



Pre-election campaigning of candidates for deputies is taking place in Belarus — to last until February 24th inclusive

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Vitebsk is often compared to St. Petersburg — it has a harsh climate, luxurious bridges and a rich cultural life

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Ksenia Kolesnikovich, a junior researcher at the laboratory of the Vitebsk State Academy of Veterinary Medicine, is creating the country's first genetically engineered vaccine for animals

Unique vaccine for animals

Genetic engineering of Belarusian veterinary medicine is gaining momentum, in particular in the field of creating vaccines for animals — drugs that can prevent diseases and preserve the health of the herd. Ksenia Kolesnikovich, a graduate student, a junior researcher at the laboratory of the Vitebsk State Academy of Veterinary Medicine, is working on one of these today under the guidance of Pavel Krasochko, head of the applied-research laboratory, Doctor of Biological Sciences, Associate Professor. The scientific team has developed a genetically engineered Escherichia coli strain, which synthesises protein of the respiratory syncytial virus of cattle. This protein replaced a culture-based virus and was used when creating a vaccine against viral infections in cattle called Bolshevak R. The import-substituting and export-oriented product is planned to be finalised and put into production during the calendar year. The finished drug will help combat infectious rhinotracheitis, viral diarrhea, parainfluenza-3, respiratory syncytial, rotavirus and coronavirus infection in cattle. Ksenia Kolesnikovich received the Belarus President's scholarship for her development.



‘The basis for solving current problems is the economy’



The Head of State welcomed the head of Russia's region to Minsk, noting that in July last year, they already had a brief conversation at the Kupala Night Festival in Alexandria. Alexander Bogomaz pays frequent visits to Gomel Region. According to Aleksandr Lukashenko, he requested the Governor of this region, Ivan Krupko, to co-operate with Bryansk Region more closely.

"I have been informed that you have established good contacts. I welcome this and will support it in every possible way," the Belarusian leader said.

Aleksandr Lukashenko emphasised that Bryansk Region is one of the closest Russian regions to Belarus. During the difficult times in the 1990s, when there was a shortage of agricultural machinery, Belarus and Bryansk Region came to each other's aid.

"Since Soviet times, we have had the warmest, friendliest, kindest, brotherly relations between our peoples. Thank God, we have not drawn a border to create inconveniences for our people, as it happened with Poland, the Baltic States, and even worse with Ukraine," the Head of State noted.

"The long-standing historical and human ties between Belarus and Bryansk Region are very strong and multifaceted. All this fully applies to another closest neighbour of ours, Chernigov Region of Ukraine. The spirit of good neighbourliness, friendship and co-operation always reigned on the border of the three republics," Aleksandr Lukashenko pointed out. "Now it is the opposite, to our deep regret. In this situation, Belarusians stand in absolute solidarity with you, empathise with you, and are ready to help in any way we can."

The President pointed out that the economy is at the heart of solving any current and possible future issues,

The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, met with Governor of Russia's Bryansk Region Alexander Bogomaz

"As they said in Soviet times — once there is economy and production, there will be work for parties, Komsomol, and trade unions. The same is true about the present day."

Aleksandr Lukashenko reminded that in 2020, the task was set to raise the trade turnover between Belarus and Bryansk Region to one billion dollars.

"Last year, we had a slight decrease in mutual trade for various reasons. The turnover amounted to about \$800m. This year we are determined to restore the previously achieved figure," the Belarusian Head of State noted.

"I think no one needs explanations to see that a billion dollars in trade turnover is far from being the limit. And the main reserve is the implementation of large-scale cooperative industrial projects."

We are ready to further develop this experience, including the creation of other enterprises in Bryansk Region for the manufacture of machinery, materials, equipment — anything you need and we can do."

They also discussed co-operation in the field of agriculture. Here, according to the Head of State, the parties have a lot to learn from each other. Moreover, the lands and climatic conditions are similar.



"We know that Bryansk Region is the leader in Russia in the production of certain types of agricultural products and sets records for potato and grain yields (rye, triticale, in particular). You have reached a good level of animal husbandry. This is also one of our priorities, hence a wide field for joint activities," Aleksandr Lukashenko underlined.

"We are ready to expand the supply of food and other goods, without interfering with your producers or competing with you. We need to combine our capabilities in the vast Belarusian-Russian market."

The programme of the Russian delegation headed by Alexander Bogomaz included a visit to the Belarusian National Biotechnology Corporation, a unique production complex that makes high-quality animal feed. It is about to launch the production of veterinary drugs and equipment for animal husbandry.

Bryansk Region is interested in co-operation in the field of science, agro-industrial and construction industries, especially since such experience is already available.

"You know well how Belarusian builders work. Last year, an investment project was implemented for the construction of a 16-storey residential building in Bryansk. If you are satisfied with the performance of our builders, we will continue our collaboration in this direction. I know from my talks with the President of Russia that you have ambitious plans in construction, including roads, cultural and industrial facilities, and, above all, housing," the Belarusian leader said.

According to Aleksandr Lukashenko, Belarus is ready to offer services in major repairs of housing and buildings, road construction, design and engineering surveys. In addition, our country can provide qualified specialists, high-quality machinery and equipment for water supply, water treatment, heating, and waste recycling.

Among the promising areas of collaboration, the President also named overcoming the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, which affected Bryansk Region as much as Belarus.

"We are engaged in the revival of these territories (you are aware of our programmes), creating normal conditions for people's lives. We have unique technologies and developments. If you are interested in them, we are ready to co-operate," the President said.



Based on materials of sb.by and belta.by

Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko heard out a report from Head of the Belarus President Property Management Directorate Yuri Nazarov

PROTOCOL

Aleksandr Lukashenko remarked that Yuri Nazarov has been working as the head of the directorate for the second year now. The executive had been assigned many tasks, which had been clarified and specified over time.

"I have attentively studied the results of work of organisations. The only thing I can say is that we need to see problems behind overall statistics. Some organisations are not that successful and require serious attention," the President said.

The Head of State stressed the rather good performance of the enterprises and organisations belonging to the Belarus President Property Management Directorate:

"Financial results are good. Individual industries are doing well, too: agriculture, civil engineering, and Belkhudozhpromysly. Everyone used to believe that the Belarus President Property Management Directorate had snatched all the juicy pieces and had no problems as a result. No. Belkhudozhpromysly Concern alone was a lot of headache."

"But there are avenues I would like the Belarus President Property Management Directorate to develop such as musical instruments and the rest. Ours is a musical nation. An educated one from this point of view. Meanwhile, we mainly import musical instruments. We tried to recreate something in Borisov but it seems that that project went nowhere. It is certainly a matter of the state. Not only the Belarus President Property Management Directorate has to take care of it. As an experienced person you should also look at the state-run organisations, which should get involved and do their best, in particular, in order to develop this area. It is a complicated one but if the Belarus President Property Management Directorate doesn't do it, then nobody will resolve this problem fast and will not turn around this industry. I am just giving an example," Aleksandr Lukashenko said.

The situation with the production of skis and other kinds of sport gear at the Telekhany enterprise is similar, the President added.

"It is also necessary to improve work and attain higher standards. After all, we are a relatively northern country. We want kids to spend their time outdoors as you and I did back in the day. And outdoors is mostly about skiing these days. It is necessary to instill this knowledge, this experience in kids so that they would grow up to be healthy adults. We don't want them to browse the Web on their phones all the time," the President noted.

Another area that needs attention is the operation of agricultural enterprises. The Head of State reminded that a decision had previously been made in favour of building new milk-processing facilities in Mogilev Region

"It is necessary to more actively use the storage facilities the Belarus President Property Management Directorate has. We've already talked about it using the agricultural enterprise Aleksandriyskoye as an example. A good storage facility has been built. They were totally empty last year or the year before last. It won't do. They should be licked into shape and store things. Not

potatoes but apples, other fruits and berries that can be sold at a profit," the Head of State gave instructions. "The market is huge. The Russian market and China want to buy more and more food. I hear they ask us to sell pork to them. Deliveries will be authorised. This is why there are plenty of markets today and they offer rather premium prices. We have to work on that and pour more efforts into it."

Speaking about the performance of the Belkhudozhpromysly group, Yuri Nazarov noted that these enterprises are now growing, making unique products of folk artistic craftwork and souvenirs.

"This year we've started making Sozh skan out of various sorts of timber and shavings. We get exceptional products. When I took over, we had two elderly people split wickerwork. Their products are outstanding. This is why we preserve this line of work and have increased the team up to seven people," the head of the Belarus President Property Management Directorate said.

Investments of bona fide business in Belarus are reliably protected by the state

The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, met with Governor of Russia's Kamchatka Krai Vladimir Solodov



The Head of State warmly welcomed the head of the Russian region, noting that this was his first visit to Belarus in such a status.

