

Authorities are solving the problems of urbanisation by not allowing the rapid spread of the population in the country's major city



Harbinger of happiness on old town's coat of arms, or five reasons to go to amazing Lelchitsy



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Issues of global significance discussed in Chinese capital

Alexander Lukashenko paid a working visit to China. In Beijing, the President of Belarus took part in the 2nd *Belt and Road* Forum for International Co-operation.

By Vasily Tikhomirov

As the organiser of this large-scale event, China has defined the idea as one of global and tolerant qualitative growth through the effective co-ordination of joint efforts. More than 5 thousand guests from 150 countries and representatives of 90 international organisations gathered in the Chinese capital. Platforms like these always offer the possibility of bilateral contacts between heads of state.

The working programme of Mr. Lukashenko's stay in Beijing began with meetings. He held talks with the Chinese leader — Xi Jinping, Vice President Wang Qishan and the President of Uzbekistan — Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

On meeting Mr. Jinping, the Belarusian President assured his colleague that China can always count on the support of Belarus in any sphere, saying, "In the context of any trade issues and the unwillingness of some countries to see China become strong, it is especially obvious who is a real friend. Belarus has never had and will never have doubts about the initiatives you have chosen. China can always count on our support in any field, as we are always confident in yours."

Mr. Lukashenko sincerely wished Xi Jinping success with the 2nd *Belt and Road* Forum for International Co-operation. He pointed out that, thanks to the efforts of the Chinese leader, this initiative has become a useful and essential platform for regular meetings of like-minded people. The President of Belarus congratulated Mr. Jinping and all Chinese people on their significant anniversaries. Last year, China celebrated the 40th anniversary of its policy of reform and openness. In 2019, celebrations for the 70th anniversary of the creation of New China are planned.

"These political and economic successes demonstrate your role as a guarantor of the stability of the party's course and the development of China in today's unpredictable world, which is changing day by day," Mr. Lukashenko told Mr. Jinping. The President particularly noted the achievements of bilateral co-operation in recent years. Last year, trade turnover reached almost \$4.5bn. Chi-



Beijing today

na is increasingly opening up to allow Belarusian products into its market. Supplies of agricultural and food products alone have risen almost five times in a year, while sales of dairy products went up 9 times, and this has not yet reached its limit.

Belarus' Minister of Agriculture and Food, Anatoly Khotko, told journalists in Beijing that, after negotia-



Wang Qishan

tions with colleagues from the Department for Market Regulation of China and the Customs Administration of the PRC, a decision was made to allow three more Belarusian producers to sell products in this country.

"We have made progress in the supply of dry technical whey. Overall, constructive penetration into the Chinese market is being seen. The possibilities of supplies for 54 Belarusian dairy enterprises and two meat-processing plants have already been discussed. The people of China have tried our products and appreciate their quality. I think we'll increase our food supplies considerably," the Minister stated.

However, there are more significant and capital-inten-

sive joint Belarusian-Chinese projects and initiatives in the pipeline. On meeting Mr. Lukashenko, Xi Jinping noted that, in the six years since the announcement of the *Belt and Road* initiative, co-operation relating to its joint implementation has been successful. Belarus is one of the key reference points of this plan. "The Great Stone Industrial Park is one of the exemplary projects of our co-operation," he said.

Mr. Jinping admitted that Beijing and Minsk are ready to further develop opportunities for co-operation in the *Belt and Road* context — to expand and deepen bilateral relations for the benefit of the peoples of both Belarus and China. The Chinese leader also noted the great success of Belarus in state-building and in economic progress.

At the end of the meeting, the heads of state signed documents on the development of bilateral co-operation — in particular, an inter-governmental agreement on international passenger and cargo transportation and a concept for Regional Co-operation and Development within the framework of the *Belt and Road* initiative. In total, over 20 bilateral documents will be signed following this working visit.

The communication between the leaders of the two countries ended on a symbolic note. Beijing has decided to present Minsk with two significant gifts: a national football stadium and a swimming pool for international competitions. Mr. Jinping presented the

models of these structures to Mr. Lukashenko with a beautifully made vase of blue and white porcelain as his personal gift. The President of Belarus presented several books to his Chinese counterpart: these are Belarusian proverbs and sayings translated into Chinese and 4 books of Chinese poets translated into Belarusian. The Chinese leader was especially touched by the picture presented by the President featuring his home village, where the future Head of China lived and where, as he pointed out, his growth to adulthood took place.

"This is an important place for me, that's where I



Shavkat Mirziyoyev

got a very good training. It's an extremely nice present!" Mr. Jinping said, adding that Vice Chairman Wang Qishan had also once lived in another village just a hundred kilometres away from there.

In addition, according to established Belarusian tradition, Mr. Jinping was presented with a basket of Belarusian products — which are already known and loved both personally by Mr. Jinping and throughout China.

After the meeting with Mr. Jinping, the President of Belarus held talks with his Deputy — Wang Qishan. The Chinese official noted then that an 'iron bond' had been established between the leaders of Belarus and China, adding that 'it will never rust'.

Mr. Lukashenko thanked Wang Qishan for his kind words and noted that his previous meeting with Mr. Jinping was more of a protocol character. The Chinese leader has a tough schedule of contact with foreign heads these days. Nevertheless, the President noted that his visit had not only identified the main direction for bilateral co-operation, but also allowed the signing of important interstate documents.

As part of the visit to China, Mr. Lukashenko also met the President of Uzbekistan — Shavkat Mirziyoyev. During his high-level talks with his Uzbek counterpart, the President noted that our country is ready to share technology with Uzbekistan to create modern production facilities there. Mr. Lukashenko also spoke about the success of bilateral agreements between Minsk and Tashkent, "We are fulfilling the plans we previously outlined. We agreed that we would develop a 'road map' — a plan of action, and we've done this. The documents include 155 items. I wouldn't say we're lagging behind. We are focusing on turnover, which is growing at 20 percent a year. Of course, this is not the volume of trade that we could have. I think that by implementing this 'road map', we will increase trade turnover even further."

Mr. Lukashenko stressed that Minsk has great interest in the creation of the production facilities that Uzbekistan needs. In turn, Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted that the visit of the President of Belarus to Uzbekistan last year gave a powerful impetus to the development of relations between the countries. He also assured Mr. Lukashenko that the implementation of the activities of the 'road map' is being personally overseen. The Belarusian and Uzbek economies complement each other, and therefore there are many points of convergence in business interests.

‘Integration of integrations’ concept truly relevant for the whole world

What causes the greatest sympathy for the Chinese *Belt and Road* initiative? Probably the lack of dominance of the initiator of this global project over both actual and potential participants.

By Vladimir Mikhailov

Beijing does not divide the links of the *Belt and Road* into small and large, strong or weak, main and secondary. It purposefully follows one very important and, to some extent, philosophical thought. The universal truth that humanity must make progress together and only this way will we reach new heights of common civilisation. Any rivalry and confrontation alienate this goal.

This concept is close to Belarus’ views on the modern world order, emphasised by Mr. Lukashenko in his speech at the 2nd *Belt and Road* Forum for International Co-operation in Beijing. He noted, “The *Belt and Road* initiative allows us to see the wisdom of our ancestors, who have long realised that the development of a country is almost impossible without interaction with other states.”

China today proposes the formation of global and interconnected partnerships for joint development and prosperity. This statement was made by Chinese leader Xi Jinping at the opening of the large-scale summit. He called on the countries of the world to deepen practical co-operation, jointly counteract risks and challenges — thus achieving mutual benefit and sustainable joint development. Judging by the fact that 150 states and international organisations have already signed co-operation agreements with China in the context of the *Belt and Road* project, his call has been heard. Another issue is that the project is not being implemented with the same speed and intensity in different parts of the world. However, a journey of thousand miles begins with a single step.

Meanwhile, Beijing is putting significant emphasis on opening the *Belt and Road* initiative to interface with the largest international organisations and regional integration associations: the UN, ASEAN, the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union. This ties in with the idea of ‘integration of integrations’ — voiced by Minsk some time ago. It was actually a call to abandon bloc confrontation, to co-operate and connect the potential of groups of like-minded states in different parts of the world — primarily, in the trade and economic sphere.

Developing this idea, Mr. Lukashenko logically linked it with the progress of modern information technologies, “Modern technologies make the world more compact. Geographical distance is no longer such a barrier to building close partnerships as it was at the time of the creation of the *Silk Road*. With the advent of digitalisation, which brought a new speed to work with information and cash flows, it would be logical to expect significant progress in trade.”

