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The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, held a meeting with representatives of the public, as well as Belarusian and foreign mass media. The event took place in an expanded format under the general title *Big Conversation with the President*, featuring around four dozen journalists, representing the largest state and non-state Belarusian media, alongside popular Internet portals and authoritative foreign

mass media. Numerous experts were also invited to the meeting, including famous politologists, economists, representatives of parties and public organisations. They also took part in dialogue discussing the most serious topics. Mr. Lukashenko's meeting with representatives of the public and mass media was broadcast live by television channels Belarus 1, Belarus 24 and the First National TV Channel of Belarusian Radio.



# Big conversation with the

The meeting lasted for almost seven and a half hours. We have included below extracts of the President's replies to questions asked by participants at the event:

## On the multi-vector policy

A multi-vector policy was my idea and I felt intuitively it was the best way forward. You are aware that not everything worked out well with this policy initially. You know it, that we were flying with one wing. Where we arrived at — you know that too.

These are traditional ideas, in line with our mentality. We should make friends with all our neighbours. Neither Russia, nor Ukraine, nor Poland, nor Lithuania are alien to us. They are our neighbours. As far as vectors are concerned, we have an open economy. Why did I go to Egypt and Sudan? To promote our products. I go where doors to trade are open. Thankfully many countries have opened their doors to us in recent days and none of the President's trips were loss-making.

## On the Belarusian model

I believe that the model of our development, and of Slavonic nations in general, is of a socially-oriented economy. I have observed the situation in Russia and Ukraine, and I pray this doesn't happen in our country. Any state is worth something only when it is reflected in its people.

A socially-oriented economy is both economy and state for the people. Yes, today we're experiencing bad times. People can criticise me for this, some show understanding, some sympathise with me, some agree with me and some criticise me. They are all right. We won't move away from a socially-oriented economy and we must ask ourselves how each of us contributes to this. I can't do things if I promised not to do them. This is not my policy. I adhere to sincere and honest politics. Fair politics. I often say that everything can't be written in the law. When it's not written down then one must act fairly as we see fit. I place justice above all laws. Justice should be the basis for all human interrelations, including between people and the state.

## On relations with Russia

On the one hand, as a President I should not put all my cards on the table. Negotiations are always in progress — some are open, while other areas are closed, and some

things are so sensitive that it is impossible to speak of them. But the situation pushes to the situation when I should tell you and other people fairly — without offending somebody, and be absolutely honest.

You must understand that as long as I am a President, no stone will be thrown at any Russian person. But you should also know that Russia has a lot of different forces at play. When I speak to Putin

not always understand this...

I never run into trouble on purpose. If necessary, I can backtrack and be flexible, but when my state and people are insulted I will never accept it...

We've agreed on oil — to deliver 24 million tonnes annually. Then there was a reduction to 18, then 16, and in the future, they say that it will be just 12. But this is not what they signed and agreed to.

We agreed about the bor-

der. We have concrete articles of the agreement of 1995 and following documents. We decided to create the Union State.

Just imagine. There are interstate contracts and agreements. One minister cannot put an end to these agreements with a stroke of the pen, it is unheard of.

## On oil and gas and food problems

Gas is linked to oil, oil is quoted. When oil cost \$120, all was good, we paid a lot of money for oil, accordingly by the formula — gas was linked to this oil and it had high price, and we paid this price. Oil dropped — the price on natural gas dropped too. If earlier we paid, let us assume, \$147, \$130, then today, by this formula, natural gas costs \$83. We suddenly realised: no, it is impossible.

I say no, it is not logic, we have agreement, we have practice, we have life. Moreover, our union relations on oil, gas and price — we put into EurAsEC relations, but then, at this high price. But

this agreement should be implemented. Moreover, oil and gas dropped — but our incomes of real sector of the economy, foodstuffs, tractors, vehicles which we sell to Russia dropped by half too. We started to search for solution to this problem. We had to agree till January, 1st of last year. Our ministers which I send there, when arrived — they did not wanted to talk with our ministers...

Is it normal? I've already

economy, foodstuffs, tractors and vehicles which we sell to Russia, dropped by half too. We started to search for a solution to this problem. We had to agree by January 1st, 2016. But there has been unwillingness to enter in to discussion with the ministers I sent, which has delayed the process unduly and caused unfortunate disagreement between us and our nearest neighbour.

capacity so I ask why do you block Belarusian goods? After all, we could sell it to pay you for oil and gas.

The second issue is Ukraine, West, embargo and other things. When they introduced the embargo, they did discuss this with us. I quote what I told them at the EurAsEU session. You introduced the embargo while we will play the role of a single border. We promised that we will not let these goods into Russia from Germany and Poland according to your decision. But if we receive raw materials — milk, apples, fish etc, we process it.

We do not deliver them in transit. We had some such businessmen, and it is difficult to monitor such cases, one person writes a receipt or invoice that the goods are from Egypt, while they are from Hungary or Slovakia and so on. But it is not half-percent at all, it is a miserable amount, it is one hundredth of 1 percent. We struggle against this illegal practice, but it happens because customs officers and others in Russia take goods at cheap prices and bring the goods in, then all of them share the profit, and deliver these goods. After all, in Russia there is a free market, private economy, nobody supervises it, everyone is open to bribery. I say it openly, because I have said this already to the leadership of Russia. We detained many people, I transferred them documents. They have not examined these or responded.

They have reproached us by saying that we deliver goods from Ukraine, stick new labels on and sell them to Russia. We import almost nothing from Ukraine because our milk-processing and meat-packing plants are filled with our own production. Just 5-7 percent remain unfilled. We can fill this 5-7 percent, by buying raw materials worldwide, processing and selling these goods. Then I ask a question: if we have bought Ukrainian milk for processing, while you forbid us to do this, whom we have punished? Unfortunate Ukrainian villagers. You in Russia have not closed oligarchical enterprises — such as Roshen and others. Recently there were rumours that ostensibly Roshen was closed in one province. Why do you



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# President in open format

frustrate the farmers from Ukraine? Are they enemies to Russians or us, Belarusians? You pressure them but not the Ukrainian oligarchs? Because they share profits with you. This is the problem of embargo and foodstuffs.

The situation should be ended. We are not against Russia. We do not aspire to NATO. We protect our arrangement for the defence of our space. As I always say, our Fatherland is Belarus and Russia. I ask you, do not offend the Russians. They come to us and spend leisure time in our country. They are our people. Presidents come and go, but the people remain. This is the main thing. Sooner or later, we will agree.

## On the border zone

We [Belarus and Russia] do not have common agreement on visas or a single visa. We have the right to accept people into our country as we see fit.

Why should anyone be concerned because we introduced visa-free entry for specific states? We position ourselves as the centre of Europe and the Eurasian continent. How can it be right that the centre is isolated? The main point is that we allowed visa-free entry for five days if they arrive through Minsk airport. Why would that pose a threat to Russia's national security? Things remain as they were. You arrive either with a visa or without a visa, and you go through passport control.

There is a list of people banned in Belarus and Russia, a single list for the union, which is checked electronically. You cannot enter the country if you are on this list. Nothing has changed in this respect. We have the right to take this decision, we are a sovereign independent state. Furthermore, we have already adopted this document.

We protect our common space carefully. Russians have never been and will never be strangers to us. Ill thought-out, unreconciled measures only worsen our relations.

## On sanctions imposed by the West

As for the western countries, I have already said that we follow a multi-vector policy. In practice, we didn't quite manage to make it work as we wished through no fault of our own, as they imposed sanctions. Do we have nuclear weapons? Do we have an economy where we can af-

ford to dictate to others? We said that we didn't need those sanctions and didn't deserve them, thankfully they have now been lifted. Our economy has not yet seen the benefits from this, but we have begun making agreements.

We must make great efforts to step up our machine building and petrochemical industries, this all exists in the West. The economy needs to

mistaken. Russia has loaded equipment on trains and is not 'occupying' Belarus, let alone attempting to fight from railway platforms.

During the upcoming exercises, troops will be deployed at places close to the training area, a camp will be arranged, a certain amount of armaments to shoot the training targets will be brought. Everything is controlled. Rus-

an incident with the reactor body frame, I immediately ordered it replaced. We are a Chernobyl-affected country, it's a sensitive issue. They removed it and brought a new one.