“I hope that despite the long distance, you will come to Belarus many times,” the President added. “As you rightly mentioned, ‘If you go to visit good people, the distance shortens.’ I want you to know that you have come to the most reliable people for any Russian.”

The Governor arrived with a solid, representative delegation, which, according to the President, attests to ambitious goals and serious intentions. In this regard, the Belarusian leader assured the Russian side of his readiness to ‘engage and do the maximum’ to boost co-operation.

Aleksandr Lukashenko was confident that Kamchatka’s geographical remoteness from Belarus should not hinder the solution of diverse tasks, friendship or co-operation.

“I am convinced that we will find opportunities to build up our relations without unnecessary intermediaries. We will ensure that the products we supply back and forth will be significantly cheaper,” the Head of State stressed.

Speaking about prospective projects, the President mentioned the grandiose idea of building the Penzhinskaya tidal power plant in the Sea of Okhotsk.

“We have certain competencies. Should you need our assistance in terms of design and construction of this facility, we will be glad to take part in this landmark construction,” the Belarusian leader pointed out.

Aleksandr Lukashenko emphasised that Kamchatka Krai is renowned for its unique marine resources.

“Establishing collaboration in this area would be the right and mutually beneficial decision,” the President said. He recalled that during his visits to Russia, particularly to the Far East, he was often interested in fish products supplies to Belarus from such remote regions.

“They all unanimously tell me that it is possible to extract, sell and buy products somewhere closer,” said the Head of State. “Yet, we would like to try to supply these products from you. We have a big deficit in this regard.”

Aleksandr Lukashenko suggested that experts work out the question of direct supplies of fish products, eliminating unnecessary intermediation.

According to the President, the creation of processing plants in Belarus by the Russian region can become a promising model to strengthen co-operation.

“If it is profitable, you can try this. We will create the most favourable conditions for the operation and delivery of your products to any point beneficial for you,” the Head of State said.

The President stressed that investments of bona fide business in Belarus are reliably protected by the state.

In addition, Belarus has a large network of trade and logistics complexes equipped with all necessary infrastructure, including access roads, facilities for storage and sorting of goods.

“They are available for you, if needed. In case you want to build a facility here, we will provide appropriate support,” Aleksandr Lukashenko suggested.

Among the areas of co-operation of mutual interest, the President also named the agro-industrial complex.

“Taking into account your plans to increase Kamchatka’s self-sufficiency in milk and meat, we are ready to provide the required equipment for agricultural and dairy complexes,” Aleksandr Lukashenko noted.

Belarus has extensive experience in creating dairy products, including baby food.

The meeting also discussed the development of tourism potential.



“Kamchatka Krai is the dream of any traveller, including me,” Aleksandr Lukashenko said. The President recalled that there was a time when both Russians and Belarusians were keen on travelling abroad. Fortunately, the volume of domestic tourism has been growing lately, especially in Russia. Also, Belarus was visited by more than 1 million Russians in 2023.

“All in all, we are ready to discuss any issues of interest to you and make corresponding decisions,” the President stressed. “If you are interested in visiting any enterprises — all doors are open to you, to all plants and factories... See what you like. We

are ready to lend you a shoulder and collaborate with you on mutually beneficial terms.”

The main areas of co-operation, which are interesting and beneficial to both sides, were later announced in detail to journalists by Vladimir Solodov. First of all, he pointed out that Kamchatka has been liaising closely with Belarus over the past two years, while new promising areas were put forward at the last meeting.

“The new milestones that have been outlined, the instructions given by Aleksandr Lukashenko at the meeting, are extremely important for further bilateral co-operation. Kamchatka today is a region where large-scale projects are launched.”

One of them is the Northern Sea Route — a waterway that connects the Far East and western territories of Russia by the shortest route. Vladimir Solodov draws attention to the fact that Kamchatka is the eastern gate of the Northern Sea Route, which makes logistics twice as cheap and shorter. This is a real alternative to the Suez Canal. In 2023, the cargo turnover here exceeded 20 million tonnes.

According to Vladimir Solodov, the main challenge in co-operation with Belarus is distance. And it can be overcome just by using the Northern Sea Route.

The parties also discussed the supply of fish and seafood to Belarus, as well as the sales rhythm of fish oil and fish meal that are used for the production of Belarusian feed.

A detailed roadmap following the visit will be presented to the President of Belarus and implemented within a clear time frame, the Russian governor stated.

Based on materials of sb.by and belta.by

Head of State Aleksandr Lukashenko signed an order that established the republican organising committee for preparation and holding of the 1st meeting of the seventh Belarusian People’s Congress, the Belarusian leader’s press service reports

PROTOCOL ■

Among the committee members are senior officials, heads of ministries, chairmen of regional executive committees and the Minsk City Executive Committee, as well as representatives of other government agencies. Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko heads the new structure.

In addition to organisational issues, the committee is also tasked to widely cover the work being carried out and to inform the population about the delegates of the Belarusian People’s Congress in the mass media.

The current Deputy Chairman of the House of Representatives, Valery Mitskevich, will head the Secretariat of the Belarusian People’s Congress, in line with the personnel decision made by the President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko.

As Valery Mitskevich told reporters, the Secretariat of the Belarusian People’s Congress will be involved in the preparation and holding of the first session of the Belarusian People’s Congress in the new, constitutional status and its subsequent meetings. The Belarusian People’s Congress is convened for its first meeting no later than 60 days after the single voting day. According to Valery Mitskevich, the exact date of the Belarusian People’s Congress has not yet been determined.

“We need to hold elections of deputies of local councils, the House of Representatives, then members of the Council of the Republic will be elected, and afterwards representatives of civil society will elect their delegates. Then the composition of the Belarusian People’s Congress will be formed and it can be

convened. The President drew our attention to serious and responsible work. Taking into account that this is a new constitutional body that appeared in Belarus’ Constitution after the nationwide referendum, everything here is new for us. On the one hand, there is novelty, on the other hand, this is responsibility, because this is the supreme representative body, which has very serious powers, and, accordingly, we must deal with the organisation of its work very responsibly,” he explained.

Valery Mitskevich added that the Secretariat of the Belarusian People’s Congress will be a small, compact body, and people there will work on a professional basis. As far as the Belarusian People’s Congress delegates are concerned, they take part in its work without interrupting their work (official) activities.

The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko,

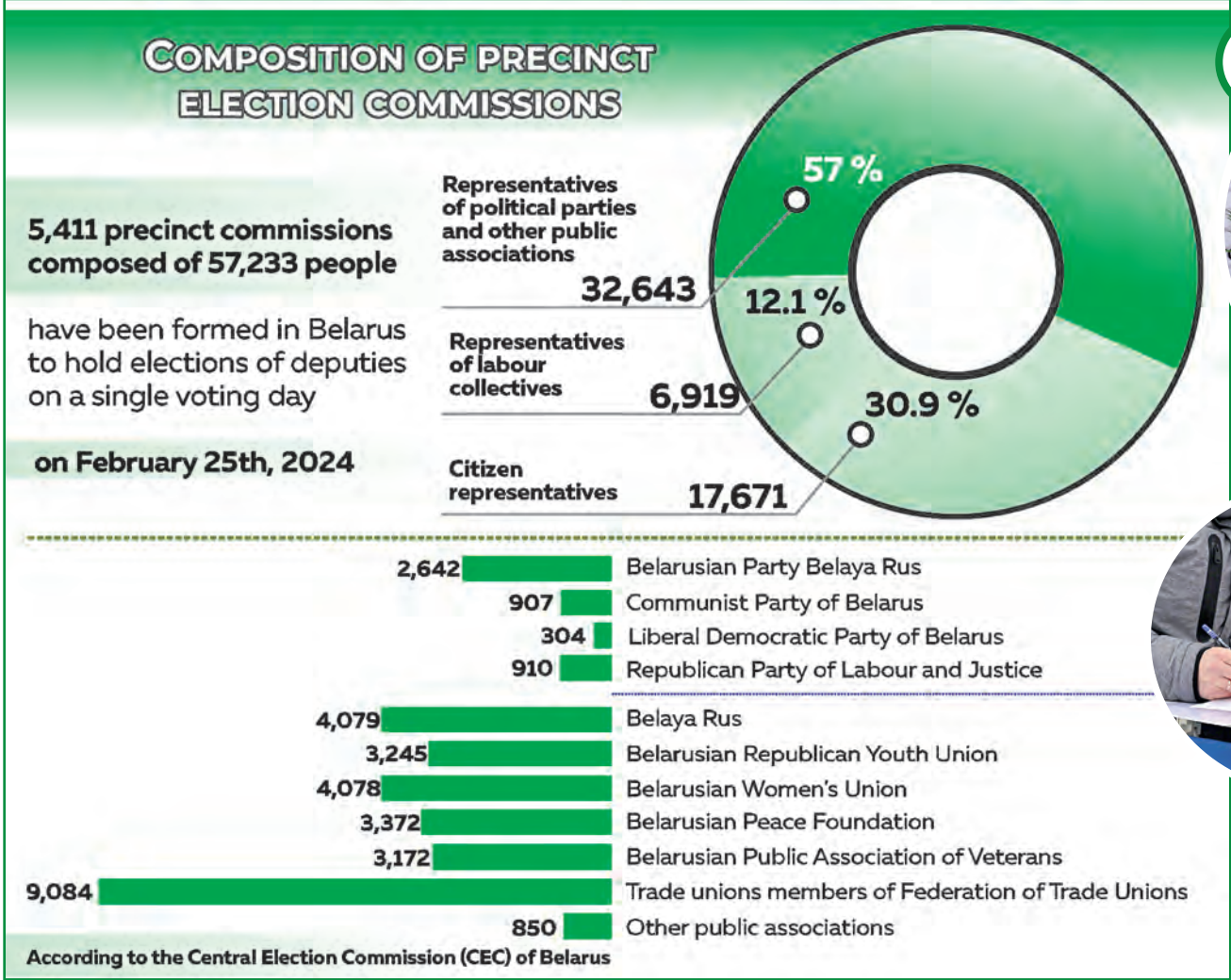
"Following Russia's example, we have also established a constitutionally unified voting day. On this day, deputies of the parliament and local councils will be elected. We have preserved regional, district, and rural councils, as it was in Soviet times. And on March 17th, presidential elections will be held in Russia. The period is not easy, but as you can see, it is passing quietly. I am confident that we will approach these dates calmly and will conduct these events just as calmly."

