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# BELARUS

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# ROAD OF KNOWLEDGE LEADS TO MASTERY

INTERNATIONAL

# The Minsk Times

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# Learning our lessons

The Belarusian system of education enjoys popularity amongst young people and those beyond our borders. Thousands of foreign students study in Belarusian universities and our educational establishments compare well in prestigious international rankings. Our country is almost completely self-sufficient as far as providing highly-qualified specialists is concerned. School alumni prefer to receive their higher education in Belarusian universities. The system of professional technical education has been preserved and is currently being improved; our experiences are emulated by other states of the former USSR. However, the current stage of economic development, the arrival of high technologies and the fast growth of the IT sphere has given new challenges to schools, secondary specialised establishments, lyceums, institutes and universities. This concerns the writing of textbooks, the preparation of teachers, the improvement of the school curriculum, greater correlation between business needs and the number and quality of university graduates. How will the issues of education be solved? This was discussed at the Nationwide Conference for Teaching, bringing together more than 800 people. In an open format, they shared their opinions and experience. Everyone could visit the exhibition entitled 'Education for the Future of the Country', and the Smart Bus hardware and software suite. Thematic sections and round table discussions were also offered. The President of Belarus delivered a speech to the participants and answered their questions.

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## Stages of development

“You know my approach towards the transformation, modernisation, and reformation of our education system. I strongly oppose any breakdown, even reformation in the real sense of this word. I've always been in favour of development. We should be answering the questions life puts before us,” asserted the President.

Mr. Lukashenko stressed that several countries have rebuilt their education system, with mixed results. “Today, they acknowledge having lost some good things from the previous system of education. We've chosen another way, passing the first stage and second (if this process can be divided into stages).

We've learned the disadvantages and analysed them, recognising problems yet unsolved. This means we're on the verge of some third stage. It may be the main stage in the modernisation of our education system. We should discuss how to resolve matters that we now see clearly, ready to take the next step in improving the education system: pre-school, primary and secondary schooling, vocational, and higher education,” summed up the President.

## Grades

The President is convinced that preserving the ten-mark grading system (rather than returning to five) isn't a major issue. Several years ago, we moved towards the ten-mark system, without

Alexander  
Lukashenko:

*We are ready  
to take the next  
step in improving  
our education system:  
pre-school, primary  
and secondary  
schooling, vocational,  
and higher  
education...*



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discussion, or testing. “This is an example of us acting without thinking things through thoroughly, or testing. Time has shown that we can do without this.”

## Teachers

“All of us had teachers who not only cultivated love for their subjects but also helped us determine our way in life. That is why teachers by right enjoy great respect in Belarus. This profession is only for dedicated people. The formation of future generations depends on the personality of a school teacher and their professionalism. They not only give knowledge but also carry out a difficult pastoral mission. It is more than just work, it is selfless devotion. The personality of a teacher, their position and view

of life are the most important things,” said Mr. Lukashenko.

## Scientific thinking

“Today schoolchildren and students are often taught to use only a ready-made set of knowledge. Pupils lack analysis and questioning. Some are unable to formulate their thinking logically or express their opinions without referring to the Internet. As a result, we see a lack of professionals on the one side while, on the other side, we see employers’ dissatisfaction with employees. This is unacceptable in education,” believes the President. “The Internet generation is growing up in an information environment. For young people Internet is a necessity in life, they don’t see themselves

without electronic gadgets. I believe that these are necessary, interesting and useful. However, it’s more important to teach people to think.”

## Congress of teachers

“In autumn, we’ll gather our top scientists, academicians, doctors and candidates of sciences for a congress,” noted Mr. Lukashenko. This important forum will discuss issues concerning the preparation of pedagogical staff at the top level.

## Kindergartens

The President is convinced that the state needs to do everything it can to enable young specialists to remain in the sphere of pre-school education, if they wish. “It’s necessary to improve pro-

grammes and methods of working with children in kindergartens,” added Mr. Lukashenko.

The Government and local authorities have been entrusted with settling these and other issues of pre-school education by the end of 2020. Much has been done to ensure quality and availability of pre-school education, with twelve kindergartens commissioned in 2016 and sixteen more in 2017. Transportation of children has been organised, in addition to opening groups for short-stay. Belarusian pre-schooling is unrivalled globally, being free of charge and offering equal access to all.

### Labour payment

The President has called for the introduction of salary differentials in education, saying, “There are all kinds of teachers, as you know. Why have we adopted a one-size-fits-all approach? Why do all teachers receive almost the same salary? However, on the other hand, there shouldn’t be a significant difference between the salary of an experienced teacher and a young graduate, if the latter has the necessary expertise.” Mr. Lukashenko declared his



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intention to solve the issues around teachers’ salaries next year, “Our education is primarily free of charge and we invest huge amounts of money in it. To some extent we ‘impoverish’ teachers, the situation is reversed in other countries: they spend a lot of money (because of paid education) assisting teachers and lecturers. Which way should we choose? Our approaches will be different.”

### Upbringing

“Previously, much was spoken of the administrative workload on teachers. Last year, the Ministry adopted an exhaustive list of school documentation, to ease this burden. However, I’m told that our teachers still complain of this problem. I’d like to underline that teachers should be focusing on teaching children rather than being involved

## Opinions



#### Natalia Baranova, Rector of Minsk State Linguistic University:

Our priorities for education’s further development are correctly oriented but we must be careful to implement them wisely. The participation of the President has added special importance to this conference on teaching. He sees problems clearly within the educational system and has determined the major vectors of its development. It’s vital to move forward with care, weighing decisions, to ensure they bring only benefit to the educational process.

#### Natalia Kalinovskaya, Director of Brest Regional Lyceum (named after P.M. Masherov):

I’m primarily concerned about issues of organisation of the educational process, at the third stage of general secondary

education: primarily regarding subject-oriented education. It’s important to preserve separate subjects, studied at an advanced level, since these are popular among students. Young people should have a choice as to which subjects they study at an advanced level and which they study at a basic level, depending on their inclinations and preferences, connected with their desire to pursue a particular vocation. When work experience is being conducted, it’s reasonable to set up collaboration between general secondary education establishments and higher schools. For example, we do so with the Academy of Public Administration (under the aegis of the President of Belarus).



#### Honoured Teacher of Belarus Vladimir Shitko, Director of Gorodok State Agrarian Technical College:

In discussing secondary and higher education, far less attention is being paid



***Priorities for education's further development are correctly oriented but we must be careful to implement them wisely. It's vital to move forward with care, weighing decisions, to ensure they bring only benefit to the educational process***

in paperwork," emphasised Mr. Lukashenko. The President warned the Education Minister, and the chairs of regional, district and city executive committees, that only documents relating to education should be sent to schools.

### **Class teachers**

Mr. Lukashenko reminded that, in the past, class teachers regularly visited pupils at home, and showed interested in their lives and occupations. "We shouldn't lose this. A teacher should live close to their pupils," underlined the President. He also said that, during his familiarisation with the harvesting campaign, in the regions, he heard about

teachers being sent into fields to help organise the harvesting process, which is clearly not part of their official job specification. However, the President noted, "I — as your colleague in the past and a person who has experienced a great deal, including various harvesting campaigns — am aware of this process. I think that a capable teacher wouldn't complain on being asked to take control of something, including harvesting. It's interesting and enriching."

### **New textbooks**

"Good textbooks are the foundation for school education. This is what primarily determines the quality of pupils'

knowledge. I remind you that the most important requirement is that the content of the educational material should be of optimal quality in volume, information and depth. By September 1st, 2019, we will have had new textbooks. This doesn't mean they will be ideal and perhaps they won't meet the requirements of 2019. Textbooks presuppose constant creativity. We will be continually supplementing and changing," noted Mr. Lukashenko. During the discussion at the plenary session of the Conference a proposal was heard regarding additional social guarantees for those authors who are involved in creating school textbooks. The President responded, "I'm in favour of paying good money for textbooks."

### **Tests**

The President also spoke about preparation for entering universities, saying that, "Centralised tests should be fully in sync with the school curriculum. Much has been done in this academic year. By the next year, September 1st, 2018, all tests will have been improved and brought into compliance with the school curriculum. This process should be completed soon, especially consider-

to professional-vocational courses. Problems exist, and the major problem is connected with a weak material-technical base. For example, in Gorodok, we prepare agro-specialists. But what machinery do we use? Out-of-date machinery! Colleges don't have money to purchase machinery, even on leasing terms. However, the whole range of modern machinery on which our graduates will be working is produced by domestic enterprises. Why can't they give at least one sample to each leading agrarian college? Just to allow students to get acquainted. In the West, such practice is widespread. It's PR for manufacturers while giving educational establishments the opportunity to train sought-after specialists, boasting the ability to work on the latest machinery.

### **Honoured Teacher of Belarus Nikolay Shirko, Director of Gymnasium #1 in Baranovichy:**

There was a time when students of higher educational establishments had their term of study reduced from five

years to just four, or four and a half. It was planned to move some elements of university programmes to the 12th grade curriculum. However, we decided against this, despite universities shifting to a four-year education programme. As a result, we have a mismatch between the level of knowledge of pupils who come to universities. They need to cover the programme within four years, where they once had five. To compensate, alumni profile classes have appeared at schools, gymnasiums and lyceums. It's a good trend but senior pupils study seventeen subjects. Can a 16-17-year old really master all at a good level, and how does this influence their health? I believe that obligatory basic education should be completed across a range of subjects, enabling secondary school students to gain an impression of their world. Meanwhile, the number of subjects in senior profile classes should be reduced to six or seven.



ing the experience of university enrolment this year.

## Enhancement of qualifications

The Head of State focussed on to the necessity of giving new impetus to the qualification enhancement of pedagogical staff. “It should be more flexible, able to promptly react to needs, considering the latest achievements of scientists and developments in modern practice. We have already agreed that retraining is not one or two months spent by a teacher somewhere in the qualification enhancement institute. A teacher should enhance their qualification in a week or ten days maximum.” Moreover, retraining should be conducted by innovative teachers, winners of awards and specialists in teaching methods who should share the best practices available.

## Language

Mr. Lukashenko noted that when the decision was adopted regarding the language used by schools, the country’s decision reflected the people’s wishes. “We did not force anyone to choose the Belarusian language. If we had chosen the same way the ‘reforming fathers’ did when the Soviet Union collapsed, we would not have had either of the languages now. Russian is our native language. If someone thinks it only belongs to Russia as a state, then we have a difference of

opinion. I treat Belarusian and Russian equally. I think by no means should we reject this heritage because we will lose a great deal. Let us be rich in language and have two mother tongues — Russian and Belarusian. Perhaps in time, life will change and a new generation will decide differently which language to speak.”

## Internet

The President is in favour of tough restrictions on damaging information on the Internet. “We need to pay considerable attention to it. Law enforcement agencies and other bodies must address the issue. We’re now preparing several relevant legal acts. We do not need destructive information about suicides and similar issues. Russia has already made a number of decisions on the problem, perhaps too late. We should not waste time ourselves as tough decisions are needed in this respect.”

## Patriotism

Every lesson or additional class needs specific educational and ideological content, not only in school, but at the theatre, and in museums, sporting venues and stadiums. “This isn’t my invention. Take the Americans, for example, for whom the anthem is sacred. We need to restore our full system of out-of-school activities. We perfectly understand its value. I’ve given instructions many times: to fill the sixth school day, to reinforce work

with families, to introduce labour for children, and to involve them in sports.”

## Youth organisations

“I have the impression that, in recent times, our ideological assistants — youth and public organisations — have been keen on flash mobs, PR actions and other showy events. Probably, this is the modern way. However, they might have forgotten that their major task is to work closely with young people, on a daily basis,” noted Mr. Lukashenko.

## Universities

The President doesn’t exclude the possibility of returning to determining the basic profile for each university. It’s necessary to reduce the number of professions which lie outside the core competence of this or that university. “It seems to me it is time to return to the definition of basic profiles for every university,” said Alexander Lukashenko. Moreover, the number of universities needs to be optimised, considering demographic processes and population forecasts.

## Vocational education

The President noted, “Vocational education was mentioned during a meeting of the CIS Heads of State and I heard some depressing facts. Some leaders had turned to Russia for assistance in fixing their vocational education systems, but Vladimir Putin had admitted that, unfortunately, Russia has destroyed its vocational education system. Only Belarus has preserved its vocational schools, though we could do with more. We’re helping other countries, including Russia, in training blue-collar workers. Our preserving of the vocational education system is our greatest accomplishment.”

Mr. Lukashenko also supports the use of modern equipment in education, and recognises the need for more vocational courses in schools. Reacting to the words of the President, the Education Minister, Igor Karpenko, said, “We’ll return such notions as ‘working practice’ and ‘service work’ into the education programme, settling these issues.”

## Competently

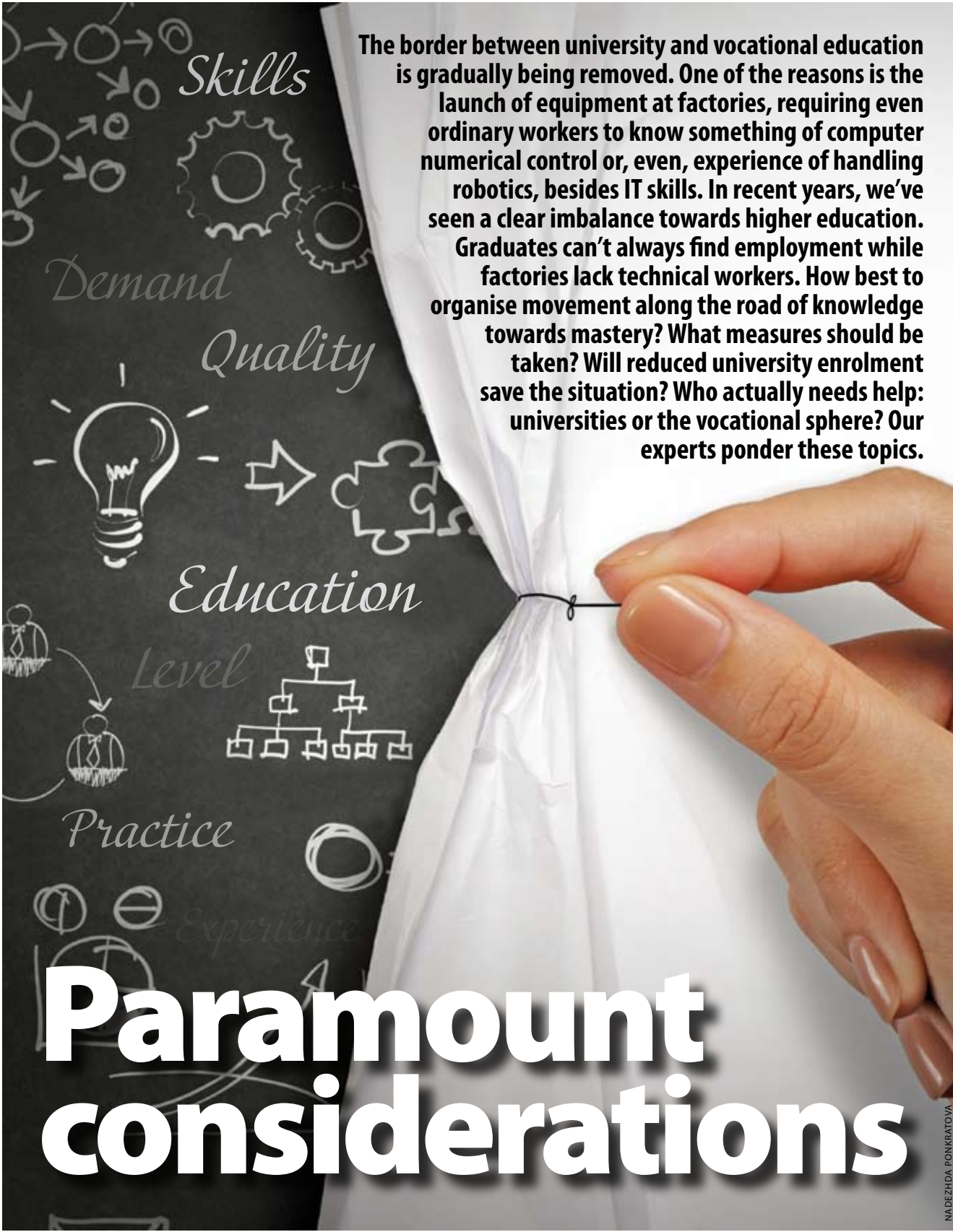


### Igor Karpenko, Education Minister:

*All conditions have been created in the country to move to obligatory general secondary education. There’s state demand for highly-qualified specialists. The Education Code has a legislative opening for innovations. Belarusian society is ready for such a shift, with almost 100 percent alumni currently receiving general secondary education. The conditions for the move are created*

*by a system of universal education, external studies and opportunity to receive general education in evening classes and establishments of professional-technical education. A qualitatively new stage in the system’s development is planned, aimed at enhancing the educational level of citizens, positively influencing the development of human potential and the international image of the country.*





The border between university and vocational education is gradually being removed. One of the reasons is the launch of equipment at factories, requiring even ordinary workers to know something of computer numerical control or, even, experience of handling robotics, besides IT skills. In recent years, we've seen a clear imbalance towards higher education. Graduates can't always find employment while factories lack technical workers. How best to organise movement along the road of knowledge towards mastery? What measures should be taken? Will reduced university enrolment save the situation? Who actually needs help: universities or the vocational sphere? Our experts ponder these topics.

