. Nevertheless, enterprises won't hire just anyone — you have to be suitable; it's a reality of life," the Belarusian leader notes.

Formalism to remain in the past

Bureaucratic formality and a callous attitude towards ordinary people are to be strongly suppressed, with corruption and bureaucratisation wiped out. "For many years, we've been fiercely struggling against this many-faceted evil," notes the Head of State. "We've already done much to make the state organs at the centre of the country and at local levels answerable for their actions; more work lies ahead."

Despite the one-stop-shop principle being introduced, people can still feel intimidated by state agencies. People sometimes feel compelled to address the President himself with minor requests: to settle a land dispute, or to gain help in cleaning a courtyard or launching a new bus route. "I'm concerned when people cannot solve such minor issues at local level; such matters shouldn't even appear," says Mr. Lukashenko. "Working with people and being attentive to their needs is more important than the fulfilment of economic plans. We must eradicate situations where elementary issues are not settled for years, with local staff awaiting orders from top managers. Such red tape leads to careless officers losing their jobs."

'Can do' space technologies

In the next five years, space technologies are to become part of everyday life in Belarus, helping with commercial and managerial decisions in agriculture, forestry, water economy and melioration, while assisting in the prevention and liquidation of emergency situations, as well as mineral mining, updating of topographic maps and navigation.

Space programmes have

encouraged the development of a whole layer of marketable technologies, which have already paid for themselves several times over. Russia, Ukraine, Italy and other countries are interested in Belarus' 21st century technologies, being ready to work jointly.

At present, our country is busy creating the necessary infrastructure for remote sensing of the Earth.

Among our national projects are the systematic informatisation of Belarus and the large-scale introduction of IT. A single global strategy is being put together, instead of individual programmes.

Nano- and bio-technologies are to be advanced to the level of commercial manufacturing. The country will create a bio-technology sector, including 20 new and modernised enterprises. Belarus is already among the top 30 states in the world regarding its scientific-technical potential index.

At the centre of a multi-vector policy

"Our country has been, is and shall remain a reliable and stable international partner. We plan to further contribute to solving global problems. Belarus is open to liaisons with anyone who wishes them as sincerely as we do," notes Mr. Lukashenko.

Not everyone is pleased that a truly independent state is being established at the centre of Europe, able to efficiently promote and defend its national interests within the international arena, breaking stereotypes. This state acts not under others' directorship but adheres to its own position regarding the international agenda. "Despite accepting the opinion of our foreign partners, we cannot blindly follow recommendations placed on us from either the West or the East. We have proceeded and shall proceed in the future exclusively from real needs and possibilities for our Belarusian society," stresses the President. "We understand the status of a 'crossroads' — which Belarus geopolitically holds — as a connecting link, as an artery between the West and the East. This is not a barrier, a buffer or a sanitary border and, of course, is not an open house."

The President explains that Belarus has no plans to choose between the EU and Russia. He is convinced that our bilateral relations with Russia will return to a normal pace. "We were once a single country; we are one people, having common roots. Our co-operation with any other country will never be as close as that with Russia — even in the worst times. This is why we'll normalise these relations. You will see that relations will return to normal, as unexpectedly as they have worsened," Mr. Lukashenko asserts. He notes that Belarus will always fulfil its duty to Russia, regardless of the form our relations

might take.

The country is following a multi-vector policy, without which, sovereignty can hardly be preserved in the modern world. "We don't intend to choose between the European Union and Russia. It would be unwise and incorrect. We are not moving towards the East or the West. We have our own special place in Europe, given by God to our people, as well as our own geopolitical identity and national interests. The most important thing is to secure balanced co-operation with everyone and to form a good neighbourhood belt along our borders," concludes Mr. Lukashenko, adding, "Making all our key neighbours feel equally close is not the point, however. The strategy of claiming equal distance to the West and the East is most optimal for us. It allows us to effectively use our geographical location, and the transit and industrial potentials of our country."

The European Union is a key buyer of Belarusian products, offering a huge market and being an important source of technologies and investments. The promotion of relations in energy transit, transport and migration, alongside the counteraction of human and drug trafficking and organised crime are important to all of Europe. "Our high level contacts with European leaders and member states indicate that a productive, trust-based (albeit complicated) dialogue can destroy stereotypes. We rely on a pragmatic and sensible approach by Brussels towards Minsk. Fully-fledged co-operation with Belarus on equal terms would be profitable for both sides," stresses the Head of State.

Mr. Lukashenko notes that Belarus would like to see the United States of America among its leading partners. "Do Belarusians and Americans have different interests regarding modern global threats and challenges? No. Yet we hardly use the opportunities of our economic co-operation, though the potential is huge," he adds.