At the meeting of the Union State Supreme State Council in St. Petersburg, on January 29th, 2024

Pre-election campaigning of candidates for deputies takes place in Belarus

The current election campaign is characterised by high-quality novelty and has a deep meaning

The campaign period is traditionally the brightest and most active stage of electoral campaigns. It will last until February 24th, inclusive.



A scientific expert council at the Central Election Commission has been formed, which will help the CEC to analyse the legislation enforcement during the elections.

After all, improvement of electoral legislation is one of the elements for enhancing the electoral system that does not stand still but evolves together with our state, political processes that take place both inside our country and on the external contour. However, innovations are not limited to this only.

Thus, one more public advisory structure of the Central Election Commission has actively started its work. In order to clarify the specifics of the current campaign, members of the Youth Council at the Belarus CEC are holding meetings with young people in the format 'equal teaches equal'. More than 35 meetings have been held since the beginning of the year. The audience of thematic and dialogue platforms is extensive — academic teaching staff and students of higher educational institutions, students and teachers of secondary, secondary professional and vocational education institutions as well as representatives of working youth.

There are also minor changes in the opening hours of polling stations. CEC Secretary Elena Baldovskaya reminds,

"It will be possible to vote in the elections of deputies on a single voting day at the polling station at the place of registration (place of residence or place of stay) on February 25th from 8:00 to 20:00. A voter who is unable to take part in voting on this day has the right to vote ahead of time — from February 20th to February 24th. During early voting, polling stations will be open from 12:00 to 19:00 without a lunch break."

By Maksim Osipov

Candidates have been identified

The results of the registration of candidates for deputies of the House of Representatives and local Councils were announced to journalists by Chairman of the Central Election Commission (CEC) Igor Karpenko, "To date, 265 candidates will compete for 110 parliamentary seats in the House of Representatives. Ten of them are under the age of 31. The youngest candidate is 23 years old. 92 candidates are women."

In addition, the CEC Chairman noted that four pensioners are nominated for deputies of the Parliament, the oldest being 66 years old, as well as one unemployed.

"In general, the competition for a seat in the House of Representatives is 2.4 people per seat," Igor Karpenko said.

As for candidates for local Councils of Deputies — 18,802 people will run for 12,514 seats.

"This is about 1.5 people per seat. That is, there is a certain competition here," the head of the Central Election Commission underlined.

Actively, competitively and openly

Thus, competition in the 2024 elections is recorded in every constituency. Two–three people in each constituency have been nominated as candidates for deputies of regional Councils of Deputies of the twenty-ninth convocation. Along with that, as many as six candidates have been nominated for the elections to the Minsk City Council of Deputies in one of the constituencies.

As for the election of deputies to the House of Representatives, the competi-

tion here will be even more serious. On the whole, from two to four candidates for the deputy mandate have been nominated in each constituency in the regions, while in Minsk, five candidates have been nominated in one of the constituencies, and six candidates in another.

The assumptions of our country's opponents about the absence of international observers proved to be untenable. As of January 23rd, the day when a regular session of the Central Election Commission was held, there were already registered 4,439 national observers — and this is only in the territorial district commissions. By that time, 5,411 precinct electoral committees had not yet been established. Therefore, CEC Chairman Igor Karpenko confidently predicted that this figure would grow significantly. As of the time of the session, 58 international observers were registered, and two days later this figure rose to 73.

According to the Head of the CIS Observer Mission, Secretary General of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Sergey Lebedev, this mission alone will include about 150 people. In total, the CEC has prepared about 300 packages of documents for international observers.

Dialogue on equal terms

The current election campaign will be held for the first time and will have a serious analytical component.

Vadim Borovik, political analyst,

"The campaigning carried out these days should first of all be perceived as an opportunity for candidates to familiarise voters with their programmes. In other words, candidates should run in the elections with solid programmes, offer concrete solutions to the problems our country faces on the external and internal contours. And at local elections, they need to raise issues of concern for people on the ground. Voters will have a chance to get to know their potential candidates. No one needs campaigning for the sake of campaigning. It is high-quality work at your post that is the best campaign for yourself. To put it simply, the campaign stage of an election is a period of communication. And for voters, it is an opportunity to consciously make their choice in the interests of the Republic of Belarus and our people."

Economic numbers are an impartial indicator of the development of society



The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko,

“Let me remind you once again why there is such pressure and demand on my part. I will put it straight: if you do not want to fight with weapons — fight in the field, at the plant and at the factory, instead. Our war goes not through Ukraine, but through the economy, through us.”

At a meeting at the Palace of Independence, on October 20th, 2022



A sign of strength and health

The welfare of a country and its citizens is often a rather subjective concept. However, there are quite objective scientific methods to assess its level. At a seminar meeting held on January 17th at the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Belarus, Director of the Research Economic Institute of the Ministry of Economy, Candidate of Economic Sciences, Associate Professor Natalia Berchenko presented the report *Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus. The Main Achievements of Sovereign Belarus*. Its provisions clearly demonstrate the main trends in this area.

By Maksim Osipov

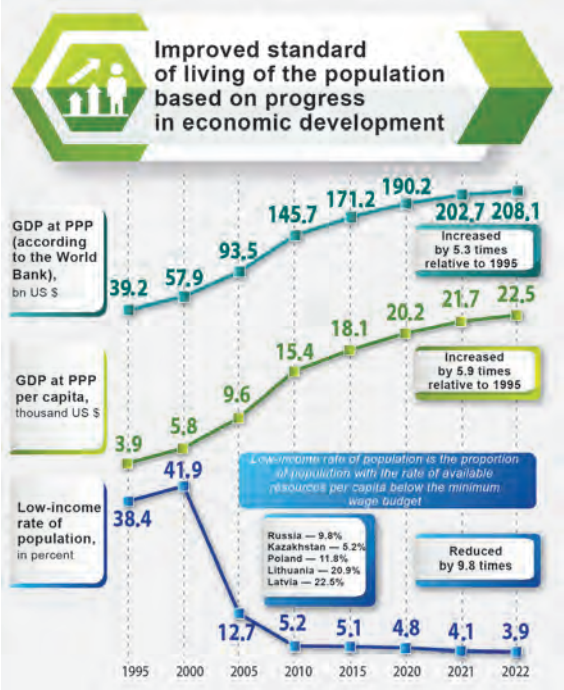
It is worth noting that at the end of 2023, a discussion was arranged on the sidelines of the Business Community Forum dedicated to the development of a National Strategy for Sustainable Development until 2040. It was at this discussion that Natalia Berchenko spoke about global trends that affect sustainable development,

“It is to be developed for five years. This is the next stage — until 2040. It is based on the concept of global sustainability, which includes the coordinated development of the economy in the interests of man without harming the environment.”

The Director of the Economic Research Institute put emphasis on global trends that affect sustainable development, “They include the destruction of the unipolar world economic and political system led by the United States, the transition to a new technological way of living, the global growth of the world’s population with a change in its age and cultural and religious structure, the increasing importance of the environmental agenda for humanity, as well as the polarisation of society in terms of worldview, competencies, income, models, strategies and lifestyle. It is necessary to think about how to use these trends in the interests of our country and reduce the risks to ensure the sustainable development of Belarus.”