# Paramount considerations

# Demand for intellect

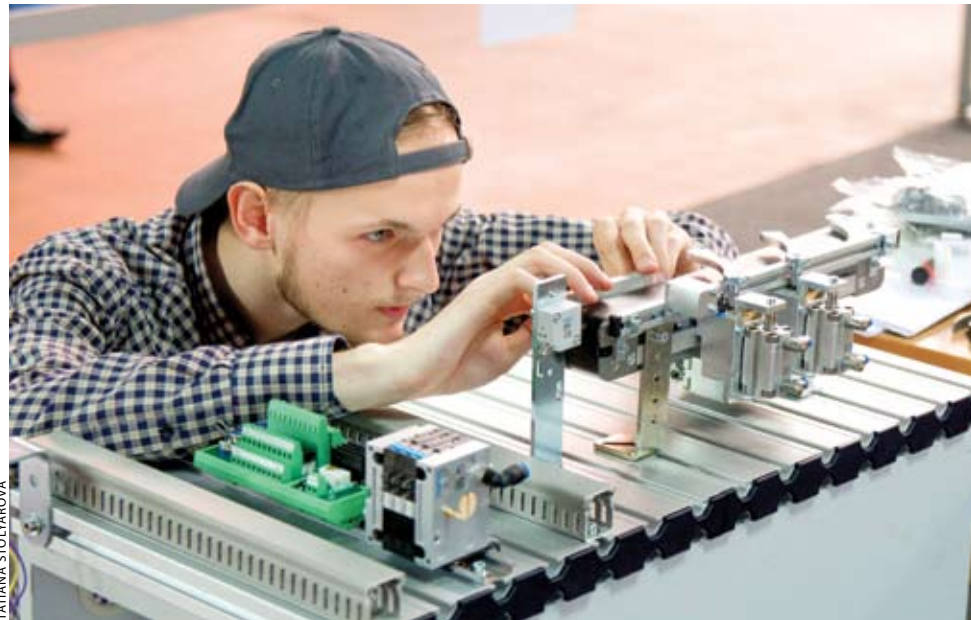
**Vadim Mozheiko, an expert with the Liberal Club:**

**A**ny attempt to send alumni to vocational schools instead of universities via any instruction from above is inefficient in the current situation. Creative economies are flourishing worldwide, and robotics is growing by leaps and bounds. Demand is increasing for highly-qualified specialists rather than mere machine operators, and vocational education is having a revival.

However, major reform is necessary. Enrolment at vocational schools has been falling for at least sixteen years. According to the National Statistical Committee of Belarus, the number of students at institutions of vocational education in Belarus has fallen consistently. In the 2001/2002 academic year, there were 138,600 such students, against 70,300 for the 2016/2017 academic year (almost half the number). The trend is evident nationwide, rather than reflecting the quality of particular secondary schools or some regional peculiarity.

Even if vocational schools offer hundreds of thousands of places, while those at universities are reduced, it won't inspire huge enrolment. However, restricting the number of paid university places will inspire youngsters to study abroad, such as in Russia. As a result, the country will experience a brain drain instead of growing its vocational education.

Belarus lacks enough 'working' specialists while having an artificially high number of higher education graduates. We all know that plenty of university graduates like the prestige of a diploma without intending to pursue employment in the field in which they are trained. We might look to Germany for a positive example, where the prestige of vocational education is high. We could study German experience in organising the work of vocational schools, which closely in-



TATIANA STOLYAROVA

teract with employers, to orient courses to market requirements. The German educational system uses modern equipment (donated by manufacturers) and focuses on industrial/professional work experience placement.

Belarus is keen to follow the world trend towards being a post-information society, remaining the most successful and rapidly-growing economic sector. New cultural initiatives are reviving, with creative hubs opening at old Soviet industrial facilities. These combine creativity and culture with economic thinking and the latest technologies, based on human capital and intellectual property.

Europe is seeing profit from creative industries, which account for 4.5 percent of the world's GDP, with annual forecast growth of 10 percent (quicker than the spheres of production and services). Creative jobs employ 8.3 million EU citizens, with an aggregate income of 558 billion Euros. If we want Belarus to be a successful country, with a developed culture and economy, it's important to invest in the development of modern technologies. However, such skills can't be taught at secondary specialised educational institutions.

The High-Tech Park is a business driver in Belarus and our IT start-ups are being sold to global companies for



billions of US Dollars, exceeding the 'value' of our Soviet industrial legacy. The state has realised the importance of this sector and is thinking of how best to facilitate further growth at the HTP. However, the whole country can and should be creative, and highly-qualified personnel are necessary for this. Professionals for creative industries are born at universities. Higher education should be modernised, to build the economy of tomorrow.



## Economy needs working hands

**Valentina Leonenko, Candidate of Historical Sciences, Associate Professor:**

**T**he news that our country plans to reduce the number of students accepted in universities and, at the same time increase enrolment in vocational educational institutions is very pleasing. The problem is so acute that within a couple of years it would be impossible to tackle it. A great deal of work lies ahead to bring order to the system of preparation of vocational personnel and it won't be easy.

It would be nice if the clearly structured system that existed in the USSR was restored. At that time, huge attention was paid to working specialities while universal workers — Jack-of-all-

trades (prepared by the system of vocational education) were greatly appreciated. Moreover, the staff policy was such that executive positions were primarily occupied by people who have trod the path from the 'plough to the machine tool'. It's a wise pathway because such a person (if appointed to an executive position) has a clear idea of the production process.

We have the complex problem of vocational orientation. The slogan 'A person is nothing without higher education!' has led us to a sorry situation. According to statistical data, in recent years, Belarus has become one of the top countries for the number of students and graduates of universities per capita. But where are the breakthroughs in the economy and science? There are none and they won't appear unless we remember that a labourer — a worker, a specialist in mecha-

nisation — stands at the root of the success of any state. There was time when we chased world experiences and didn't notice how our own developments were copied by others. For example, a classical Soviet scheme is currently operating in Germany and other EU states — around 20-30 percent of alumni enter universities while the remaining become students of very good professional-technical colleges. The level of development in Western Europe confirms the success of such division.

This leads to another problem — the material-technical base of our colleges and technical schools. In times of high-tech production, the level of workers' preparation should compare with the level of university graduates. At the same time, the workshops of many technical schools have only out-of-date equipment. As a result, an employer must re-train young specialists directly at their place of work. Thus, state mon-

ey spent on their education and preparation, is spent in vain. This is an inadmissible situation. For renewal of the material-technical base a clear and efficient scheme of public private partnership should be formed in the sphere of vocational training. To make graduates of colleges popular on the market and to provide them with work we need a scheme of efficient interaction between various ministries and departments, primarily between the Education Ministry and the Economy Ministry.

A time-tested scheme to prepare specialists used to exist in the USSR. This was facilitated by the now almost obsolete system of vocational training facilities and all passed this internship. This was extremely important and professional vocational orientation helped many schoolchildren determine their place in life. At that time, the thinking was that to achieve success and respect one shouldn't necessarily have a higher education diploma. We now have twice as many university graduates compared to those who have completed a professional-technical education.

It appears that everyone wants to govern and there's no one to work. Even if technical schools had been equipped with super-modern equipment they wouldn't have enough students as a scornful and sometimes derogatory attitude towards working specialists exists in the mass consciousness. TV influences young people by showing films and programmes where a successful person must be wealthy but no one shows the formula for success which is unchanged: in reality, businessmen work extremely hard and often start their careers at the bottom of the ladder.

It's necessary to educate people from childhood that success is a goal in life but it's impossible without hard work. Only when such professions as carpenters, bricklayers and locksmiths are respected in the mass consciousness will the system of education finally be balanced and the wheels of the economy will turn in the necessary direction.



# Budget places are never empty

## Fifty-three thousand first-year students receive their student passes in Belarus

### Clever youngsters from remote places

Parents sigh with relief as the application process is completed and half of all Belarusian candidates have chosen a lucky ticket to study for the basic grant; others are now thinking about where they will take the allowance and pay the extra costs to study elsewhere.

In the educational reform period, centralised testing was implemented to rank future students. The procedure is simple, after choosing a higher educational establishment, school leavers had to pass tests in a language (Russian or Belarusian) and nominated subjects. The maximum score for each test is 100 points.

Nobody relies on luck: the more points you gain, the greater the chances

of entering a prestigious faculty. This year, three hundred (out of 90,000) super-intelligent girls and boys earned 100 points in one or two subjects. “Pleasingly, these clever young people live and study not only in Minsk’s gymnasiums and lyceums,” says Belarus’ Minister of Education Igor Karpenko. “Schoolchildren from small towns and villages are increasingly showing brilliant results and entering the best Belarusian universities. No corruption or personal acquaintances can help them. Everyone has an equal opportunity. In two decades, the testing system has proved itself.”

### Brainstorm

Alena Apolonik from Baranovichi proudly calls herself a student of the best medical university in the country. Her centralised testing results combined with the school diploma produced an incredible 382 points. While trying on a snow-white lab coat, she recollects her heart beating before the tests — especially in

biology. “After three hours of brainstorming, I left the room last — rechecking my answers dozens of times. Two weeks later, I received a message from the Republican Institute of Knowledge Control and could hardly believe my eyes. I’d earned one hundred points! I’m grateful to my teacher Zinaida Kuchur who taught us magnificently. Furthermore, on seeing how interested I was in the subject, she stayed at school after lessons to help me learn the complicated material. I needed no extra tutors as a result,” she says.

As is traditional, medical universities have the greatest competition. This year, the Belarusian State Medical University’s Pharmaceutical Department accepted future students with no less than 376 points; the Medical Department’s requirement was 360 points.

## *This year, three hundred (out of 90,000) super-intelligent girls and boys earned 100 points in one or even two subjects during their tests*

The Belarusian State University’s International Relations Department took the lead in this regard. Budget-paid places for the ‘International Law’ speciality (preparing international lawyers with knowledge of a foreign language) have been given only to those with at least 384 points (out of possible 400).

“We are pleased with the results of centralised testing in physics and mathematics. These are higher than ever before,” admits Vyacheslav Molofeev — the executive secretary of the BSU’s Admission Committee. “This has affected pass boundaries: last year, about 200 points were needed for several specialities of the Mechanical-Mathematical Department; this year, three hundred have been registered.”

The number of those wishing to follow a technical course has not decreased how-

ever: in Minsk and the regions, IT specialities have enjoyed impressive popularity (up to five applicants for every place).

### **Three plus one**

This year, a new practice has been introduced which many applicants have appreciated: bonus centralised testing. Previously, higher educational establishments accepted only three test certificates. An additional fourth test could have been taken just in case one subject was failed. With an additional certificate, a young person could apply for a similar speciality or another university. This trick is quite legal, however, other attempts to outwit the examiners were severely penalised.

“This year’s testing has registered no serious issues. Only 30 people failed

to reach the finish line (out of 90,000),” the Deputy Prime Minister of Belarus and the Chairman of the State Commission for Control of the Preparation and Conducting of Entrance Examinations — Vasily Zharko — explains. “Most often, young people were ordered to leave the room for well-known tricks such as cell phones and cheat sheets.”

Apart from Belarusian, Russian young people also participated in the entrance campaign. Admission committees accepted their certificates with centralised testing results on the same grounds as Belarusians’. Exactly the same result was expected from them. It is too early to speak of final results but it’s already known that around 2,000 Russians have made their choice in favour of Belarusian universities.

By Kristina **Khilko**

## **Day of Knowledge**

# **Teachers, in your name...**

**On the eve of the annual Day of Knowledge, the best employees from the education system gathered in the Independence Palace. These are people who shape the moral and spiritual values of our generation, cultivate the love of honest values and pass on their knowledge.**

**T**hey facilitate the formation of an educated, cultural and hard-working nation and this awards day in the President’s schedule was dedicated to them. The event began with a memorable trip to the palace and sincere speech from the President, “The bestowing of state awards on the eve of Knowledge Day is the recognition of your personal merits, as well as a sign of great respect for the profession of teachers.”

Those awarded included the best representatives of higher and secondary schools, lyceums and colleges from Vitebsk, Ivatsevichi, Krichev, Minsk, Mogilev and Pinsk. Honorary titles and Gratitude from the President was bestowed on rectors and teachers of the Brest, Polotsk, Belarusian National Technical, Belarusian State Economic, Belarusian State University and the Academy of the Interior Ministry. It’s difficult to overestimate their contribution to the development of our education system and the strengthening of the international image of our country. The words of the geography teacher at gymnasium #1 from Zhodino, Irina Pichugina, awarded ‘For Labour Merit’ resounded in the Independence Palace, “I’m proud that the names of our pupils were heard in the USA and India, Indonesia and other countries. I’m proud that our flag was raised in their honour and the Belarusian national anthem was performed.”



# EAEU: roadmap for further progress



## Astana hosted meeting of EAEU Heads of Government, featuring Prime Ministers of Russia and Belarus, Dmitry Medvedev and Andrei Kobyakov

“Over the first four months of this year, the volume of EAEU trade (including with other countries) has increased by more than 25 percent,” noted the Russian PM. “The structure of goods is also improving, with the export of machinery and equipment having grown by 34 percent, while that of food products and agricultural supplies has increased by 26 percent. Moreover, the share of energy goods is falling, making trade more balanced.”

Mr. Medvedev is convinced that it's necessary to reinforce dynamics and that we must further improve the rules of doing business and develop co-operation processes. A 'roadmap' is to

be fulfilled, aiming to eliminate barriers to industry, the agrarian sector and power engineering.

“It's very pleasant that our session, the first of recent years, is being held against a background of economic revival for EAEU member states,” noted Mr. Kobyakov. “Growth is becoming more sustainable and we're seeing positive dynamics across several economic branches.”

The sides have agreed to develop the digital economy, with an online auction for electricity, and a single space for the work of air transport, and so on.



***The President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, signed a law giving citizens of countries where Russian is an official language the right to work as drivers in Russia, using national driving licences, granting validity to citizens of Kyrgyzstan (where Russian language is one of the official languages), as well as those of Belarus***

Regarding recognition of driving licences, it's desirable to implement universal rules across EAEU member states. Since June 1st, Russia has refused to accept the validity of driving licences issued beyond its borders. However, on June 16th, Dmitry Medvedev and Andrei Kobyakov agreed on recognition of Belarusian licenses, while meeting at the Union State Council of Ministers.

Of course, other EAEU member states are keen to see the abolishment of restrictions on their drivers. On July 26th, the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin signed a law giving citizens of countries where Russian is an official language the right to work as drivers in Russia, using national driving licences, granting validity to citizens of Kyrgyzstan (where Russian language is one of the official languages) as well as to those of Belarus. The same validity is still under discussion regarding Armenia and Kazakhstan. The Speaker of the State Duma of Russia, the Chairman of the Belarus-Russia Union State Parliamentary Assembly, Vy-

acheslav Volodin, suggested that Yerevan make Russian an official language.

The treaty on pension provision was high on the agenda, to facilitate working in any EAEU country without loss of employment register. "Millions of people who've worked in several EAEU states are waiting for this treaty. The issue is sensitive but the interests of people should be protected," asserted Mr. Kobyakov.

After the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council session, the Heads of EAEU Governments attended EXPO 2017.

The Heads of Government examined a water installation 'Energy of the Arctic', with models of ice breakers and a floating nuclear power station. They then visited the pavilions of Belarus and Kazakhstan. Belarusians demonstrated their achievements in IT and machine building, with the accent on national characteristics. Dmitry Medvedev said that Yekaterinburg will be fighting for the right to host EXPO 2025 and asked his colleagues to support the Russian application.

By Nikolay Alexeev



SERGEY LOZIUK

# Words reign in Polotsk

## Early autumn in Polotsk marked by Belarusian Written Language Day

**T**here's no doubt that the current year is a landmark in all respects for Belarusian book printing. Thousands of guests have arrived in ancient Polotsk from across Belarus and elsewhere (where our words are familiar, enjoyed and studied) to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Francysk Skaryna publishing his first Bible. Polotsk is also celebrating the 1155th anniversary of its foundation, as well as the Day of Belarusian Written Language and the 500th anniversary of Eastern Slavonic book printing. The literary capital's station was decorated for the holiday, funded by national, regional and local budgets. Polotsk's bus and railway stations were renovated, alongside central city streets and Francysk Skaryna Avenue. The restored Palace of Culture also looked wonderful for the

occasion, hosting major events for the nationwide holiday of language and spirituality.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Vasily Zharko, read a greeting sent by the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, to guests of Belarusian Written Language Day. He also addressed guests personally, welcoming those who'd come from abroad. "When celebrating the Day of Belarusian Written Language, we acknowledge all those who have created our statehood, culture, education and the high level of national art," he said.

Read on to see how Polotsk entertained tourists over the noisy festive days.

### Walking along Francysk Skaryna's streets

Our great first printer enjoyed travelling, seeing much of Europe, so it's no surprise that, around 1522, he released his 'Small Travelling Book', publishing in Vilnya, as a spiritual





БЕЛТА



VLADIMIR SHLAPAK



‘helping hand’ for wanderers like himself. This year, Skaryna’s original edition finally returned to his homeland, after travelling through the centuries and various cities. However, the rarity didn’t stay long in Minsk and will be touring again soon, alongside the international ‘Along Skaryna’s Roads with Belgazprombank’ exhibition.

Connoisseurs from Vilnius were the first to see the book, in May, when it went on show at the Palace of Great Lithuania Dukes. Now, Polotsk residents and guests have the opportunity to see the edition. Until September 10th, the book was at the Museum of Belarusian Book Printing, before going to Kaliningrad.

Oleg Lukashevich’s documentary, entitled ‘Francysk Skaryna. Man of the World’, was shot especially for the project, and visitors can view Skaryna’s printing workshop via a virtual reality helmet.

### Native words

The renewed Palace of Culture was recently filled with Belarusian classical literary works, performed by finalists in the Republican ‘Live Classics’ contest, for young readers. The project began in February, under the motto ‘We Embrace Reading, Reading Together, Creating Ourselves and our Country’. It already lays claims to being the most large-scale contest for readers in the history of the country. Over a period of six months, almost

13,000 schoolchildren took part, while the literary competition covered all cities and regions, uniting those with a love for Belarusian language, preserving it in their memory and heart.