Alas, there is an obvious problem. The President of Belarus drew attention to the fact that there are still artificially created tariff, non-tariff, technical and administrative barriers to the movement of goods. It is no secret that these problems are sometimes acutely seen between our closest partners. Belarus is not a supporter of such actions. Mr. Lukashenko added, “If we want to expand our economic co-operation and give powerful impetus to the development of economies, we need to work more effectively to eliminate all kinds of barriers. However, doing this only in one state is the same as getting rid of a traffic jam in a big city. You’ll simply get to the next junction faster. Our common task is to co-ordinate the actions of countries throughout the *Belt and Road* initiative.”

Mr. Lukashenko spoke directly about the country’s interest in the existence of a fair, equitable and transparent system of international trade. This is objectively dictated by the fact that Belarus is situated at the crossroads of trade routes from East to West, from North to South, in opposite directions. Minsk calls on its partner countries to achieve practical results in three very important areas.

“Firstly, this envisages the creation of digital transport corridors, primarily between China and Europe. The use of modern satellite navigation seals makes it possible to remove unnecessary customs and other inspections and reduce the time for movement of container trains by almost a week. Experiments on the introduction of such seals are already being successfully conducted in Belarus. We propose to join the efforts of the operator authorised by the Chi-



Beijing lived with the spirit of the summit

nese leadership and the national Belarusian operator for the joint implementation of this project,” said the President of Belarus.

The second initiative concerns the abolition of the licensing system of international road transportation which will be an additional incentive for the development of transport and logistics activities. The third proposal aims to actively strengthen the interconnection of infrastructures. “We need further reconstruction of border stations, roads, railways, bridges and the creation of multimodal transport hubs. We do all this in Belarus,” Mr. Lukashenko stressed. “The interconnected infrastructure is a basic element of development through

co-operation. It depends on us whether we follow the new standards of economic co-operation, to create a new big family or to return to outdated geopolitical manoeuvres,” he added.

The President ended his speech philosophically by saying, “A strong party will overcome barriers and a wise party — the entire path. I would like to wish the forum participants strength to overcome all the obstacles that arise in our joint work on the *Belt and Road* construction, as well as the wisdom to successfully implement the projects of this global initiative for the benefit of all our peoples.”

Top level guests at the forum applauded his message.

USEFUL MEETINGS ON SUMMIT’S SIDELINES

Major international events are traditionally a convenient platform for bilateral contacts. Mr. Lukashenko met with the President of Serbia — Aleksandar Vucic. During their



Aleksandar Vucic

talks, the Belarusian leader noted that he hopes to give significant impetus to the development of bilateral relations during his upcoming visit to Serbia. Mr. Lukashenko stated full political understanding between Minsk and Belgrade and spoke in favour of raising trade and economic co-operation to the same high level. “I think that, during our meeting in Serbia, we will discuss seriously the direction of our co-operation. We are working on organising this visit so that we have something to say to people in Serbia and Belarus,” he said.

The President of Belarus sees good prospects for the development of liaisons in the investment sphere and the creation of joint ventures, “Our economies are beginning to catch up. I think, in the next 2-3 years, we will be able to significantly accelerate our co-operation.”

Mr. Lukashenko also noted the prospects for military-technical collaboration, “We are ready to

co-operate with our close friends in Serbia as much as they like and as much as we can support the development of the Serbian military-industrial complex. In all areas, we are investigating issues that will give additional impetus to our co-operation. I really want our next meeting to be meaningful and bring our liaison to a higher level. I’m sure we can achieve this.”

Mr. Vucic, in turn, said, “I think we have good political relations, but we need to do a lot to increase our trade. You were right about the creation of joint ventures. We are absolutely open to this. We are waiting to welcome you to Belgrade and hope that the visit will be successful for both Serbia and Belarus.” The Serbian President also thanked his Belarusian counterpart for co-operation in the defence industry.



Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum

In Beijing, Mr. Lukashenko met with the Vice President, the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister of the UAE and the Ruler of Dubai — His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. Prospects for further development of bilateral relations between Belarus and the UAE were discussed at the meeting.

Problem solving is a key priority for OSCE

By Alexey Fedosov

We must not ignore the problems which exist in the region of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) — as Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko said on meeting President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, George Tsereteli

“We agree that there are a lot of problems in our common home, and we must solve them. Among them are issues such as Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, and other less urgent problems. Ukraine has also joined,” Mr. Lukashenko said. He added that, although in the past, he may have criticised the organisation for weak responses, now the resolution of these problems is a priority for the OSCE. “First of all, the organisation is responsible for security on the European continent, and it is unacceptable to ignore existing problems,” the Head of State said.

Mr. Lukashenko added that there have been no meetings between heads of state under the auspices of the OSCE for a long time. These meetings allow leaders to discuss current issues and try to find a way out of difficult situations. The last



George Tsereteli

event of this kind took place in Astana in 2010 and an even bigger conference occurred in Istanbul in 1999.

Mr. Tsereteli, in turn, thanked the Belarusian President for the organisation of the 26th annual session of the Parliamentary Assembly in Minsk in July 2017. He agreed with Mr. Lukashenko that there are pending issues in the OSCE region. “When your neighbours have problems, these are your problems as well. I agree with you that the OSCE is a valuable organisation and many countries, including Belarus, are doing a lot to strengthen it,” the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly said.

Mr. Tsereteli arrived in Minsk to take part in the International Parliamentary Conference of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Silk Road Support Group — *Belt and Road: Strengthening Co-operation for*

Sustainable Development and Prosperity.

Mr. Tsereteli supports Belarus' idea to restart the Helsinki Process. In his discussion with Mr. Lukashenko, he stated, “The OSCE sees Belarus as a very important partner in the implementation of the goals and the basic principles of the Helsinki Process. I am glad to see that the President supports these principles, which are currently being violated. I welcome the idea, which was voiced by the Head of State, of the need to return to the Helsinki Process,” he noted. He spoke against changing them drastically. It is more important to remind everybody about the need to abide by these principles. “They must be strengthened, perhaps through preventive mechanisms.”

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Silk Road Support Group was established in July 2017 at the 26th annual session of the Parliamentary Assembly in Minsk. It unites 24 states. The Group acts as a platform which contributes to mutually beneficial economic and trade ties via the development of transport corridors, measures to simplify transportation and trade procedures, provision of free and safe displacement of people, goods, services and investments.

Partners show mutual interest

By Natalia Yemelyanova

Belarus hails progress in relations with the Council of Europe for local governance

On meeting the President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe — Anders Knappe — in Minsk, Alexander Lukashenko stressed that Belarus has its own vision of the development of local self-government. “We will naturally move in the direction of the greater autonomy of local governments,” he said. “Many of your achievements can be emulated by Belarus. Close contacts between local governments and the relevant structures of the European Union would be helpful in realising this goal.”

Mr. Lukashenko recalled that he had already discussed the development of local governance with Mr. Knappe's predecessor: Gudrun Mosler-Törnström. The Head of State noted that he was pleased to return to these issues with someone with solid personal experience in local self-government. In turn, Mr. Knappe noted that he was visiting Belarus for the first time and viewed his five-day visit as fruitful. He stated that the Congress is pleased to see the interest of the Belarusian authorities in the development of local self-government. “Belarus has always represented and been



Anders Knappe

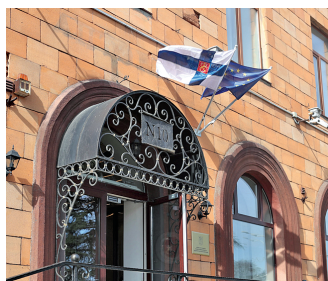
of interest to the Council of Europe and our Congress in terms of co-operation. I have already received a good impression from discussions with representatives of the Government, local and regional authorities and business,” said Mr. Knappe.

The Congress is a consultative body of the Council of Europe. It aims to actively involve local and regional authorities in the activities of the Council and promote its core values.

In December 2018, a seminar was held in Minsk on the development of the associations of local councils of deputies in Belarus. It was attended by leading experts in the development of local self-government from the Council of Europe's member states. In a continuation of the dialogue, there were discussions in February 2019 on the improvement of the work of the associations — with the participation of the Council of Europe's experts.

