

MAGAZINE FOR YOU

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# BELARUS

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## ENERGY, EXPRESSION, SYMBOLISM AND... THE DREAMS OF MARC CHAGALL

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## Country in modern dimension

**J**uly 3rd in Belarus is the major state holiday. It's Independence Day. What can be more important for a young sovereign country than this symbol!

It's also symbolic that the day of liberation of Minsk from the Fascists — July 3rd, 1944 — is a starting point for the holiday.

During the war years, a third of the country's residents died. It was the price of freedom, as we remember.

After World War II, Belarus became a founder of the United Nations: an honour held by few states. The choice was made in favour of Belarus — then a republic of the Soviet Union — for its great contribution to destroying Fascism.

We continue to revere our veterans, though other nations may neglect theirs. For us, memory and respect are sacred, because that war left its trace on every family.

What do modern teenagers think of our war heroes? Many search selflessly for soldiers who died during the war, restoring the names of the unknown and taking patronage over veterans. They honour the victors.

Time goes by and the world is changing. However, true values aren't subject to revision. Belarus constructs its relations with other states on principles of good neighbourliness. It is the political credo of Belarus. We prefer to achieve victories in competitions — a good way to reveal who's the strongest.



Today, we seek more partnerships between people and between countries. This is a strategic essence of contemporary international cooperation, and Belarus orients towards it in its foreign policy.

In July, Minsk hosted a major political forum — the 26th summer session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, with around seven hundred foreign parliamentarians and politicians in attendance, from fifty-six states, including OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Christine Muttonen and Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE Sebastian Kurz.

The major topic of Minsk discussions was the strengthening of mutual trust and cooperation, for the sake of global peace and prosperity. Parliamentarians have discussed the most acute and urgent topics in the region: settlement of conflicts, counteraction of terrorism, migration challenges, human rights, climate change and cyber-security. It's the first time when Minsk has welcomed such a forum, despite being a fully-fledged member of the OSCE and its active participant for twenty-five years. The choice of the country to host the dialogue was the result of many factors. The geopolitical situation in the region is seriously changing, with tensions on the rise. Under these conditions, Belarus remains a hub of stability, making a weighty contribution to the provision of European security.

The well-considered peaceful policy of the country and readiness for open dialogue has not gone unnoticed. The world community is beginning to understand the importance of our country as a reliable and secure link between the West and the East. The OSCE was founded in the 1970s in response to the aggravation of the Cold War. Today, it's the largest international organisation, covering three continents and more than one billion people. Initially, its task was to prevent conflicts in the region and to settle crisis situations. However, over time, it's become apparent that the OSCE has failed to fulfil its functions. Alexander Lukashenko considered the meeting of the heads of OSCE states as playing a vital role for discussing serious and important problems. Later, speaking at the plenary session, the President suggested discussion within the OSCE on the need to organise a new Helsinki Process: an idea supported by parliamentarians.

All details of the forum are further on explored in our publication **Minsk discussion on European topic**.

Belarus is becoming more recognisable and not only due to its activity in foreign policy. The country is hospitably opening its doors to those who wish to become better acquainted, as we discuss in this edition. Our cover page, **Welcome, Tourist!**, says all that is needed. You're sure to find much of interest here on the attractiveness of contemporary Belarus to tourists, with its rich history and traditions.

SERGEY LOZIUK

VIKTOR KHARKOV



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## Solemn session as prologue to holiday

**Oktyabrskaya Square in Minsk sees waving of red and green flags, festive dress and merriment at the Independence Palace to mark the historic holiday**

**T**he event, dedicated to Belarusian Independence Day, brought together labour and military veterans, experienced professionals from various spheres, and talented youngsters. Those who have created the roots of our sovereignty and those who now, confidently and proudly, take the baton joined in celebrating their love for their country.

Alexander Lukashenko spoke of today's geopolitical situation, saying, "We've done everything to make our army modern and strong, rivalling any other state". He stressed that history has proven the necessity of Belarus being able to defend itself. "We'll try to preserve and protect



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the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Belarusian state."

He underlined that our nation is 'precious', and that state policy is guided by the need to promote citizens' wellbeing. "This is a guideline for all authorities, because the republic is truly for the people."