STV TV Channel — one of the co-organisers of the contest — has presented two projects: ‘Live Classics’, which brought live Belarusian language to Polotsk; and the ‘Golden Collection’, of best-loved Belarusian songs.

### The literary market

The festival of book and press, held on Polotsk’s Francysk Skaryna Square, provided two days of surprises. The city’s book heart hosted presentations of the latest literature from Belarus and the CIS, as well as projects by Polotsk poets and writers, with trade and autograph sessions and exhibitions dedicated to the 135th anniversary of the birth of Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas — classical writers of the Belarusian literature. Visitors could also see how a print yard looked in the 16th century, with an ancient publishing workshop being greatly enjoyed by both adults and children.

Close to the ‘SB. Belarus Segodnya’ pavilion was a 16th century printing machine, meticulously recreated by historian and collector Vladimir Lihodedov. Guests could print their own page, guided by Mr. Lihodedov. “Today we have



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first recreated The Diamond Sūtra: the world's first dated book, released in China in 868. We've used special paper from the mulberry tree," he told us.

The book was first printed by Wang Jie, using extremely thick paper, but was actually written by Buddhist monks, as the Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra (Vajra Cutter Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra). In the 4th century, monk Kumārajīva translated the text into Chinese. It is likely that the thickness of the paper allowed the book to survive, since almost 1,500 years have passed since its printing.

There was a presentation of a 20-volume repro-

duction edition of the book legacy of our first printer, created by employees at the National Library, over a period of almost five years. Fragments of his works were tracked down from all over the world. The results have already been assessed by the book community, with 'The World Heritage of Francysk Skaryna' winning the Grand Prix at the 'Art of Book' international contest of CIS member states.

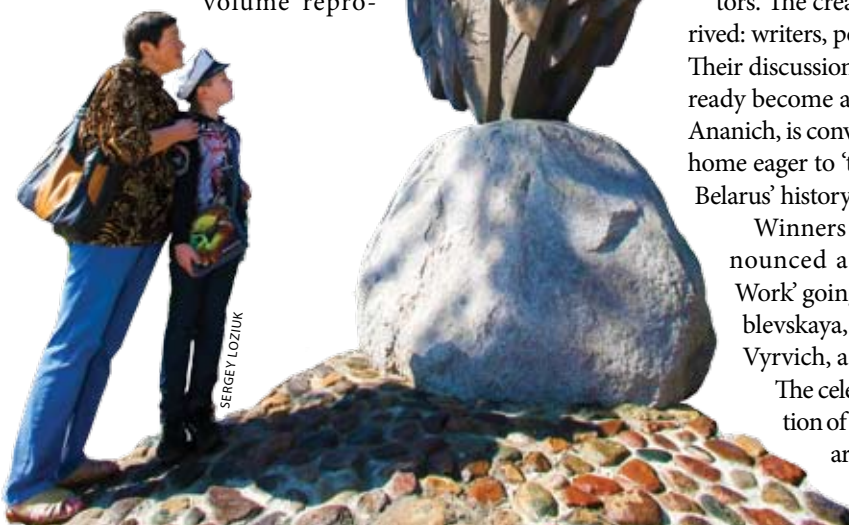
### Discussions of high topics

The literary round table discussion at the Museum of Belarusian Book Printing brought together those for whom literature represents the spiritual will of our ancestors. The creative elite from a dozen neighbouring states arrived: writers, poets, journalists, publishers and heads of media. Their discussions and annual meetings with colleagues have already become a tradition. Belarus' Information Minister, Lilia Ananich, is convinced that guests attending the event will return home eager to 'tell their readers, spectators and listeners about Belarus' history and how it's building its present and future.'

Winners of the 3rd National Literary Award were announced across seven nominations, with 'Best Prose Work' going to famous writer and journalist Lyudmila Rublevskaya, for her adventure saga, 'Adventures of Prantish Vyrvich, a Betrayer and Confederate.'

The celebrations finished with a concert, 'Golden Collection of Belarusian Song.' Thirty thousand postage stamps are being distributed countrywide to mark the Day of Belarusian Written Language, and various television recordings have been made.

By Yuliana Leonovich



SERGEY LOZHIUK

# There's plenty to read

Millions of copies of the first Belarusian printed books, which appeared five hundred years ago, are now released annually

**D**espite the popularity of all manner of gadgets and the development of electronic libraries, paper books are still holding their own in our country.

We continue to be one of the most well reading and book publishing nations. Last year, 2.4 books per resident were

released in the Republic. This figure is less than 1 in Ukraine and Kazakhstan, while 1.4 books are published annually in Lithuania. Russia is slightly ahead, releasing 3 books per capita. Educational literature accounts for more than 70 percent of the total circulation of books released in Belarus, with over 1.5 million published for children and teenagers. 1,122 books and brochures (with a circulation of 3.74 million copies) were released in the Belarusian language. Publishing houses have printed 140 different authors of books and brochures (with a total circulation of 352,500 copies) using budgetary subsidies. Socially important editions include books from the 'School Library' series (printed in Braille script) for visually impaired children. There are 497 publishing houses in Belarus, including 180 state-owned.



SERGEY LOZIUK

In 2016, Belarus released **9,581** volumes of books and brochures, including **1,122** in Belarusian

The total circulation of books reached **23.14** million copies

**2.4** books per resident released countrywide last year



# Successful flight within five years

## Belarusian space branch celebrates five years of BKA Belarusian satellite in orbit

**T**he satellite was designed for remote Earth sensing, being almost completely developed by Belarusian specialists, with the participation of the National Academy of Sciences. It was manufactured at Belarusian enterprises and has been sending

back data since its launch. Even the data processing system is Belarusian, allowing us to assert that our space branch is truly established, and ready to meet new challenges.

Sergey Zolotoi, the Director of Minsk's scientific-engineering enterprise, Geoinformation Systems, tells us, "Around 125 million square kilometres of the Earth's surface has been photographed with the help of the BKA, with

the territory of Belarus covered many times. This information is used by eleven ministries and departments and is available freely. Meanwhile, over \$8 million of income has been generated beyond the expenditure of the project. We now have a portfolio of orders for the future and our country has almost completely avoided the need to import such data, saving a considerable amount of currency."

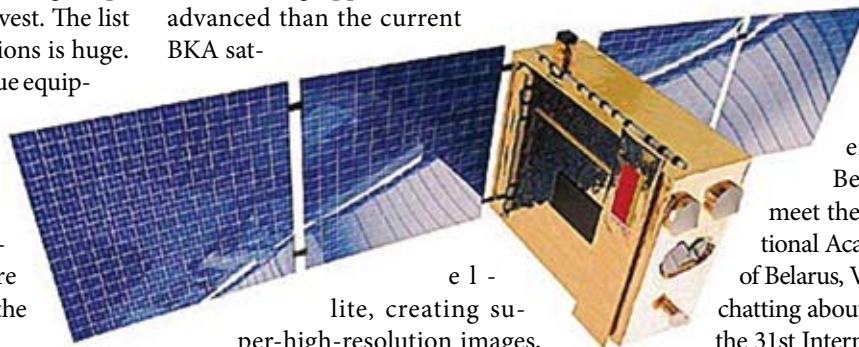
Belarus is managing to locate forest fires and places where illegal wood cutting is taking place, with the help of satellite photography. We can also find where insects are causing damage to wildlife, and where disease is affecting flora. Maps of new settlements and streets are being compiled with an accuracy of up to a few centimetres, allowing land lots and building locations to be determined. In addition, farmers are able to find out promptly how crops are ripening, helping them forecast their harvest. The list of advantages and applications is huge. Belarus now possesses unique equipment for remote Earth sensing from space, as installed on the Belarusian BKA satellite, and on the similar Russian satellite, Canopus-B. Both were launched five years ago on the same rocket carrier.

Minsk's Peleng JSC produces unique devices; however, other scientific-production enterprises in Belarus are also implementing the space programme, including Integral JSC, which manufactures micro circuits and other electronics — resistant to space radiation. Over the next few years, Russia is to launch up to fifteen Canopus satellites into orbit, all produced by Belarusian enterprises. This guarantees the above-mentioned companies work, while ensuring that Belarus will receive data from the joint space group, as was noted at a press conference organised by representatives of the Russian Roscosmos State Corporation, during a visit to the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus. According to the Deputy Director General of Roscosmos, Mikhail Khailov, the Belarusian BKA satellite is due to remain in orbit beyond its initial five years span. Others have been known to survive for two or three times the length of their guaranteed span.

What's next for the Belarusian space industry? On June 30th, 2017, in Moscow, the Chairman of the Presidium of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus joined the Head of the Space

Research Agency of Belarus, Vladimir Gusakov, and the Director General of Roscosmos Space Corporation, Igor Komarov, signing a memorandum of intentions to create a new Russian-Belarusian space apparatus for Earth remote sensing.

There are plans for Belarusian and Russian enterprises to work together in producing the satellite. Much of the technology exists already and, of course, the resulting apparatus will be more advanced than the current BKA sat-



ellite, creating super-high-resolution images, with a resolution down to just a few metres and the satellite weighing just 850-900kg — just over half that of similar American apparatus. This reduces costs significantly.

“The new BKA’s combination of technical characteristics will enable it to shoot from space at parameters beyond those currently available on the world market,” explains the Head of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, Vladimir Gusakov. “Demand for such space apparatus is guaranteed, so we’re planning serial production. Moreover, new opportunities are appearing for users of space information. For example, digital cadastre models of large cities are becoming a reality, alongside other high-tech applications, which significantly enhance the level of security.”

According to preliminary calculations, around \$180 million is needed for the creation and launch of another Belarusian satellite in the coming four or five years. This will be injected by Belarus and Russia, with funding sought. Already, specialists from our two states have begun work via five joint, Union State, Belarusian-Russian space programmes. In particular, technical stand-

ards have been agreed to develop space technologies, with Belarusian and Russian specialists combining their efforts, as in Soviet days.

Belarus also has ambitions in the sphere of piloted cosmonautics, with three Belarus-born people having been into space several times. One such is Vladimir Kovalenok, who heads the Federation of Cosmonautics of Russia. Belarus-born Oleg Novitsky, who recently returned from orbit, having

worked several months at the International Space Station, is another. He arrived in Belarus to rest and meet the Head of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, Vladimir Gusakov, chatting about preparations for the 31st International Congress of the Association of Space Flight Participants, being hosted by Minsk in September 2018. According to tradition, all citizens of Earth who have been into space are invited to such events, including Russian cosmonauts.

“We attach special importance to the congress,” notes Mr. Gusakov. “The fact that it’ll be attended by representatives of dozens of countries significantly raises the image of Belarus as a space state.”

Mr. Novitsky has promised to take part in this international meeting and has given recommendations regarding its organisation. He also took part in the aviation holiday in Minsk, where he met young people and told them about his impressions from orbit.

The Belarusian satellite continues in orbit while scientists and students from the Belarusian State University have developed and produced their own nanosatellite, being launched in early 2018. At the 68th session of the UN General Assembly, on November 1st, 2013, Belarus became a member of the Committee for Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) and has since worthily met the expectations of the international community.

By Vladimir **Bibikov**

## Man-made intellect stimulates thinking



**'I'll be back' is the immortal phrase of Arnold Schwarzenegger's character in 'The Terminator', which we all recollect on thinking of intelligent robots. Over the decades, the world of cinema has portrayed artificial intelligence as the rise of intelligent machines against people, but what's the reality? Does artificial intelligence exist, and what does this concept mean? Alexander Kalinovsky, from the Laboratory for Biomedical Images Analysis of the United Institute of Informatics Problems of the National Academy of Sciences, shares his views.**

### **Neural networks as a universal vehicle**

Around four years ago, little was spoken of artificial intellect. 'Deep learning' made it possible to obtain good results in image classification. What does that mean? Some time ago, sites began using verification of non-hacking during registration (alongside login and keyword) asking users to answer a simple test, such as distinguishing between a cat and a dog. This proved very effective, since systems were able to recognise the picture with an accuracy of 50 percent.

Over time, neural networks responsible for verification have improved, with detection accuracy approaching 99 percent. Accordingly, protection against bots has lost its relevance. On the one hand, this is bad but, on the other, it means that the intellect of machines has increased. This is thanks to the enlargement of a machine's ability to handle large amounts of data and the ability to quickly train neural networks with a high degree of accuracy to recognise images and texts, and make translations.

Commercial projects, in the sphere of entertainment, are largely responsi-

ble for this progress. Well-known Russian start-up 'Editor Fabby' is a good example, as its search systems remember your location, using this to make suggestions.

### ***Is this artificial intelligence?***

This is machine learning, which happens when you give a task to a computer, hoping to receive certain material afterwards. The full algorithm isn't always needed as neural network models can work with raw data, identifying key features, such as the difference between animal wool and fish scales. In fact, an algorithm is responsible for this, but has

wide application, beyond what's immediately apparent. Neural networks are a 'vehicle' for processing data and making new connections. For example, a computer may be asked to identify a tumour in an image; using advanced algorithms, it can rival the success of doctors.

## Not yet ready for automatic diagnostics

### *Is medicine a promising avenue for the use of machine intelligence?*

Machines used in medicine tend to be aimed at assisting doctors rather than automating diagnostics, which is probably the right course at present. If a computer fails to distinguish between a cat from a dog, you smile; if a medical mistake is made, the reaction would be different. More than a universal algorithm is needed; it must be supplemented by a large number of specially marked images. For example, a photo editor aimed at recognising change in hair colour would contain about 20,000 images in its database. While the human eye can see hair colour, only a specialist can distinguish a tumour. Doctors sometimes lack appreciation of why a computer needs such data. However, compiling such databases would be easier for our country than in the West, where data is mostly confidential. The Institute could develop a collection of medical data and, combined with preparation for the computer, a true breakthrough would be possible, without financial risk.

### *Can a computer train itself?*

As yet, we lack a clear explanation or a certain set of features to describe the modern concept of artificial intelligence. Some people say that it equates to the intelligence of a human, using the Turing, to evaluate a computer's ability to deceive in conversation. This seems a very narrow understanding of artificial intelligence. A few years ago, Google DeepMind created AlphaGo: a game in which the computer learns to solve problems. It's the first in the world to win a match against a professional player of the Chinese game of logic,

Go. Believe me, this is much more difficult than playing chess. The programme contains the elementary theory of the game and is filled with examples of professionals' moves and strategies of play. It's viewed as a model for developing artificial intelligence, for application in other areas.

Market researchers were the first to popularise the concept of artificial intelligence, but they have misled in failing to give precise definitions.

## Returning 'stray' drone

### *Is a fantastic robot uprising impossible?*

I believe so, yes. Robotics is progressing fast, in terms of hardware but, more importantly, regarding software. Construction of new sensors is vital. For example, a smart car needs a well-designed Lidar sensor. The prototype costs about \$70,000, which is beyond the budget of an ordinary person. These still have some drawbacks, too.

The DeepMind team continues to study natural intelligence, to better understand artificial intelligence and make a breakthrough.

### *Perhaps no analogies are needed. After all, a plane flies differently to a bird.*

We can offer various examples, with pros and cons. It's necessary to improve artificial intelligence.

## *Science has long gone beyond country boundaries, understandably. What do we know and what are we capable of?*

Our laboratory is engaged in image processing, and we've succeeded in tumour recognition. We've solved problems of 'computer vision', for example, in the application of space image processing. We're helping agricultural monitoring of the land, as it's hard to see where someone is farming in the wrong place, and it's a challenge to check what's growing in particular places. You need to have a large staff able to go on business trips across the regions. However, we can monitor using special algorithms and drones (which return if they lose a GPS signal). We're also completing a joint project with the Americans, preparing an algorithm to create three-dimensional images of tuberculosis.

### *What's ahead for the application of artificial intelligence?*

Science shouldn't work in isolation from industry. We're part of the Artificial Intelligence cluster, which is great, but more is needed. We're working jointly with long-term colleagues and are hoping for a project commissioned by industry. We have plenty of ideas.

By Vera **Arteaga**



*The ‘Supporting the Transition to a Green Economy in the Republic of Belarus’ project is assisting our country in generating economic growth via ‘green’ principles. These include environmentally sustainable and economically feasible use of natural resources, promotion of green production and green consumption patterns, green jobs creation, and changing target groups’ behaviour towards greater environmental sustainability. The budget for the project is five million Euros.*



## Economy on ‘green principles’

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### Production of Belarus’ first environmentally-friendly coolant for internal combustion engines established in Gomel

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**T**he new environmentally-friendly coolant production line at Gomelhintorg JSC can produce a thousand tonnes annually. The venture has been launched by the ‘Environmental Security of Coolants for Internal Combustion Engines’ pilot initiative, within the ‘Supporting the Transition to a Green Economy in the Republic of Belarus’ project. This is financed by the European Union and realised by the UNDP, in partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus. The initiative promotes partnership be-

tween Gomelhintorg JSC and the Promotion to Assistance Business Development Organisation.

The production of Belarus’ first environmentally-friendly coolant for internal combustion engines will solve the problem of poisonous coolant disposal, reducing the burden on the environment. Belarusian car owners will receive the opportunity to use environmentally-safe antifreeze that won’t accumulate in the soil. Moreover, the initiative is creating jobs.

Samples of the new ‘Antifreeze ECO-100’ have already undergone laboratory testing, at the Republican Scientific-Practical Centre for Hygiene, confirming environmental safety. The new antifreeze has a low-risk chemical composition, meaning that it doesn’t require recycling. It rivals more expensive foreign analogues, and will reduce the financial burden on enterprises, since there’s no need to dispose of used coolant.





The Assistance Business Development Organisation has installed thirteen devices, including five items of unique equipment, using European Union funds.