A decent head start

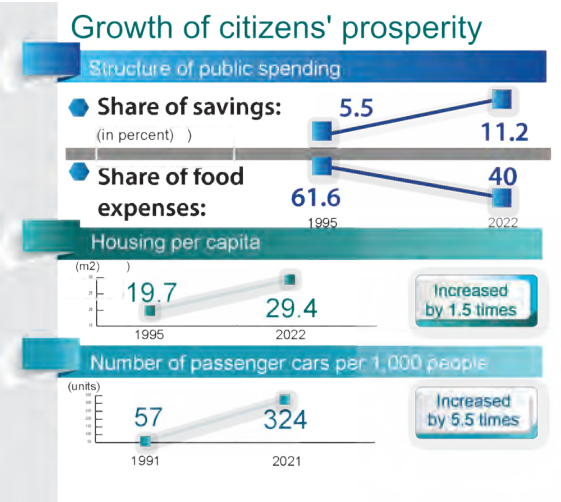
This is particularly true considering that Belarus has a decent head start, as you can see from our graphic material. Recently, the Ministry of Economy summed up the results of 2023. It was noted that the economic growth last year was balanced, which ensured the solution of three main tasks — outstripping growth in household in-



come, low inflation and high employment. Moreover, the slowdown in inflation last year exceeded all expectations.

In general, the Belarusian economy has demonstrated a high degree of adaptability to the changing operating conditions, as well as the successful containment of inflationary processes, which is a clear sign of its strength and health.

The situation on the outer contour is different. According to the Chinese tabloid newspaper “Huanqiu shibao”:



“The United States and Europe have not got rid of the risk of inflation and in general hover on the edge of recession, which also seriously affects the prospects for the global economy. Nevertheless, the West’s focus on reducing the threat of recession seems to be far less than the enthusiasm for geopolitical confrontation.”

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY INSTITUTION AND QUALITATIVE GROWTH OF HUMAN POTENTIAL

Life expectancy at birth in 2022 — 73.5 years
target indicator of NSDS-2035 — at least 80.2 years by 2035

Multi-child families: over 121 thousand — 2022 as of 01.08.2023 — 122.7 thousand
2019 — 105.7 thousand (growth of 116%)

97.6% — availability of high-quality medical services in 2022

68.1% — the share of general secondary education institutions supplied with modern teaching aids and educational equipment for classrooms in 2022

73.0% — the share of updated educational standards in the total number of vocational education specialties

76.8% of children and youth aged 6–18 were provided with additional education in 2022 target indicator of NSDS-2035 — at least 79% by 2035



ECONOMY

Workers in the agricultural sector of Germany, France, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, the Netherlands, some regions of Belgium and Austria went out on strike. They have been joined by farmers from Spain, Italy and Latvia. France is rocked by protests across almost the entire country — 85 out of 96 departments. Its capital is blocked, too. The strikes in Lithuania are going on locally and only at weekends for now. Yet, a wave of outrage has been growing since the beginning of the year. Farmers from different countries flock to Brussels to express their claims to the European Parliament directly...

By Alena Krasovskaya

Problems in common

In June 2022, the European Union agreed to temporarily lift the import duty on Ukrainian agricultural products and open duty-free corridors for its transportation to other countries. The decision was unprecedented — the EU had always jealously defended access to its market. However, the critical thinking of European officials, obsessed with assistance to Ukraine, completely let them down.

As a result, agricultural products flooded into EU countries bringing down prices and putting local farmers in conditions where they were forced to sell their own goods significantly below cost. Just in the first year of such ‘care for Ukraine’, 29.5 million tonnes of Ukrainian corn, wheat, rapeseed and sunflower were imported to EU countries.

Due to the fact that land transportation, by railway and road transport, is much more expensive than sea transportation, it was profitable for Ukraine to sell its agricultural products without moving far from its borders. Thus, out of 29.5 million tonnes, 38.2 percent (11.3 million tonnes) of imported goods entered the countries bordering Ukraine. In Poland alone, 3.93 million tonnes of Ukrainian wheat worth €201m, rapeseed for €414m, corn for €556m and sunflower for €482m were purchased during this period.

In total, according to Eurostat, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria purchased Ukrainian wheat, rapeseed, corn and sunflower for the sum of €4.03bn just in the first year. The EU countries, which do not have a common border with Ukraine, did not fall behind much.

Another 16.7 million tonnes of Ukrainian wheat and corn were delivered to EU countries as part of the *Black Sea Grain*

Protests gather steam

The dissatisfaction of European farmers with the policy of Brussels officials is spilling out onto the streets



Initiative that, despite promising to feed the starving countries of Africa and Asia, turned out to cater for Europe’s needs more.

Furthermore, a conflict is already brewing in the EU over the import of Ukrainian sugar — French sugar beet producers demand that it be re-exported outside Europe. This is because, just like in the case of grain, Ukrainian sugar on the European market deprives local producers of the chance to sell their products at reasonable prices.

On top of that, the European Union imposed sanctions against Belarusian and Russian fertilisers shortly after the start of the special military operation. As a result, the prices for fertilisers skyrocketed, which made local agricultural products even more expensive.

The Green Deal adopted in the EU also dealt a blow to agriculture. Its absurdity led to the fact that in the Netherlands, one of the world’s largest exporters of agricultural products, they started to talk about the need... to close livestock farms altogether. Allegedly, they emit too much nitrogen into the atmosphere. Also, meat can be made from vegetable ingredients...

They ‘took it into account’

The EU spends billions of euro on military support to Ukraine taking away this money from the economies of their own countries. The proposal to extend a special permit for Ukraine for expanded access to the EU market until June 2025 became the last straw for European farmers. That is, European officials are ready to completely finish off their own agricultural sector in the next two years.

Under the same brand of assistance to

Kiev, EU countries are raising taxes, reducing subsidies, eliminating support programmes for their own citizens and national businesses, as well as introducing additional restrictions and prohibitions. Already affected, farmers are unable not only to adapt, but to exist in the conditions offered to them by Brussels. And calls to support Ukraine at the cost of their own well-being only irritate European peasants and push them to take active action.

Farmer protests in the European Union are not uncommon, yet the demonstrations of 2024 have become the largest in the entire existence of the EU. More so, they continue to snowball. Blocked kilometres of roads and border crossings, burning tyres and bales of straw, manure that villagers use to generously fertilise the streets, prefecture buildings, town halls and catering establishments, foreign trucks with agricultural products, which are now being unloaded directly on the roads — all of this is surging up and threatens to move into a phase of violent confrontation. Military equipment has already been deployed on the streets of Paris against the discontented. It is peaceful so far, but one spark is enough.

Sooner or later, the European Union and national governments will have to either make concessions to the protesters, or use force to remove farmers from the streets. There is nothing to make concessions with — billions of euro have been pumped into Ukraine and EU countries have no money left to save their own economy. Also, any concessions are fraught with the fact that the next day, protesters will be joined by workers from other sectors of economy causing the situation to escalate exponentially, up to a complete and uncontrollable chaos, on the verge of which the European Union has been balancing for the second year.

In the meantime, the EU leadership ‘took into account the concerns of farmers in a number of countries’ related to the unrestricted import of Ukrainian agricultural

products. This was stated by Polish Agriculture Minister Czeslaw Siekierski on January 23rd after a meeting of the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council.

European agricultural manufacturers do not want to tolerate it anymore. Just because another five to ten billion for Ukraine, ten million tonnes of Ukrainian agricultural products on the EU market, and there will be no more farmers in the European Union. Hence they are on strike hoping that European officials will hear them. Yet, hopes seem to be in vain — the European Union, which has undertaken to orchestrate an arms race for Ukraine, is no longer able to hear anyone, even their own citizens who need help.

TO THE POINT

Belarus and Russia continue to build mutually beneficial co-operation in the agricultural sector. In particular, the volume of chicken eggs supplies from our country to Russia is growing convincingly. According to the results of 11 months last year, Belarus accounted for 94.1 percent of import of these products, said Alexey Polishchuk, Head of the Russian Foreign Ministry’s Second Department of the CIS countries.

The President of Belarus, while visiting the First National Trade House in Minsk, instructed our food manufacturers to share chicken eggs with Russians. When speaking about the shortage of eggs in Russia, Sergei Bartosh, Head of the Agriculture and Food Ministry, noted that we are ready to supply the available surplus of chicken eggs and meat to Russia.

Based on the results of 2022, Belarus accounted for 71 percent of total poultry meat imports to Russia. Over the 11 months of last year, the quantitative indicators of supplies increased by 5.3 percent. The figures for food eggs are even more solid — 94.1 percent of imports to Russia, as Alexey Polishchuk noted.