I ask the Lithuanians: why are you 'fighting' against us on this issue? We don't complain that you have a dangerous Ignalina nuclear power plant that you should close. God

sity or higher education establishment offering classes in Belarusian? I can say neither 'yes' or 'no' to the issue until I understand it thoroughly. It is necessary to study the problem, I agree but I'm against people proclaiming: 'I speak Belarusian and, so I'm more Belarusian than others'. I urge you also not to give up on the Russian language. Otherwise, you'll be rejecting one of your

double standards on the issue from Europe. In addition, there are also restraining factors. I have no right to cancel or impose a moratorium on the death penalty. We held a referendum. If Belarusians had not had such a referendum, I would probably have thought about it from another angle. When I'm being pressured on this I say: let's convince society. Let's have this debate in Parliament, among political parties and public organisations. If we then ask people — after sharing all the pros and cons — and the majority vote against the death penalty, I will sign the results of the referendum on the same day.

## On the national idea

An idea is needed, clear and concisely formulated, to encapsulate our beliefs as a state. I have come to believe that, probably, in our development we have not yet reached the point where this idea would strike our minds and hearts. I have put myself at rest: if the society cannot come up with anything, then I cannot suggest anything either because this is a very responsible task. So we live as we do, without this idea. Though we would want to have one. I don't believe this is an easy thing to 'invent' it but must come from our society and its ideals, as well as the way we live in the modern world. We have not existed as a sovereign, independent country for long and therein lies the difficulty in modernising our ideology. Even Russia is not able to formulate it clearly. For everyone to be on board, it needs to be a clear yet detailed philosophy.

In the modern world, these ideals will be essential for the development of our country and are the future for our young people.

## On the Belarusian dream

I would be happy if Belarusians always have money in their pockets and can satisfy their needs. As for the state, I would like to see my country, where I am the first President, quiet, peaceful and convenient for people. I'd want it to be conformable for you to live in and, on going away, to miss home on the second day.

I want every Belarusian and everyone who visits us to be eager to return here. If your soul is here — in Belarus, then it means I've not spent my presidency in vain.



receive a boost but the main issue is financing. There is an enormous amount of money in the West and if we could take loans at least at a mid-level, low interest rate, it would be beneficial for us.

## On military co-operation with Russia

I proposed the idea to President Putin that we conduct military manoeuvres, large and small, every two years, one year in Russia and the next in Belarus. Now it's our turn to host the drills [Zapad-2017]. It will be an open exercise, we will invite everyone to show that we are not going to attack anyone, we don't have any such intentions.

There is some concern about the military base, but in a modern war against NATO, for example, what use is an aeroplane? War is different today, you may be able to fly freely in Syria when there's no air defence system, but here in Belarus, when you have just taken off we can see you 200km away, and your minutes are numbered. With only two missiles on a runway, no aeroplane would take off.

If people think that Russia is bringing troops here to occupy Belarus, they are

sia will never occupy Belarus and the defence of our Motherland is a holy mission.

## On refugees

The mass media has reported that we are creating refugee camps, using 7m Euros allocated by the EU. What are these camps? Where are they situated? We want to build temporary detention facilities at the border for illegal immigrants to be kept in human conditions until we decide what to do with them. We have never and will never build camps for the reception of refugees.

## On the nuclear power plant

The IAEA and all the countries agree that everyone can build nuclear power plants. Why is it not similarly acceptable for Belarus? Our nuclear plant is not being built by a weak state. It's being built by Russia, a nuclear state who seeks to show a new generation of nuclear power plants how to build the safest. Nuclear power plants are the cheapest way to produce energy. We will have to repay fewer loans. Semashko [V.I. Semashko — Deputy Prime Minister] is controlling every nut and bolt. When there was

forbid, something happens there. This is the worst plant in the world. Let's make an agreement that it will be our common plant. We can even accept all Lithuanian people to work at our plant as we need experienced specialists. The main thing is to produce electricity. The Lithuanians are facing a deficit, we will sell it at a reasonable price. They understand and agree, but then they politicise the issue publicly in the media, we must reach agreement by considering the economy rather than politics.

## On language

I am very careful regarding this issue. Thankfully, neither Russian, Belarusian or any of our other languages have become a stumbling block in our society. While I'm the President, I wouldn't allow anyone to offend others on the language issue or divide people by the degree of their knowledge of Belarusian.

Turning to the national university, I recall the Belarusian State University. Isn't it national? They are all our national institutions — lecturing in Russian, Belarusian, English and other languages. Are you talking of a univer-

sity or higher education establishment offering classes in Belarusian? I can say neither 'yes' or 'no' to the issue until I understand it thoroughly. It is necessary to study the problem, I agree but I'm against people proclaiming: 'I speak Belarusian and, so I'm more Belarusian than others'. I urge you also not to give up on the Russian language. Otherwise, you'll be rejecting one of your

## On the death penalty

I'm not bloodthirsty. When I receive execution files and need to sign each death warrant, you cannot imagine what I feel. I'm the last person (common in many states) to put my signature on the paper. I understand that someone will be gone afterwards.

I'm provided with files, photos, operating materials, films and so on. On seeing them, my blood runs cold. When a person is mutilated by a criminal or a woman is drowned in a bath and then cut to pieces — to be later taken away and hidden — this person is worse than an animal. Some say that no-one has the right to execute others. God gives life and God must take it away. However, who has given these people the right to take others' lives? These are my feelings on the matter.

Politics is another issue. When pressure is put on us to abolish the death penalty I often tell them: let's start with America. Press them first to abolish it — in addition to others whom you admire and take money from. Let's start with them. I feel there are



# Time to move to concrete actions

By Vladimir Khromov

**Belarus and Pakistan have a real opportunity to reach \$1bn mutual trade turnover by 2020. President Alexander Lukashenko expressed his confidence in this as he met the Chairman of the Senate of the Pakistani Parliament, Mian Raza Rabbani**

The Head of State emphasised the current friendly relations with the leadership of Pakistan. He referred to expanding interaction across all areas saying, “I know that parliaments play a big role in the two countries, and I would like to ask you to monitor Pakistan’s efforts to implement the roadmap that we developed for our short and medium-term co-operation. We can even exceed the target. We should not just make declarations but must work to achieve this target by mapping out specific areas for interaction and establishing concrete figures for goods that we can sell to each other.” The Head of State added that there are no closed topics in the liaison between Belarus and Pakistan, he expressed his hope that MPs of both countries will step up their efforts.



Mian Raza Rabbani

In turn, Mian Raza Rabbani said that Belarus has posted excellent results in many areas. He believes that relations and co-operation between Belarus and Pakistan will be increasingly productive. Within a short period, they have managed to create a legal framework for co-operation which comprises more than 70 agreements in various fields, including the economy.

The meeting also focused on the expansion of the legal framework of interaction, the enhancement of trade-economic ties, including the establishment of assembly plants for Belarusian machinery in Pakistan and the training of personnel. The two sides mutually reaffirmed the need to switch from rhetoric to concrete actions to implement existing agreements.

# A variety of interesting projects are planned

By Vladimir Mikhailov

**This year, Belarus and Portugal plan to organise a variety of events to mark 25 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations. The issue was on the agenda at a meeting in Lisbon between the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Belarus to France with concurrent accreditation to Portugal, Pavel Latushko, and Head of the Portuguese Foreign Ministry’s Department for European Affairs, Antonio Sabido Costa.**

Pavel Latushko and Antonio Sabido Costa discussed a wide range of issues on the bilateral agenda, including the content of the upcoming ministerial consultations, preparations for signing bilateral agreements and the implementation of cultural and educational projects. Both parties agreed to hold several joint events to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Belarus and Portugal in 2017. Mr. Latushko and Mr. Costa also considered the pos-

sibility of setting up an Honorary Consulate of Belarus in Porto.

The Belarusian diplomat informed the Portuguese about work begun by the Honorary Consul of Portugal in Minsk and the progress in cultural co-operation. Mr. Latushko said a few words about the recent exhibition, *From Lisbon to Vladivostok via Minsk* featuring paintings by the Portuguese



artist Luis Rodrigues.

During the meeting of the Portuguese Foreign Minister with ambassadors, Mr. Latushko also met with the Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Political Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Portugal. They agreed to hold consultations between the Foreign Ministries.

Mr. Latushko also attended the 2017 New Year reception hosted by Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa in honour of the heads of the diplomatic missions accredited to Lisbon. At the meeting, Pavel Latushko had a brief conversation with the Portuguese Head of State. The parties expressed interest in bolstering co-operation between Belarus and Portugal in the economy, including in the development of the legal framework.