Legal and management documents that help establish sales of environmentally-friendly coolants and ensure the management of environmentally-friendly production have been developed within the pilot initiative. The 'Supporting the Transition to a Green Economy in the Republic of Belarus' project is assisting our country in generating economic growth via 'green' principles. These include environmentally sustainable and economically feasible use of natural resources, promotion of green production and green consumption patterns, green jobs creation, and changing target groups' behaviour towards greater environmental sustainability. The budget for the project is five million Euros.

By Vladimir **Mikhailov**



**Firsthand**

**Deputy Chairman of the House of Representatives at the National Assembly, Boleslav Pirshtuk, said at the line's opening ceremony:**

*This project deserves special attention because this is a know-how on the post-Soviet space but not a new product for the European Union. By realising this project we're becoming closer towards European standards. He noted that the launch of a small line (the manufactured produce will be able to replace around 5 percent of the total volume of consumed coolant in the country) will enable to simultaneously solve several problems: import substitution, recycling of waste and the creation of new jobs.*



Berry picking is a painstaking job, since each berry needs to be individually plucked and carefully placed in your basket

# Bilberry is queen of fields

**More than a hundred farms in the country specialise in bilberry growing**

**W**hen blueberries, which grow all over Belarusian forests, close their season, bilberries only begin to ripe. It's always great luck to gather them in the wild. Interestingly, despite Polesie being famous for its marshes, bilberries are rare. How-

ever, there is a place in Belarus where a full truck of this berry can be easily gathered. It's a field of miracles!

## **Time for mushrooms and berries**

Belarusian farmer Ivan Grib is busy bilberry harvesting on his Olshany farm, in the Brest Region. Growing on an industrial scale, he began his business with cucumbers, like his neighbours,

selling mostly to Russia. However, with so many competitors, Mr. Grib decided to reorient his agro-farm. Knowing that few bilberries grow in the area, Mr. Grib planted a couple of bushes seven years ago. They grew well and he now has over ten hectares of land (equal to around 15 football fields) covered in bilberries. Last year, he harvested about eighty tonnes, most being sold to Russia. Residents of Moscow, St. Petersburg

and even Anapa love Olshany berries; the bilberries are truly the calling card of Mr. Grib's farm.

## Bilberry therapy prescribed by doctor

Mr. Grib hires villagers for seasonal work but other Belarusian farms accept anyone. The owner of one of these farms in the Brest Region, Yuri Sharets, believes it's an excellent opportunity to escape from city bustle and offers a kind of therapy. Seven years ago, the Moscow doctor of medical sciences exchanged the noise of the capital for bilberry plantations in Belarus, and has never regretted his decision.

"We spent most of our life in Moscow, eating food from a supermarket. Everything changed when we established a farm. We then realised what quality vegetables, fruits and berries look like; we know their real price. We're inviting everyone to our farm, to learn the same thing," says Yuri's wife, Nina.

Anyone can come to Dr. Sharets' farm, learning about the useful properties of blueberries and seeing how they're grown. You can gather berries to take home (paying at a much lower rate than the market price, at 300 Russian

Roubles per kilo). Such agro-tourism is gaining in popularity, especially among residents of large cities, who are ever wishing to escape to nature.

## Precious berries

This useful berry helps not only farmers earn money but also villagers from neighbouring areas. Many people are needed to harvest and, during the season, anyone can get a job. Old and young people help pick the berries, allowing pensioners to supplement their allowances, and schoolchildren to earn their first pocket-money.

Picking berries seems an easy job at first glance but they're fragile. You need to pluck them carefully and place them gently in your basket, to avoid bruising. In fact, bilberries are among the most expensive, being ten times the price of imported watermelons and grapes at Minsk's Komarovka market.

Bilberries appeared in Belarusian fields in the late 1970s, having been raised initially at the Botanical Garden and at experimental areas, before moving to collective farm fields. Belarusian agrarians have now cultivated over sixty varieties and they are grown at over a hundred farms countrywide.

By Anna Kurak



## Polesie's red gold

### Cranberries are gathered in Belarus

Every Belarusian family stocks up on this healing berry for winter. Previously it was gathered in the forests. However, now it's possible to grow cranberries elsewhere. There is a cranberry plantation in the Brest Region's Poleskie Zhuraviny enterprise — the largest in Europe (occupying 84 hectares).

"When cranberries are collected with the hands they can become squashed. We have 'used' the peculiarities of the berry — it has four air-pockets inside. It 'swims away' from the tractor wheels and is not damaged. We discovered this method in the USA, but all the machinery used is domestically produced," explains the business owner.

The harvesting technology is very interesting: fields (so-called 'checks') are flooded with water and then tractors with special devices — headers — 'beat down' the ripe berries. Cranberries rise to the surface and then are caught with log booms and are dragged along the water to the place of shipment. At the business, the berries are sorted depending on their size, frozen at a temperature of 18 Degrees and then packed.

Belarusian cranberries are sold in Belarus, as well as in Russia, Poland, Latvia, Ukraine, the UK and Germany. They are very tasty!



Last year, Mr. Grib's harvest reached 80 tonnes and an even greater volume was in 2017



# Friends, bonjour!

**More than half a year ago, Minsk National Airport welcomed its first visa-free tourists. What inspires foreigners to fly to Belarus for five days and what could entice them to stay longer?**

## Claude searching for treasure

Claude Lucien from Toulouse visits Minsk several times a year. He has many Internet friends here and is delighted by Belarus' visa-free opportunity. "It's great! I save both money and time. Previously, it took several days to gain a visa — collecting documents and standing in queues. I now only need to buy a ticket and insurance and take a certificate to the bank," he smiles. Claude loves Belarusian nature, Slavonic girls and our attractive prices. He's toured all our regional cities and many of the district centres. As a true Frenchman, he's searching for his great love...

Since February 12th, when the visa-free regime came into force, 35,000

## Foreigners come from:

- 1. Germany
- 2. Poland
- 3. Italy
- 4. United States
- 5. the UK

foreigners have visited Belarus, arriving mostly from the USA, Europe and China — usually visiting relatives and friends. Guests come less often out of pure tourist curiosity, but many are businessmen, having communicated with partners by phone and then negotiating face to face. They spend a day on business matters and then several more seeing the country.

## Give me ten!

Vitaly Gritsevich, the Deputy Director of the Tourism Department at the Ministry of Sports and Tourism of Belarus, tells us, "It was planned that the inflow of foreign tourists would grow by 20-25 percent, but the figures for the first five months have been pleasantly surprising: the airport's load has increased by a third. We can say that the visa-free regime has justified itself."

It's already clear that five days are not enough: both tourists and hosts are asking to increase the term. "Sanatorium-resort holidaying accounts for the lion's share of tourist service exports from Belarus. Most programmes at health resorts envisage at least ten days of stay. If we want foreigners to come to our sanatoriums, the visa-free



Visa-free travel was initially tested for trips to the Avgustovsky Canal, bringing foreign guests for cruises and picturesque hiking, while enjoying national cuisine



### Direct speech

## Helping with electronic visas

Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), Taleb Rifai:

*It's much more profitable to attract tourists for longer periods. Foreigners would like to stay longer. It's not necessary to expand the list of countries. Rather, you need to switch to an electronic visa option, so that visitors can fill out all information online. It's safe and convenient: a tourist can immediately pay for their visa online and receive a code to enter the country. Many are already using this mechanism and it's working well, saving time for everyone. On our part, we're ready to offer all necessary assistance.*

regime should be increased to at least 10-20 days," Mr. Gritsevich adds.

Belarus' Foreign Minister, Vladimir Makei, has already confirmed that the Government is discussing the extension of the regime to ten days. In early July, the Deputy Minister of Sports and Tourism of Belarus, Mikhail Portnoy, said that our Belarusian and Chinese leaders had agreed to work on visa-free entry to Belarus for citizens of China for up to 30 days; so far, this refers to group tours only.

### Potato pancakes as country's brand

Staff at a Minsk travel agency specialising in the admission of foreigners say that many come to Belarus with a 'script' in mind. They surf the Internet and prepare a plan: to see the Great Patriotic War History Museum, the Stalin Line, Troitsky Suburb and a sightseeing tour around Minsk. These are common sights. Moreover, foreigners ask for help in finding a place serving tasty potato pancakes: a mandatory article of their programme. The stereotype of Belarus as a 'country of potatoes' has spread to all continents. Those who travel beyond Minsk go to Mir and Nesvizh, while the tourist potential of other Belarusian cities goes unexplored.

Claude complains that most of the information available online refers to

Minsk, while foreigners can find little about the regions. Last winter, it was announced that the Gomel Region alone had over a hundred tourist programmes ready for the visa-free regime, envisaging a five day stay. Everything is planned, to the smallest detail — including transfer from the airport, interpreting services, food and accommodation. With museum visits, a night on a country estate, and kayaking or rafting on the Pripyat or the Dnieper, there's truly something for everyone, but many foreigners remain unaware. Pleasingly, the Belarus. Travel portal (launched this January) has been already translated into English; it's now possible to schedule travel through the Belarusian regions. However, much work lies ahead.

By Anna Kurak

### Historical facts

- Belarus took its first steps towards a visa-free regime back in 2015, when foreigners were allowed to stay for three days in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha. The pilot project produced modest results, with about five thousand tourists using the scheme. Another visa-free project was launched along the Avgustovsky Canal and through its neighbouring territories, including the city of Grodno, attracting tourists from Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. On the first May weekend, border guards registered record figures, with over 2,000 foreign guests crossing the border: an impressive figure for the regional centre.



# Focus on agro services

## Powerful impetus to the development of new leisure area in Belarus given by Presidential Decree

### Revival of the 'unpromising'

In 2006, there were just three dozen agro-estates in Belarus while now their number exceeds two thousand — a huge jump over a decade. Moreover, Belarusian agro-ecotourism continues to develop by leaps and bounds, with the benefit of 'charitable' taxes.

The conditions are almost unbelievable: paying just one base rate per year, taking a loan on privileged terms and launching one's own business. Signing the Decree, Alexander Lukashenko was in no doubt

that agro-ecotourism will help revive abandoned villages and preserve folk traditions and way of life. The advantages are apparent: new jobs appear, the infrastructure improves and additional money is directed to the regions for development.

An important aspect is that the hosts need not simply rent accommodation for tourists but introduce them

to local sites, culture and traditions. This is the requirement of the law. There are those however, who try to violate the rules, turning authentic rural houses into the usual cafes for corporate parties. This practice has forced the Ministry of Sports and Tourism to submit a new draft decree for consideration, "If a host lives in the village, does the housekeeping and rents out up to ten rooms nothing will change for them, they will continue paying one base amount and will be able to take privileged loans," explains Mikhail Portnoy, Deputy Minister for Sports and Tourism. "Sly owners of restaurants and hotel businesses will have to tighten their belts; they have disguised their businesses as agro-ecotourism." After the summer vacation, the draft law will be considered by the deputies.

### 'Cups' and 'sizzles'

Last year, according to the National Geographic magazine, Belarus won in the 'Agrotourism' category, followed by Italy and France, while Russia was placed fourth.

What do Belarusian villages and homesteads offer to tour-



TUTBY

ists? Renovated houses boast ancient interiors and modern conveniences. The more original and diverse the site is, the more guests there are. Tourists are delighted by mini-zoos — live corners where one can feed peacocks, geese and pheasants, to milk a goat and stroke a lamb. Original cuisine with national flavours also attracts custom.

An interactive map, 'Gastinia' was invented for tourists, gathering dishes from various regions of the country. One just needs to click an interesting name and see the agro-estates which offer ancient Belarusian dishes of peasant or 'noble' cuisine.

Meanwhile, as men don't live by bread alone, in some villages tourists can make pots from clay, create talismans in the form of dolls from straw and weave belts. More and more guests from abroad are attracted by folk holidays organised in each village together with the traditional festivals: Kupalie, 'Calling of Spring' and Maslenitsa.

Previously agro-estates were a place of rest just for a weekend but now they are often booked for a longer period, from a week or more.

"Many are fed up with the traditional beach holiday," Georgy Gribov, the Chairman of the public council on agro-ecotourism of the Brest Region and host of the Mlynok agro-estate, says confidently. "Many would like to have simple joys of picking mushrooms, fishing, natural products and rural quiet. We have a sweet-smelling hayloft for sleeping, picnic places and campfires, as well as cycle rides and extreme rafting, so places are often booked until the end of summer."

The businessman admits that foreigners are among his guests but they are mostly Belarusians and Russians.

"We often welcome families from Minsk, Moscow, St. Petersburg. Residents of large cities would like a rest from the concrete jungle in the countryside. Many visit us several times and we have already acquired regular clients. Agro-tourism rests on three major aspects: hospitality of the hosts, originality of the estate and its location. We're located one hour's drive from the Belovezhskaya Pushcha or ancient Brest. Prices are moderate: a house will cost about \$40 per day."

### Under the wings of the green roosters

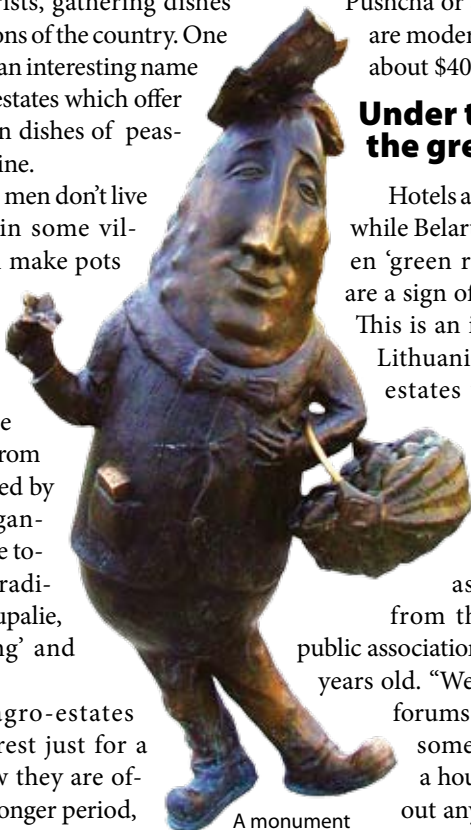
Hotels are usually given stars while Belarusian estates are given 'green roosters'. Four birds are a sign of the highest quality. This is an international trend: Lithuanians mark their best estates with storks, Spaniards — with olives, Latvians — with butterflies.

Estates and their services are assessed by experts from the Country Escape public association which is already 14 years old. "We read comments on forums and talk to hosts. It sometimes happens that a house is ordinary, without any sophistication, but there's no end of guests. The secret is in benevolence and

hospitality of the hosts," explains Valeria Klitsounova, the Chair of the Country Escape Belarusian Association of Rural and Ecotourism.

Agro-estates aren't an easy business and special seminars are conducted by specialists from the public association for those wishing to start their business. They describe how to develop the concept of the agro-estate and to organise everything. Experience shows that if a correct approach is taken, rural and ecological tourism is fashionable and profitable.

By Kristina **Khilko**



A monument to cucumber in Shklov

## Tourist Choices

**1** 'Nanosy-Novoselie' ethno-cultural complex (Myadel District's Nanosy village in the Minsk Region). Guests are offered to heat a Russian stove, cook food in it and sleep in the hayloft. A wind and water mill is located near the house, as well as museums of samovars, coins and Soviet automobiles. Moreover, there's a brandy kitchen.

**2** 'Veres' estate (Zelva District's Kozlovichi village in the Grodno Region). It was recognised best agro-estate in 2006. The inn in the national style cooks original dishes. A dendro-park with two hundred trees and bushes is located nearby. Children are greatly delighted with swans, peacocks and pheasants.

**3** 'U Rysya' homestead (Svisloch District's Korevichi village in the Grodno Region). The agro-estate conducts master-classes on creating straw dolls, moulding clay pots and weaving traditional belts. The local healer will tell her guests how to collect and prepare healing herbs while water therapy will help cure some disorders.

**4** 'Krolava Khata' estate (Rossony District's Zaborie village in the Vitebsk Region). A one-storey house stands on the bank of the picturesque Lake Neshcherdo, with an air-rifle shooting range and a sports ground nearby. The hosts of the estate are experienced tourist instructors, offering hikes, trips and rafting events.

**5** 'Khata pod Klenami' estate (Postavy District's Noviki village in the Vitebsk Region). Last year, the estate was recognised best in the 'Preservation of Belarusian Traditions' category. Guests can bake fresh fish caught in the lake or bake a cake from mushrooms gathered in the neighbouring forest. Hosts offer their guests home-made cheese and cottage cheese while a wedding in line with ancient Belarusian traditions can be organised for newly-weds: with a round loaf, medovukha (an alcoholic drink made of water, honey and yeast), 'bride price' and circle dances.



## Lego for adults

### Belarus offers another original tourist product: tours of its major factories, and the chance to help assemble a tractor

#### Quality above all

In early July, the first group of international guests joined the tour of Zhodino and MTZ, including visitors from the USA and Switzerland.

Californian Heinz Heimburger is fascinated by vehicles, so was thrilled to be able to see BelAZ trucks being made before his eyes, and tractors moving along the conveyor belt. Under the

watchful eye of staff, he helped assemble part of the steering column.

“This is a first for our country,” admit MTZ staff. “Previously, only US car assembly plants offered this sort of tour. Now, anyone can come to us to try their hand. You just need to book in advance. Every visitor receives detailed instructions on how to assemble a tractor, and then a certificate stating the se-

rial number of the tractor upon which they worked, together with the country where the ‘iron horse’ will be sold.”

Customers need not worry, since all vehicles undergo strict control by the quality department.

Heinz tells us, “It was most challenging to get into the cab and assemble the steering wheel. I’m too large for that small space!”



## Fashion reigns

All-knowing Google states that ‘industrial tourism’ began in the mid-19th century, thanks to the founders of American bourbon factory Jack Daniel’s. In Belarus, we’re only just beginning on this path, with tours of Minsk Tractor Works launched around six months ago. Initially, nobody was allowed to approach the conveyor.

Over 1,500 people from 28



countries have now toured the plant, including some from Australia.