The President mentioned the revival of the Chernobyl regions, and the forthcoming session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Minsk, as well as negotiations between heads of Belarus and Russia in Moscow. Moreover, Mr. Lukashenko confirmed that the country has focused on an economy of knowledge, which role has significantly increased in the contemporary world. "Creating an IT country is our ambitious yet achievable goal. By accomplishing it, we'll make Belarus even more modern and prosperous, allowing Belarusians to confidently look into the future."

The most important words of the President aroused a true ovation in the hall. "By surviving hard times, Belarusians have earned the right to live in a free land, in peace and abundance, and to be full-time participants of global processes. Let's together strengthen this blessed land, given to us by the God, by uniting our efforts. This is our destiny, our present and the future of our children and grandchildren!"

By Alexey Fedosov





# INDEPENDENCE DAY BRIGHTLY CELEBRATED IN BELARUS

Major holiday of the Belarusian statehood celebrated on July 3rd

**T**he decision to celebrate Independence Day on July 3rd was made in 1996, with Belarusians voting in favour of this at the Republican referendum on November 24th. In December 1996, the Decree of President Alexander Lukashenko established a state holiday: Independence Day of the Republic of Belarus (Day of the Republic). It's celebrated on the anniversary of Minsk's liberation from German invaders — which occurred on July 3rd, 1944. Belarus first celebrated its Independence Day in 1997.

Belarus was the first to bear the brunt of Hitler's troops, while Minsk was exposed

to ruthless bombardment and artillery fire on the second day of the war. On the city's fringes, Hitler's soldiers faced stubborn resistance, with the 100th and 64th rifle divisions fighting especially fiercely. However, on June 28th, the Fascists managed to seize Minsk and residents of the city were obliged to fight against the enemy in the first days of occupation.

Occupation lasted 1,100 days, during which people undertook selfless and heroic struggles against the invaders. Minsk was occupied but wasn't conquered.

As a result of the brilliant Belarusian operation, with interaction of the 1st and 3rd Belarusian fronts and with sup-

port from partisans, on July 3rd, 1944, the capital of Belarus was liberated from German invaders. This day became a holiday of liberation for the whole country. People of Belarus are aware of the price of freedom, since one in three residents of the Republic died in the Great Patriotic War.

As is traditional, on July 3rd, Belarusian people pay tribute to the heroism of soldiers, and the self-sacrificing struggle of members of clandestine and partisan movements, as well as the unprecedented efforts of those who revived the country from its ruins.

By Sergey **Bogomazov**



ALEXANDER KUSHNER

## Peaceful principles of country's sovereignty

**Belarus in favour of resolving international conflicts through negotiations only, notes President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, speaking at the parade in honour of Independence Day on July 3rd**

**“W**e’re proud of the fact that Belarus is an established independent nation that pursues a peaceful multiple-vector foreign policy. Equality of all countries and their non-interference with domestic affairs of each other represent our unwavering principle. We’re in favour of resolving any international conflicts through negotiations only,” notes Mr. Lukashenko.

**“U**nfortunately, other countries are unwilling to follow the example,” asserts the President of Belarus. “What do we have as a result? The global instability is on the rise. The international security system lies in ruins. European countries are joining the arms race and are making military preparations. The USA is deploying a missile defence system near our borders and is building up its nuclear potential.”

**“O**ur answer is the modern Belarusian army, which is being constantly modernised. It’s mobile, well-trained and armed,” stresses Mr. Lukashenko.

# Powerful impression from solemn march

**Military parade of troops from Minsk garrison and passing of civil machinery in honour of Independence Day takes place in the capital of Belarus**

In total, the parade involved around 3,500 military men, with twenty parade units as part of the dismounted column, including cadets from Minsk Suvorov Military School, the Military Academy, the Military Technical Faculty of the BNTU and combined units of military commands.

The mechanised column involved twenty-six parade units of contemporary combat equipment and 222 vehicles, such as T-72B combat tanks, BMP-2 infantry combat vehicles, BTR-80 armoured personnel carriers, Bogatyr vehicles, light-armoured

Cayman vehicles, MZKT trucks with unmanned aerial vehicles, P-434 stations, Sani mortar complexes, Shturm combat vehicles, Polonez multiple-launch rocket systems and other combat vehicles. The Air Force was represented by twenty-six helicopters and thirty-two aircraft.