Similar mentality definitely matters

Finland supports promising trend of developing relations between Belarus and EU



By Alexey Fedosov

Finland supports promising trend of developing relations between Belarus and EU

The Under Secretary of State for External Economic Relations at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Markku Keinanen, at the opening of a new office of the Finnish Embassy branch in Minsk said, “From July 1st, Finland will preside in the Council of the European Union, and we will maintain a positive trend in the development of relations between Belarus and the EU.”

Regarding the prospects of opening a full-fledged Embassy of Finland in Minsk [currently, Finland's interests in Belarus are represented by the Finnish Embassy in Lithuania — editor's remark], the diplomat noted that there are no such plans at the moment. “Perhaps this will be a step in the future. We'll continue to

work through the office of the Embassy of Finland in Minsk as before, — though in a separate office,” he explained. “Our own office will enable us to work more widely, hold business meetings and other events at our own base.”

Mr. Keinanen said that Belarus and Finland are situated close to each other and it is necessary to use this opportunity to increase co-operation, including in the tourism sector. “It is my first time in Belarus and Minsk. I am stunned by how beautiful and remarkable Minsk is,” Mr. Keinanen said. “The distance between our countries is not that large, there is a good opportunity to promote travel.”

In turn, Belarus' Deputy Foreign Minister, Oleg Kravchenko, emphasised that Belarus and Finland are natural partners in many areas. He pointed out that our countries have a solid foundation for the further development of co-operation in regional and universal international organisations. “This foundation is the respect for international law. It is international law that our countries primarily rely on when promoting national interests,” he said, noting that every nation chooses its own path of devel-

opment and seeks to strengthen statehood and national identity. “Finland, like Belarus, has two official languages. Belarus, just as in Finland, relies on scientific and technological progress and innovations, paying particular attention to education,” Mr. Kravchenko said. Among the distinctive features of Be-



Participants of Minsk ceremony

larusians and Finns are a love of nature and sport, especially winter sports.

It's well-known that the Finnish capital, Helsinki, has become synonymous with multilateral negotiations and diplomatic efforts to find peaceful resolutions to international disputes. Continuing the constructive tradition of dialogue, diplomacy and peacemaking, Minsk has established itself as a place of talks to ease tensions

and promote the international rule of law.

The new office is located at 11 Svobody Square. The building is also home to the foreign offices of France, Bulgaria and Switzerland. Attending the ceremony were Belarus' Deputy Foreign Minister — Oleg Kravchenko, the Under

secretary of State for External Economic Relations at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland — Markku Keinanen, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Finland to Lithuania with concurrent accreditation to Belarus — Christer Michelsson, and the Head of the Office of the Finnish Embassy in Minsk — Janne Heiskanen. The event was also attended by heads and representatives of foreign dip-

omatic missions accredited in Belarus. Mr. Keinanen said that the opening of the new office of the Finnish Embassy in Belarus is a result of long-standing efforts. Finland had previously co-operated with Belarus through Vilnius. Then, in 2010, an office of the Finnish Embassy in Lithuania opened in Minsk. It was located at the Embassy of Sweden in Belarus. “We now have a new office. We hope that it will be an opportunity to step up co-operation between our countries,” said Mr. Keinanen.

Belarus and Finland established diplomatic relations in February 1992. The Minsk office of the Finnish Embassy in Lithuania opened on October 1st, 2010. The Belarusian Embassy in Helsinki has been operational since December 5th, 2011.

The deployment of the Belarusian diplomatic mission has served as a catalyst for the intensification of bilateral relations. The foreign ministers meet on a regular basis and annual ministerial consultations have been resumed. The parties exchange high-level visits. Last year, trade between Belarus and Finland exceeded \$127m, while exports of Belarusian goods reached \$18.8m.

New town development plans

By Kristina Khilko

Improving the satellite towns

For more than a year, the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, has voiced the Government's position, "No one is about to deny access to Minsk but it's necessary to restrict the inflow of people however unpopular it may sound."

In 2008, during a meeting with representatives of the Minsk City Executive Committee, the Head of State said that the Republic's major city mustn't become overpopulated and there is the need to actively develop its satellite towns. Initially the word 'satellite' meant a body guard in Ancient Rome, so perhaps these towns will become saviours for Minsk.

Compared with Moscow, however, the number of residents in Minsk is small: around 2 million people but, according to the authorities, it's at its limit. Mr. Lukashenko noted, "Look at Kiev and St. Petersburg, for example, let alone Moscow, when labour resources are concentrated in one place. More than 20 percent of our population live in Minsk and it can't continue."

The volume of housing construction in the capital will consequently fall with each consecutive year, while building in satellite towns will increase.

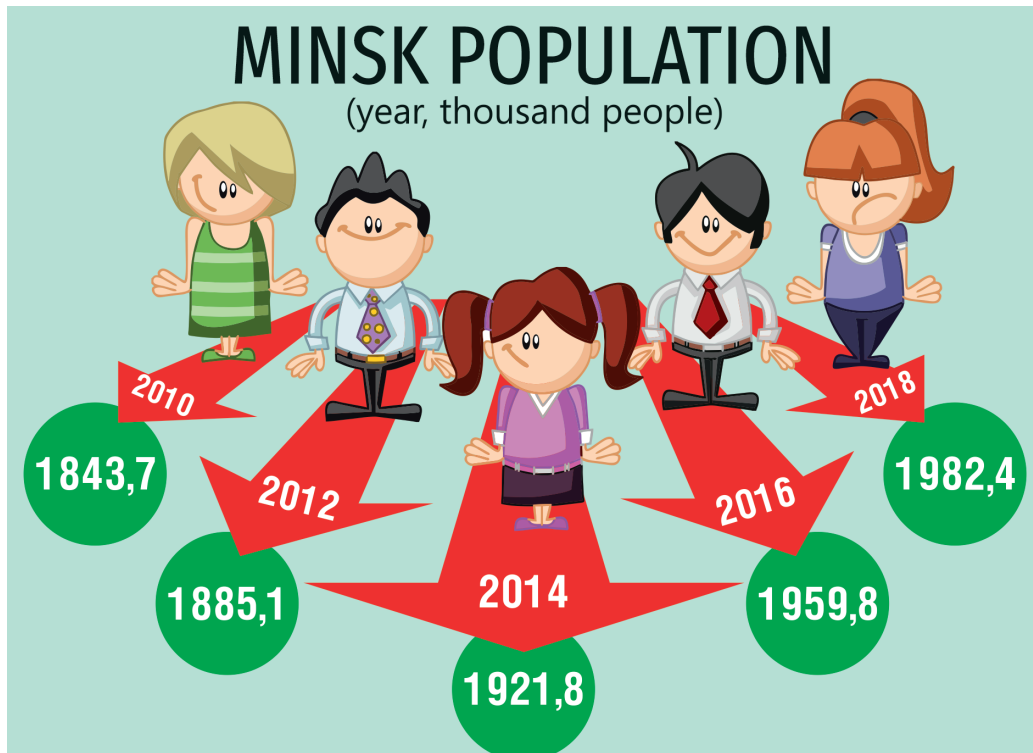
Margin of five percent

In 2009, the satellite towns which need to be developed were determined as: Smolevichi, Dzerzhinsk, Zaslavl, Logoisk, Fanipol and Rudensk.

"We'll try to distribute production powers throughout the country so as not to concentrate them all in Minsk. Otherwise, a problem will be created for native Minskians and the state. Everyone will congregate here, and it will be empty elsewhere," said the President.

In late 2018, he insisted the Government immediately launch the fulfilment of plans

Authorities are solving the problems of urbanisation by not allowing the rapid spread of the population in the country's major city



dealing with the development of satellite towns, to increase the rates of housing construction and develop the necessary infrastructure.

Construction will be primarily launched in Smolevichi with rental housing and a pilot project for those on a waiting list to improve their housing conditions.

"The innovation lies in the opportunity for even those Minskians who have recently been included on the waiting list to apply for a new place. The price per square metre will be lower than in Minsk. If the number of those applying is more than the expected number of flats in a house, preference will be given to those who applied first. If the experiment finds a favourable response among residents, the project will be continued," said the Deputy Chair of the Minsk City Executive Committee's Construction and Investment Committee, Irina Gontareva.

By next year, eleven multi-family houses are expected to have been built in Smolevichi, as well as a kindergarten and a school. It's planned that

the number of town residents will almost double to 30,000.

Life in the capital does certainly have its advantages. However, the ecological situation is better in small towns, there are no problems with traffic jams, and more opportunities to enjoy fresh air, go to the woods and the river. Moreover, housing in the provinces is much cheaper.