The Belarusian diplomat presented a catalogue of the international exhibition, *From Lisbon to Vladivostok via Minsk*, to the Portuguese President. President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa praised the initiative of the Belarusian side in holding such a large-scale cultural project.

# Towards multi-polarity

## Outlines of new geopolitical landscape of the world

By Yevgeny Vasiliev

The world political season of 2016 was very turbulent and out of many dramatic events we can highlight the Brexit and Donald Trump’s victory during the US Presidential elections, which were forecast by only a few. The results of these political campaigns have vividly demonstrated the displacement of international relations towards so-called ‘realpolitik’ which charges each state to more jealously defend its own interests. Analysts forecast that this year ‘realpolitik’ will materialise in the actions of major players on the global arena. This process will be launched by the inauguration of the new US President. Then we’ll see an exciting series of elections in the Western European countries with unpredictable results, this will make us re-assess previous political preferences on the whole continent. How will it affect the system of international relations?

The answer to this question is not of great interest for some states, since they stopped orienting towards the USA. A good example is the recent meeting between representatives of Russia, Turkey and Iran on the elaboration of a plan for a peaceful settlement in Syria. Representatives of Washington haven’t even been invited while the new President of the Philippines (previously allies of the USA), Rodrigo Duterte, announced that if China and Russia decide to set



In politics, as in chess, it’s important to move carefully

up a new world order he would be the first to join it. The strengthening of the positions of right nationalist parties in Europe against this background, promoting isolationism and the stiffening of migration policy and strengthening of security measures, only confirms the waning tendency of the West’s influence within the global political system.

In the Netherlands, hosting general elections in March, leading positions are preserved by right forces, headed by the Party for Freedom; its leader Geert Wilders is called the ‘Dutch Trump’. He is against Islamisation of Europe and would like to organise a referendum regarding the Netherlands’ leaving the EU. Meanwhile, the Alternative for Germany party is gaining strength in Germany which agitates for the country’s exit from the Eurozone. There are also complex issues in France where the

president will be elected in spring. Even if Marine Le Pen fails again this time there’s also a candidate from the Republicans, François Fillon, who also speaks with pride and warmth about the national state, closure of borders and French self-consciousness.

Such feeling doesn’t increase cohesion for the Euro-Atlantic alliance but is rather convenient for Russia and China who can take dividends from the current situation. If powers oppositional to European leadership win at the elections in France, Germany, the Netherlands and probably Italy, then Russia will have the perfect opportunity to achieve the abolition of economic sanctions. However, China remains the major puzzle of the year; it continues to expand its economic power and reinforce its geopolitical positions. Beijing has launched a gigantic communication

and infrastructure project, entitled The Silk Road Economic Belt, and has already injected \$1 trillion into it. The project at such a level requires reliable and long-term relations with the interested countries, including Belarus. And this is already a serious application for the creation of an alternative Eurasian centre of power on the continent. “On the one hand, Donald Trump’s victory came as an unpleasant surprise for China and many other countries of the Asian Pacific region. Some of the protectionist initiatives of Mr. Trump could provoke a trade war between the first and second economies of the world,” forecasts political analyst Vasily Kashin. “On the other hand, the arrival of Trump has removed or at least postponed another problem — the creation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) which is viewed by Beijing as a political initiative

### EXPERT COMMENT

Piotr PETROVSKY,  
a politologist  
and philosopher:

Belarus as a country in the centre of Europe isn’t keen on confrontation between some geopolitical blocs and conflict in our neighbouring states. Our state adheres to a multi-vector policy and peaceful settlement of all conflicts. On the one side, Belarus has always positioned itself as a state which pursues a policy of non-interference while, on the other hand, it’s the state which is able to organise a negotiating process. A definite tradition has formed that Belarus is involved in ensuring peace, stability and security in our rather turbulent region, promoting the idea of ‘integration of integrations’. At present, we see normalisation of Belarusian-European relations. I think that if our European partners express more interest, this year we may expect at least the adoption of the decision regarding cheapening of visas and continuation of work on a new framework agreement between Belarus and the European Union. In its turn, it will play a favourable role in normalisation of the relations between Russia and the West.

aimed at isolating the PRC. Now the future of the TPP is under question. This is one more argument in favour of the thesis that the world is moving towards multi-polarity. This is a rather positive trend if it is conducted gradually, calmly and without any dramatic excesses.



# Complete line-up for game

The last two years have not been easy for Stadler Minsk JSC: external crises have significantly affected the company. Foreign customers partially abandoned their commitments and production capacities were at only 30-40 percent. Nevertheless, the company managed to find the way to retain all its employees and diversify exports. The modern enterprise in Fanipol welcomed the new 2017 year with optimism: it boasts new orders; the number of jobs will be growing and the average salary is already substantially exceeding the equivalent of five hundred Dollars.



ARTUR PRUPAS

At Stadler Minsk JSC production

By Polina Konoga

In 2015-2016, many manufacturers turned to unpopular measures to cut costs — shifting to part-time employment and reducing staff. Although Stadler experienced hard times then (as only thirty percent of all capacity was reached), the company didn't make cuts. Currently, 440 people are employed at the Fanipol facility and, in 2017, their total number is expected to exceed 500.

The Director of Stadler Minsk, Philipp Brunner, comments on the company's strategy, "We've found jobs for people abroad, sending Belarusian specialists to plants of the Stadler Rail Group in Germany, Poland and Hungary for 2-6 months. The second step envisages export diversification — which is quite a specific measure. We are currently implementing a Norwegian project here — assembling the body, partly doing painting and assembly. European factories will then complete the work. Moreover, we produce components for our German partners. These all enable us to maximize our production facilities."

Stadler Minsk continues its work on electric trains for Russian Aeroexpress. Some time ago, the company ordered 25 trains, but due to the Russian Rouble devaluation it couldn't meet its obligations — cutting the order to 11 trains. Five of them are already in Moscow. "Some issues need solving, most importantly, our client is making payments and this is a great success for co-operation," added Mr. Brunner.

The main order now envisages the production of 23 three-section trams of the 'Snowstorm' series for St. Petersburg. While this is only the first series, the company hopes that there will be also additional projects. Regarding co-operation with Russian Railways



ARTUR PRUPAS

Electric train ordered by Georgian Railways

(which plans a major upgrade of its infrastructure), Mr. Brunner noted, "We have a competitive product that we can offer at a good price. We are ready to work on something new and participate in tenders. However, it is necessary to understand that the Russian market is quite closed to European producers, even if the company is located in Belarus.

Meanwhile, collaboration with Belarusian Railways will continue. The two sides have recently discussed the delivery of two additional trains; these are to be ordered early this year, with three more coming in 2018. "We are now busy with paperwork but hope that the order will be realised.

**Stadler Minsk has signed an agreement with the Minsk metro for the supply of trains. As planned, ten of them will be delivered within four years from the end of 2018.**

"We are ready to make a good offer," added Mr. Brunner.

Everything usually comes down to money and the key reason for customers failing to buy Stadler Minsk products quickly



ARTUR PRUPAS

Philipp Brunner

is the rather high price. The plant believes this is justified. Products with a service life of 30-50 years cannot be cheap. "We are ready to cut the price without compromising quality," Mr. Brunner explains, adding, "However, it's necessary to understand that the cheaper prod-

ucts are, the costlier their maintenance and repair. Passengers will feel this. Therefore, our secret is to find the best solution with clients. We offer competitive prices. For example, a tender for the supply of trains for the Minsk metro was won by us. Generally, the cost directly depends on the technical complexity and characteristics of the order."

Belarusian components in the total volume of Stadler Minsk's finished products occupy a minor share so far. Belkommunmash is the supplier of some components for the 'Snowstorm' tram. The company admits that it's ready to work with any supplier. Pleasingly, Belarusian producers are willing to offer competitive products not only on price but also on quality and delivery dates. "We also enable Belkommunmash to propose products for our order for the Minsk metro. However, we wish our relations to be market-based," Mr. Brunner added.

# Indian investments have reached new dimension

By Vladimir Velikhov

**At least three new pharmaceutical plants are to open in Belarus in the near future, notes Mikhail Myasnikov, the Chairman of the National Assembly's Council of the Republic, during the ground-breaking ceremony of the new enterprise in Skidel**

"Our country maintains active

political contacts with India. We have many good investment projects and are developing sci-tech co-operation. Bearing in mind that India has a strong presence on the pharmaceutical market, we've reached an agreement with Indian partners to build within the next 2-3 years, at least 3 pharmaceutical plants, with the participation of Indian capital," notes Mr. Myasnikov. He stressed

that the plans are being successfully implemented. The first phase of the pharmaceutical plant in Beshenkovich has already been commissioned. The project to build a plant in Kolyadichi near Minsk has passed initial examination by experts. In fact, building and assembly works have already started.