Last year, the countries completed the main directions for implementation of the provisions of the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State for 2021–2023 and 28 sectoral union programmes, including those envisaging the formation of a common agricultural market and elimination of barriers to mutual trade. Now, new plans have been developed that provide for additional coordinated steps in the agricultural and food sector.



Latin America News Agency

Elena Vizzola

The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko,

"Unfortunately, humanity is at a crossroads. We have entered an era of uncertainty, unpredictability and prolonged instability. There is no longer a place on the planet where you can hide, isolate yourself and watch the ongoing processes from afar. Security has become a tangible phenomenon... The fight for a place in the world hierarchy has intensified. Strategic rivalry and competition between states have become commonplace. All this is accompanied by an increase in tension and confrontation that have already started to go off scale."

From the State of the Nation Address to the Belarusian people and the National Assembly, on April 24th, 2018

By Anton Popov

Border passions

It goes without saying that the most attention is riveted on this topic in the context of the situation in Texas. Let us recall that since January 11th, a new round of struggle between the state administration and the federal government in Washington has flared up. The Texas National Guard took control of the most problematic border section with Mexico in Shelby Park, in the town of Eagle Pass on the banks of the Rio Grande River. Federal border guards, who set up a real camp for illegal immigrants there, were forced out. Eleven days later, the U.S. Supreme Court decided to remove a 30-mile-long (about 48 km) wire fence on the USA-Mexico border in Texas installed as part of Governor Greg Abbott's fight against the influx of migrants. However, things have not budged an inch — the governor refused to obey the decisions from the capital and declared a state of emergency in the state, starting to recruit volunteers to help the National Guard. Another 25 Republican governors expressed their solidarity with Abbott, and 10 of them, according to local media reports, sent their subordinate units to Texas.

One of the signs of the emerging multipolar world is deglobalisation and creation of new centres of power, the very 'poles' around which independent states are concentrated. However, this process holds another, more particular but no less interesting one — the strengthening of centrifugal forces inside large and not very large countries. This trend has many guises — from decentralisation to open separatism. And while there is a redistribution of spheres of influence and a new anti-colonial struggle in the big world is ongoing, there is also unrest on local fronts...

Separatist movements are gaining strength in the United States and Europe

The Texas syndrome

The situation turned out to be in a state of limbo. The federal centre has been at a loss after Texas ignored the ultimatum to remove the barriers and let the Border Guard into Shelby Park until the morning of January 26th.

Democratic senators from Texas have called on Biden to put the Texas National Guard under federal control, but this request has remained unanswered so far. It is known that the White House under Biden tends to make rather unorthodox decisions, yet they are clearly not ready to head for such a confrontation.

Get up, Texas?

While the National Guard is building new lines of defence and the Vice Governor of the state, Dan Patrick, threatens to wrap the entire border with Mexico with barbed wire (which is almost three thousand kilometres), supporters of state independence have sharply intensified in Texas. Just a month ago, when this epic was only reaching its peak, the people of Texas collected 139 thousand signatures in favour of holding a referendum on the state's independence in November in parallel with the presidential elections. The Austin authorities rejected the signatures, but the very idea of gaining sovereignty continues to hover in the air.

In Texas, there is a plethora of national movements calling for the region's independence as they have accumulated a lot of complaints against the federal centre. As long as presidents are Republicans, Texans moderate their tone since the elephants' views are close to them. But when a Democrat becomes the owner of the Oval Office, conversations about the creation of the Texas Republic sharply intensify. Separatist communities oppose the LGBT agenda, loathe feminism, and cannot tolerate the eco-friendly politics claiming that it will eventually bring an end to the famous Texas beef farming and oil industry.

Nevertheless, it is premature to say that Texas will secede right now, with a number of states following its suit (judging by the Republicans' determination), which will split the country into two.

Statements by such figures as member of the House of Representatives Marjorie Taylor Greene, who called for a 'national divorce' between the red and blue states, are rather an element of large pre-election bidding than a real declaration of intent to create a new Confederation.

Europe divided

Yet, centrifugal tendencies in the Western world shall not live by Texas alone. Let us fast forward closer to our native penates — there are also plenty of regions in Western Europe that gravitate towards independence.

When they talk about independence movements west of the Belarusian borders, they first of all recall Great Britain with

its Irish and Scottish problems, and Spain where rebellious Catalonia and the Basque Country periodically revolt. All these problems have been around for a long time in a smouldering format. Sometimes there happen exacerbations, such as in the spring of 2017, when the Catalans held a referendum on secession from Spain.

Today, the national liberation movement in Northern Ireland is fragmented, which does not allow small groups to exert any serious influence on British politics, as it was during the confrontation in the middle of the last century. In addition, violence, towards which radicals gravitate, is no longer perceived unambiguously positively by part of the population and Republican politicians. For example, the Saoradh party carefully dissociates itself from any links with the New IRA members.

The Scottish problem also creates a headache for London,

though of a slightly different nature. Edinburgh politicians are trying to resolve the issue peacefully by initiating referendums. The first attempt in 2014 was unsuccessful — 55.3 percent of Scots opposed secession from the United Kingdom. In 2022, the Scots tried to launch the preparation procedure for a plebiscite once again. However, the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom unanimously ruled that, in accordance with the Scotland Act of 1998, the Scottish Parliament does not have the right to pass bills on issues related to the constitutional structure of the United Kingdom.

France has its hot spot, too. This refers to Corsica, where Corsican National Liberation Front operates. It seeks either broad autonomy or full independence of the island and recognition of Corsicans as a separate people from the French. In 2014, the front announced the transition from power-based methods of struggle to diplomacy, yet in 2022 it took responsibility for 16 attacks altogether. Since then, the situation in Corsica has remained tense — France is not ready to grant independence to the island, although autonomy and broad concessions are already under discussion.

The intensification of separatist sentiments in the West during the period of global instability we are experiencing now can also be explained by the disagreement of the population of certain regions with the policies pursued by government groups.

Indeed, why should Texas participate in Pan-American risk-taking activities that recently have had a tendency to end up with regular failures for the hegemon? Or why should any other region suffer economic losses just because the country's leadership decided to play sanctions roulette and unexpectedly shot itself in the foot? It is quite possible that nation states that have not yet been born would have chosen a different course of development, more constructive than the one that the entire West eventually embarked on. Therefore, it can be stated that centrifugal processes will continue to intensify further, giving rise to new hotbeds of tension.



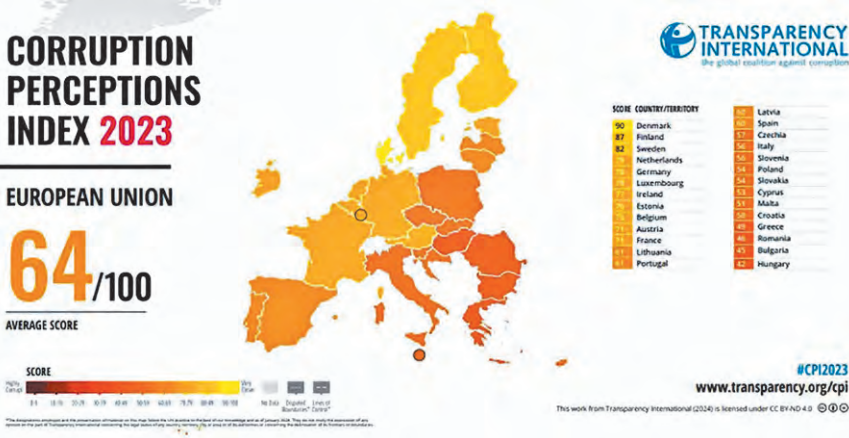
Corruption has become a growing problem in Europe

Transparency International’s latest Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) looked at 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption on a scale of zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).

According to the report, experts and business people find that the world’s least corrupt country is Denmark, followed closely by Finland and New Zealand in second and third place respectively.

Despite placing well in the overall list, several high-ranking democracies, such as Sweden (82), the Netherlands (79), Iceland (72) and the UK (71), recorded their lowest-ever scores in the annual CPI since it was first released in 2012.

“The fall of the regional CPI score in Western Europe and the EU demon-



strates that European governments need to take the fight against corruption and upholding the rule of law more seriously,” said Flora Cresswell, Transparency International’s Western Europe regional co-ordinator. “Rollbacks on checks and balances leave the door open to corruption. Countries must raise their standards and better enforce their own rules to step up efforts against corruption, shielding the justice system from interference and putting a backstop to powerful interest groups in politics.”

Anti-corruption efforts have either stagnated or declined in over three-quarters of the countries in the region, according to Transparency International.

When compared to their scores in the 2015 CPI, Austria (71), Luxembourg (78), Sweden (82) and the United King-

dom (71) have declined significantly.