'We won't put our hands into other people's pockets'

New buildings will also appear in Minsk, but they won't be high-rise, and the price will be fair. High-rise apartment blocks are possible only with approval and in exceptional circumstances.

"Shaping town-planning requires attention to facilities in the city centre which are not used efficiently, including warehouses and company buildings," emphasised Anatoly Sivak, Chairman of the Minsk City Executive Committee.

An important condition for housing construction is the cost of flats. A successful experiment has been conducted

in Minsk aiming to restrict the profit of housing developers by 5 percent. The Effective Industrial Construction Plant was allocated construction sites, but its profit margin was restricted.

The enterprise has already successfully built more than one housing site. This is now being studied in order to expand it and, as Mr. Lukashenko said, 'not put our hands into other people's pockets'.

A clear transport run to the centre

The question remains as to whether people will actually want to live 'in the orbit' of the city instead of being at the core of Belarusian life? Why not, if it is possible to get to the capital from Logoisk and Fanipol quickly? To achieve this, transit transport hubs will be created.

"This will enable people to move from one means of transport to other, without entering an open space, stepping in puddles or jumping over snow," explained Mr. Sivak.

In addition, a high-speed tram will soon run through the

capital. A business plan for this project is currently being developed and the first vehicles will be running from the Sukharevo district to Kalvaryyskaya Street.

The 'tram project' will be cheaper than the laying of new metro lines. Meanwhile, the construction of a third metro line is also being continued in Minsk. The Minsk metro is fairly young, being opened in 1984, but passenger numbers are rising and, in the first year of the metro's operation, 79m people used it, while last year the figure reached 328m — almost half the entire passenger flow.

At present, the focus is on the development of public transport. The metro frees up roads, preventing the capital from suffocating from exhaust fumes. The construction of the third metro line — around 25km long — is in full swing and it should be launched next year.

The plans also include encouraging Belarusians to move towards electric cars. For these vehicles, a state charging network will be created: more than two hundred ecological charging stations will have appeared by the end of the year, corresponding to the number of electric cars in



Newly built houses in Fanipol

Belarus. At present, these vehicles can't be called cheap, as the accumulators account for 25-50 percent of their price. However, due to the growth of production and the development of technologies the batteries may soon be 40 percent cheaper, which means that electric cars will also cost less. According to forecasts, within six years, there could be more than 25,000 electric cars in Belarus.

Demographic trends as indicator for the country

Sustainable development impossible without resolving global problems relating to demographic change — as noted by Belarus' Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Dapkiunas at 52nd session of United Nations Commission on Population and Development

By Oleg Bogomazov

This year's session was dedicated to reviewing and evaluating the implementation of the action plan of the International Conference on Population and Development, as well as its contribution to a review of the 2030 Agenda. Mr. Dap-

kiunas informed those present about the main demographic trends in Belarus, including the falling birth-rate and ageing population. He also mentioned key directions of national policy and programmes designed to resolve these problems. In particular, he detailed the efforts being made to encourage

childbirth, including substantial financial benefits (including maternity benefits) and a three-year maternity leave.

The Deputy Foreign Minister noted that the effectiveness of national strategies and programmes relating to sustainable development rely on up-to-date information on population



numbers and parameters. Belarus is due for a population census this October.

He added that new and emerging technologies play a special role in resolving mod-

ern demographic problems, as is reflected in the 2030 Agenda, which recognises cutting-edge technologies as a catalyst for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

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Priorities define modern times



Charles Guene

By Alexey Fedosov

France is keen to develop collaboration with Belarus in several areas, including the latest technology. This was announced during a meeting of the Chairman of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly, Mikhail Myasnikov, with a French parliamentary delegation in Minsk.

Charles Guene, Deputy Chairman of the Finance Commission of the French Senate and Chairman of the France-Belarus Friendship Group noted that France has interest in a number of areas of co-operation with Belarus. These include the forest industry and its associated businesses, as well as tourism. The French MPs also proposed discussion of interaction in latest technologies. As an example, Charles Guene cited artificial intelligence and digital technology.

France keen to co-operate with Belarus in latest technologies

Mr. Myasnikov welcomed the fact that the Belarus-French relations have significantly intensified in recent years, including in the sphere of political contacts, inter-parliamentary dialogue and economic co-operation. He also invited the French parliamentarians to discuss issues related to mutual support in international organisations, including the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. Belarus is preparing a draft resolution on science, technology and innovations for the OSCE PA summer session. Mr. Myasnikov expressed the hope that French MPs would support the Belarusian initiatives.

Mr. Guene said that France thanks Belarusians for their sympathy and support over the Notre Dame tragedy. "It feels as if a part of us were burned down in those flames," he said. In turn, Mr. Myasnikov expressed his sympathy and stressed that Belarusians and many other people across the world took this news close to heart.

The parties also discussed the development of twinning relations and co-operation between the cities and regions of the two countries. Mr. Myas-

nikov suggested a forum of twin cities as a promising format of co-operation.

As regards trade, in 2018, bilateral turnover went up by 9 percent, including Belarusian exports growing by over 12 percent. The positive trend continues this year. "This shows that business has been gradually developing relations, raising them to the level of political contacts between the parliaments of the two countries," Mr. Myasnikov noted.

The working group on co-operation with France at the Council of the Republic and the France-Belarus Friendship Group at the Senate of France, was set up in 2018. The groups intend to expand liaisons between the twin cities of Belarus and France, to establish direct business contacts and develop bilateral relations in investment, agriculture, the environmental and other areas.

While in Belarus, the French parliamentary delegation also held meetings with heads of the Foreign Ministry, the Constitutional Court, and the Hi-Tech Park. The French MPs visited BELAZ JSC and met local authorities of the Minsk and Grodno regions.

By Olga Korneeva

Taste of Belarus — a unique project developed specially for the 2nd European Games to help foreign guests learn more about Belarus' culture and its authentic cuisine

Taste of Belarus is a gastronomic guide, supplemented by a special mobile application in English. The project will enable each tourist to quickly navigate Belarusian cuisine and choose those places that are definitely worth a visit. The online and offline directory will bring together 2,500 national dishes from Minsk's 200 restaurants. The application has been developed by Relax.by which has become an official media partner of the 2nd European Games.

In the *Taste of Belarus* online catalogue, a review can be placed for each dish and anyone can see its rating, as well view ratings of restaurants where a particular dish can be tasted. A printed version of the catalogue will be released for the Games; it will be distributed at the National Airport, Minsk hotels and sports venues. Each dish will have a QR-code to ensure



the application opens a list of places where it can be eaten.

As a result, an increasing number of people around the world are learning about the best gastronomic experiences of Belarus. The project is planned to be integrated with the website of the 2nd European Games and the official mobile application.

The largest Belarusian guide for recreation and entertainment will take over the function of information support and will cover the events that will be held in Minsk as part of the 2nd European Games. In addition, the portal will act as a guide to Belarusian cuisine and culture of the country.

Pinsk residents taught to draw rushnik patterns

By Svetlana Yevgenieva

Museum of Belarusian Polesie in Pinsk presents art exhibition from archives of the Bielsk Podlaski Museum

The main theme of the exhibition is the phenomenon of a folk rushnik (hand woven towel) as a distinctive element of Slavic culture. The exhibition demonstrates the wealth of material and spiritual culture of the Bielsk Region. It consists of about two dozen paintings by artist Miroslaw Zdraikowski. In their form and content, modern paintings are associated with the traditions of ritual rushniks: they are full of symbols, links to historical memory, hidden signs and meanings.

In addition, nine folk rushniks are on show, from the collection of the Polish museum, which has more than 300 exhibits. This is the largest collection of folk rushniks in Poland. For several years, the museum has been conducting systematic ethnographic research in Podlasie. In the



course of this work, the *Mysterious Rushnik* permanent exhibition has been created. Catalogues and collections of patterns have been released.

Before the opening of the exhibition, the museum hosted a master class for everyone wishing to learn to draw the patterns of folk rushniks on canvas bags. It was held by the Bielsk Podlaski Museum's Head, Alina Dembowska, who demonstrated the use and relevance of ethnic motifs in everyday life, proving that traditional patterns are equally fashionable today.