The column of civilian vehicles and machines comprised 102 vehicles, including BelGee passenger cars, and vehicles made by Minsk Tractor Works (MTZ), Gomselmash Holding and Amkodor.

By Vladimir **Velikhov**



# A gate of memory at the place of the tragedy

**During the war, one of Europe's largest death camps — Trostenets — was situated near Minsk**

**T**wo years ago, modest obelisks were added to the 10-metre-high bronze Gates of Memory, featuring figurines of emaciated prisoners, literally imprinted on the camp gates. The monument's author — sculptor Konstantin Kostyuchenko — tells us the story of its creation.

The gates are a symbol of the transition. It was unfortunately easy to get into Trostenets, but only a few ever managed to escape the death camp. The monument is a tribute to the victims of concentration camps. It depicts people who experienced inhumane suffering. I'd like the sculpture to make people stop just for a moment and reflect on the tragedy of war. The sculpture has no pedestal or steps. I refused them intentionally to ensure everyone can touch the gates, go through them

and feel the fear and hopelessness that prevailed here during those years.

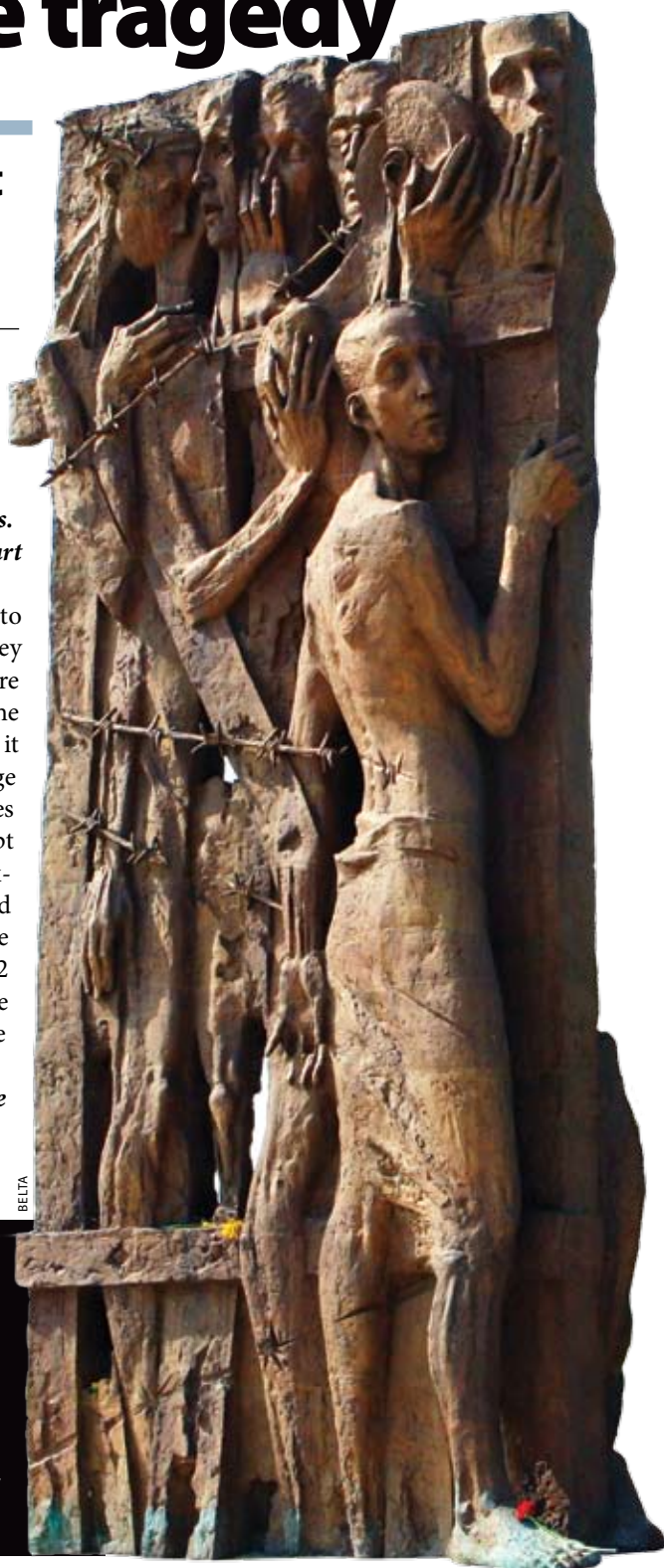
*Your monument is the tallest bronze sculpture in Belarus. What was the most difficult part of creating it?*