The company well understands what’s needed to enhance its image. “Our factory is still widely perceived as a Soviet legacy, which brings with it quality recognition in such countries as Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. It’s a ‘time-tested’ stamp. However, we’re doing more than just honouring traditions; we’re also following world trends. How else can we inform potential buyers of our policy of openness? There are many commercial secrets which we’ll keep to ourselves, but there are aspects of new technologies we can share,” explain staff.

Some time ago, the facility was attended by guests from Estonia, representing local government. They paid close attention, and were impressed.

It’s not yet known whether the visit will transform into a state contract for the purchase of equipment but the Estonians admitted to viewing Minsk’s vehicles as an excellent alternative



American Heinz Heimburger takes away fond memories and experience in assembling a tractor, with a certificate bearing its serial number

to those from the West. They were surprised to find that the Minsk plant (associated only with Soviet classics and

Belarus-82 tractors until recently) is assembling a wide range of equipment. In fact, every tenth tractor in the world comes from Minsk.

## BelAZ ready for anything

Manufacturers of the world’s largest mining dump trucks are expected to seriously engage in industrial tourism: as soon as tours to BelAZ were launched, guests began lining up.

Three years ago, the famous Zapashny brothers (representing a circus family) were invited to drive a 280-tonne truck, as part of a promotional campaign for BelAZ. Some time later, Honoured Artiste of Russia Stas Mikhailov drove a 130-tonne quarry dump truck. BelAZ began attending national folk holidays, and

BelAZ’s Father Frost has been visiting children. Meanwhile, on February 14th, for Valentine’s Day, sweethearts have purchased their loved one the chance to drive a giant vehicle.

## Provalletto with taste of summer

Some people are bemused by the idea of what goes into the making of a sausage but local companies are now inviting us to tour their plants, to find out for ourselves.

Anyone can go to Turov to see how ricotta, mascarpone and provalletto are made. Meanwhile, in Grodno, Molochny Mir welcomes guests and Minsk’s Krinitza and Olivaria breweries, to see their bottling lines, and take part in tasting. There are tours entitled ‘Courses in Brewing’ and ‘Guiding Aromas’, with eight beer varieties to sample.

By Dmitry Umpirovich

# More festivals: both interesting and diverse



BELTA

**According to data from the World Tourism Organisation, the contribution of the tourist industry to global GDP is nearly 10 percent. Every 11th job on the planet depends on tourism, both directly or indirectly. Marketing of the business has become one of the most important types of economic activity and competition between regions for the attraction of investments and guests is also seen in our country. If large cities are confidently ascending the staircase of branding, district centres and villages are still finding their niche by trial and error. Our reporters have seen how tourists are welcomed and attracted to the regions.**

**E**ach district in the Brest Region for example, has invented its own festival, with the Bereza District celebrating the 'Sporovo Haymaking', the Drogichin District the 'Tanochak' holiday of folklore art, the Ivatsevichi District the 'Vygonoshchanskaya Fortress' military and historical festival and the Stolin District the 'Polesskaya Niva' horse festival. Meanwhile, the festival of food has become the most popular and famous, recently held in the Ivanovo District's village of Motol for the eighth time — 'Motol Delicacies'.

The Chairwoman of the Board of the Country Escape Belarusian Association of Rural and Ecotourism, Valeria Klitsounova — one of the organisers of the festival — tells us, "Today food is fashionable, so tourists want to taste it where it's produced."

Undoubtedly, business plays an important role in rural marketing. There are 26 private unitary enterprises in Motol, which has a population of just 4,000. Where does the Motol residents' business acumen come from? They say that it goes back to the time of Bona Sforza. Thanks to the wife of the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Żygimont Stary, Motol received the Magdeburg Right to trade in 1555. The Italian Duchess brought skilful craftsmen and merchants — Jews, Italians and Germans — to the banks of the Yaselda River and they settled here.



BELTA

The first 'Motol Delicacies' Festival was a winner of the Republican tourist contest, 'Learn About Belarus', in the 'Event' category. The seventh festival was given international status, while this year's forum, held for the eighth time, turned Motol into a food court for two days. Master classes on cooking dishes of national cuisine were given by guests from Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, China and Israel.

Thanks to the festival, a museum of bread has now appeared in Motol and the local wedding 'karavai' (a round loaf) tradition received the status of an intangible historical and cultural heritage of Belarus.

Agro-estates have been built, as well as an hotel. An archaeological museum has opened, alongside public catering sites which were on the rise at the recent festival. Of course, Motol has now become famous all over the world and the 'Motol Delicacies' brand is well known far beyond the borders of the country. The Chairman of the Ivanovo District Executive Committee, Yuri Bisun, notes, "Motol produce made a real stir in Moscow during the presentation of the economic, investment and tourist potential of the Brest Region."

Why did Motol succeed? The answer is tradition, history and people and the activity of local business which promotes its produce. 'Motol Delicacies' is probably one of the most successful examples in the country of involving the population, authorities, business, public associations and foreign partners in regional promotion.

What prevents others from doing the same? The absence of advertising and uncertainty about how to conduct such an event result in a gap in the calendar of tourist events. 'Conflicts' in timings also happen sometimes. For example, the 'Motol Delicacies' Festival has recently 'occupied' the last weekend before the Assumption Feast. The 'Sporovo Haymaking' Festival was unfortunately planned on the same days. It's also an interesting event but not every curious tourist will be able to visit both banks of the Yaselda River...

How are things in other regions? The calendar of tourist events on the website of the Mogilev Regional Executive Committee begins in October. If we place the events according to their importance, probably, it would be correct to give first place to the Knight Fest in Mstislavl. Over the last decade it has become an interesting event, attracting up to 15,000 people — the number of guests is 1.5 times more than the number of residents.

To some extent, due to the festival in Mstislavl, dozens of sites have been reconstructed, restored and built from scratch: a complex of the Jesuit Monastery, the Carmelite Catholic church... Moreover, a true 12th century church and a princely donjon have appeared on Zamkovaya Hill, with a unique archaeological dig from ancient Mstislavl now open to visitors.

Considerable sums of money are spent annually on the organisation of the festival. However, practically all of it returns to the district budget.

The Day of Cucumber in Shklov, 'Makovei near the Blue Spring Well' in the Slavgorod District, 'Visiting Radimichi' ethno-holiday in Radomlya and 'Dribinskie Torzhki' Festival are also designed to create an image of their regions in the Mogilev Region; however, they have a long way to go for them to reach the popularity of the Knight Fest.

The Cherry Festival in Glubokoe on the calendar of tourist and cultural events of the Vitebsk Region and, over the last five years, this original festival has become of the most visited in the Republic and received the official status of a cultural event of international importance. They have also made a connection with history. In the 1920-1930s, a land owner, agronomist and selectionist from Glubokoe, Boleslav Lapyr,

began to popularise the 'acid cherry' variety. From the beginning, the Glubokoe District Executive Committee approached the event very thoroughly. With the help of residents, organisations and schools, a cherry orchard was planted. A city hospital was repaired and the embankments of lakes Velikoe and Kagalnoe were renovated. Thanks to the festival, the town has changed significantly, acquiring a granite monument to cherries and a monument to Baron Munchausen. In Glubokoe you will be told that the great storyteller who used to hunt deer with the help of a cherry stone, was buried in the Belarusian district's centre. This year, the festival in Glubokoe was attended by delegations from Germany, Georgia, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and France.

Why do some succeed and others not? Ms. Klitsounova believes that many unseen (at first sight) aspects stand behind each event that make them successful or not. "A festival is a live organism rather than merely an instrument in a programme of actions to develop and promote the tourist market. To enable the festival to flourish, inspiring personalities are needed. People stand behind each good endeavour, as in Motol where both residents and authorities work with passion."

Furthermore, there are plans to make an application to include the 'Motol Delicacies' Festival in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List, while cuisine from Motol aims to be promoted in the country's restaurants.

By Valentina **Kozlovich**,  
Diana **Garaninova**,  
Sergey **Golesnik**



# Eyes which capture through the lens

**Sculptor Yevgeny Kolchev views artistic photography as a hobby, although it won him the National Award for Fine Arts**



In late May, the 1st National Award for Fine Arts was presented and, as with any competition, it aroused much talk in artistic circles, especially regarding Yevgeny Kolchev. Some wondered how a sculptor could suddenly be acknowledged the best in the 'Art Photography' category, asserting that he'd 'stolen' his award from professional photographers.

Yevgeny lacks any formal photography training but has been 'eyeing' — as he names the process — for many decades. He's had eight personal photo exhibitions in Belarus

and abroad, and posts new works to Facebook almost daily; his followers number around a thousand. His style is definitely unique, with his portraits more sculpted than shot, showing his particular artistic background.

His skills seem miraculous, transforming an ordinary picture into something worthy of a studio shot. Discussing his digital processes, Yevgeny says, "It's nothing special. I've simply highlighted the focus."

By virtue of his profession, he's always taken photos, to help him in his sculpting. For a bust, he'll invite someone to his workshop for a photo session, before making their sculp-

ture. Over time, photography became a daily activity and he now often takes pictures at diverse exhibitions, meetings and artistic shows.

"I've read that all professional artists suffer from 'eyeing'; they can't stop looking about them! I've contracted this disease," he smiles. "There are so many beautiful faces around, which I want to 'capture'."

Mr. Kolchev has shot painters, sculptors, critics, collectors and spectators, often without them realising, as he does so discreetly, using a telephoto lens and hidden camera angles.

"When someone's interested in what they're looking at, or are atten-

tively listening to someone, their faces become fascinating; their eyes are enthusiastic, surprised and attentive. It's my treasure. However, if they notice a camera, the moment is lost. They become shy, and may start posing, which spoils things," Yevgeny adds.

Mr. Kolchev often manages to successfully photograph someone, but the background isn't ideal. It's not a problem though, as he simply uses his software to edit the shot, using brush-

## Reference

**Apart from working as a photographer, Yevgeny Kolchev is a sculptor: an occupation requiring much effort. "Sculpture is transforming as a medium, becoming more conventional and decorative, changing shape. We have more women sculptors now, as men tend to choose a more stable and profitable occupation. There are virtually no orders and, when they're placed, sculptors face conflict in having to please the customer. Maybe that's why I enjoy photography: it distracts me!" Mr. Kolchev says.**

es, patches or textures to modify the background.

"I use several techniques. In modelling, the volume suggests the further development of a sculpture; when it comes to photography, the image hints at further action: either to make something more obscure or brighter, using a watercolour or graphic background," Yevgeny says.

Undoubtedly, his artistic education helps him in creating light and shade, and interesting angles. He takes a different approach to most photographers. His work is often compared to painting, as his shots sometimes resemble sketches of old paintings by famous masters.

"Perhaps these experiments with artists have succeeded because I know all of them to some degree and understand them. I've photographed many of my colleagues, at various times in their lives. I could hardly have imagined that a certain historical layer of the artistic intelligentsia would be created. I've been told it has value. I really don't think about concepts: I simply do what I love," the master says sincerely. "I've been taking photos for myself — simply sharing impressions of the people I know, on my Facebook page."

His photo of May Danzig, which won the National Prize of Fine Arts, was taken by Mr. Kolchev at the Congress of the Union of Artists. "May Danzig is a very interesting and wise man. He's an El Greco character for me: a 'textured' old man with interesting facial features and expressive eyes, full of depth," Yevgeny says.

Mr. Kolchev doesn't make money from his photography. It's his hobby. For a long time, he saw no value in his experiments but his friends — artists and art critics — drew attention to Yevgeny's photos, helping organise exhibitions. Among them were Tatiana Bembel, Oksana Arakcheeva, Alla Zmieva, Valery Vedrenko and Oksana Bogdanova.

"This happened not because I'm lazy. I was tormented by doubts that my

work wouldn't be interesting to anyone. I didn't initially think of submitting my work for the national award. My colleagues asked me, "Are you participating in the competition? Have you applied?" I replied that all of my sculptures were kept at galleries, or were still under creation. "What about your photos?" they asked. I wasn't sure I could apply with them. I understand that some consider it's unfair that a sculptor has won the 'Art Photography' nomination. However, I didn't choose the winner! Of course, I'm pleased and flattered. I also feel responsibility. If I fail, people will say that the award was given to the wrong person," he notes.

By Lyudmila Minkevich



The photo of May Danzig which won the National Prize of Fine Arts was taken by Mr. Kolchev at the Congress of the Union of Artists. "May Danzig is a very interesting and wise man. He's an El Greco character for me: a 'textured' old man with interesting facial features and expressive eyes, full of depth," Yevgeny says



Nowadays one doesn't need a great deal of equipment to shoot a movie: a good phone with a camera is often enough. What will happen to the film and who will be interested in it is a different question. However, the fact remains that, thanks to uncomplicated technology and the resourcefulness of individuals, Belarusian independent cinema does exist. Our reporter visited the set of the first producer project directed by Alexandra Butor — 'No Entry into Personal Space' — to investigate the audience for such films.

Several cars are parked along Sadovaya Street in the Minsk suburb of Tarasovo. Nothing indicates that a movie is being made here. There are no actors' vans and no trailers. Everything is simpler and there are just fifteen crew. Two years ago, Alexandra's 'Sweet Farewell of Vera' — shot at Belarussianfilm — featured over fifty people.

"On the one hand, it's good to have such a large team: all the tasks are shared out but controlling so many people is challenging. True, my present situation is not easy: I have a huge responsibility. The main advantage of non-state cinema is that I am my own master. I've given myself a task and I must complete it. I love to joke about how easy it is to solve all the issues between the director and the producer when they are one person. Another advantage is that I've gathered people I wanted. Nobody imposes an operator or actors on you. Only those who understand me and whom I believe in work here," Alexandra says.

It's not enough however, to simply gather friends and people who under-



## Director, writer and producer in a single personality

stand you. Money is essential. The director does not have a commercial secret: her project costs are 60 thousand Euros and she has personally invested part of the money. After all, she opened her own film school two years ago — firstly, to train her own team and, secondly, to earn initial capital. Three private companies have also agreed to finance the project.

Alexandra's reputation works in her favour: she earned it while working on TV and state cinema. For example, an expensive Jaguar — attracting by-passers' attention in the Sadovaya Street — has been provided by a car showroom free of charge for the period of shooting. Brand new suits for the main character are on loan with the same conditions. The house in Tarasovo is a summer cottage belonging to Ms. Butor's friends; she'll pay no rent for it. However, the director has to pay for an old Volga car with the 'Medical Aid' badge herself.

In short, every little helps, although actors are not usually keen to work for nothing. Alexandra explains, "In the cost estimate, technical costs and work of the team have approximately equal shares. Actors and the film crew will receive an advance payment and, after the film is sold, the remaining money will be paid."

Of course, not all actors — especially experienced and popular ones — will agree to such conditions. However, in this case, the director's good name and

old friendships help. Some time ago, Ms. Butor invited novice actor Sergey Zhabankov, to her 'Belye Rosy: Return' film. He is now present on the set, not just as a token of gratitude: he greatly admires the director and her sensitive and heartfelt work. Anna Polupanova is a similar story, and has worked with Alexandra on several occasions. This time, the actress has been persuaded by an emotional storyline and a good role. Moreover, young actors who have recently completed their studies at the film school are taking part, as they all are promised a fee.

The main star of the set is a tall handsome man driving the said expensive car. The young actor Erik Abramovich can barely express his delight at the role he finds himself playing. His appearance is enough to make everyone else smile and after the film is launched, a sex symbol of Belarusian cinema will undoubtedly be born.

A soloist of the 'Tyani-Tolkai' band — Pavel Traimovich — is modestly hiding in the shade. He explains, "I'm an assistant here — fetching and carrying. This time, I've got medical gowns for the main characters." Alexandra adds that an old friend also helps with the sound. The musicians have invested their money in the film and their songs will feature in it.

By the end of autumn, the film is expected to be ready, after only ten days of shooting, three shifts of location and a month-long cutting process. Mean-

while, Alexandra has a new business plan, "When my 'Belye Rosy: Return' and 'Sweet Farewell of Vera' were on show in cinemas, I learnt what movie distribution is and how it works. I'm not expecting any difficulties touring the film around the country."

Furthermore, the young producer plans to move beyond the borders — focusing on the CIS. She was also in negotiations with the Baltic States even before shooting began. The Lithuanian company Za Granitsu (Abroad) is among one of the interested partners; it will deal with filming in the neighbouring states. Of course, Alexandra would like to conquer the secondary market — selling her film to TV channels. She isn't disclosing all her plans, as she is well aware that she has plunged into an experiment where the exact outcomes are unclear. At the same time, she dreams of establishing her own film company to release at least one film a year. She has already received a proposal from an investor who is ready to finance her next project. But she has no plans to hurry. Once you taste freedom, you don't really want to depend on someone else.

On set, everything is serious and progressing well. We wish Alexandra all possible success and prosperity. Who knows: perhaps Belarus will one day make a breakthrough in its independent cinema.

By Natalia Stepuro

## What is the movie about?

Three storylines develop in parallel. The character of one is young talented programmer Max who suddenly decides to go far from civilisation in the hope of shedding the problems that torment him. The second plot revolves around the 16-year-old daughter of a small café owner; who dreams of becoming a singer. The third story is the true passion of medical assistant Anna Sergeevna and her trainee Anton. One day, the fates of all these characters are intertwined...



Alexandra's film makes viewers both laugh and cry



# Good music at the Town Hall



YURIY MOZOLEVSKIY





*No other concert hall is able to bring together such diverse audience gathered on Saturdays near the Town Hall*

**A**s in 2016, maestro Alexander Anisimov and the State Academic Symphony Orchestra opened the season. Drumming was followed by an overture from ‘The Thieving Magpie’ by Rossini. Truly, the People’s Artiste is great at preparing a programme to captivate audiences. His baton is inspirational.