Poland (54) has also seen a seven-point decline over the past decade due to ‘efforts by the previous ruling Law and Order (PiS) party to monopolise power at the expense of public interest’, said the report. It also highlighted that Greece (49) scored very low on the 2023 list due to its weak judicial independence.

However, even top-scoring countries have trouble curbing corruption in the public sector, according to the report, noting that they ‘have a poor record of prosecuting companies that pay bribes to win foreign markets’.

In fact, Transparency International’s analysis found that access to information about companies’ real owners was significantly restricted for civil society and journalists across the EU.

Medical bills driving millions into poverty

A new report from the World Health Organisation (WHO) shows that millions of people in Europe are struggling to pay their medical bills

The WHO has recently released a new study that looks at healthcare systems across 40 European countries, focusing on their pre-pandemic state.

The overall conclusions are particularly downbeat, showing that millions of Europeans are experiencing health-care-related financial difficulties.

The phenomenon is notably driven by the expectation that patients must make upfront, out-of-pocket payments, even if these fees will be reimbursed at a later stage.

Many patients will therefore forgo treatment where they can, meaning that Europe is witnessing a high volume of unmet medical needs.

The WHO classes spending as ‘catastrophic’ when the out-of-pocket amount a household pays for healthcare exceeds 40 percent of its capacity to pay for medical bills.

The rate of catastrophic health spending ranges across the continent, but the situation is most critical in Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine, where over 14 percent of households are affected by this issue.

Countries that have the lowest incidence of catastrophic health spending, recorded at under 2 percent, include Ireland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

The World Health Organisation also shows that across the 40 countries studied, those in the most disadvantaged households are more likely to make medical payments that eat into their spending budgets.



National park on fire

A forest fire in Argentina’s Los Alerces National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site in the Patagonian Province of Chubut, had destroyed 2,300 hectares of land, official sources from the park’s administration said

The fire has been burning since late January, and adverse weather conditions — especially strong gusts of wind and high midsummer temperatures — have at times interrupted firefighting efforts.

Authorities confirmed that the fire broke out in two different areas of the park and that the causes remain under investigation as arson is suspected.

Some 250 personnel from the federal government, the National Park Service, and the provinces of Chubut and Córdoba are in the area fighting the flames in the seven sectors affected by the fire.

In addition, two water-dropping planes and three helicopters have been deployed, and an amphibious plane also joined the operation.

According to the director of operations of the National Fire Service, Andrés Bosch, 70 percent of the areas affected by the flames are inside the protected area.

But Otaño, the ranger, said the fires have mostly destroyed transitional Andean vegetation and not the protected larch trees, native conifers of the Argentine and Chilean Patagonian forests that give the park its name.

Located in the province of Chubut, about 2,000km from Buenos Aires, Los Alerces National Park extends over 259,822 hectares. In 2017, the park was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in part because of ‘its impressive scenic beauty’ and as ‘the habitat for a number of endemic and threatened species’.

Renovations fuel outrage

Egypt’s Menkaure pyramid — the smallest of the three main pyramids at Giza — is already starting to look different as workers attempt to give the ancient structure a facelift by lining the pyramid in large granite blocks

For Mostafa Waziri, the Head of Egypt’s Supreme Council of Antiquities, renovating Egypt’s pyramid of Menkaure is ‘the project of the century’ — but his opponents have insisted the ordeal is nothing short of horrifying.

Waziri shared video footage of labourers setting rows of granite blocks at the base of the pyramid in front of a curious crowd of onlookers.

According to Agence France-Presse, the renovation project was enacted in an attempt to resurrect the pyramid’s original appearance, as it was once encased in an external layer of granite that has been lost over time.

The video has already attracted outrage from both members of the international archaeological community and people who oppose altering the iconic pyramids.

“Impossible!” Egyptologist Monica Hanna wrote. “The only thing missing was to add tiling to the pyramid of Menkaure! When are we going to stop the absurdity in the management of Egyptian heritage?”

Hanna said the international archaeological community should ‘mobilise immediately’ in response to the renovations.

Other laymen critics of the project chided in the comments of Waziri’s post that he may try to correct the leaning Tower of Pisa’s famous tilt next.



Materials prepared with aid of information agencies



The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko,

“NATO’s neighbours on the western flank are rapidly arming themselves. Poland’s military budget, for example, is growing by leaps and bounds and is expected to reach 4 percent of GDP next year. I wonder how this correlates with their constant declarations about the defensive nature of the alliance. Or with the name of the announced NATO exercise Steadfast Defender, the largest one since the Cold War. It does not correlate in any way.”

At the session of the CSTO Collective Security Council in a narrow format, Minsk, on November 23rd, 2023

The hatchet of war

The largest military drills of NATO countries since the late 1980s called *Steadfast Defender–2024* kicked off on the territory of Germany, Poland and the Baltic States. According to the official statement of the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, US Army General Christopher Cavoli, 90 thousand military personnel from 32 countries will take part in it from January to May. The exercise will work out algorithms for the implementation of regional defence plans by NATO armies, allegedly against the Russian invasion. It is expected that the World War III will be rehearsed in full — from the beginning of the conflict to the arrival of American reinforcements on the continent.

By Anton Popov

Para bellum

A one hundred thousand corps, which will train to fight with the Union State troops at the training grounds of Poland and the Baltic States during the winter and spring, includes 80 aircraft units as well as 1,100 combat vehicles, including 133 tanks and 533 infantry fighting vehicles. In addition, on March 3rd–14th, NATO’s *Nordic Response–2024* naval exercise will be held near the Norwegian cities of Bjerkvik and Tromsø. It will involve 20,000 alliance troops and 50 warships, including aircraft carriers (most likely British), submarines, destroyers and landing craft.

It is expected that the main activities of NATO troops will be concentrated around the Suwalki corridor, a narrow strip of land on the border of Lithuania and Poland.

According to the plans of Western strategists, a hundred kilometre stretch of the territory separating Belarus from Kaliningrad Region of the Russian Federation is to become the site of the first major battle field in the upcoming conflict between the Union State and the North Atlantic Alliance.

‘You will hear of wars and rumours of war’

References to a direct clash between the armies of NATO and the Union State have been increasingly flashing in the Western media lately. At the end of last year and the beginning of this year, a number of high-ranking military and civilian figures in Europe made frightening predictions about the timing for the onset of the impending storm.

Thus, German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius, who is considered to be the most likely candidate for the post of a new chancellor, has repeatedly stated that a military conflict between the alliance and Moscow may occur by the end of the 2020s. Recently, he has raised this topic again noting that German experts consider a 5–8 year period that separates Berlin from the armed confrontation to be real.

The need to be prepared for a possible conflict was pointed out by the Commander of the Dutch army, Lieutenant General Martin Wijnen, who said that the country

should have ‘sufficient deterrents’ against a possible adversary. Finally, Swedes were urged to be ready for the possible outbreak of war with Russia by Civil Defence Minister Carl-Oskar Bohlin and the Commander-in-Chief of the Swedish Armed Forces, Mikael Buden.

Belligerent tirades are also heard from across the ocean. U.S. President Joe Biden stated in his address to the nation on October 20th, 2023 that if the United States stops supplying weapons to Ukraine, Russia will not stop and will invade Poland or the Baltic States. The Chair of the NATO Military Committee, Rob Bauer stressed during his conversation with journalists, following the meeting of the heads of defence departments of the alliance countries in Brussels, that the armed forces need to be ready for combat, and the civilian population needs to prepare for a conflict that will radically change their lives.

The corridor of discord

As already emphasised above, the strategic thought of NATO generals revolves around the Suwalki corridor. On the one hand, if the West decides on a land, air and sea blockade of Kaliningrad, the issue of restoring the route by military force will rise to its full height. There are about 100 kilometres from the Belarusian border to the borders of Kaliningrad Region, and this is the shortest way.

The hysteria around the possible direction for the first strike clearly shows the ‘corridor’ thinking of Western strategists. The fairly outdated concepts of the Polish and Fulda corridors are used to escalate the situation. The first became one of the reasons for Adolf Hitler to invade Poland at the start of the World War II, the other remained for many decades the most likely place for the Cold War to escalate into a ‘hot’ conflict. Now the scenarios of the last century are obviously being transferred to the current realities.

The hysteria of the Western establishment broadcast by the media looks especially suspicious against the background of the fact that both Aleksandr Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin have repeatedly said that the Union State is not going to attack NATO first.

Commenting on the statements of the European Union’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, during his visit to St. Petersburg on December 25th, 2023, the Belarusian leader called such statements ‘nonsense’ and asked a rhetorical question, “Do we need a new war today?” referring to the unresolved conflict in Ukraine.

The Head of Russia has a similar position. Vladimir Putin dismissed Biden’s assertions that after the victory in Ukraine, Moscow is going to invade Poland or the Baltic States as ‘complete nonsense’, adding that ‘Russia has no reason, no interest — no geopolitical interest, neither economic, political nor military — to fight with NATO countries.’