Exhibition dedicated to Christian holiday

Exhibition of embroidered icons dedicated to Easter — *Sacrament of Holy Images* — opens at Gantsevichi Regional Museum of Local History

By Natalya Yakovleva

The exposition presents 47 works by local artists. Among them is a man: Maxim Dranets, from the village of Malkovichi. He is the only one who has used mosaic chips in his works: other images are embroidered with threads and beads and some are even consecrated. Images of the Blessed Virgin prevail in works such as the icons of Tikhvin and Kazan Mother of God, the Mother of God of Seven Arrows, the Unfading Flower, the Inexhaustible Chalice and 'Axion Estin'. From the walls of the exhibition hall, the faces of St. Nikolay, the Guardian Angel, Blessed Matryona, Ksenia of Petersburg, Parascève, the holy martyrs Vera, Nadezhda, Lyubov and their mother Sofia look down on visitors. The collection is complemented by two Catholic icons: the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

This is the first time the museum has organised an exhibition like this — devoting it to the oldest and most important Christian holiday of Easter. "The archives of our museum also have 19th-20th century pictorial icons donated by Brest's customs officers. We regularly show them to visitors. This time, we've decided to make an exhibition of embroidered icons. There are many skilled artists in the area who are engaged in this type of art. We have known some of them for a long time and have got to know others through the District Centre of Social Services for Population. We are grateful for their help in organising the exhibition, which helps escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and think about eternal life just for a moment," said Director Natalia Kulesh.

The new show enjoys a great success among visitors.



Stop on request

In Mogilev, 250 wild geese stop to rest — including the rare Brant goose

By Svetlana Savelieva

The Brant goose is a species that is rarely registered in Belarus during transit migrations, as it never flies far from the sea. These birds winter in Northern Germany and the Netherlands, and nest on Taimyr and further to the east — in coastal tundra.

The area where the geese rested is closed for hunting, it almost resembles a city. Flocks of wild geese can be found almost everywhere in countries where no spring hunting is allowed such as in Poland and Lithuania. As the APB-BirdLife Belarus public organisation explains, the birds need to rest and eat, as when they reach tundra in July, there will still be snow.

Harbinger of happiness on town's coat of arms



Girls lure the warmth of spring with traditional songs and noisy fun

By Kristina Khilko

Admire Belarusian fjords

Tourists involuntarily exclaim 'Wow!' on seeing the fantastic landscapes of a granite quarry near the village of Glushkovichi. High rocky shores, clear water and lush vegetation create the illusion that they've come to the Scandinavian peninsula.

This is the only place in the country where you can touch granite rock formed billions of years ago. In Soviet times, the local high-quality stones were popular as they faced Minsk's metro station walls, as well as Minsk-2 Airport and the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. The quarry with its alien landscape is an ideal place for enthusiastic photographers. Fishermen are also attracted to the ease of catching pike, perch or silver carp.

Beckon spring

As legend says, the name of this Polesie town was given by the storks which were affectionately called 'iels'. This harbinger of happiness is also depicted on Lelchitsy's coat of arms. Birds are generally respected here. In the village of Tonezh in the Lelchitsy District, the old ritual of luring the spring — 'Chyrachki' — has been preserved. The name is translated simply as little duck:

teal-whistle. 'Spring calling' begins in the house where women bake special bird-shaped cookies. These are 'chyrachki'. The delicacy has a special secret: the cake is decorated with dried blueberries.

After the preparations, young people and children go to the highest place in the area. The trees are decorated with colourful ribbons — attracting birds carrying the heat from the south on their wings. Then, hand in hand, they lead dances and sing ceremonial 'spring songs': *Over the Green Fence*, *Oh, Spring — Oh, Beautiful*, *Chyrachka — Little Bird*. People then share the treats. The village of Tonezh has long been called the 'nightingale's paradise' since singing skills here are passed down from generation to generation.

Bow to the Polesie sister of Khatyn

In the heart of the village of Tonezh, there is a memorial to the victims of fascism. This is a tall cross in the centre, next to four figures frozen in silent horror. The memorial makes it impossible to forget about the tragedy that occurred on January 6th, 1943.

Polesie is a wooded and marshy land. During the Great Patriotic War, the area was the site of fierce guerrilla battles

Five reasons to visit Lelchitsy

where the Germans cruelly avenged resistance. The fascists who had entered the village, ordered the inhabitants to gather in the square near the church. Those who resisted were shot on the spot. The others were herded into the church and set on fire. Over 260 people died in the fire, including 108 children.

Leave a present to the stone woman

After 'spring calling', guests may go to the village of Danilevichi where a three hundred year old king-oak grows. Locals believe if you hug the giant and make a wish, it will come true. There are also other mysterious objects in the area — such as stone boulders in unusual shapes. Polesie residents call them 'girls' or 'women'. These can be found on the outskirts of Danilevichi and Borovoe.

According to one version, these miracle stones growing out of the ground appeared in pagan times: they served as altars to which our ancestors brought gifts to the gods. The locals have their own legend. Hesitating with the harvest, a mother and a daughter did not notice the terrible thunderclouds. The mother began to hurry the girl, but she did not pay any attention. She shouted angrily, "Why are you standing there, you might as well turn into stone!" The thunder struck and the child was indeed turned to stone.

At Easter, local people get up at dawn and bring gifts to the stone idol: cakes, painted eggs and coins. They ask for help and advice and decorate



the stone woman with ankle bracelets, handkerchiefs and ribbons, while burning the old decorations.

Gather honey like Winnie the Pooh

The old craft of beekeeping has been preserved in Lelchitsy District. The secrets of collecting forest honey are passed down from generation to generation. Homes for these buzzing workers are raised to a height of six to eight metres, hardly possible without great skill and force. The weight of a single hive often reaches two hundred kilograms!

Collection of forest honey is a special ritual. Do you remember how Pooh tried to get the honey at the top of the tree? Local beekeepers have a similar task, but they have special tools. People fix a swing-like construction onto a tree and approach the hive sitting on the plank, pushing off with their feet from the trunk — like mountain climbers. The taste of forest honey is unique! It's sweet, amber and melts in the mouth. The fragrant delicacy in wooden kegs is likely to become the best souvenir from local places.



In spring green, huge stone blocks hanging over the water create a fantastic landscape



MPs welcomed by Extinction Rebellion

The environmental action group — Extinction Rebellion marched on Parliament Square to greet MPs returning from their Easter break

Extinction Rebellion are rallying to demand that the UK Government to declare a climate and ecological emergency and go carbon neutral by 2025.

They also want a People's Assembly to be created, to oversee the changes the Gov-

ernment will make.

“What we're having today is a People's Assembly at Parliament Square, where we will be discussing a way forward. People will get together in various groups and look at what we should do next,” says Janey Forbes, spokesperson for Extinction Rebellion. “Everybody asked to get their MP to come out and... listen and talk about the climate emergency. But now we realise we have been banned from Parliament

Square so we have to negotiate with the police,” she adds.

The police tweeted warning Extinction Rebellion they will only be allowed to protest in Parliament Square Garden, restricting them from going close to Parliament.

The police have already arrested more than 1,000 people since the protests started. They report having charged 53 people for various offences, including obstructing a highway and obstructing police. “It's

unfortunate that we had to do this. It's very unfortunate, but it's a step we had to take. They have released us under investigation, so we don't know if we're going to get charged,” Janey Forbes noted. She says the police had to arrest them because the group was civilly disobedient.

“They don't have a choice, we were disobeying the law. What we did was illegal. We understood that, they understood that and they arrested us.



Uber raises \$1 billion

Uber's self-driving car unit has lured \$1bn in investment ahead of the company's hotly anticipated stock market debut

The ride-hailing firm said that Japanese tech group Softbank (SFTBF)'s Vision Fund and car maker Toyota (TM) were among those providing the cash boost, which increases the value of Uber's Advanced Technologies Group (ATG) to \$7.25bn.

Uber said in a statement it will use the cash to speed up the development of self-driving technologies. “This investment and our strong partnership with the Toyota Group are a testament to the incredible work of our ATG team to date, and the exciting future ahead for this important project, alongside great partners,” said Uber CEO Dara Khosrowshahi in the statement.

“The development of automated driving technology will transform transportation as we know it, making our streets safer and our cities more liveable.”

Toyota and Japan-based automotive parts maker Denso (DNZOF) together will invest \$667m into Uber's ATG, while Softbank's Vision Fund will stump up \$333m.

Toyota is an existing investor in Uber, having poured \$500m into the Silicon Valley start-up last August. Softbank's Vision Fund, the brainchild of Japanese billionaire Masayoshi Son, is already Uber's biggest shareholder with a 16.3 percent stake.