"The plant near Skidel is the third. It is created based on a busi-



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Participants of the event in Skidel

ness that is already operating," said Mr. Myasnikov, adding that the plant will make new, unique drugs, including expensive medicines.

The Belarusian-Indian enterprise which is being set up on the premises

of the existing plant in Skidel will produce up to 50 medicines to treat HIV, tuberculosis and cancer. The first set of equipment is to be installed by the end of the year. The total investment is approximately \$2.8m.



# Secrets of low temperatures

A 14-year-old Briton — dying from a rare form of cancer — has ordered that her body be frozen in the hope that humanity will someday defeat the deadly disease and learn how to return people from the ice alive. She is not alone in her desire: the cryo-storage facilities created in the United States and Russia already have several hundred customers, while the list of those wishing to take advantage of the service is over a thousand. The prospect of getting a new life is illusory: so far, there is no technology allowing for the revival of organs after freezing. However, progress has already been made regarding cells and tissues. The cryobank of the Republican Scientific-Medical Centre for Cell Technologies (at the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Biophysics and Cell Engineering) offers some freezing services.

By Yulia Vasilieva

The key feature of this cryobank is that it is focused on the storage of adult cells. Two other banks — operating at Minsk's 9th Clinical Hospital and the Republican Scientific-Practical Centre of Paediatric Oncology, Haematology and Immunology in Borovlyany — specialise in cord blood stem cells. The material — which a foetus uses while growing and developing — is obtained at birth. Of course, not everyone has an opportunity to use this new technology and take out 'insurance' for the future. With this in mind, the Centre for Cell Technologies has turned to cryo-conservation and the individual storage of adult stem cells and fibroblasts (skin cells).

Lyudmila Dubovskaya, the Director of the Institute of Biophysics and Cell Engineering, explains why it was decided to concentrate on this material, "Mesenchymal stem cells is a universal medicine; it can be used for a whole

range of diseases. In Belarus, around 30 new treatments have been approved: pulmonary (including tuberculosis) and haematological diseases and multiple sclerosis. Some others are in the pipeline for dentistry, traumatology and neurology; these will join the market in the next three years. In our Centre, for example, therapy for venous ulcers is being conducted with the help of stem cells. Jointly with other medical organisations, we are developing new technologies for the treatment of cartilage and bone tissue defects, gingival and periodontal eye corneal ulcers, burns, wounds, pressure ulcers and female urinary problems. These will also become available for patients in the near future. Fibroblasts are responsible for the condition of the skin."

Any work at cellular level is very complicated. It is based on the Institute's own developments — including the long development of cryoprotectants which protect cells from damage during freezing.

Initially, cryo-storage was conducted exclusively for scientific purposes but, in 2014 (when the bank was established), it opened for anyone. At the moment, over a billion stem cells are frozen here — including on a commercial basis (for the patients who received treatment of venous ulcers in the Centre). Among

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**In the USA, the cost of cell collection and cryo-conservation is up to \$2,000, while their personalised storage reaches \$100-150 a year. In Russia, this cost is \$1,000 and \$100 respectively, in Belarus — \$75 and \$40.**

them was an old lady who had suffered from the disease for over three decades.

"It's necessary to understand that these ulcers produce not only cosmetic effects. They generate terrible pain which force patients to take painkillers that destroy the liver and kidneys. We twice transplanted over two

million stem cells for that lady — which was enough. After the first operation, the pain decreased and a month later the wound began heal. It took six months for complete restoration of the skin," the Head of the Production of Biomedical Cell Products Department — Sergey Pinchuk — says. "Our employ-

ees worked hard to preserve each cell and transplant the most active of them — even though, with age, the quality is declining."

Thus, the patient, who attended consultations jointly with her son, decided to store her cells in case the disease returns. So, did the young Emergency Ministry officer

who, after years of suffering, received relief after cell therapy. The first patient who addressed the cryobank was a Belarusian doctor working in the United States. After coming to Belarus to visit his parents, he learnt of our cryo-storage and froze his cells. This is normal practice in America and Europe; the key is that cells are more active if frozen at a younger age. In case of an emergency, there is no need to spend several weeks preparing a cure: this might be crucial in the case of injuries and burns. The medicine would be ready in a couple of days. Most importantly, there will be no rejection as the patient's own cells are used.

Stem cells can be stored virtually endlessly under conditions of extremely low temperatures and in liquid nitrogen. Experiments at the Institute of Biophysics demonstrate that around 70-90 percent of cells completely recover after cryo-freezing; these can be used for transplanting. Production at the

Centre for Cell Technologies certified according to the international quality standard GMP and looks quite futuristic — though it's only possible to see it through a small window. All rooms ensure purity class A; admission is possible only through a system of locks and in special uniform. Meanwhile, the procedure of taking the material is simple: to get fibroblasts, a piece of skin (few millimetres) is needed. A surgeon takes it under anaesthesia from the inner side of the forearm or thigh area around the navel, or behind the ear... Stem cells are obtained from adipose tissue: the required 2-5ml are 'extracted' using lipoplasty, with the help of a special cannula-tube, with minimum discomfort.

It is quite possible these manipulations will soon become natural — like vaccinations (to prevent diseases). The seemingly emerging growth of cellular technologies — aimed at preserving health and beauty — is likely to contribute to the process.



A cryo-storage unit at the Institute of Biophysics and Cell Engineering of the National Academy of Sciences

VLADIMIR SHLAPAK

# People should take curing a cold seriously

**If you catch a cold, what is the best way to treat it?**  
(I. Stasevich, Brest)

When treating a cold, it's not a good idea to take any cough medicines: coughing helps the lungs and bronchial tubes to release mucus and germs. Expectorant drugs — such as liquorice root or plantain — are recommended.

Acupressure is also helpful for treating respiratory diseases. If your nose starts running, it's recommended that you press the point near

the nostrils, under the nose, between the eyes and in the centre of the chin. To reduce fever, a person should massage the point right below the elbow joint. If you suffer from headache, doctors advise massaging the area between the thumb and the index finger.

Drugs prescribed by a doctor should be taken if a cold lasts more than 3-4 days. Some medicines boast their efficiency at tackling flu: among them is Oseltamivir (Flustop). WHO experts also

recommend Zanamivir (Relenza). If the disease is progressing as expected, doctors in post-Soviet countries recommend Arbidol — despite the fact that it is unproven and not recognised by the WHO as an antiviral drug.

Treatment of severe and moderate cases of acute respiratory diseases is aimed at preventing primary viral pneumonia — which can develop into a serious illness and cause respiratory failure. In addition, it aims to prevent secondary bacterial infection



which also often causes pneumonia. Antibiotics are prescribed if complications are foreseen by the doctor.

Urgent hospital consultations (an ambulance) are necessary upon symptoms of severe respiratory failure,

depression of brain activity and disorders of the cardiovascular system: shortness of breath, cyanosis (skin turning blue), fainting, appearance of coloured sputum, low blood pressure and pain in the chest.

Consultations with the doctor (usually in a clinic where you live) are a must in case of high temperature continuing for 3-4 days and the aggravation of the illness after a temporary improvement.

**By Tatiana Zhukova,**  
doctor of higher category,  
D.M. Ph.D.



# Grants for migrants

EU to allocate funds to build centres for illegal immigrants detained in Belarus

By Vasily Malashenkov

## No refugees?

The German *Tageszeitung* newspaper recently reported: 'The EU is planning to build refugee camps in Belarus. These new establishments will primarily gather three categories of migrants: refugees from Ukraine, Syria and 'persons who escape Russia on grounds of the economic crisis and search for a job in the EU'. Journalist Christian Jacob has discovered a document in the European Commission for internal use. The news has been quickly picked up by other media stating that Belarus would soon face an influx of Syrian refugees and other forced migrants!

"This is a joint project with the International Organisation for Migration in the Republic of Belarus," explained the Head of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry's Press Service — Dmitry Mironchik. In turn, the Interior Ministry commented that no Syrian or refugees from other EU countries will access the country. "One of the focal areas of the project will be the creation of centres for temporary detention of foreign nationals. It is important to note that we are talking only about foreigners — illegal migrants detained in our country. No Syrian or other refugees from the EU will be placed there," the Ministry's specialists noted.