Nothing personal, just business

However, the rise of hysteria in the West is evident. Where do the roots of this phenomenon stem from and what threat is it fraught with in the near future? Firstly, tension is beneficial to the highest ranks of the army and the leadership of the military industrial complex. Above all, it involves big money that is already pouring into the defence sector. According to the report by the German Society for Foreign Policy, Germany’s defence budget will increase by €1.7bn this year and will amount to €51.8bn. Along with that, Germany’s total defence spending will reach €78bn. Thus, Germany is going to reach the cherished target of 2 percent of GDP, which NATO members must spend on military needs in accordance with the decisions of the Vilnius summit.

At the same time, Germany is far from being the first in the militarization race. For example, it falls behind neighbouring Poland, which, even after a change of government, is in no hurry to abandon plans on creating a powerful army. Warsaw is planning to funnel 4.2 percent of GDP to the military sector this year, which will equal to about \$40bn. More than half of this money will be spent on upgrading the old military equipment and purchasing the new one.

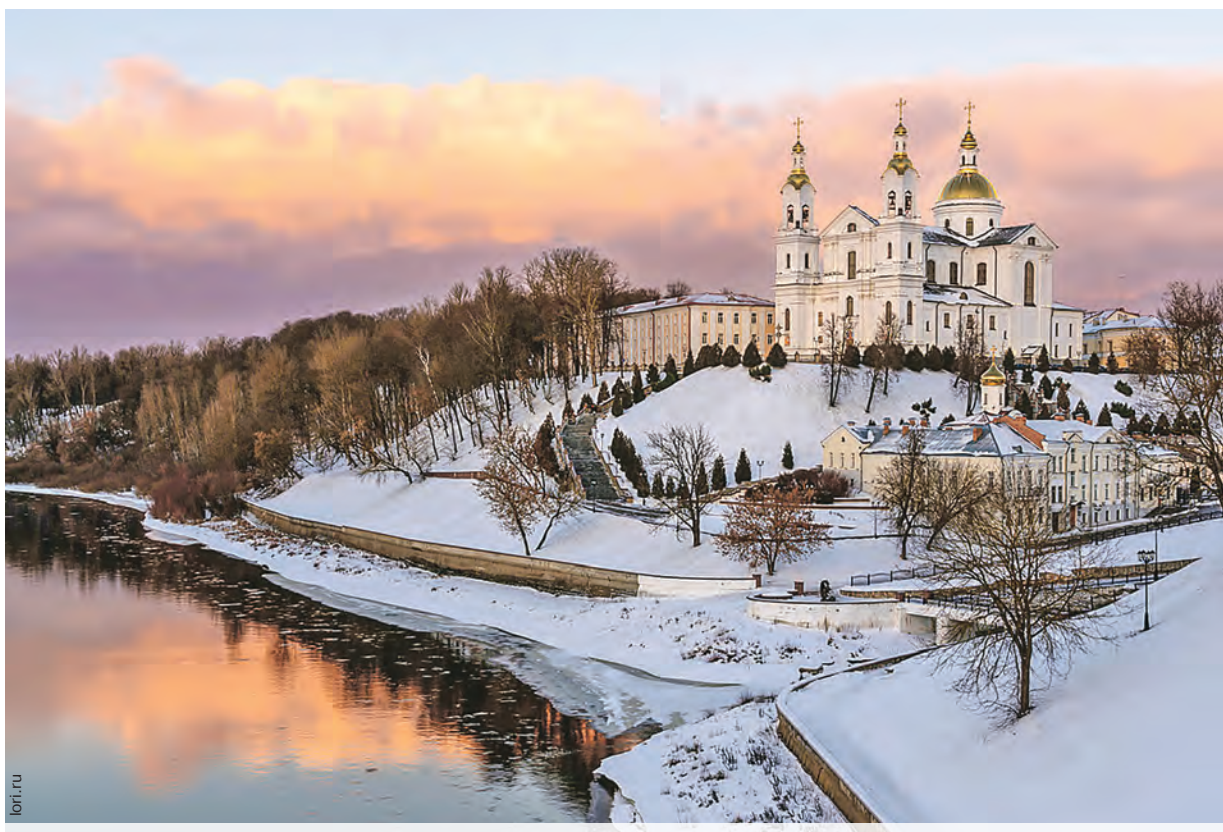
Secondly, continuing military drills can, alas, turn to be a preparation for aggression against Belarus and Russia. All the more so as there are obvious signs of preparation for such a scenario. It is worth recalling the training of militants to be thrown into Belarus and Russia, the attempts to sway public opinion with the help of targeted information campaigns as well as the exploration of a potential theatre of military operations under the guise of border manoeuvres.

It would be premature to say that war is inevitable. Actions aimed at preventing a negative scenario are underway both in Belarus and Russia. They include the stationing of tactical nuclear weapons in our country, army modernisation, its saturation with modern weapons as well as the development of a new Military Doctrine and a new version of the National Security Concept. The main task is to keep the peace, yet, in case the West does cross the ‘red lines’, to have ready-made answers.



Northern capital of Belarus

Vitebsk is often compared to St. Petersburg — it has a harsh climate, luxurious bridges and a rich cultural life



lori.ru

The best selfie is on the background of the Uspenskaya Mountain

Love blue like Chagall

When we talk about Vitebsk, we mean the Russian avant-garde. At the local art school, Marc Chagall and Kazimir Malevich turned over students’ ideas about painting and architecture. Yet, in public consciousness, the city is more often associated specifically with Chagall. His childhood memories, acquaintance with Bella, the opening of an art school and even work with leaflets — all this is reflected in the works of the avant-garde artist. “Paris, you are my Vitebsk!” the great artist did not hesitate to make such comparisons.

Fabulously expensive paintings by Chagall with views of his native city have spread across continents, and modern Vitebsk pleasantly surprises fans of his work. The house on Pokrovskaya Street, where the genius grew up, has been preserved. There are cornflower blue objects there everywhere — Marc Chagall was a great lover of the blue colour. Also, you can admire the authentic works in the art centre named after him. The place was chosen not by chance — a distinctive red house is depicted in one of the most famous paintings *Above the City*.

By Sofia Arsenyeva

Go back to the past

The city on the Dvina River is great in summer — the *Slavic Bazaar* will make you have fun until dawn. Yet, in winter Vitebsk has a different atmosphere. Years ago, Ivan Bunin wrote about it, “I arrived in the evening. It was frosty and bright. It was very snowy everywhere, peaceful and clean, pristine. The city seemed ancient and non-Russian to me — tall houses merged together, with steep roofs, small windows, deep and rough semicircular gates in the lower floors....”

Follow Bunin’s route: go from the railway station to the historical city centre. Here you will see the ancient Town Hall, the Baroque-style Holy Assumption Cathedral, and cobbled streets. The views of the river banks from the Kirovsky and Pushkin Bridges are like postcards from the beginning of the last century.

Party like Napoleon

It is known that in 1812, the French emperor stayed in Vitebsk for two weeks. “Let’s stop here! I have to pull myself together. The 1812 campaign is over.” Napoleon really was not planning to stick his nose further into the Dvina.

However, the fate of Grande Armée was decided by champagne! On the occasion of his 43rd birthday, Bonaparte threw a party at the Governor’s palace, which played a cruel joke on him. Just in the middle of the evening, unexpectedly for everyone, he went out on the balcony and called on all supporters to move to Moscow. What happened next is a well-known story.

The Governor-General’s palace with the same balcony has been preserved to this day. You can even get there with an excursion — ask for tickets at the local history museum.

Unleash your emotions

A cultural city offers the same kind of rest. Four theatres in Belarus have the national theatre status — three in Minsk and one in Vitebsk — the Yakub Kolas National Academic Drama Theatre. The luxurious building with columns is located in the heart of the northern capital.

Its almost century-old history began in Moscow, where Belarusian artists honed their skills in a specially created studio at the Moscow Art Theatre. In 1926, they presented the first performance for the Vitebsk audience. A massive hit and the hallmark of the theatre is ‘Nesterka’. This comedy has been in the repertoire for over eight decades and is still relevant.



BELTA

Alexander and Alexandra have been together for centuries



In the Yakub Kolas National Academic Drama Theatre, young talents shine together with people’s and honoured artists

Find traces of Alexander Nevsky

Vitebsk is home to one of the most unusual monuments to the ancient Russian prince — he is not with a loyal squad, and even without a horse here. Alexander Nevsky is depicted with his eldest son in his arms and his beloved wife Alexandra Bryachislavna. It makes sense — the prince’s wife came from this place.