“The State Academic Symphony Orchestra is turning ninety this year,” reminds the founder of the Equilibrium Arts Agency, engaged in organising the open-air show, Inga Bukhvalova. “This is the first symphony orchestra in Belarus and among the first in the former Soviet Union. It’s our pride! Moreover, maestro Anisimov is also celebrating a jubilee this year, so we cannot ignore this double celebration. Our soloists include Oksana Volkova, Russian Irina Krikunova and Lithuanian tenor Kristian Benedikt, singing favourite opera arias, duets and tercets. During rehearsals, something incredible happened in the square. People were listening, forgetting everything.”

This new season sees eight music nights planned, featuring Belarusian and foreign musicians. Many guests from abroad have Belarusian roots and love to return for such events, performing alongside regional groups.

“This year, we’ve managed to lure Grodno Capella to the capital, with

whom we’ve co-operated on other projects,” explains Ms. Bukhvalova. “Conductor Vladimir Bormotov is a very talented musician, and we decided to present this wonderful team to Minsk. We also expect the I, CULTURE Orchestra (ICO) — an international youth orchestra of ninety young people from Poland, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus. They’ll be performing for the first time in our country; it’s viewed as an honour to join this group. Maestro Andrey Boreiko will conduct, having performed at many famous concert halls. We’re happy to achieve an agreement with these guys to play in our ‘Classics at the Town Hall.’”

Classical music lovers will be flocking to the or Town Hall, which rivals Minsk Arena in terms of hosting major events. Several thousand people attending a classical concert is a phenomenon for Belarus and to see them gathered a full hour before a concert, with the audience standing shoulder to shoulder, speaks for itself. While some may feel intimidated by the Philharmonic or the Opera Theatre, the informal atmosphere of an open-air event appeals to everyone, especially with balloons and ice cream cones in their hands. Young and old gathered near the Town Hall: older gentlemen with canes, serious mothers with children, bearded hipsters and girls with brightly coloured hair — all united in their love of music.

By Irina **Ovsepyan**

**Summer open-air concerts near Minsk Town Hall have become a tradition, with singing, dancing, drumming and trumpets. The opening of the new season of ‘Classics at the Town Hall’ has created a marvel, with record audience numbers.**



# Poetic quest for the future

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**Nikolay Metlitsky is the winner of the State Prize of the Republic of Belarus, a laureate of the President's Special Award, a poet, a translator and an essayist. He translates poetry from around the world into Belarusian and, thanks to his efforts, Abai's 'Steppe' has been released. He has received Kazakhstan's Alash International Prize and has edited and prepared a book of Chinese poetry translations, entitled 'Under the Dragon's Wing: a Hundred Chinese Poets'. He recently completed work on another remarkable anthology, which unites his translations of 20th century Chinese poetry.**

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***Nikolay, you've already completed, or shall soon complete, work on a 20th century anthology of Chinese poetry. Tell us more...***

The work is on a major scale, showing the range of 20th century Chinese life, as reflected in the poetic word. It's a single, sonorous ballad, of sad and joyful tears. I've realised that, across the centuries, the poetry of the Chinese people has remained faithful to human values, aspiring to be a sensitive nerve in public life. This was established via the dedication of its genius poets but we must remember that a large part of the last century in China was devoted to the 'search for

the future': a process fraught with drama and, even, tragedy. Creative honest people — who with all their hearts wanted their nation to be happy and free — were stirred to action.

***Few read poetry today, with even less attention paid to translated poems. You've bravely taken up this task. What inspires you?***

Many of the most precious spiritual world treasures are unknown but this is a temporary phenomenon. We cannot eat the same 'salty soup' every day. Eventually, we want to try something different — including spiritual nourishment. Think of how the Renaissance was

born: we see only the tip of the iceberg. The many-century old history of Chinese poetry clearly shows that our soul seeks poetry, even in adverse times. We experience 'ups and downs' but our spiritual power is ever accumulating. Our world has a solid spiritual foundation, upon which our generation, and those to come, is based. This hereditary energy of eternal classics embraces us and will continue ensuring our spiritual balance. We cannot help but be interested in how our ancestors lived, as we want to learn from their experience, to more confidently stride forward — looking to the future.

Having translated works by many Chinese poets, into Belarusian, I remain fascinated by the poetry of this great nation. I'd love to see with my eyes and feel with my heart our predecessors' courageous efforts. I'm interested to see the impact of these works today and I'm delighted that 20th century Chinese poetry retains its spiritual power.

***The profession of a poet-translator is complicated and sometimes thankless. You insistently demonstrate that you're a hard worker in the field of literary translation. Are you unafraid of assimilating the artistic world of national literature via Russian translation, or do you fear making mistakes?***

Any activity is sophisticated if treated responsibly. In taking up a scalpel, even an experienced surgeon may be distracted. You need to draw upon internal forces to remain professional, and the same is true of difficult translation work. A unique path is needed to translate each poet. It's important to hear them, and accept with your heart. I can hear the voice of a true poet, either in a perfectly-written inscription or in serious Russian-language translation. Over the decades, the Russian school of translation has gained a reputation for being one of the most sophisticated and serious. Almost every true poet of Russia has dealt with it. It's impossible to avoid fear, unless you speak the other language perfectly. I often observe, with sadness, how even native speakers create imperfect poetry. We're working to use the soul and mastery to give poets loud voices in other languages.

***Speaking of 20th century Chinese poetry, does it have enough rhetoric for its time?***

Jointly with the author of the future Belarusian-language anthology of 20th century Chinese poetry, Ales Karlyukevich, I've taken content from three anthologies published in the 20th and 21st centuries. It would have been a challenge for me to do this alone. Mr. Karlyuke-

vich is much more experienced in modern Chinese poetic life, being in contact with many Chinese authors, and greatly contributing to the 'Light Signs' series.

It's important to observe copyright. As a translator, I have to choose from what's available. As regards an anthology, everyone would agree that only the best should be included. The early 20th century saw a wide range of famous names establish in China, including Wen Yiduo, Yin Fu, Huang Zunxian and, later, Ai Qing and Guo Moruo. These are true stars, whose brightness is not easily rivalled. There were about a hundred notable Chinese poets last century: all interesting and different, standing out for their own features, subtle, or more forceful. Being united by their historical time, they reveal much about little-



known Chinese life. Our book shows the Chinese thirst for life, and ability to appreciate even minor achievements. The Chinese truly rejoice and grieve, love and appreciate their homeland, know its history, and promote spiritual and intellectual forces. These are part of Chinese optimism.

***How does 20th century Chinese poetry differ from that of the Middle Ages?***

Through all history, Chinese poets have written their poems with blood and tears. However, the 20th century differs in being an anthem to human freedom, loudly proclaimed. This was a final age in the struggle to establish a sovereign country, which now dominates the world in many areas of human life. The poetic word has accurately documented many stages of that development. In reading our anthology, you'll see the full ballad of China's historical, social and political formation and will deeply understand the soul of ordinary Chinese people. It's possible to see how sonorous our fates are — despite our nations being so far away from each other. Everywhere — in China and Belarus and all around the world — much blood has been spilt to ensure freedom.

***Which 20th century Chinese poets have most impressed you, touching your soul?***

Definitely young Yin Fu, who lived from 1909-1931. The poet was shot, alongside twenty-three other revolutionaries, on February 8th, 1931, by the Kuomintang secret police. Born to a wealthy family, he worked to protect the disadvantaged, writing courageous, defiant poems. At the age of 21, he left a considerable artistic legacy, of great scale. We can only imagine how much more this young genius could have created, for China and for world poetry. My heart aches for him with the same force as it aches for our young genius, Maxim Bogdanovich.

***What's your advice to aspiring young translators, seeking to convey Chinese poetry to our contemporaries?***

I advise them to step into the spiritual space of this country, with its seemingly eternal history. Chinese poetry has great energy. Great China, as a world civilisation, has been developing for thousands of years. Its spiritual experience, as described by the poetic word, has relevance for the present day.

Interviewed by Sergey **Shichko**

# Children and parents, or a little bit about perfection

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**I met the main character of this story during a psychotherapy course. Leonid Levit wasn't well-known in Minsk back then, but he led the course. These days, he trains others for the job of psychologist. However, this story is not his, as a respected doctor of psychology and author of many books, but is the story of Stella.**

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**T**his beautiful young woman, aged about 35, could not go unnoticed. Tall and slender, in a black raincoat, with a white fluffy scarf sliding from her dark chestnut hair, she walked up the stairs, to where we were studying, sitting at a distance from the rest of the group. She took off her coat, and placed her briefcase on the seat beside her, but said not a word during the class, except to give her name. This is how I learned her name.

Stella, in Latin, means 'star', and she really was one, just as bright and cold as the distant stars. During the coffee break, she kept aloof, as I did. Meanwhile, everyone else chatted excitedly about where they came from, sharing their impressions of the methods used by Leonid Levit, which they'd heard about from his past students.

There was something in her oriental looks that I found magnetically attractive. She was mysterious, filled with pride and arrogance, charisma and dignity... It took me years to figure it out...

During the class, I realised that I couldn't stop thinking about Stella. And I couldn't make myself focus on the assignments of the psychologist. Out of the corner of my eye, I followed her every move: how she wrote, and listened attentively, throwing back her hair... Later that night, at home, cooking dinner, I recalled her enigmatic expression; her face without feeling or emotion.

At the next class, it was Stella who suggested that we sit together, ready for our need to choose a partner for role play. She said, "I see you're a loner, like me: last time, you were sitting by yourself..." It made me happy to hear her speak those words.

It's well known that it's delightful for two people who've just met to realise how much they have in common. As a journalist, I wouldn't describe myself as a loner, and I was pleased that Stella picked me as her partner. We did share something in common. It takes me some time to open up but, as soon as I recognise a kindred spirit, I become talkative. I didn't work out whether this was a good or a bad thing until much later in life...

Our course lasted for two months, or, maybe, three, I can't remember. My new friend would probably know better because, for her, psychology was a profession whereas, for me, it was only a hobby. Stella and I became friends. Her interest in life and search for meaning resonated with my own, forming



the foundation of our friendship. Stella knew everything about me: where I lived and worked, and how I lived. I introduced her to my relatives and friends, invited her to family celebrations and didn't want to hear any critical comments about her. She was stunning, yet so cold, so materialistic, so indifferent, not mention the fact that she was a vegetarian...

However, I only saw her best traits: intelligence and expertise in her field. No psychological situation confused her. Stella could easily dig at the roots of conflict between people and explain in such a delicate manner that married couples would leave her office in agreement and at peace. She sent husbands and wives off happily where they had previously been lost in labyrinths of miscommunication. Stella taught them to accept each other as they were, and to recognise the need to change themselves rather than others. She taught parents not to manipulate their children, nor try too hard to make them into geniuses. Rather, to give them opportunities for growth. Her clients came to understand their mistakes, listening to her advice, which was given without admonition or patronisation, helping children especially. I liked this about her.

How do I know all this? Before Stella left Minsk, I sometimes visited her two-bedroom apartment, which she rented for her sessions with clients. I attended as a journalist, as some

didn't mind my presence. Afterwards, the two of us would discuss various life situations, putting them under a magnifying glass.

Stella never spoke about herself, although it would have been natural for us, as two women. I didn't know what she liked to eat or drink, even. At my place, she'd ask for a glass of water and refuse tea or coffee. At occasional holiday feasts, she'd have almost nothing: just some fruit or a slice of bread. I didn't pay any attention, as my husband and I also were vegetarians for four years, so I understood Stella's eating habits.

Still, I wanted to know more about her: where she was born, and who her parents were, where she'd studied, and whether she had any other relatives, or a close friend. But I never asked questions, knowing that I'd bump into a wall of silence. Once, I alluded — as delicately as I could — that I'd love to see her collection of expensive jewellery: she'd often wear earrings with either sapphires set in gold, or with opals in silver, or pendants with the same stones. I remember a luxurious ring with a ruby in an intricate golden band, on her slender ring finger. The jewellery and clothes always matched in tone: skirts and blouses of single-coloured silk, and short vests embroidered with golden threads. Sometimes, she wore wide trousers and tunics, as worn by women in India, plus a thin scarf in a pale colour at her throat. On the wing of her nose, she wore a tiny, glitter-

ing emerald. She smelled of incense, cinnamon, sandalwood Indian sticks and something else, oriental in fragrance.

Stella paid no attention to my hint, as if I'd never said anything. She smiled in her wistful manner, touched her nose and said, 'When I was five years old, my father pierced my ears and nose. By force. It was very painful...'

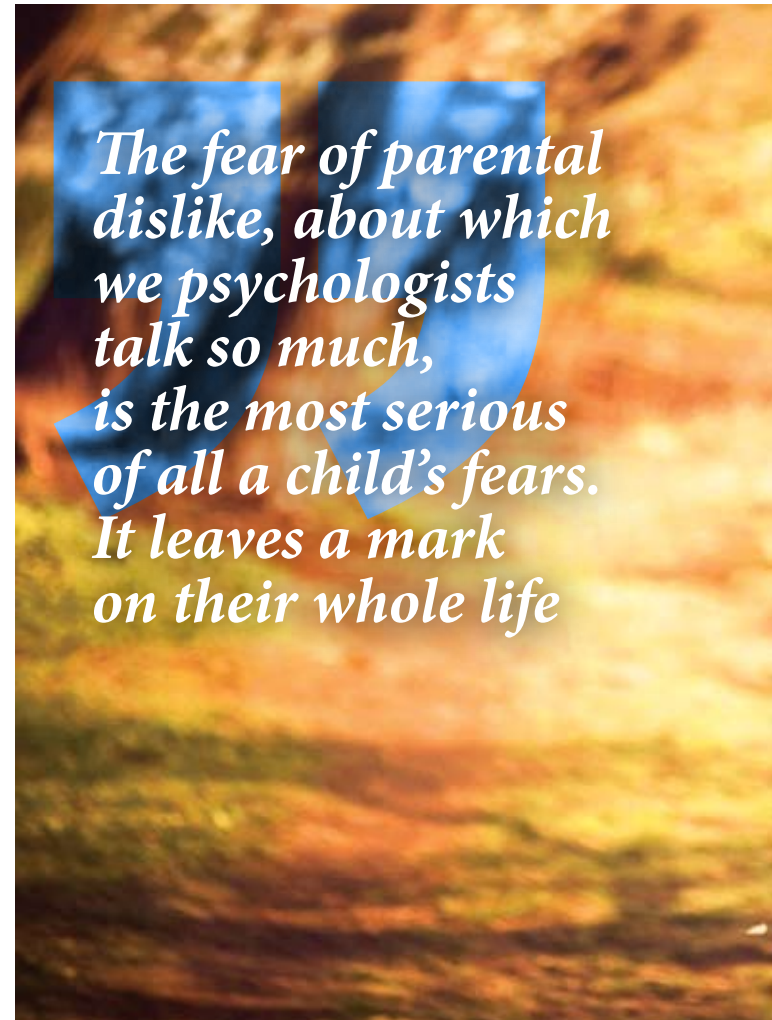
Perhaps, that was the only detail of her life she shared with me, before she disappeared without saying goodbye. Did I take offense? I'd say not. By that time, I'd become used to her being unlike others. A black sheep. I patiently waited, hoping that my exotic friend would return. Six months later, Stella called me, as if we'd never parted. She'd moved to Turov, where she had better opportunities for her small practice as a psychologist. She'd acquired a dog and she walked it every evening, along the Pripyat's banks. Sometimes, I called her on the phone, seeking her advice in challenging times but, as time passed, we interacted less. And then, our communication stopped. From time to time, I recalled Stella fondly, though feeling that sadness which was mostly present during our meetings. Many years later, I heard from the post office that they'd received a parcel for me: a heavy envelope from Turov. From Stella.

### Black sheep

*'When you receive this letter, I'll be far way. So far, that barely anyone will recall me. There is nobody to do so, as all my relatives from Turov have left this world. My mother has passed away and I've never made true friends, apart from with my dog. When you finish reading this, you'll understand why I couldn't let you, or anybody else, into the story of my life. It's highly unlikely that I'll ever tell anyone else the content of the notes I wrote about myself during our psychology studies. Why do I send them now, to you? You're a journalist. If you feel it necessary, you may publish them, if you think they may be of interest. My story is common between parents and their children, as I've seen many times during my practice in Turov. I've described several cases. Edit them, if you decide to tell them. I'm sorry that I didn't email. I've always remained committed to my portable typewriter, as the gentle clattering comforts me. Perhaps, it reminds me of my father, typing, in my distant Indian childhood...'*

*Thank you for everything. You were so kind to me and never inquisitive; you deserve to know more. I ask only, please, that you don't use my name. It's unlikely that anybody who knows me will stumble across it, but I shan't take the risk.*

*I was born in India, in Trivandrum, where my father worked at one of the clinics, as a neuropathologist. He arrived, together with my mother, at the time when the USSR was giving assistance to 'third world' countries. Our doctors, teachers, and construction workers were sent to India, among other countries... My parents both graduated from universities in Moscow, and my mother was a linguist, fluent in English and French. In Moscow, they married soon after meeting, in Red Square, before graduation. My mother, born in Turov, always dreamed of Moscow, and it's where she met her destiny, in the face of an Avar, from Dagestan. In India, my*



*father became fascinated by Ayurveda, and gained certification at the oldest Ayurveda Institute, at the Ayurvedic Vasudeva Vilasam Hospital. You remember that the World Health Organisation recognises Ayurveda as an alternative medical treatment; we discussed it together.*

*Our family moved to a small town near Trivandrum and my father continued extending his knowledge of Ayurveda, through his whole life. From him and from my mother, I took the habit of continually working to learn something new. My knowledge of languages derives from there, from India. My mother taught English to Indian children, while my father worked at a large hotel, in the Ayurveda medical centre. I'm fluent in English and French, and also know Hindi, plus a little Malayalam (the language spoken in Kerala). But, as you know, I didn't need any of this in Minsk.*

*I received my primary education at home, and then my mother and I left for Turov. At the local school, I passed the final assessment tests, and went into the fifth grade, like all Soviet children. My father visited us every six months. In the summer, we spent time in India, where my father wanted me to study, at*



the Institute of Ayurveda, after graduation from Turov. However, I was attracted to psychology and entered the Faculty of Psychology at Leningrad University. I studied for six years, extramurally, and worked as a laboratory assistant at the Pedagogical Institute in Minsk, in one of its departments. My aunt, my mother's older sister, helped me gain a place, because her friend worked there. I also undertook extra-curricular courses on the psychology of personality at the institute, and had my private practice, as you know...