Many people advised me to make the gates half the size they are, but I insisted on the 10-metre version. The sculpture reflects the scale of the tragedy; otherwise, it would have been lost in a large open space. It took my colleagues and me three months to sculpt the monument from clay in extreme winter conditions. We had to use heat guns to ensure the clay wasn't frozen. We used 32 tonnes of clay and almost the same amount of bronze to make the four-storey-high piece.

*How was the image we see now born?*

## Facts

■ Trostenets is among the largest death camps in Europe, ranked fourth in the number of victims after Auschwitz, Majdanek and Treblinka. Here, the fascists killed over 200,000 people from Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia and France. The Trostenets memorial complex embraces several places where people were killed: the village of Trostenets (where the prisoners lived), Shashkovka (burnt down) and Blagovshchina (where people were shot). The erection of the memorial complex on the site of the tragedy was conducted under the patronage of Alexander Lukashenko.



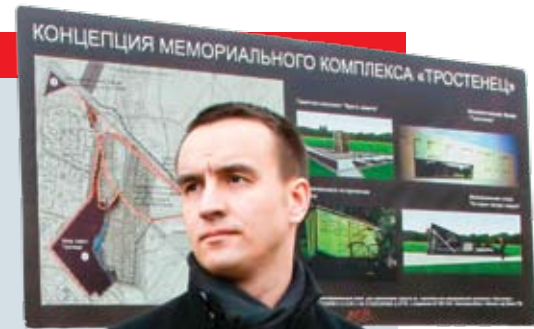


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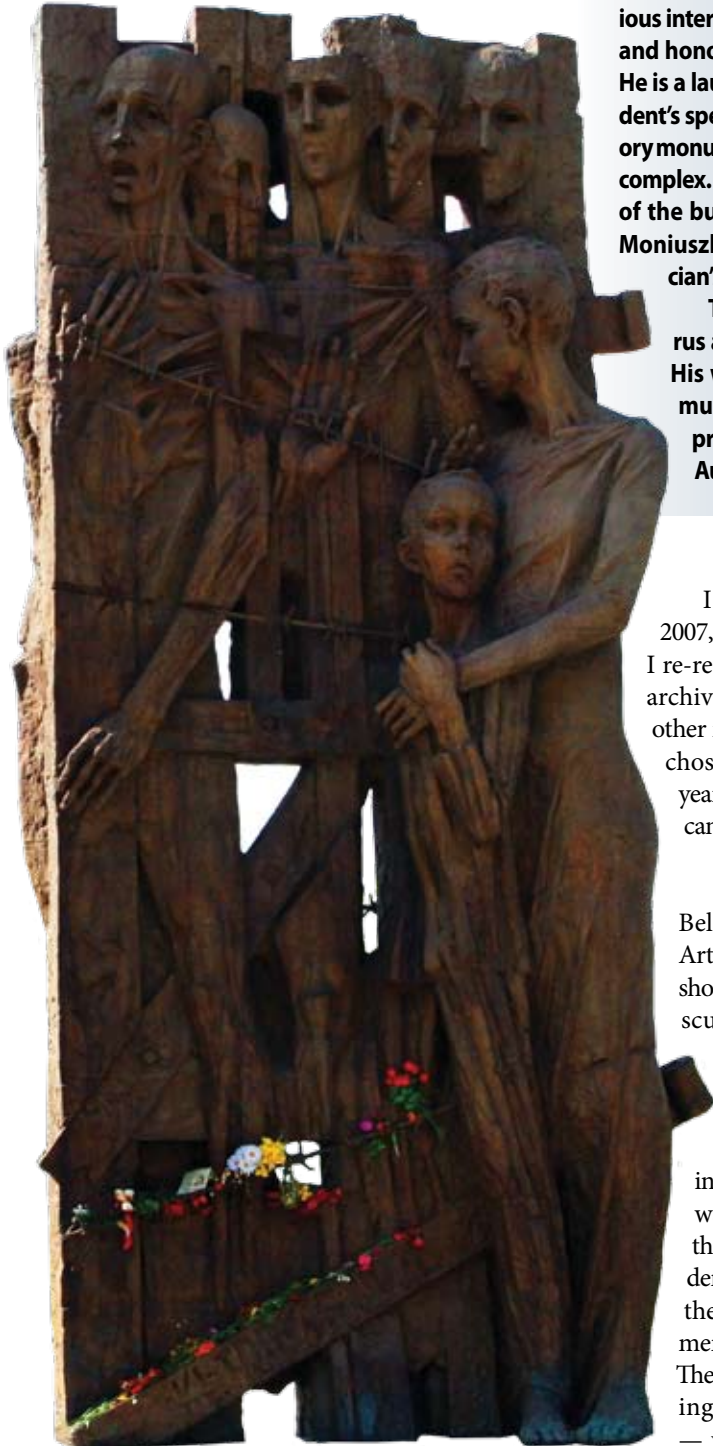
■ **Konstantin Kostyuchenko is a sculptor and assistant professor at the Sculpture Department of the Belarusian State Academy of Arts.**