"We'll have no refugees from Europe," confirmed the Head of the Department of Citizenship and



VITALY GIL

A lesson for a group of Afghan children in Minsk's school #136

## Last tour

According to the Department of Citizenship and Migration of the Interior Ministry, Belarus more often attracts migrants from Congo, Pakistan, Lebanon, Libya and Ukraine (in the last two years). This is the last chance for these people to gain transit to Europe.

German journalist Jakob has overexaggerated in stating that more Russians 'escaping the economic crisis' would come. There are no such people at the border but some have included a few Chechens who travel to the EU through Brest on this list. "They remain in Belarus on legal grounds as citizens of Russia. These people cannot be viewed as illegal immigrants," asserted Mr. Begun.

## Fighting illegal migrants

Last year, Belarus and the EU signed an agreement on partnership in the field of mobility. This document envisages the steps to be taken by the state to combat illegal migration. "The construction of centres for accommodation of illegal migrants relates to the preparations for signing an agreement on readmission\* between Belarus and the European Union," said Mr. Begun. "Belarus is a transit country and is now actually taking on some obligations of the EU aimed at curbing this flow of migrants."

Belarusian authorities must feed these illegal migrants, providing them with shelter at special centres on the border and then send them home at the expense of Belarusian taxpayers. The Republic has long been negotiating with the EU for the latter to at least partially compensate these costs.

On January 10th, the Head of the Main Consular Department of Belarus' Foreign Ministry — Igor Fisenko — announced that Belarus 'needs time and money' to accept people returning under readmission. "We simply lack the necessary infrastructure for this," he noted.

As a result, both parties concluded that seven million Euros will be allocated to Minsk as part of the European Neighbourhood Programme in Minsk in 2017-2020, in several stages. This money will be used to build several centres for the temporary accommodation of migrants — each placing no more than 30-50. It's not yet clear what cities will be chosen for them and, now, the project is being discussed by several bodies: the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Border Committee of Belarus and the International Organisation for Migration.

In addition, a share of the EU allocated funds will be spent on the voluntary return of migrants to their homeland and on training state agency personnel working with this category of foreigners.

## Milestone anniversary brings guests together

By Alexander Pimenov

Literary men from 17 countries have announced their desire to take part in the symposium dedicated to the 500th anniversary of Belarusian book printing to be held during the 24th Minsk International Book Fair, noted Alexander Karlyukevich, Deputy Information Minister, at the session of the Republican organising committee for preparation and organisation of the celebrations for this memorable date.

The Deputy Information Minister noted that delegations from more than 30 countries will take part in the Minsk International Book Fair. The landmark events of the forthcoming exhibition include presentations of books dedicated to the first book printer, Francysk Skaryna, which were released by Belarusian publishing houses in late 2016. Book awards will be presented, with the participation of foreign guests and participants of the international symposium of literary men, *The Writer and Time*, devoted to the 500th anniversary of the Belarusian book printing.



According to Mr. Karlyukevich, representatives of 17 states have already announced their desire to take part in this symposium, including famous figures from Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Poland, Turkey, Italy and Serbia. "These meetings, round table discussions and exhibition venues will be discussing ways to mark Francysk Skaryna's activity and the date of the 500th birthday of Belarusian book printing in 2017 in our country and around the world," added the Deputy Information Minister.

Within a year, thematic editions (books and photo albums) will be released, these will be presented during festival events both at home and abroad. An international television project, *Skaryna on Languages of the Nations of the World*, is planned, as well as the creation of the '500 Years of Belarusian Books' section on the national educational portal (adu.by).

The 24th Minsk International Book Fair is held on February 8th-12th. This year, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will be an honorary guest, with large exhibitions being presented by Russia, Germany, China, Iran and the USA.

## Country of surprises

By Olga Sarukhanova

### Belarus launches new portal for presenting its tourist opportunities to foreigners

One just needs to type Belarus.Travel in the address window of any browser to get into a new national tourist portal for Belarus, recently launched. This is a beautifully created and well-thought-out website which vividly and concisely explains what can be seen in our country. "This

year we've renewed the site of the National Tourism Agency which targets professionals. Now, we have a country portal Belarus.Travel — our second instrument for promoting Belarus in the world," commented the leading specialist of the National Tourism Agency's Information Provision Department, Anastasia Shatkevich. "The website is aimed at the domestic market, tour operators and excursion guides, while Belarus.Travel is de-

signed for presentation of the country abroad."

"The country of surprises, unexpected discoveries and warm memories". Do you recognise Belarus by these complimentary slogans? Users can browse through its tabs: 'Unusual in Vitebsk'. 'Inspiring in Grodno', 'Unique in Minsk'. Classical routes along castles, suggestions for gourmants, selections of unique places and wonderful local sites. The website will search all the



necessary information and organise it according to the preferences of the target audience, with an accent placed on agro-ecotourism, sporting events and musical festivals.

The website has just begun to be filled with content but already looks promis-

ing. According to the National Tourism Agency, all the information presented on the website will be later translated into several languages, whilst currently the Internet portal is only in Russian, although it has an Instagram profile of the same name.





Protesters wave a Romanian flag during a demonstration in Bucharest, Romania

# Protesters in Romania are not backing down after decree repeal

About 500,000 demonstrators have rallied across Romania, despite the government revoking a controversial decree that fuelled their discontent

The left-wing government earlier scrapped the decree, which would have shielded many politicians from prosecution for corruption. But protesters remain dissatisfied about a revised version of the bill which will now be put to parliament.

Some are calling for the government of PM Sorin Grindeanu to resign.

Recent days have seen Romania's largest protests since communism fell in 1989.

## Strategic retreat or surrender?

The decision to repeal the decree was confirmed at an emergency government meeting in the capital Bucharest on February 5th.

But protesters expressed concerns about the government's plans to redraft the law and send it for debate in parliament, where it could be forced through.

Huge crowds swelled in the capital's Victory Square for several days.

A giant laser beamed the words

'Do Not Give Up' and 'Resignation' on to the government building housing the PM's office.

"This government is organised from the high level to the low like a mafia, and we don't want something like this," one protester, Profira Popo, said.

## No calm after the storm

Sunday night's demonstration in Bucharest was planned as the climax of the protest movement. The government hoped that by scrap-

ping the decree, calm would return to the streets of the country -- but that hasn't happened.

Many in the crowd don't trust the government to keep to its word. They are afraid that new legislation, promised by the Prime Minister when he abolished the decree, might contain some of the same elements in a different form.

The decree would have decriminalised abuse of power offences where sums of less than €44,000 (£38,000; \$47,500) were involved.

Critics saw it as an attempt by the government to let off many of its own officials caught in an anti-corruption drive.

The government had argued that the changes were needed to reduce prison overcrowding and align certain laws with the constitution.

One immediate beneficiary would have been Liviu Dragnea, who leads the governing Social Democratic Party and faces charges of defrauding the state of €24,000.

## 'Oldest human ancestor' was found — and it's not pretty

**A group of international scientists in China have discovered what they say is the oldest known ancestor of humanity**

The 540-million-year-old fossil is a microscopic sea animal, no larger than a millimetre in size, called a Saccorhynchus. It was discovered in central China.

The team of researchers from China, the UK and Germany say the animal is

part of the deuterostomes family, which are common ancestors of a broad range of species, including vertebrates, and therefore humans.

Degan Shu of Northwest University in Xi'an, where the fossils were discovered, said that the Saccorhynchus 'gives us remarkable insights into the very first stages of the evolution of a group that led to the fish, and



Our ancestor who is 540m years old

ultimately, to us'.

The fossils are so small that Professor Simon Conway Morris of the University of Cambridge, who was also part of the team, noted that 'to the naked eye, the fossils... look like tiny black grains, but under the microscope the level of detail was jaw-dropping'.

Scientists have deter-

mined that the Saccorhynchus was covered with flexible skin and muscles, and therefore moved by wiggling between grains of sand on the sea bed.

But the team in Xi'an noted that the most fascinating feature of this ancient creature is its mouth, which is relatively large compared to the rest of its body.

## Telecom deal is last step to end European roaming charges

**The abolition of roaming charges has moved a step closer**

The European Union has reached a preliminary deal with telecom operators on limiting how much the operators pay each other when their customers use their mobile phones abroad.