It sounds like a well-established life, and everything seemed to be fine. What else could I want?

But that's exactly the point, and the reason for my troubles. I did not want anything. I was surrounded by people who were rude and — I'm sorry to say it — stupid, nosy, irresponsible, and seduced by casual relationships. I only ever felt truly happy alone: in the forest, on the bank of the river, or in my room, in my grandmother and grandfather's house in Turov. When the blue-black mongrel approached me, uninvited, I tolerated its presence, as I do some clients. However, unlike them, Cobalt (as I've called him) never asked for anything. The dog didn't need

my affection or, even, food. It would just sit and wait and, if I called it to walk with me, would trot beside me, disappearing briefly to answer a call of nature. It would even approach food with dignity, slowly, as if reluctantly. He was just as cold and reserved as myself.

I don't know who raised the dog to be like this but I was brought up this way by my father. I remember, as a four-year-old, sitting on a chair, with my father opposite. His beautiful face without expression, calm and unruffled. He would take me onto his knees and tell me a fairy tale about a girl who didn't know that she was the daughter of a god...

From childhood, my father instilled in me the idea that I was that girl from the fairy tale. 'So, you are a god, since I'm your daughter,' I'd say, rejoicing.

I lived with this conviction for a very long time.

From the age of four, I was told that I should talk calmly, not expressing emotion, and be careful. I shouldn't take food from the table with my hands, and should never walk barefoot. Even in India, where it's warm all year round, it was necessary for me to wear soft shoes in the house to avoid making noise. Otherwise, one might disturb the dreaming of Vishnu, the god who sleeps from July to October, and is replaced by Shiva at that time. I asked my father questions that puzzled him. Why did Indians walk half-naked, throwing rubbish on the ground, but I was not permitted to do so? Why did Vishnu or Shiva allow them to act that way? Why did they talk loudly, and their children scream and go around dirty-faced? Why was I not permitted to play with them?

There was only one answer: you are the daughter of god, you are ultimate perfection...

That was the framework my god, my Dad, gave me. His authority was indisputable, and I became distant from other children. By the age of seven, I was disgusted by their screams, and smells, and sticky hands. I preferred reading to chatting with them and if my mother invited me to play with them outside of our courtyard, beyond the high fence, I would raise an eyebrow in surprise. Why would I go into the street, with so much rubbish and dirt? Nor did I want them to enter our courtyard, where the light concrete slabs were washed with detergent. I still remember the traces of my mother's bare-footed students, who sometimes came for additional lessons.

One Sunday we heard a loud scream from the street. My mother went to see what had happened and returned to the courtyard with a five-year-old boy, whose leg was covered in blood. Apparently, he'd slipped and hurt his knee. She helped him, gave some tea and called me, in the hope that I'd feel sorry for the boy. I felt nothing but indifference.

In the evening, I heard my mother tell my father about what had happened but he was unperturbed and expressed no fear regarding my insensitivity. He only dropped one phrase that still sounds in my mind: one who deals with the sick and poor should be as cold as ice. I understood that my mother didn't like this attitude, as she was very kind to people.

When my father wasn't at home, she tried to awaken my sleeping soul, suggesting that I go for a walk around the village, along the shore, to try to draw my attention to the beauty of people, the sunset, and white ibises... She would stop to talk with some Indians and would listen to them for a long time, sympathetically nodding her head. I would stand beside her, unperturbed and indifferent. Everything that happened around me I observed as if through glass, as if I lived inside a transparent bubble from which I could not escape. After all, I was a god's daughter.

Once, my father told me, 'Your mother is unlikely to understand you, as she is too simple...' After hearing those words, my kind mother's authority declined in my eyes, and my communication with her became increasingly formal. I was polite but, if something didn't suit me, I'd explain calmly why I didn't agree with her proposal, for example, to eat something, go somewhere or wear the clothes she'd chosen for me.

Over time, I began eating alone in my room, because my father taught me not to eat in public. Very soon, my mother stopped advising me and only agreed with my proposals. Every year, the unspeakable sadness in her eyes grew. When my father came to visit, she was a little animated, but this liveliness would quickly fade. My father barely spoke to her. It was me he came to visit.

Nothing could shatter the glass of my alienation at Turov school and, very quickly, my classmates turned away from me. Why would they need a weird girl, with an unchanging book in her hands? In the fifth class, she was interested in the philosophy of the ancient world and the Middle Ages and read the Vedas and Bhagavad-Gita!

I ate neither sweets nor cutlets from the school canteen and I never galloped up and down the school corridors... I sat at my desk by myself. Did I suffer? Not at all, despite being called a 'Snow Queen.' I knew that my heart must be cold.

Time flew between my father's visits and, when he came, we talked extensively on the subject of different worlds where perfect people would live, and where harmony and tranquility would prevail. I knew that I had to graduate from school, no matter how much I disliked it, to return to India, and enter the Ayurveda Institute, to continue my father's business.

When I moved into tenth grade, my mother died. Sorrow and pain had sharpened her from the inside and she'd had a heart attack. My father didn't come to the funeral, which was arranged by my aunt, my mother's older sister, who was single, and lived in the second half of the house. Although she didn't have children of her own, it was clear that she didn't care much for me. I held her at arm's length, even though she tried to reach me.

I didn't need my aunt, but I understood that I'd have to tolerate her until the final exams; in the worst case, until I reached the age of eighteen. Then, I'd wave farewell to Belarus, with its rain and gloomy weather. I'm only employing a turn of phrase, as my environment influenced me. I adopted various idioms and phrases unsuitable for a god's daughter. By the way, at my mother's funeral, I shed not a single tear.

## Father, aunt and draniki

The director brought him to the class and introduced me to the young man who I'll give the fictitious Dagestani name of Vali. Something in this calm and confident man reminded me of my father, who was also slender, dark-haired and acted with great dignity. Here, the similarity stopped. He was open and friendly, heading directly to my desk, sitting down beside me. I felt my bubble swing, a wall forced in. Something inside me moved slightly.

Unlike me, Vali had a great sense of humour and was sociable; he was easy-going and interested in others. This was why — as I later learned — he was going to enter the Psychology Department at Leningrad University. Everything I'd failed to learn from my father, over many years, happened on the wave of my affection for Vali, within a few months. It was first love. For the first time in my life, I felt that I wanted to eat an apple during the break, drink a glass of tea with Vali in the canteen, and touch his hand. I even tried a cutlet, which he was eating with zest, praising it.

He made me walk barefoot along the bank of the Pripyat: in that year, spring was early and very warm. Then, for the first time, I felt the welcome softness of the grass. It was such a pleasure, laughing over trifles, and remarking at how a cloud resembled the beard of one of our teachers. I even cried, as I'd not done since the age of four, on Vali's shoulder, when we went to the cemetery, where he wanted to see my mother's grave.

The huge sense of guilt I felt towards my mother, driven far into my subconscious, and of which I was afraid, poured out in a stream of tears. I had failed to show love and affection, due to my father's dominant authority. That night, I called my aunt, who was working in her garden. I began to breathe easily and freely, and wanted to hug the whole world. I remember her shrug when I put her into my arms... she started fussing and called me and Vali, who was walking me home, to come in for dinner. For the first time, I ate potato pancakes, draniki, with sour cream, without a knife or fork, looking at Vali. He took one in his slender fingers, dipped in sour cream, and bit off a huge piece with relish. He told me how his relatives ate lavash in Yerevan, when they picnicked on Lake Sevan, putting basil, eggs and cheese inside. I tried to eat the draniki in the same manner as Vali but I couldn't do it well. Sour cream ran down my hand, and I had to lick it off, which I never did, even in my childhood. My aunt looked at us with eyes full of tears and kept repeating: 'Eat, I'll make some more...' She smelled like home-made pies and a little garlic, which, as it turned out, she was weeding in the garden.

When Dad came to Turov in May, to give his daughter encouragement before the final exams, he immediately saw the change in me. My sparkling eyes, wide smile and cheerful tone worried him. 'A god's daughter shouldn't be so open...' he told me over dinner. He asked me where my reserve had gone, and I laughed loudly. The longer I laughed, the more I realised how terrible the wall I'd erected had been, protecting me from the real world, and built by my father since my childhood.

At the age of sixteen, I still wasn't looking for answers to these questions. I only knew that, if it weren't for Vali, I would never have



learned that life is not only about books, and made-up stories about a perfect world in which harmonious people live. I told my father the next day and explained that I planned to enter Leningrad University, rather than the Ayurveda Institute.

My father listened in silence but his face turned pale. He didn't want to meet Vali, or visit my aunt, and left a week later, informing me in writing that he had decided to no longer support me financially, after I would have completed school. I'd kept all my mother's jewellery but chose to study extramurally and work part-time. My father never replied to my letters, although I wrote to him regularly, about my life, and talked about my colleagues, and about new trends in psychology. I even wrote that psychology and Ayurveda could co-exist in a friendly way. But my father remained silent.

You, of course, cannot wait to know what happened to Vali. After the final exams, he left with his parents: his father, a military man, was transferred to Yerevan. We'd agreed to meet in Leningrad on a certain day and hour, in the park near the Admiralty, on the day of university enrollment. I waited for three hours but Vali didn't come. Neither that day, nor the next. I was in despair, despite the joy of enrollment. I never thought to go to the dean's office, to find out if he'd entered the Psychology Faculty. It was only as I began my first exams that I learned that Vali had never applied. Did I mourn? Not for long. I drew on my father's training: that the lack of flowers in winter is no cause for sadness.

I thought that Vali must be fulfilling the will of his father, who insisted on his son's military career. He would never know where he might be sent on service. What happened to his family during the war in Nagorno-Karabakh? In the early 1990s, Armenia was in a state of siege for three years. I remember you telling me how you tried to find your Armenian friends but failed. Maybe Vali is not even alive...

I quickly got back into the swing of things, though I didn't socialise much, being more interested in books than people. I never let anyone into my life. To be as open as I became with Vali, I needed him. Sometimes, it seems to me that the Almighty sent me this amazing young man so that I could see life as it is, in the raw, in its true colours. And I fell in love with its unpredictability, and sharp turns...

I've never again met a man like Vali. There was one good person when I was younger, but that's another story. Men have tried — and still try — to approach me but you know how cold I am. I'm back in my bubble, but now I can go out when I need to, when I don't feel danger, as I did with you. My aunt died and I sold the house. As for my father... Why, you ask, as a child, did I not rebel, or prove something to him? I was terrified of losing his love. The fear of parental dislike, about which we psychologists talk so much, is the most serious of all a child's fears. It leaves a mark on their whole life and I continue to live with this.

I need to figure out what happened to my father. How was it that he, born in a small Avar village in Dagestan, had such a strong desire to see people become perfect. That's why I must now bid you farewell. I don't know if I'll ever return to Belarus, nor if I'll find my father in our Indian home. Something tells me that he's alive. Probably, this is a tiny part of the higher being that lives in each of us.

By Valentina **Zhdanovich**

## Comment

# Voice from childhood

**The story of Stella's life demonstrates how important it is for children to believe they are loved by their parents. That love teaches children to love themselves and other people, and sets their perception and attitude towards themselves, and the world around them.**



Sergey Zhadkov, a psychologist at the Centre for Successful Relations

**W**e were all once children and need emotional support and love to feel safe. It's a basic need, and the foundation of harmonious development. If we aren't satisfied in this way, we feel despair and remain aloof.

The behaviour of Stella's father was neither overtly sensitive nor aggressive but he projected this feeling onto others. It seems that he had very high standards. He knew he wasn't perfect but he pushed against that knowledge, wishing to become ideal and to make a perfect creature of his daughter. He told her that she was the daughter of a god, since this placed him in the role of a god.

Behind all was the desire for power, aiming to subject his daughter, via manipulation, using restrictions and insults rather than love. His attitude towards Stella ignored her as an individual and did not give unconditional love. He wasn't interested in Stella taking her own path. To show respect for another person, we must allow them freedom. The father didn't want his daughter developing such independence, preferring that she obey him. Meanwhile, her mother chose to be a victim, pitying herself, and subjecting herself to the will of her husband, rather than fighting, for herself and her daughter, demonstrating a healthy model of behaviour to her daughter.

Stella's letter is the voice of a small girl who wishes to be understood, recognised and loved. However, we can be inspired by the fact that, after becoming a mature person, she realises that, before loving others, we must love ourself. She is on the right track.

# Beautiful mirror of the gallery

**Celebrating its 15th anniversary, University of Culture Art Gallery, at the Palace of Republic, in the centre of Minsk, implements interesting projects**



Pavel Sapotsko

YURI IVANOV

**T**he University of Culture Art Gallery was established in 2002, under the Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts, supporting young painters' development. In recent years, much attention has been paid to international ties and the promotion of our artists from across the regions.

The Gallery is guided by Pavel Sapotsko, a magister of cultural studies and a senior teacher at the University of Culture and Arts.

*Mr. Sapotsko, which recent projects have aroused the greatest public response?*

We recently organised an exhibition of sand graphics: an international project, involving thirty-eight authors working with sand, from Belarus, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. This sand painting exhibition was the first such for

our gallery, with each author presenting one work. During the day, visitors could approach a special table to make their own creations, and we held master classes, creative meetings and presentations of books. We even prepared some performances for children. Everything was interesting.

Our new ideas include inviting other countries to join in our project, giving artists the opportunity to show their creativity. We took the exhibition on tour through various cities and countries, with Minsk among them. It's taken a great deal of time to organise, but has been a huge success.

*How often are such international exhibitions held at the Gallery?*

Around half of the projects we implement are international.

*With which countries, creators and painters have you already established collaboration?*

We've organised exhibition programmes with creators, as well as organisations, cultural and educational



At sand graphics exhibition

OLGA KACHURO

**Exhibition of sand graphics, hosted by the University of Culture Gallery, brings together thirty-eight artists, from Belarus, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine**

Works by students of the Folk Decorative-and-Applied Chair at the University of Culture and Arts

institutions, diplomatic representation offices and creative groups from Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, Slovakia, Germany, Italy, Iran, and Israel. We're currently preparing a joint exhibition with the Japanese Embassy and have a project with Zvyazda Publishing House (in conjunction with the Information Ministry and Chinese Embassy). This includes a presentation of a series of translated Chinese verse, nine volumes of which have been already released. Works by famous Chinese poets now exist in Belarusian as a result. We've organised an exhibition of works by Kamil Kamal to help promote this series, as he illustrated collections of verse. We've also enjoyed a small concert, featuring our Belarusian-Chinese joint choir, from the University of Culture and Arts.

Looking to the future, we have an agreement with the embassies of Ecuador, India, Palestine, Russia and Italy. Moreover, we're launching the 'Belarusian Talents in the World' project, to show the creativity of talented Belar-

rusians abroad, including those living in India and Ecuador. One Belarusian woman has been living in India for seven years and another for two. Both married there and have settled. As painters, they've made connections with local, Indian artists, and are keen to help organise joint projects.

**Mr. Sapotsko, how do you find such interesting people?**

I don't have any secrets. Each exhibition grows in its own way, from some idea, or snippet of accidental information (although I don't really believe in 'accidents'). Sometimes, we address embassies, or vice versa. We also liaise with partnership communities without involving diplomatic offices, as with some Belarusian-Polish and Belarusian-Russian projects. However, we usually do try to connect with masters and creative people living abroad with assistance for our embassies.

We organised two exhibitions, recently, as part of the 7th Congress of Belarusians of the World. Our interesting exhibition of equilibrists, called 'Three



YEKATERINA ALEXEEVA



Exhibition of Nikita Fedosik's photos, dedicated to 70th anniversary of People's Artiste of USSR, Valentin Yelizariiev

DMITRY YELISEEV

Kalykhankas' ('Three Lullabies'), demonstrated works by Belarus-born Anna Tikhonova-Yordanova, from Bulgaria, as well as her friends from Belarus, Olga Krupenkova and Tatiana Siplevich. Another exhibition, entitled 'Zora and Vitovt', appeared through our friendly relations with the editorial office of 'Golas Radzimy' newspaper, and the Belarusian State Archive-Museum of Literature and Arts, both of which feature creative groups. Before the Congress, we were pondering what to showcase and finally connected with the Batskaushchyna World Association of Belarusians. At first, we thought to conduct the usual style of creative exhibition but then decided to hold a documentary exposition, dedicated to famous figures of the Belarusian diaspora in the USA, Zora Kipel and Vitovt Kipel.

**Many interesting Belarusian masters live abroad. I expect you'll continue to present their creativity via the Batskaushchyna Society of Belarusians of the world?**

Of course, we'll continue! In particular, we're keen to know how Belarusians in France and Moldova are realising their talents. We hope to be able to liaise with our embassies on such projects and would like to host artistic and documentary exhibitions along the lines of 'Belarusians in Moldova' and 'Moldovans in Belarus'. We wanted to do the same with India, with our Belarusians in India helping fund the transportation of pictures, paying for insurance. However, it turned out that Indians residing in Bela-

rus are primarily involved in choirs and dancing. I've spoken to the BSU and the Linguistic University on how to move forward, and I hope our plans will prove interesting.