The latest cash injection into Uber comes in the run-up to the company's eagerly awaited initial public offering, announced earlier in April.

Sri Lanka's economy is fragile and much depends on tourism

A series of deadly attacks could deal a body blow to one of Asia's fragile economies

On top of the heavy loss of human life, the attacks could cause serious damage to Sri Lanka's economy, which depends on tourism.

The island nation in the Indian ocean welcomes about 2.5m visitors a year from around the world. Data from the World Travel and Tourism Council show that the industry is one of the biggest contributors to the country's economy, supporting about 1m jobs. It's also the third largest source of foreign currencies.

One business feeling the impact immediately is Sri Lankan Airlines, the national carrier. CEO Vipula Gunatilleka said that hundreds of passengers have cancelled bookings since attacks. The airline is allowing passengers to delay or change flights without paying a fee.

“Since the hotels were attacked and all that, you'd expect more and more [cancellations], especially the for-



eign bookings and all of that to come down,” he said. “That's the reality.”

Gunatilleka, whose airline carries about one-third of people flying into Sri Lanka, said it was too early to speculate on how long the damage to tourism will last. “We are looking at [the] immediate impact and how to handle that,” he added.

The US Dollar, Chinese Yuan and other currencies tourists spend in Sri Lanka are vital to the economy. Sri Lanka needs a constant flow of currency to keep up payments on its foreign debt. The debt owed by the Sri Lankan Gov-

Botswana unveils blue diamond to rival the Hope Diamond



Botswana has unveiled a blue diamond whose value could outstrip that of the storied Hope Diamond: the 20.46-carat, close-to-flawless Okavango Blue

The diamond was presented in Botswana by the state-owned Okavango Diamond Company. Found as a 41.11-carat rough stone in the Orapa mine operated by the producer Debswana, the jewel is the largest blue diamond ever found in Botswana.

Like the Hope Diamond — which likely originated in Golconda, India and now resides at the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of Natural History in Washington — the Okavango Blue is a Type IIb ‘fancy blue’ diamond (its tint is the result of boron inside the gem).

While the Hope Diamond is larger at 45.52 carats, the Okavango Blue's immense value lies in its clarity. The Gemological Institute of America (GIA) graded the diamond as ‘Very, Very Slightly Included’, or VVS2, meaning inclusions — internal imperfections — ‘are difficult for a skilled grader to see under 10x magnification’.

In comparison, the Hope Diamond received a ‘Very Slightly Included’, or VS1 grade, according to the Smithsonian, meaning ‘inclusions are minor and range from difficult to somewhat easy for a skilled grader to see under 10x magnification’.

ernment amounts to about 80 percent of the country's annual economic output, statistics show, and it is rising.

Much of this debt is owed to countries in currencies other than the Sri Lankan Rupee, analysts point out. In 2018, Moody's and Fitch both downgraded the Sri Lankan government's credit rating, citing questions over its ability to repay its debts. If investors lose confidence in Sri Lanka's capability to repay its debts, that could prompt the nation's currency to weaken further.

Materials prepared with aid of information agencies

Magical, mysterious and delightful world. True dream-world!



Tamara Kurochitskaya's personal exhibition of ceramics at the National Art Museum — dedicated to the artist's 70th anniversary — intrigues with its title: *Constrained Fire. Sculpture — Relief — Painting — Graphics in Clay*. The show is truly original.



Many friends attend the show opening of the hero of the day

By Veniamin Mikheev

The exhibition showcases about 30 works from the author's personal collection, some of which are shown for the first time.

Tamara Kurochitskaya's distinctive, recognisable ceramics include monumental works (some of the most famous decorate the National Library of the Republic of Belarus and Mir Castle's conference hall), decorative relief panels, sculptures, exquisite vases and

small sculpted figurines. The artist is skilled at a variety of genres, including those that are more characteristic of painting and drawing: landscape and still-life. However, the animalistic genre is perhaps her most favourite medium.

Paradoxically, although ceramics are born from land and fire, Tamara's main elements are air and water. The artist can turn a clay mass, bound by flame, into an airy and weightless or, on the contrary, fluid and changeable piece. Flight,

the open sky and mysterious watery depths comprise the artist's world; these form the space in which she feels comfortable and confident.

No wonder the artist's favourite characters are, on the one hand, birds, angelic creatures and even aliens and, on the other, fish of the most incredible shapes and colours, even shellfish and shrimp. Even the images of beautiful women widely represented on her relief panels, look completely immaterial, unearthly

and reminiscent of fantastic butterflies.

The shell is her favourite among all the images. The artist is fascinated by its perfect spiral forms. Since ancient times, the spiral has been considered to be a symbol of the Universe, the cyclical development of all things. The spiral is a whirlpool, a tornado, cosmic twists, eternal rebirth. Tamara Kurochitskaya has noticed all these and repeatedly plays with the image, embodied not only in the shells of sea molluscs or snails, but also in the handles of vases and even in chess pieces. Perhaps it was the shape of the shell that inspired the artist to invent her special technique of mosaic laying.

Of course, is not the only invention by Tamara. The artist has managed to develop a special style which is indicated in the subtitle of the present show: *Sculpture — Relief — Painting — Graphics in Clay*. Her works — born on the border of sculptural forms, paintings and graphics — form a magical, mysterious and very attractive world. This is the dream-world to which Tamara Kurochitskaya invites all visitors to the exhibition.



Real art can never fade

By Mikhail Veremeev

Exhibition of Belarusian icons on show at National Museum of Liechtenstein

Preparations for the exhibition began in July 2018. Several months of negotiations, bilateral agreements, logistics, customs clearance and difficulties of installation are now in the past. Guests of the show can see the result: a hall with three dozen unique icons painted by Belarusian masters.

The icons presented at the exhibition are from the collection of the National Art Museum of Belarus. Many joined the archives after WWII when the museum began to conduct expeditions to Belarusian cities and find holy images in closed churches.

Among the icons that are temporarily on show in the Na-



tional Museum of Liechtenstein is the icon of Hodegetria Mother of God. It was painted in the mid-17th century and discovered during a scientific expedition in 1970 to a church in the Minsk Region's Golyinka. The icon is painted in a mixed technique using tempera and oils. Semiprecious stones, malachite and lapis lazuli were used as pigments and, accordingly, the colours are vibrant and seem to glow from the inside. The image of Our Lady has been hidden under six layers of paint.

Motivated by life and nature

By Alexander Pimenov

Minsk's Mikhail Savitsky Art Gallery hosts the *Native Land* exhibition of paintings by Nikolay Nazarchuk

The exhibition is a retrospective of works by the artist from different periods of his creativity: from the mid-1960s to the early 21st century. These are from the collection of Nikolay's family, the Belarusian Union of Artists and the Yakub Kolas State Literary-Memorial Museum.

The personal exhibition of Nikolay Nazarchuk — who is a master of modern Belarusian art — shows his creative achievements for the first time on such a large scale. "At the same time, the exposition reveals this outstanding painter in a new light," notes art critic Yevgeny Shuneiko.

Mr. Nazarchuk worked in different genres and thematic areas of oil, tempera and water-colour painting. He created hundreds of works and thousands of sketches. Only some of these works are displayed at the exhibition. Among them are *Flowers for Aloiza Pashkevich* and *Vitold Bialynitsky-Birulya and Yakub Kolas in Priluki in 1945*, from the historical series dedicated to the legendary figures of history and culture of Belarus.

Such works as *Belarus, Your People Will Wait*, *Renaissance* and *Allegory of Time* are also represented at the exhibition, along with such paintings as *Mother of the Dead*, *A Portrait of the Hero of the Soviet Union — Vladimir Tsaruk*, and *A Portrait of Artist Leonid Borozna*.

"The heroes of these works are very different in character and social role. However, they

are united by Belarusian sincerity, modesty and loyalty to their moral principles. The thoughtful expressions on their faces remain in the memory for a long time because of their humanity and the honesty of their feelings," adds Mr. Shuneiko.

According to the art historian, the artist is an excellent colourist and master of still-lives, landscapes and portraits. "His artistry is rich in contrasts, inspired by the nature of Polesie. His palette is loud and varies from thick and rich malachite-amber to transparent and sunny tones. It's no surprise that the master's works are kept in the museums of Belarus and private collections in Russia, Poland and France," said Mr. Shuneiko.