It is the last element needed to end roaming charges. That is due to happen in mid June of this year. The deal covers the use of mobile Internet as well as calls and texts.

Brussels has been slowly

moving forward for the last 10 years with a plan to allow people to use their phones abroad without paying extra.

It has been difficult to find an agreement that takes into account the wide differences in domestic prices and the way people use their phones across the European Union.

Countries in Northern and Eastern Europe — where consumers access a lot of mobile data at low prices — favoured lower wholesale caps to avoid companies raising prices in their home markets.



# Icon painters from past and present awarded honours

National Art Museum hosts awards for the participants of the *Heavenly World on Earth* project

By Veniamin Mikheev

The National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus hosted a meeting dedicated to the joint exhibition of Belarusian icons — *Heavenly World on Earth* — from the collection of the National Art Museum and contemporary icon painters of the Belarusian school.

Previously, this exhibition — entitled *Belarusian Icon Painting from 17th-21st Century* and including fewer pieces (33 icons) — was on show at the Vatican Museums, where it received great acclaim and became a landmark event in the Year of Culture.

During the current event, the men's choir of the Church of All Saints performed in front of the numerous visitors with beautiful melodies and Belarusian folk songs.

The solemn ceremony awarding certificates of honour was opened with a welcome speech by the Director General of the National Art Museum, Vladimir Prokoptsov. He expressed sincere gratitude to the icon painters and participants of the choir, as well as personally to Archpriest Fiodor Povny, the abbot



Awarding certificates of honour to participants of the project

of the Church of All Saints in Minsk, for their work aimed at restoring spiritual culture in Belarus and beyond its borders.

The *Heavenly World on Earth* exhibition, presenting works of 17th-21st century church art has just finished at the National Art Museum. This interesting and educational exhibition showcased Orthodox, Catholic and Uniate icons, as well as altar pictures, artistic weaving and liturgical items. Of course, it was fitting that the exhibition took place in the Year of Culture of Belarus and during the Extraordinary Jubilee (Holy) Year of Mercy, announced by Pope Francis.

The exposition displayed works from the collection of the National Art Museum of Belarus and icons of modern



It was crowded at the *Heavenly World on Earth* exhibition

icon painters, who continue the ancient traditions of Byzantium and the states of the Baltic Region. The organisers of the project tried to demonstrate similarity and difference in the interpretation of religious plots, while focusing the attention of spectators on the major postulate — a single source of the formation of Christian culture.

The exhibition included

most of the icons shown in the Vatican Museums from May 18th to July 25th 2016. This international exhibition has become the largest event in the history of Belarusian culture. Undoubtedly, the visitors were attracted to the section dedicated to the activity of the restorers of the National Art Museum. Thanks to the dedicated work of these unique specialists, pieces of art that



Icon that was previously on display in the Vatican

were on the edge of disappearing were restored.

The icons *Christ Pantocrator* and *Mother of God and Child* (from St. Nicholas Church in Pinsk), dating from the 1670s, opened the exhibition, being painted in Byzantine iconographic traditions. Furthermore, several paintings from St. Brigitte Catholic Monastery in Grodno (mid-17th century) are marked by the influence of European and the Flemish art school on local icon painters.

In 2009, with the blessing of the Metropolitan of Minsk and Slutsk, Patriarchal Exarch of all Belarus, Filaret, seven ancient icons from the Uspensky Monastery of Zhiroviichi (built about 1730) were given to the National Art Museum. During restoration works, the museum restorers discovered a magnificent and colourful painting made in the masterful technique of the Baroque era.

Icons of the festival tier

of the iconostasis were represented by two sets of panels: the first one is inserted into an oval shape with a patterned frame from Obrovo village (mid-18th century) and the second one from Shereshevo (the second half of the 18th century) is pictured showing a rare iconographic scene.

Decorative and applied art is being represented by Catholic church vestments, made from Western European materials and liturgical objects such as altar crosses, chalices for communion, discs and frameworks of icons.

Today we can confidently say that sacred images give us an idea of the peculiarities of Belarusian art and its close interaction between Western and Eastern cultures. Modern Belarusian icon painters adopt new techniques and subjects, bringing their own vision and understanding of the heavenly world that is closely associated with our earthly life.

The Economist

## Skaryna — one of the greatest figures of European culture

By Vladimir Velikhov

Authors of the British edition, *The Economist*, have dedicated an article to Francysk Skaryna, in which they compare the first Belarusian printer with the theologian, initiator of the Reformation and translator of the Bible into the German language, Martin Luther, naming Skaryna as one of the greatest figures of European culture.

The article notes that this

year celebrates the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's *95 Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*, and a range of church events and exhibitions is dedicated to this. 'But 1517 is worth remembering for other reasons, too. In that year, Francysk Skaryna published a Book of Psalms in his native Belarusian: it was one of the first to use the Cyrillic script. Only two years later, he had translated large swathes of the

Bible. Beyond the borders of Belarus, where monuments, streets and university buildings bear his name, Skaryna is one of the forgotten talents of the age'.

The publication mentions the biography of the Belarusian enlightener and notes that he 'had a very diverse life'.

Comparisons between Skaryna and Luther can be taken further. Like the Protestant reformer, Skaryna

understood the importance of new technology in spreading his message. He ran the first printing press in Vilnius, and his designs were influential even beyond Belarus' borders'. However, he didn't receive international recognition because there was no Orthodox Reformation.

Nevertheless, Skaryna remains popular among Belarusians. In 2012, the results of a poll showed that Skaryna was named the most famous



Belarusian.

Francysk Skaryna should stand next to Luther as one of

the great figures of the European culture, concludes *The Economist*.



# ‘Zhloby’ from Vitebsk and Dushegrei from Moscow staged fascinating puppet show of the Nativity

International Festival of Batleika Theatres, *Niabiosy*, gathers twenty puppet theatres from Belarus, Russia, Poland and other countries

By Vasily Malashenkov

Saint Elisabeth Convent, where the festival took place, was full to bursting before the performance.

“When will the fairytale begin? What is Batleika? Is it true that puppets talk?” the impatient little audience asked their parents. The children were entertained by festival founder, actor Alexander Zhdanovich, known as ‘Malya-vanych’ — anchor of the TV programme *Kalykhanka*, “Just a minute of patience — we will begin soon! Parents, keep hold of your children so they don’t get lost. Or you will miss the most interesting things.”

Batleika — is folk puppet theatre. This tradition was brought to us by Catholic monks from Italy through Poland three centuries ago. The Slavs quickly ‘domesticated’ it, and from purely Christmas performances, it transferred into plays presenting the most burning issues of the day. The plots never age: love and jealousy, benevolence and greed, envy and nobility.

“At one exhibition, my wife and I saw a reconstruction of the Nativity scene. We were so fascinated that we bought ourselves a wooden box with puppets. We have performed with them for twenty years now,” said Director Victor Dragun from the Moscow theatre, TriLika.

One of the most unique



During the *Sky and Earth* performance, by a theatre from Novopolotsk

types of Batleika theatres in *Niabiosy* was brought by Andrey Ritikov from the Novopolotsk theatre, KapyaluSH. People call them ‘Vitebsk zhloby’ — which originates from ‘zheloby’ — the local name for the puppet show of the Nativity or crib, a reminder of Christmas and the Bethlehem cave.

‘Zhlob’ — is a shadow-puppet theatre which was very popular in the Vitebsk province half a century ago. The puppeteer lights a candle, and images of the figures in turn appear on a half-transparent screen. The action is accompanied with off-screen voices. The play is always the same — the his-

tory of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The performance is so fascinating that even the most restless young viewers stop talking and concentrate on the stage.

‘Zhloby’ were revived only a year ago, the last such Batleika was kept in the Vitebsk Local History Mu-

seum and burned down during the Nazi occupation in the Great Patriotic War. Only its detailed description and drawings remained, they had been made before the revolution by Belarusian-Russian ethnographer, Yevdokim Romanov. The reconstruction was based on them.

The Moscow Theatre was the winner of the festival. This year the collective celebrates its twentieth anniversary. All performances are based on fairy tales of the peoples of Russia and other countries. In Minsk, the actors showed a Christmas puppet show with spiritual verses.