US businessmen are ready to invest in Belarus — as seen from a recent visit by the American business community. A new delegation of American businessmen is to arrive soon. "We are sincerely interested in establishing friendly and mutually beneficial relations with the USA and are ready to do our utmost to encourage this," says the President. Additionally, Belarus is to continue contributing to the development and strengthening of relations with its partners within the Customs Union and other states — including those in Europe, Asia and Latin America.

In three and a half hours of speaking, the President covered all the most important spheres of public life, offering concrete paths of development.



Delegates attend exhibition of goods by Belarusian enterprises

Applied character of Congress' work

By Igor Slavinsky

After President Alexander Lukashenko's speech at the 4th All-Belarus People's Congress, sectional groups continued discussing the country's promising plans, creating the 2011-2015 Programme for Socio-Economic Development

The deputies from the House of Representatives, as well as members of the Council of the Republic and representatives from District Councils of Deputies, headed by Vladimir Andreichenko, the Speaker of the Belarusian Parliament's Lower House, headed for Atlant JSC.

During their tour, the delegates were shown how refrigerators and washing machines are assembled: already an indispensable part of any home — in Belarus and abroad. The delegation visited workshops and an exhibition hall, viewing the latest achievements and the enterprise's entire range. Atlant Director Victor Shumilo acted as their guide, explaining that the company primarily orients its production towards buyers' needs.

"New models account for 20 percent of our output," he explained. "On the one hand, this is expensive; on the other, customers want to see new models." Suggestions were made to the delegate-deputies regarding laws relating to property management, transformation into joint stock companies and the securities market, since these issues relate directly to Belarus' largest enterprises.

The conversation embraced a range of topics, with Tatiana Kononchuk, the Chair of Slavgorod's District Council of Deputies, speaking of the need for further improvement of the quality of life in villages. She believes that it's vital to develop information technologies and to increase the number of bank info-kiosks and ATMs.

Meanwhile, the heads of diplomatic missions joined foreign guests and representatives of the Belarusian diaspora in visiting Belkommunmash, with Belarus' Foreign Minister, Sergei Martynov, as their head. The traditional route through the factory was expanded to include a demonstration of a new, fourth generation trolley bus, which can travel without cables. It is also able to lean to one side, with its step almost touching the ground. The guests highly praised this achievement and were in admiration of the novelty. The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Serbia to Belarus, H.E. Mr. Srećko Đukić, is already familiar with such vehicles however, since they run through the streets of Serbia.

Examining contemporary Belarusian machinery, pilot-cosmonaut and twice Hero of the Soviet Union Piotr Klimuk told me that trolley buses and buses are, of course, a good area. "However, space research, to which the Belarusian President devoted much attention in his speech before the All-Belarus People's Congress, is also essential. Goods manufactured by Belarusian Peleng are produced by just a few companies worldwide," he added.

The past five years have been extremely difficult for everyone, but Belarus has emerged worthily from the world crisis, according to our foreign guests and Belarusians from abroad. "The President's major accent has been the social component; the greater part of his report was dedicated to it," notes Sergei Lebedev, the Chairman of the CIS Executive Committee and CIS Executive Secretary. "I think that the proclaimed goals will be supported by the Belarusian people. I'm very glad that Belarus has preserved a calm atmosphere. Moreover, it remains an active CIS participant, regardless of some rough edges." According to Giuseppe Carboni, the Honorary Consul of Belarus to Italian Sardinia, the

social orientation of politics and the economy is the country's biggest achievement. "Belarus has shown the rest of the world that it has its own path, which is correct. The country should not be compared with Italy, but with those countries which have grown from a similar starting position," Mr. Carboni is convinced. "I like that the President has sincerely admitted the country's weak points and would say that the problem of reducing red tape is also well known to Italians: we continue to struggle against it."

Azerbaijan has its own Universal Azerbaijani Congress, bringing together Azerbaijani people from all over the globe. President Ilham Aliyev always takes part. Kamal Abdulla, Rector of the Baku Slavic University, notes that our two assemblies are strikingly similar. "I'm very impressed. When the Belarusian President spoke about friends, he named Azerbaijan. We've set up trusting relations, bringing our two countries closer. I'm convinced that this is largely due to the friendship of our presidents. Personal contacts are very important for nations."

Martin Vidović, Archbishop of Nin and Apostolic Nuncio of the Roman Catholic Church in Belarus, believes that people's opportunity to take part in choosing the country's future is 'a very important principle of democracy'. "People take part in the process while jointly working to achieve these goals," he added. Discussions on the Socio-Economic Development Programme were divided into ten sections, hosted by the largest enterprises from Minsk and the Minsk region. The delegates visited MAZ JSC, the National Library, the Belarusian State University of Physical Culture, the Belarusian National Technical University and the National Academy of Sciences. Participants of the Forum penetrated deep into the tiniest nuances of the country's most important future document.