N. Nazarchuk's work

CULTURE

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Help should come from the heart

Ruslan Alekhno assists home town while promoting 2nd European Games

By Kristina Khilko

Ruslan Alekhno became famous through the *People's Artiste* project, back in 2004. The 20-year-old from Bobruisk conquered spectators' hearts with his wonderful voice. Unlike some one-hit wonders, he managed to reach *Eurovision* and won the *One to One* TV project. Here, he tells our *MT* reporter about his home town's charity singing marathon, how his musical career is coming along, and the 2nd European Games.

It's Friday, at 11pm, and Ruslan apologises for such a late call. His schedule is very busy, and it seems that every day is the same.

I wake up around 7-8am and immediately go to work: recording at the studio, shooting and performing. It's important to manage time well, in order to do everything.

Ruslan, you've become a Star Ambassador of the 2nd European Games. What obligations does this bring?

It's pleasant to be part of the team. However, it's also a major responsibility. Music and sport eliminate boundaries, bringing nations closer. The 2014 IIHF World Championships showed that Minsk can host the highest-level sports events and I've no doubt we'll see the same this summer, with Belarusians organising an unforgettable holiday for athletes, fans, Minskians and guests of the city.

The European Games is a grand event for our country, as well as for the whole world. It's important that as many people as possible learn about the sports forum and I'll do my best to achieve this. My tight tour schedule leaves little time for training but I enjoy swimming. I'm convinced that everyone should make time for exercise, since it promotes good health, as well as an uplifted mood. Cycle racing is among my favourite disciplines at the Games. Closer to the major start,



Ruslan Alekhno promotes an active lifestyle

in June, I'll participate in the flame relay, carrying the Flame of Peace, brought from Italy to Belarus.

You were born in Bobruisk but now work in Russia. Do you often visit your homeland and see your parents and friends?

I'd like to visit more often but I don't always manage. I miss the tranquillity of my home town, and think about the days when I used to play ball with my friends, or walk through the shady park avenues. They're warm memories. When I return home, my mother always treats me to her 'Napoleon' cake, which is her specialty. It's so delicious that it melts in the mouth. I believe that everyone should write their name in their home town history, making residents proud, and our efforts should come from the heart.

Last year, you organised a charity marathon to raise money to repair the children's hospital in Bobruisk. Did the project go as planned?

The concert was entitled 'Answering the Call of the Heart by the Whole World'. I'm so grateful to all the artistes who responded to this call. I feel that people should support each other and no one needs to be a millionaire to help. There are so many ways of giving assistance: financial, enlightening and creative. The most important thing is to care. Stars were performing free of charge and, alongside the

concert, there were two football matches, with all money deposited in the children's hospital bank account. Reconstruction began in December 2018 and should finish next year.

In 2008, you tried to conquer Eurovision. Why do you think our artistes fail to win, or reach the final three? It's not for want of rehearsal...

'Eurovision' is a prestigious contest and a perfect opportunity to make a name for yourself. I don't agree with comments that 'Eurovision' is politically motivated and that it's getting worse each year. People watch 'Eurovision' with delight, as the high television ratings confirm. Within three minutes, you need to stir the audience's feelings. Of course, everyone wants to see bright performances, and hear memorable songs. Belarus boasts rich singing traditions, so I'm confident that we'll soon see a breakthrough. I have only positive recollections from my participation and I don't regret taking part. It was a great learning experience and an important stage in my creative life. Each year, I watch the national selection round.

When you were seven-years-old, your parents took you to the musical school, where you learnt the trumpet, button accordion, guitar, piano and percussion instruments. Belarus has preserved a system of education which enables children to develop their talent,

regardless of their family's income level. My acquaintances from Italy have been surprised to hear that my niece plays the piano and asked whether her father was a wealthy businessman, as music lessons abroad cost a great deal. What inspired your early musical career?

We have many talented children but each needs support and assistance from experienced people. Lots of musical schools operate in Belarus, alongside centres of culture which help children realise their creativity. I didn't dream of becoming a musical artiste as a child. Music was rather a hobby. I studied and took part in contests and worked as a musician in a restaurant. However, I was about eighteen or nineteen before I chose to make music my career. Having a professional education is vital, although some geniuses do achieve success without it. They are rare though. Strangely, some young people think they're stars after singing just one or two songs. It's important to keep learning and improving your skills. The biggest reward is the love of your audience, as they are your main judges.

Ruslan, you became famous after your victory in the People's Artiste TV contest. Your song, *The Unusual*, 'exploded' via radio stations. What are you currently involved in?

I'm involved in various creative projects, with some relating to my home town. I won't reveal all my secrets but this autumn will see a venture aimed at promoting our national cultural heritage. My personal participation is more important than any grand speeches.

Parents hire tutors from an early age, with many hoping their children enter showbusiness. However, it's a thorny and expensive path, since costumes, staging and good songs all cost money. Does success depend solely on a thick wallet?

Parents always believe that their child will become a star and appear on the largest stages. However, so few find that level of success. Also, due to the investment, there's a lot of pressure. Children can 'lose' their childhood as a result. It's good to explore your talents but parents should leave it to their children to decide if it will become a career.

Time adapted festival



By Natalia Yemelyanova

No dramatic changes planned for *Slavianski Bazaar in Vitebsk*

The festival's recently appointed Director General — Gleb Lapitsky — has informed a press conference that the event will not change anything this year. "After the new appointment, no dramatic changes will follow. All we want is to keep up with the times," he said.

He explained that the 2019 *Slavianski Bazaar in Vitebsk* will include around 200 events, with competition events remaining key. The Vitebsk 2019 International Song Contest will bring together 18 participants from 18 countries, while representatives of 34 countries compete to qualify for the final. In 2019, the organisers decided to skip the semifinal, so the contest will last for two days. On the first day, the contestants will perform any Slavic hit song in one Slavic language, accompanied by the National Academic Concert Orchestra under the baton of Mikhail Finberg. The second day will feature a world hit song accompanied by Alla Dukhova's *Todes* Ballet. The jury will be headed by a People's Artiste of Georgia and Russia — Tamara Gverdtsiteli.

Representatives from 21 countries will compete in the Vitebsk 2019 International Children's Song Contest. The organisers have invited a popular Swedish singer and songwriter, Bosson, to head the jury.

Years have no effect on talent

By Olga Korneeva

Over a hundred illustrations by Gustave Dore presented at an exhibition in Gomel

A large-scale exhibition project of works by the outstanding 19th century French graphic artist and illustrator, Gustave Dore, has opened at the Gavrriil Vashchenko Art Gallery.

The exposition includes 120 illustrations of the literary works which brought glory to Gustave. Among them are Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Cervantes' *Ingenious Hidalgo don Quixote of La Mancha*, Raspe's *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, Lafontaine's fables, Perrault's fairy tales, as well as illustrations for the Bible made using the techniques of late 19th century lithography.

Gustave created a new style in art, encouraging a taste for it among the public and discovering new facets in the illustration of books. Turning to the original



Gustave Dore's work

source, the artist subtly follows the story, revealing to readers all the nuances of feelings, experiences, doubts, emotions and passions of the characters.

Having conquered his native France,

Dora's talent crossed the borders of this country during his lifetime. He was talked about around the world as an artist capable of glorifying even the most ordinary romantic fable with his illustrations. Publishers lined up for the right to be the first to commission illustrations by Gustave for books being prepared for publication.

An impressive number of works is on show, as well as a huge number of the literary works that Dore illustrated with his inherent wealth of imagination. The poetic beauty of some of his prints, the humour and pathos of others are all sources of genuine admiration by the visitors to the show.

The exhibition will be open until late May.

High price of great effort

Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko presents state awards to weightlifters and their coaches as part of a solemn ceremony at the Palace of Independence

By Natalia Yermolaeva

The Head of State congratulated the national team on their successful performance at the 2019 EWF European Weightlifting Championships in Batumi. Belarusian weightlifters clinched 19 medals — including eight medals in the combined total, and second place in the team standings. The



Sportsmen at the Palace of Independence

President complimented the athletes, saying “You are great!”

Mr. Lukashenko admitted that he does not watch weightlifting competitions very often due to his busy schedule. However, he watched almost all the recent European Championships in Batumi. “You did a great job, you

won and you were fighting. The main thing is that you were determined and had very few failures. The coaches also did a great job. They were aware of the potential of every athlete. I cannot say that we had 100 percent results, but you were very close,” he said.

According to Mr. Lukashenko, athletes work hard to be a success in weightlifting. “Weightlifting is a very difficult sport. It may seem a bit mundane but you are fighting all the time. Team sports are always exciting and dynamic. However, when you are one on one with a barbell... You have to do it every day. Weightlifting is a very difficult sport,” the President concluded, saying that he had also tried weightlifting in the past but had to give up.