PAVEL CHUIKO

## CONGRATULATIONS!

**In the spring, we will go to Mir**  
Actress of the Dushegrei Theatre, Yelena Sarieva, shared her impressions about their tour in Belarus:  
*Last year we visited Minsk, at that time the festival had fewer participants. But this time it was difficult to get in with more than sixty applications, and only a third were chosen.*  
*This year we presented the puppet show with new scenery, puppets and a cheerful drama part-based on fairy tales by Boris*

*Shergin and Stepan Pisakhov. We also enjoyed watching performances by our colleagues. In Moscow, there are a lot of puppet theatres, but we can only see the regional and Belarusian puppeteers during festivals.*

**Do Batleika and puppet shows of the Nativity differ greatly from each other?**  
*In the Nativity play-box we see the Christmas mystery, while in Batleika there are both fairy tales and parables. One of the Belarusian collectives, for example,*

*showed a performance this year based on Nobleman Zawalnia, which was very original!*  
**The theatre will soon celebrate its anniversary, how will you celebrate?**  
*On the stage. We constantly perform in parishes, children’s clubs and even in apartments. After Easter, we will go to Belarus, as during the festival we made friends with actors from the town of Mir in the Grodno Region, who have invited us to come!*

## Celebrating spiritual holiday

Belarus revives traditions of Batleika folk theatre

By Valentina Kozlovich

The village of Stoily is located on the edge of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha. It is even possible to say that this suburb of the Pruzhany District is hinterland. Despite this, crowds of people are attracted to the place, even in January.

This remote place has recently acquired a new cultural centre for ‘Rural Renaissance’, being the first in

the Belovezhskaya Pushcha area to revive the folk theatre Batleika.

Many years ago, the Head of the Department of Traditional Culture of the Brest Regional Social and Cultural Centre, Larisa Bytsko, found a unique master in Stoily — Nikolay Tarasyuk, who carved naive figures from wood and made thought-provoking sculptures. Thanks to Larisa Nikolaevna, Nikolay Tarasyuk became famous not only in

Belarus, but also abroad. The name of the master and his creativity was included in the list of the non-material heritage of the country.

Two years ago, old man Tarasyuk died. It seemed that the last inhabitant of the village had gone and it would die... But, together with her husband Alexander, Larisa Bytsko decided to organise a ‘Rural Renaissance’ in Stoily. Recently she has exhibited ‘Batleika’ — a traditional

puppet theatre with wooden toys, which were made by old man Tarasyuk. “He would be very happy about this,” say those who knew the famous master.

Previously there was only one such theatre in the Brest Region, in the House of cCfts in the village of Rusino near Baranovichi. Batleika in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha is a work of art. It was created by the best craftsmen of the Brest Region. The national master



Art worker Larisa Bytsko revives traditions

of Belarus, Tatiana Zdanevich, painted a chest for the puppets, “I am fascinated with our collective work, I wanted to play my part so that everyone would like it.”

Larisa Bytsko admits

that she knew almost nothing about the puppet theatre of the Nativity, “I had a dream about this ‘Batleika’, how it should look. Puppet shows in Stoily were carried out throughout Christmas.”



# Good mood of our players and support of fans help win

The Belarusian national team beat Romania in the first round of Davis Cup Europe/Africa Zone Group I. The match took place in the Minsk Palace of Tennis and finished with a score of 3: 2 in favour of the hosts.

By Alexey Grishin

The decisive point for the Belarusian team was brought by number two Yegor Gerasimov (341) in the final match. It took him 2 hours and 17 minutes to defeat second seeded Romanian Adrian Ungur (313) — 7:6 (7:5), 6:4, 6:4.

Taking the lead from the start of the match, Gerasimov then allowed the Romanian to return to the game and won the first set on a tie-break. In the second set, with the score of 4:3 in favour of Gerasimov, Ungur

asked for a medical break, the Belarusian then pressed his opponent to win the challenging third set. As a result, Yegor brought two points to the Belarusian team — winning both his singles matches. Another point was won by the Belarusians in the doubles.

The first day opened with a game for the number one of the Belarusian team — Ilya Ivashko — and second seeded Romanian, Adrian Ungur. The latter proved stronger — 6:2, 5:7, 7:5, 6:4. In the next match, Belarus' number two, Yegor Gerasi-

mov, defeated Romania's first seeded Marius Copil — 6:3, 6:4, 6:4.

On the second day, the hosts won the doubles match: Max Mirnyi with Yaroslav Shilo smashed Romanian Horia Tecău and Marius Copil. The match lasted for 3 hours and 15 minutes, ending with a score of 7:6 (7:3), 6:4, 6:7 (5:7), 6:4. Initially, Max Mirnyi planned to pair with Yegor Gerasimov, but before the match, captain Vladimir Volchokov made a replacement — sending Yaroslav Shilo instead of Yegor. The Romanians also made a replace-



National team of Belarus



Max Mirnyi and Yaroslav Shilo in action



Yegor Gerasimov

ment: the more sophisticated Marius Copil played instead of the planned Nicolae Frunza.

In the morning match of the third day, Belarus' number one Ilya Ivashko lost to Marius Copil — 5:7, 4:6, 1:6. In the first and second sets, the Belarusian imposed his style on his rival but, in the third set, Copil took the lead — finally equalising the score 2: 2. The winning point was then taken by Yegor Gerasimov — performing perfectly in the final match of the Davis Cup first round against the Romanians. He dem-

onstrated strong sporting character and skills. Having managed to beat a more experienced Romanian tennis player — Adrian Ungur — in three sets (7:6 (7:5), 6:4, 6:4), Yegor brought victory to the national team of Belarus.

It has already been announced that Belarus will host the second-round match of the Davis Cup Europe/Africa Zone Group I — against the Austrian team. It is scheduled for April 7th-9th, in Minsk. Both teams have met previously in Davis Cup matches.

## A bold jump to medal podium

Belarusian freestyler Stanislav Gladchenko wins silver at FIS Freestyle Ski World Cup in American Deer Valley

By Igor Svitov

This is the first medal for the 22-year-old freestyler at the World Cup stages. In the finals, Gladchenko was given 114.60 points, only behind the two-time world champion and



Stanislav Gladchenko (L) on the medal podium in Deer Valley

owner of the 2010/11 World Cup from China, Qi Guāngpú (128.96). Third place went to a freestyler from Russia, Stanislav Nikitin (earning 114.60 points). The judges decided that he lost to the Belarusian on the additional parameters. Another Belarusian sportsman, Maxim Gustik, was placed fifth (with 109.50 points).

After four stages the FIS Freestyle World Cup, the standings are topped by the Chinese Qi Guāngpú, followed by Belarusian Anton Kush-

nir and American Mac Bohannon. Maxim Gustik of Belarus is placed 4th, Stanislav Gladchenko finished 6th while Artem Bashlakov is ranked 24th among 39 ski aerials who have earned credit points.

The next World Cup stage will take place in Bokwang Snowpark in South Korean PyeongChang on February 10th, while Raubichi in Belarus will welcome freestylers on February 25th and the final stage is organised for Moscow on March 4th.

## Beginning of the season inspires optimism

By Semen Bondarev

Alina Talai had her first start this season and was placed second at a large international indoor tournament in Dusseldorf

In the 60m hurdles finals, Alina Talai posted a result of 7.95 seconds and crossed the finishing line simultaneously with Cindy Roleder of Germany. The winner was decided only by a photo-finish, after which the Belarusian athlete was awarded a silver medal. "Competition with Roleder is already becoming a tradition. We finished at the same time but I was given second place. In any case, I'm pleased with my performance at the beginning of