The city has an ancient history. The legend says that it was founded in the tenth century by Princess Olga. She chose an excellent location — on the most important trade route from the Varangians to the Greeks. In the 11–12th centuries, the city was subordinated to the princes of Polotsk, Kiev, Chernigov, and Smolensk. There was a stronghold on the Zamkovaya Mountain, with settlements of artisans and merchants at its foot. The only stone building in ancient Vitebsk was the Holy Annunciation Church. Nowadays, only its reconstruction can be seen in the centre. You will find the princely couple in bronze right in front of it.

Games of the Future kick off in Kazan on February 21st. About 2,000 people will take part in the event — 277 teams from 107 countries have submitted applications. They will compete in 21 disciplines. For example, in the *Sports* category or challenge (that’s how the organisers call it), participants will first compete in computer games and then on real sports grounds. In other challenges, they need to play speed games or demonstrate their supremacy using various devices and developments, such as drones, robots, VR technologies. Belarusians are also getting ready for *Games of the Future*.

Forward, to the future!



At the monitors — Exponenta Team, with the ball — its leader Kirill Volodkin



Kazan to host a tournament that will combine sports, science and technology

By Tatiana Pastushenko

“Four athletes from our country will participate in the tournament. Alexander Kovalev will compete in phygital martial arts, and the Exponenta Team — in phygital basketball,” says Andrey Makarenko, Executive Director of the Belarusian Federation of Pankration and Mixed Martial Arts, who is in charge of the team preparation for *Games of the Future*. “Our guys participated in test competitions and performed well. The MMA team took second place in the team standings, and the basketball players reached the playoffs.”

There was no selection process for *Games of the Future* within the country — little is known about the phygital direction yet. Last autumn, the first republican team tournament *Sport of the Future* was held in Minsk, where participants first fought in the *Mortal Kombat* computer game, and then in pankration. Andrey Makarenko recalls how it all started,

“When considering the development of a new direction, we turned to the Belarus President’s Sport Club with an initiative. We were warmly supported, and together we began to hold a series of events on phygital martial arts — and not only among adult athletes, but purposefully for all ages. I must admit, when we were arranging the first tournament in Falcon Club, it was not easy to explain to colleagues from regions how it would be held. It was not easy to assemble teams, either. Yet, we received a very good response after the first tournament. Athletes, coaches, and parents got encouraged. Everyone liked the high-level event, with a solemn appearance of athletes, presenters and cool gifts (children were presented with sports gear and valuable prizes). After that, we had to conduct selections for the tournaments — there were so many people who wanted to participate. Now they often call us from the

regions to ask for guidance in opening phygital MMA groups — in terms of equipment, rules and training for athletes. We are pleased that we have managed to catch the interest of teenagers, who make the most difficult category to retain in sports.”

After *Games of the Future* in Kazan, interest in the new format will surely become even greater. The athletes representing our country will compete in the Sport challenge. Alexander Kovalev, the winner of the MMA and pankration World championships, one of the top fighters of our country, who plays in the ACA league, will first play *Mortal Kombat* and then meet with rivals in the octagon. The competitions in phygital MMA will be team-based, and Alexander will perform in a multinational team. The Exponenta Team basketball players will have to compete with rivals in computer NBA, and then go out on the court. While the guys have no questions about the sports part, they are preparing for the virtual component of the competition in a special way.

“Our partner CyberX has taken over the training of athletes. They have been assigned coaches, under



whose guidance they are practising. This is not just a game for the sake of interest, but the execution of specific tasks. By the way, the guys did not think it would turn out to be rather challenging. Yet, we see now that their skills are growing by leaps and bounds,” Andrey Makarenko noted. “The same athletes will play the console and go out on the court at *Games of the Future*, so they should be strong in both components of the competition. This rule was introduced for a reason — during the test starts, there were cases when guys playing for hockey teams could play the console very well, but then could not skate up to the middle of the ice rink.”

Andrey Makarenko has no doubt that the second Games of the Future, which are likely to be hosted in China, will bring together even more participants,

“I think that promotion of this direction is a very good, necessary and relevant idea. It may trigger a new round in the development of various sports. Today, there is an outflow of young people from sports, and phygital can become the mechanism that will help stir up the sphere and attract people to training. Children nowadays spend a lot of time on computers, so perhaps participating in such competitions motivates them to do real sports. The world strives for digitalisation, and we must keep up with the times. Our federation has started to develop phygital martial arts, and now we co-operate with other organisations. We want to show our colleagues and residents of our country that a new direction has appeared, which is interesting to young people and which, I will repeat myself, will help attract them to sports clubs.”



Alexander Kovalev (left) is preparing for Games of the Future

TO THE POINT

The *Games of the Future* prize fund is a total of \$10m. Almost half, \$4.8m will be distributed among representatives of the *Sport* challenge. Thus, in phygital football and phygital basketball they will contend for \$1.250m, in phygital hockey, racing, martial arts and skateboarding — \$500,000 each, and in virtual cycling and phygital BMX — \$150,000 each.



Ivan Yanvarovich

Photo of the week

Andrey Konotop, a mechanic at the Mozyr Oil Refinery, and his colleagues from transport workshop turn scrap metal into works of art

DATES. EVENTS. PEOPLE.



February 2nd is World Wetlands Day. On February 2nd, 1971, the Convention on Wetlands was signed in Ramsar, Iran. Wetlands,

along with forests, are the most important oxygen regenerators. The main value of wetlands is the ability to accumulate water and improve its quality. The Republic of Belarus joined the Ramsar Convention in 1999. The Sporovsky Republican Biological Reserve is the first territory that was included in the list of wetlands of international importance.

February 2nd

is Sled Dog Day. There are about 20 varieties of sled dog breeds, the most famous of which are Husky, Laika and Malamute. All of them continue to faithfully serve man in harsh natural climatic conditions, where even modern special machinery sometimes turns out to be powerless. Sled dogs began to serve humans millennia ago, which is confirmed by excavations. Both poles of the Earth were conquered on dog sleds. In 1909, Robert Peary reached the North Pole, and in 1911, Roald Amundsen reached the South Pole.



On February 2nd, 1943, the Soviet army defeated the German Fascist troops in the Battle of Stalingrad. The battle, which began on July 17th, 1942, was one of the most important events of the Second World War. The losses in this battle were huge. The troops of Nazi Germany, Romania, Italy and Hungary lost about 1.5 million people. On the Soviet side, the losses amounted to about 1.3 million soldiers and officers. At the cost of these losses, the liberation of the country and the occupied territories of Europe began. The victory of the Soviet Union in the Battle of Stalingrad became a milestone towards the final defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945. February 2nd is the Day of Military Glory of Russia.

On February 3rd, 1966, the Soviet Luna 9 spacecraft made a soft landing on the Moon for the first time in the world. After landing, the Luna 9 lunar station worked for 75 hours and gave seven communication sessions. Luna 9 transmitted a television panorama of the area to Earth. Those images taken from the height of about 1 m showed objects up to 1 mm in size. The received scientific information confirmed the theory about the 'meteor-slag' structure of the Moon's outer cover.



February 4th is the International Day of Human Fraternity. It was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly resolution in 2020. The principles of human brotherhood based on interreligious and intercultural dialogue contribute to the sustainable development of humanity while hostility, conflicts and wars impede this process.



February 5th, 1923 is the date of birth of Leonid Shchemelev (1923–2021), a famous Belarusian painter, People's Artist of Belarus. He is the author of works in the field of narrative paintings, portraits, landscapes, and still life. Among his paintings are *Difficult Years*, *The First Day of Peace*, the *My Land*, *Minsk Region* cycle, etc. He is also a laureate of the State Prize of Belarus. In 2001, Shchemelev was awarded the Order of Francysk Skaryna.

On February 6th, 1900, a radio signal about a disaster at sea was transmitted for the first time in the world. On that day, an ice floe with 50 fishermen broke off and was carried out



to sea near the Finnish island of Lavansaari. The decision was made to use the wireless telegraph of Popov's system. Popov himself transmitted the order to the Ermak icebreaker on the radio. The icebreaker immediately put to sea and successfully rescued the fishermen. This order became the first official Russian radio message. The wireless telegraph proved its reliability and was adopted by the Russian Navy.



On February 8th, 1837, a duel took place in St. Petersburg between great Russian poet Alexander Pushkin and Baron Georges de Gekkern (Dantes). It was provoked by anonymous letters hinting at the infidelity of Pushkin's wife. In the duel, Pushkin was mortally wounded in the stomach. He lightly wounded Dantes in the right arm with a return shot. A memorial obelisk has been erected at the site of the duel (the area of the Black River).

On February 8th, 1838, Samuel Morse, an American artist, publicly demonstrated his electromagnetic telegraph system for the first time. He came up with a code for transmitted signals in the form of a combination of long and short ones. The combinations of dots and dashes made up the famous Morse code.