**What are your next plans?**

We've won a tender to host the European Heritage Days in Belarus, so this year's theme is 'Heritage and Nature'. The project is being implemented under the guidance of our Culture Ministry and under the aegis of the Council of Europe. We're preparing a photo exhibition (of approximately 50-60 photos) to illustrate our natural wealth. To accompany each exhibited photograph will be modern poetry, and lines from classical works of Belarusian literature.

**Yevgeny Pesetsky, a famous photographer working for 'Zvyazda' newspaper, uses reportage style shots. In the 1990s, 'Belarus' magazine had a column entitled 'Photo Word'. Mr. Pesetsky has been writing his own poetry, and has now released a book of his photography, accompanied by his verse. People move towards art in various ways. How was it with you?**

In the place where I was born, people respected art. I was born in Molodechno, while my mother was born in Smorgon; both are connected with the life and creativity of Michal Kleofas Oginski: the state figure, diplomat, composer and owner of the famous 'estate of muses' in Zalesie.

My mother, Yelena Smirnova, comes from Russia. After graduating from Tambov military school, my grandfather was sent to serve in Smorgon as an officer, and met my grandmother, working as a teacher of mathematics. Later, they moved to Molodechno, where my parents found each other. My father comes from Olekhnovichi, near the Minsk-Molodechno railway. A rather big agrotown is currently located there. I still enjoy visiting and find it therapeutic to dig the potato field!

**It's great to be close to the soil! Such work allows us to remember our roots, and the reality of life.**

I agree. I love visiting my parents' home, where my aunt and my half-cousin

*Annually, the University of Culture Gallery hosts the Republican Artistic Exhibition of Scholarship Holders of the Special Fund of the President of the Republic of Belarus to Support Talented Youth. This is a great creative campaign, which boasts good traditions and has wide press and public recognition. Usually, the exhibition promotes the younger generation of painters and representatives of the modern art school of Belarus who have won significant contests, both at home and abroad.*

Works by artist Inna Soldatova



YEKATERINA ALEXEEVA

now live. Unfortunately, my grandmother, Vera Ovzebushovna (my great-grandfather had such a rare name) died several months ago. She was Polish, born under the surname Sobol, from the village of Soboli, on the Belarus-Lithuania border. The village no longer exists, sadly.

*The family tree of the famous romanticist, Alexander Grin, also has a rare name, similar to that of your great-grandfather; he is descended from the Belarusian noble family of Grinevitskie (in Russia, they use the surname of Grinevskie). Alexander's father was Stefan Euzebiusz Grinevsky. Meanwhile, the father of famous Polish poet and translator Juliusz Słowacki also had the name of Euzebiusz.*

A rather interesting range... It's fascinating to explore one's family tree. My father, Mikhail Sapotsko, is a builder and doesn't have any relation to writing. However, in the Sapotsko family, there was a Catholic saint: Michal Sapotsko. He was born in 1888, in the village of Yushevshchina, which is now Novosady, in the Volozhin District. A decade ago, an icon of St. Michal was brought to the Catholic church in the Molodechno District's Krasnoe (where I was baptised). The procession was accompanied by Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, while priest Sapotsko was beatified in 2000 in Polish Bialystok. At that time, I was an 11th-grade pupil. In 2008, our relatives from Bialystok connected with us and confirmed that the saint was from our family. Interesting documents exist to confirm the details; the saint is the second uncle of my grandfather Stanislav.

*Such relationships, like art, should raise the spirit. How did art enter your life?*

Molodechno painter Kastus Khoroshevich played a great role. We live in Molodechno, in the street named in honour of painter Yazep Drozdovich. Close to our house is the state children's art school, which I attended. Kastus Khoroshevich was a great authority, coming to conduct master classes; we sometimes dropped into his studio. Our teachers were from Molodechno, friends of the

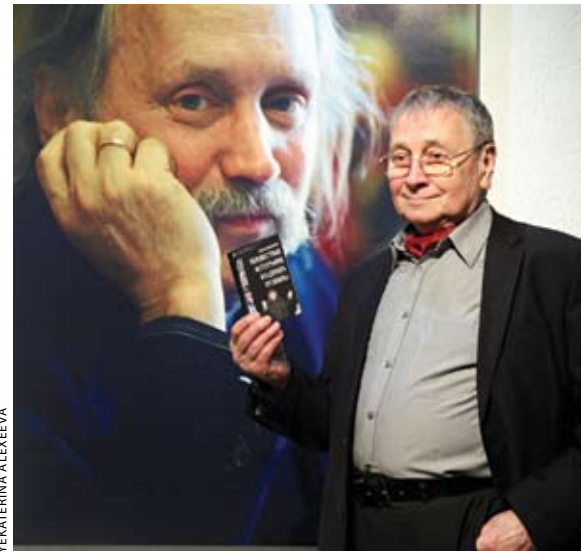
Union of Artists: Vasily Tarkan, Ales Pashkevich, Vasily Lazovsky and Vera Dvorak... I remember our lessons in sculpting, and drawing, painting, composition and the history of art. I studied for one year in preparatory and two years in the main department. Students had to study for five years all together.

*Why did you leave?*

It was difficult to combine art with my main subjects: my school had a physical-mathematical profile. Over time, I became a humanitarian. Of course, mathematics helps us to learn the laws of the highest harmony and art. As far as Kastus Khoroshevich is concerned, we were good friends by the time I visited him in his studio. We planned to make a booklet and I took photos of all his works, over a period of three hours. Now, we're planning a virtual exhibition. We'd like to show the potential of Molodechno painters at our Gallery. Next year, we have exhibitions planned for the Palace of Culture and the Children's Art School, as well as at the Department of Decorative-and-applied Art at Molodechno State Musical College (named after Michal Kleofas Oginski).

We have a very powerful community of experienced masters, who work as teachers and artists: Ales Pashkevich, Vasily Tarkan, Nikolay Ovchinnikov, and Yegor Mezhev. I'm proud that such men introduced me to the world of art. My task, now, is to make exhibitions.

Interviewed by Ivan **Zhdanovich**



YEKATERINA ALEXEEVA

Yuri Ivanov — an author of the photo exhibition, devoted to Vladimir Mulyavin

*The University of Culture Art Gallery enjoys diverse activity, implementing dozens of creative projects, supporting initiatives for talented young people. It helps develop and strengthen international cultural ties and promotes awareness of the artistic heritage of Belarusian masters, while presenting the achievements of foreign masters to Belarusian audiences. It also allows representatives of the Belarusian diaspora to show their works in their homeland.*

Various media eagerly tell their audience about exhibition projects of the University of Culture Art Gallery



YEKATERINA ALEXEEVA

# Attractive image of the capital



## Famous Belarusian artists each found their own way



**T**he National Art Museum of Belarus is currently hosting the exhibition 'City. Architecture. We,' dedicated to the 950th anniversary of the foundation of Minsk.

The exhibition comprises dozens of paintings, drawings and sculptures from the collection of the National Art Museum, conveying images of the city: ancient and modern, pre-war and post-war, solemn and casual, city squares, avenues and suburbs. The exhibition aims to show the diversity of Minsk's architecture and moods, across the decades, revealing how artists have approached

their portrayal of the city, in various media, and using various techniques.

The exhibition showcases a cross-section of urban iconography and gives a rare opportunity to see the works of Belarusian artists of different generations, seeing artistic traditions and stylistic landmarks created almost a hundred years ago, representing a variety of visions.

The opening of the exhibition coincided with the presentation of the illustrated album 'City. Architecture. We,' featuring about four hundred paintings, graphics and sculptures, published by Mastatskaya Litaratura Publishing House.

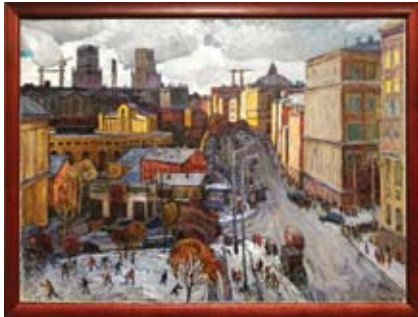
Works by Honoured Artist Boris Arakcheev are on show. The great

painter's daughter, Oksana Arakcheeva, tells us, "Nature was his first teacher. He was a boy from a Russian village on the River Sit, running along its banks, collecting pebbles. For him, they were simply colourful."

The boy grew up to become a great painter, whose works today occupy a worthy place in museums, galleries and collectors' homes, not only in our country, but all over the world. Moreover, the master trained dozens of students.



'My City' by Vladimir Lagun (1973)



'Urban Landscape' by Sergey Katkov (1967)

"Dad treated his students as creative personalities," Oksana explains. "The main task of the teacher is to nurture a creative atmosphere for students. His were very fond of him and many have become excellent teachers themselves."

Although not Belarusian by origin, Arakcheev became so by his attitude and love for Belarusian history, culture, and nature. His 'Berezina', 'Silence. Zhirovichi Monastery', 'Lake Svityaz' and 'The Army of Bagration Crossing the Dnieper Near Sary Bykhov' are a few of his canvases demonstrating his fascination with our country.

He created not just landscapes, portraits and still life works, but military and historical paintings, and many ardent sketches of Minsk.

"My father painted buildings on Svobody Square that no longer exist. I, as a little girl, watched city life from the windows of his studio. My father was painting a tram ring at that time, which is no longer there, and the impressive, huge trees have been cut down. Nevertheless, things remain alive via his paintings,



showing how the capital once looked. They're interesting to see today."

Oksana learned a lot from her father. Today, she's not only a painter, but an expert in book illustration, designing books for children and school textbooks for junior students. She's also a fan of the cityscape, with particular fondness for Yanka Kupala Square, and views over the Svisloch River, the embankment, Yubileinaya Square with the Cathedral, Town Hall and the old city streets.

Naturally, time changes the face of the city, which Oksana reflects in her

works, often comparing her canvases with those of her father. She rejoices when she finds something to delight her. While she has her own style, her philosophy clearly follows in his footsteps, as she recognises, devoting many creative ideas to her father.

The exhibition also displays paintings of Minsk by Vasily Sumarev. To understand the origins of his creativity, one should visit his studio, as is always desirable for those who write about artists. However, in the case of Sumarev, it makes special sense. His studio is very



unusual, being full of students. They paint, mould, make engravings, and weave tapestry on homemade looms. The studio has a spirit of collective creativity. It's difficult to imagine Sumarev's work outside this atmosphere of constant invention and sincere feelings.

He painted from childhood, helping his father and brother to make cabinets, and attending classes at a children's art studio, at a railway school. He studied at Minsk Art College and then at the Painting Department of the Belarusian Theatre and Art Institute, which he graduated from in 1965.

The years of his study coincided with the most interesting period in Belarusian art, when a new post-war generation of young artists grew, with a spirit of daring, seeking truths. It was a time when many ideas were being re-thought, and when each exhibition brought heated debate, among students and young teachers.

This environment shaped Sumarev, teaching him not only the basics of art, but guiding his artistic taste, and his views on life and art, from which he sought his own reference points.

From Konchalovsky, he learnt to portray colour and vivid life, appreciating cultural inspiration, and became fond of the primitivists. This most important

time in his life allowed him to reinterpret well-learned canonical concepts, forming his own position.

His very first works made a statement, with his graduation work 'Raftsmen' shown at the All-Union Show of Works by Graduates of Art Schools. In the same year, of 1966, at the Republican Exhibition of Works of Young Artists, he displayed a whole series of independent works, created during a trip to Leningrad and Karelia: 'City Landscape', 'Northern Village', 'Quarry' and 'Chemical Works'. The last was selected for the All-Union Youth Exhibition.

All these works stood out for expressiveness of colour and form, as is especially acute in 'Chemical Works': a harsh, urbanistic painting, showing the angularity of industrial buildings, in gradations of emerald-blue and black-and-white, with many cramped pipes, giving the composition internal tension.

This 'alienation' was gradually replaced by a sense of lyricism, as we see in 'CHP-2', painted for the 900th anniversary of the foundation of Minsk. Rather than brute-force opposition of new to old (common place in landscapes on similar topics) he combines architectural images from different eras, reproducing fragments of nature, as seen from

his windows or on his way to his studio, or in the city centre. We see the house where Sumarev was born and raised, and we see people's everyday concerns, and suburban rhythms, reproduced with surprising warmth. Minsk's corners are transformed via sculptural composition, with familiar details seen from unexpected points of view, intriguing the viewer. All are slightly reminiscent of old engravings portraying urban scenes.

His quick eye and spontaneity, alongside interest in traditions, and desire to reinterpret what he'd learned at the institute, seeking his own artistic manner, determined his artistic diversity. His most famous works create the impression that the artist developed in only one direction. However, this isn't the case. His early attempts to address the civilian theme were influenced by the 'severe' style of art of the early 1960s, including monumentalisation and generalisation of form, as we see in 'Letter', 'Return', and 'Likbez'. His student approach to naive semantic symbolism, and amorphous images are noticeable.

At the same time, Sumarev created a series of paintings with surprising interpretations, combining landscapes with household artefacts. Sumarev plunged into a 'microcosm' of stylised images,





revealing an attachment to presenting the world in miniature.

Some of the works painted in this style are of very small size, but the details are carefully drawn, with each figure having its own gesture, facial expression and character.

He has an entire series set in a Minsk square, on a Sunday, showing a carousel of buses, shop signs and the queue at a kiosk. 'Sunday' (1968) sparkles with the colours of a festive rainbow, with an upbeat mood.

Meanwhile, his 'Merry Winter in Loshitsa' shows a holiday with almost childlike impartiality, being colourful, trembling with musicality, like a winter's fairy tale, inhabited by cheerful youngsters like 'toy tin soldiers'.

By giving himself to the children and believing that an artist lives in each, Sumarev unwittingly experienced their charm and delight, finding brave compositional and sculptural solutions. Perhaps only professional meticulousness and his sense of humour guarded him from deliberate primitivism, which would have been so easy to fall into. Even his purely thematic works, dedicated to such exhibitions as 'Physical Education and Sport' or 'Always Alert', have a slightly tongue-in-cheek manner.

The same deliberateness is felt in the fiery palette of his 'Hot Day. Training Firefighters' with its red cars and human figures, steam and smoke rising from the Minsk cityscape. We see slogans on buildings and a couple in love at a fountain, while a bustling grandmother drives a goat into her courtyard. There is a fairy-tale atmosphere, as if the figures are no more than toys. The long and somewhat prosaic title of the painting emphasises its narrative structure, and unhurried flow of thought. The artist watches on high.

The perspective in Vasily Sumarev's compositions shows, invariably, a high horizon, opening up the canvas, as we see in 'Awakening Day', where the conditional nature of space is emphasised by a delicate silver, sparkling palette.

Such an approach is common to Sumarev. In the same manner, he turns the New Year Minsk market into a colourful kaleidoscope, in 'New Year is Coming'. The fair's colour, with a predominance of crimson, yellow and blue, evokes the illumination of Christmas lights wrapped around a huge tree, with interlacing branches and flocks of birds. The fair's spirit is shown via small details with the composition.



'Minsk. Pobedy Square'  
by Alexander Mozolev (1960)



'Minsk. Internatsionalnaya Street'  
by Natan Voronov (1949)

Using intense detail, Sumarev evokes intimacy with the viewer, despite the inevitable distance between artist and audience. He brings something fresh and original, too, inspiring us to return time and again to his works.

His 'My House', created in 1970, has been displayed at various exhibitions, quickly gaining popularity. This painting, more than his other works, reveals the artist's view of life. Critics note that it transforms the traditions of popular print and miniatures, showing a multitude of events as if occurring simultaneously. Using the pasticcio folk art method, he demonstrates his love for 'naïve' art and clearly manifests his personality. Depicting the actual home in which he grew up, we see a 'family photo', capturing relatives and neighbours, memorable episodes, and childhood and adolescence experiences, which form a peculiar panorama of life. This unfolds against the background of a new city being constructed, with helicopters flying and rushing electric trains.

A cheerful red house floats through the years like a fairy-tale ship, huge and

filled with sunlight, and glowing colour, its windows open wide. It's a place where people celebrate weddings, and dream, and read books... They live in the house without hiding, leading their simple, everyday life.

The artist repeatedly returns to his favourite topic: of what is happening in 'his' house, zooming in, giving a close-up at a window. This how 'Wedding' was born, created two years after 'My House'.

This wish to separate the window with the wedding into an individual painting is certainly revealing, indicating the artist's need to move to portraiture to tell about the inhabitants of the house in more detail. He took another step in this direction in creating, in the same year, 'Still Life with Laska', again showing the house from within. One half of the window is open to the sunny world, while the other is closed from prying eyes by a crumpled newspaper. Also, the table is divided into two, with a white tablecloth on one side, showing a cup and a bottle of milk with a flower. Under the table is a floppy-eared mongrel, Laska. On the other side are chopping boards and a meat grinder, filled with blood-red meat.

The artist invests symbolic meaning into these objects, emphasising the bright and gloomy halves, as if separating 'good and evil,' unselfishness and gluttony. At the same time, Sumarev knows how to combine naïveté with seriousness and evoke deep thoughts in the viewer, remaining true to the traditions that nourish his work. The panorama of events is viewed from above, as if through time and remote distance, which gives the picture a monumental scale, despite its small size. This symbolic generalisation may seem unlike his usual manner but it reveals Sumarev's artistic and sculptural manner.

May Dantsig and Leonid Shchemelev also painted Minsk a great deal, and their beautiful works are on show at the exhibition, among paintings by other artists who held our capital dear.

By Veniamin **Mikheev**



'Minsk. Shopping Stalls' by Oskar Mariks (1945)



'Komarovka' by Monas Monaszon (1980)



'Central Post Office' by Lev Leitman (1954)



'Minsk. The House of Government' by Pavel Gavrilenko (1940)



'Minsk is Awakening' by May Dantsig (1960)



'Battle at Nemiga' by Mikhail Filippovich (early 1920s)



'Minsk. July 3rd, 1944' by Valentin Volkov (1946-1955)