After the ceremony, Mr. Lukashenko spoke with coaches and athletes. They discussed current trends in weightlifting, the development of the sport in the country, and future competition plans. Special attention was drawn to the participation of Belarusian athletes in the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

Before meeting the Head of State, the national team members were taken on an excursion to the Palace of Independence.



At the International Outfit Accreditation Centre

Ticket to the Games

After just a few minutes and a camera flash, a bright badge — accreditation for the tournament — appears around the neck of the mascot of the 2nd European Games, Fox Lesik. In the athletics arena of the Belarusian State University of Physical Culture, the first non-sports facility of the multisport forum has opened: the International Outfit Accreditation Centre. Lesik became its first visitor.

By Vladislav Khmyrev

The Centre is divided into two zones. On the left, there is a point for accreditation and the Head of the Accreditation Department at the Directorate of the 2nd European Games — Anton Lyakhov — explains, “Participants will be able to receive their accreditation here, personally or by proxy. About 18 thousand will be sent by email: for foreign citizens who have entered their data into the electronic system and for whom the card is a prerequisite for visa-free entry to our country. Accreditation for the 2nd European Games is a secure document, printed on special paper and laminated.

The badge also has a hologram which helps visually check its authenticity.”

After volunteers and representatives of other groups of participants of the 2nd European Games receive their badges, they will go to another part of the Centre — the outfit section. It has fitting rooms and full-height mirrors. Items of kit will soon appear on the shelves and each accredited participant will be able to choose the right size.

“The design of most of the clothes has been done by Yulia Latushkina, and they have been sewn at Belarusian enterprises,” adds Olga Bogdanova, who heads the Outfit Department at the Directorate

of the 2nd European Games. “Each group has its own kit. The largest is for the volunteers: it includes two jackets, pants, shorts, a cap, a backpack and shoes. All the items are in one style, but the design for the different groups will be different. It is planned that 18,000 participants will receive their kit at our Centre, but more sets are being prepared. Participants of the Flame of Peace torch relay — which starts on May 3rd in Rome — will be the first to receive them.”



Torch and torch-bearers

Minsk hosts 2nd European Games Flame of Peace presentation, while the Games' organisers present the torch and the torch-bearers uniform at the Teleport Virtual Reality High-Tech Park

Olga Korneeva

“The name of the torch relay — Flame of Peace — aims to unite all European countries at one of the biggest sporting events of the year, in June. It is symbolic that the presentation of the relay is held on April 6th — the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace,” the CEO of the Minsk European Games Organising Committee (MEGOC), Georgy Katulin, said. At the ceremony, he welcomed the three-time Olympic wrestling champion, Alexander Medved, who is the torch-bearer of the upcoming sports forum. In 1980, the legendary wrestler lit the flame of the Summer Olympic Games at the Dinamo Stadium in Minsk.

One of the important attributes of the upcoming relay is the torch, which was developed by Belarusian designer, Yulia Braichuk, along with specialists of the Novogrudok Gas Equipment Plant. The torch weighs some 1.7kg and is 81cm high. It is made of stainless steel.

450 people will act as torch-bearers. Among them are outstanding athletes, cultural, art and public figures, scientists,



Torch and torch-bearers

the singer Teo, four-time Olympic fencing champion Yelena Belova, Paralympic swimmer Alexey Talay, legendary Belarusian strongman Vyacheslav Khoroneko and People's Artist of Belarus Vladimir Gostyukhin.

The uniform for the Flame of Peace torch-bearers was developed by Belarusian designer Yulia Latushkina. It is made in traditional light colours, symbolising peace and purity of intention, which corresponds to the ideals of the Olympic movement. The Flame of Peace torch relay will kick off in Rome on May 3rd — where the flame of the 2nd European Games will be lit. After that, the torch will be taken to Mont Blanc — the highest point on which the Belarusian climbers will raise the torch and the flag of Belarus. The relay will then continue across Europe: Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland.

In Belarus, the Flame of Peace will start in Brest, on May 12th. The torch will then be taken through over 60 locations in all regions of the country. A six-day route will be developed for each region. The final destination will be the Dinamo Stadium in Minsk: the flame will be brought during the opening ceremony of the 2nd European Games on June 21st.



Show of the week

A concert by the Assorti show-dance ensemble, hosted by Rechitsa

EXHIBITIONS

NATIONAL ART MUSEUM OF BELARUS

20 Lenin Street
Until 12th May. *Paralised Flame*
Until 21st June. *Two Worlds of Russian Icon Painting*: 17th century monuments from Russian Icon Museum (Moscow)
Until 30th June. *Salvador Dali*

NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM

12 Karl Marx Street
Until 12th May. *1919: Belarusian Republic*
Until 14th May. Exhibition of Andrey Sagalov's works: *STELL, WOOD & BONE*
Until 30th May. Exhibition of party dresses: *Invitation to the Ball*

PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY OF BELARUS

11 Sovetskaya Street
Until 2nd August. *Killed Strongmen of Belarusian Land*

NATIONAL CENTRE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS

3 Nekrasov Street
Until 12th May. *I'm Monet, I'm Shishkin, I'm Malevich*

BELARUSIAN LITERATURE HISTORY MUSEUM

13 Bogdanovich Street
Until 31st May. *Vladimir Korotkevich: Awakened Memory*

VILNIUS GALLERY

55 Kalinovsky Street
Until 27th May. *Sacred Spring*
Until 10th August. *Yakub Kolas and Vilno*

YANKA KUPALA LITERATURE MUSEUM

4 Yanka Kupala Street
Until 3rd May. Exhibition of Boris and Oksana Arakcheevs: *Belarusian Space as Teacher*

MIKHAIL SAVITSKY ART GALLERY

15 Svobody Square
Until 15th September. *European Martial Arts. From Volcano's Smithy to Mars' Arts*

MUSEUM OF BELARUSIAN NATURE AND ECOLOGY

12 K. Marx Street
Until 1st September. *Dangerous Beauty*

FIRST RSDRP SESSION HOUSE-MUSEUM

31a Nezavisimosti Avenue
Until 7th July. *Miraculous World Under Microscope*

MAXIM BOGDANOVICH LITERARY MUSEUM

2A Gertsen Street
Until 15th May. *House in Lyubimskaya Street*

THEATRES

BOLSHOI OPERA AND BALLET THEATRE

1 Parizhskoy Kommuny Square
05.05. *Giselle, ou les Wilis*
06.05. *Romance Night / ALternative*
08.05. Festive concert dedicated to Victory Day
10.05. *Anastasia*

MAXIM GORKY NATIONAL ACADEMIC DRAMA THEATRE

5 Volodarsky Street
04.05. *Twelfth Night*

THEATRE-STUDIO OF CINEMA ACTORS

13 Pobediteley Avenue
03.05. #13
04.05. *Battlefield*
05.05. *Macropolis' Means*
08.05. *Midnight Robbery*

YANKA KUPALA THEATRE

7 Engels Street
03.05. *Two Souls*
04 and 05.05. *Prudok Homeland*
04 and 05.05. *Paulinka*
05 and 08.05. *Inspector*
08.05. *Elza's Land*
10.05. *School of Taxpayers / Harvest*

CHAMBER DRAMA THEATRE

5 Frunze Street
03 and 10.05. *Trench Shelter*

BELARUSIAN DRAMA THEATRE

44 Kropotkin Street
03.05. *Adam's Jokes*
10.05. *Gender Tricks*

YOUTH THEATRE

17 Kozlov Street
03.05. *About Fedot – Archer*
10.05. *Hotel of Two Worlds*

MUSICAL THEATRE

44 Myasnikov Street
03.05. *Shalom Aleikhem! Peace to You, People!*
05.05. *Hello, I'm Charlie's Aunt*
10.05. *Tristan and Isolde*

BELARUSIAN ARMY THEATRE

3 Krasnoarmeiskaya Street
03.05. *A Dog on Hay*
08.05. *Soldiers*
10.05. *Three Sisters*

CHAMBER DRAMA THEATRE

5 Frunze Street
03 and 10.05. *Trench Shelter*

YOUNG SPECTATORS' THEATRE

26 Engels Street
04.05. *I See the Sun*

PUPPET THEATRE

20 Engels Street
03.05. *Belvedere*
10.05. *Pushkin: Very Small Tragedies*