Alina Talai

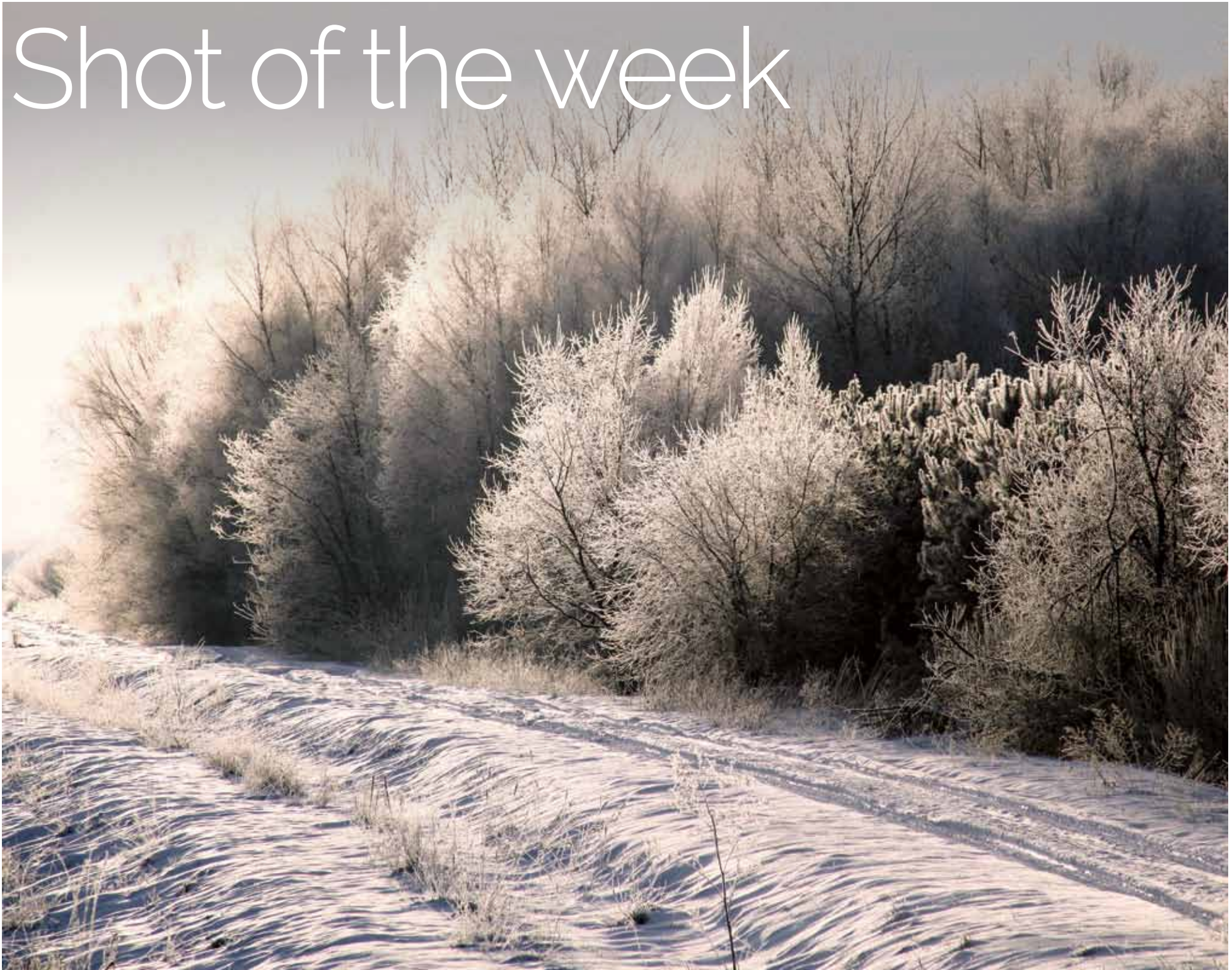
the season and I enjoyed it," noted Ms. Talai.

Another Belarusian, Elvira German, failed to qualify for the 60m hurdles finals, coming 12th in the semi-finals. Marina Arzamasova finished fourth in the 800m.

In the issue of February 2nd, 2017, an error was made on the first page in the caption beneath the photo. Instead of 'Roman Petrushenko and Vadim Makhnev — Olympiad-2012 silver medallists' it should be read as 'Vitaly Belko and Olympic champion Roman Petrushenko'. The editorial staff apologizes to the readers.



# Shot of the week



Winder won't surrender. The Gomel Region's Kalinkovichi District

## EXHIBITIONS

### NATIONAL HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF BELARUS

12 Karl Marx Street  
Until 19<sup>th</sup> February. *Time of Mute Stars. From Black-and-White to Red*  
Until 28<sup>th</sup> February. *Time of Miracles: Winter Holidays and Entertainments*  
Until 1<sup>st</sup> June 2017. *From Romanian Dinary to Belarusian Rouble*

### BELARUSIAN STATE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR HISTORY MUSEUM

8 Pobediteley Avenue  
Until 26<sup>th</sup> February. *Weapon of Victory*

### NATIONAL LIBRARY OF BELARUS

116 Nezavisimosti Avenue  
Until 1<sup>st</sup> March. *Paris, Ahead! Europe Seen in Windows* Until 1<sup>st</sup> March. *Under Dragon's Wings*

### YAKUB KOLAS STATE LITERARY MUSEUM

5 Akademicheskaya Street  
Until 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017. *In Waves of Endless Movement: Along Kolas' Automobile Paths*

### MUSEUM OF THEATRICAL AND MUSICAL CULTURE HISTORY

5 Muzykalny Lane  
Until 18<sup>th</sup> February. *19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> Century Dollars of the World*  
Until 23<sup>rd</sup> February. *Iliotropion (Sunflower)*

### EXHIBITION HALL OF BELARUSIAN NATURE AND ECOLOGY MUSEUM

9A Bogdanovich Street  
Until 13<sup>th</sup> March. *Noisy Feathered Rainbow*

### MUSEUM OF BELARUSIAN CINEMA HISTORY

4 Sverdlov Street  
Until 5<sup>th</sup> February. *Diary of Travels*

### MUSEUM OF BELARUS' MINIATURES

25 Nezavisimosti Avenue  
Museum of Miniatures of Belarusian Sights permanent exhibition

### UNIVERSITY OF CULTURE ART GALLERY

1 Oktyabrskaya Square  
Until 13<sup>th</sup> February. Exhibition of Iranian art on occasion of 38<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Islamic Revolution in Iran victory

### HOUSE-MUSEUM OF RSDRP FIRST SESSION

31a Nezavisimosti Avenue  
Until 2<sup>nd</sup> April. Exhibition of experiments: *Science Museum*

### CENTRAL BOTANICAL GARDEN OF BELARUS'S NAS

Kalinin Square  
Until 19<sup>th</sup> February. Exhibition of live exotic butterflies

## THEATRES

### BOLSHOI OPERA AND BALLET THEATRE

1 Parizhskoy Kommuny Square  
09.02. Iolanthe 10.02. Bayadera; Nights with Serenada 11.02. Rigoletto 12.02. Miraculous Music; Don Quixote 14.02. Grey Legend 15.02. Fountain of Bakhchisaray; Most Secret of Love 16.02. Figaro's Wedding

### BELARUSIAN STATE ACADEMIC MUSICAL THEATRE

44 Myasnikov Street  
09.02. Swan Lake 10.02. Jane Eyre 11.02. Nutcracker 11.02. Ball in Savoy 12.02. Little-Red-Riding-Hood. Generation NEXT; The Clandestine Marriage 14.02. Blue Cameo 16.02. Cleopatra

### YANKA KUPALA NATIONAL ACADEMIC THEATRE

7 Engels Street  
09.02. School of Taxpayers 10.02. Two Souls; Yegor Zabelov 11.02. Evening 12.02. Kolyady Night 14.02. Abduction of Europe, or Ursula Radziwill's Theatre 15.02. Local Cabaret 16.02. Seagull

### MAXIM GORKY NATIONAL ACADEMIC DRAMA THEATRE

5 Volodarsy Street  
09.02. Testosterone 10.02. Double Eternity 11.02. The Twelfth Night 12.02. As if By Magic; An Ideal Husband 14.02. Lady for a Day 15.02. He and She 16.02. Oedipus

### THEATRE-STUDIO OF CINEMA ACTORS

13 Pobediteley Avenue  
09.02. Forgetting Herostratos 10.02. Pygmalion 11 and 12.02. A Very Simple Story 14.02. Abduction of Yelena 15 and 16.02. Two Arrows

### MODERN ARTS THEATRE

5 Oktyabrskaya Street  
10.02. Two Henpecked Husbands 11.02. Mad Money 12.02. Barmaley 14.02. House Upside-Down

### REPUBLICAN THEATRE OF BELARUSIAN DRAMA

44 Kropotkin Street  
09.02. White Angle with Black Wings 10.02. Contract 11.02. Adam's Jokes 12.02. A Two Dogs' Tale; Pelican 14.02. Silent Love 15.02. Eternal Song 16.02. Golden Heart; This is All She

### BELARUSIAN REPUBLICAN YOUNG SPECTATOR'S THEATRE

26 Engels Street  
09.02. An Intimidated Apostle 11.02. Cat's House 12.02. Blue Bird 14.02. Thumbelina 15.02. Belarusian Vaudevilles 16.02. Teddy

### MINSK CONCERT HALL

5 Oktyabrskaya Street  
09.02. Thank You, Margo!  
13.02. Synthesiser of Love; There is No Such State as Holland