**He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence and has won prestigious international and national awards and honours in the field of sculpture. He is a laureate of the Belarusian President's special award for his Gates of Memory monument at the Trostenets memorial complex. Mr. Kostyuchenko is a co-author of the bust to the composer Stanislaw Moniuszko; it was erected in the musician's native town of Cherven.**

**The sculptor represented Belarus at the Venice Biennale in 2011. His works are exhibited at national museums of modern art and kept in private collections in France, Belgium, Austria and Italy.**



ARTUR PRUPAS



I began making sketches in 2007, in preparation for the work: I re-read military books, studied archival documents and visited other memorials. My project was chosen out of 20 works seven years ago, in the open Republican competition.

***Who were your teachers?***

After graduating from the Belarusian State Academy of Arts, I worked at artistic workshops of painting, drawing and sculpture headed by People's Artist Mikhail Savitsky.

I learnt much from the legendary sculptor Lev Gumilevsky. When deciding to enter the competition, I was told I was too young for the challenge but I was confident in myself. While creating the images, I was assisted by memories of Mikhail Savitsky. The author of the famous paintings — 'Partisan Madonna' — went through the horrors

of concentration camps in Düsseldorf, Buchenwald and Dachau. I often heard that my work was viewed as gloomy and frightening, but I don't think all art should be beautiful, especially this piece, as the monument stands in a place literally covered in blood, and my sculpture screams this. Together with Anna Akse-nova, the main architect of the project, we decided not to make any unnecessary additions. There are simple slabs of granite in front of the monument and a lawn nearby. Why should we disturb the remains of people buried in the mass grave on this huge field?

***Did any of your family members take part in the war?***

My both grandfathers fought against the enemy on the frontline. They are dead now but I know that they would wish their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren never to experience the nightmare of the war years. My paternal grandfather saw my war memorial. The gates impressed him; he said he was proud of me.

By Kristina **Khilko**

# Minsk discussion on European topic

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**Minsk hosts a major political forum for the 26th summer session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, with around 700 foreign parliamentarians and politicians in attendance, from 56 states, including OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Christine Muttonen, Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE Sebastian Kurz and other famous European politicians.**

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**T**he major topic of Minsk discussions is strengthening of mutual trust and cooperation for the sake of peace and prosperity in the world. Parliamentarians have discussed the most acute and urgent topics in the region: settlement of conflicts, counteraction of terrorism, migration challenges, human rights, climate change and cyber-security. It's the first time when Minsk has welcomed such a forum, despite being a fully-fledged member of the OSCE and its active participant for twenty-five years. The choice of the country to host the dialogue was the result of many factors, testifying to the growing authority of Belarus and the Belarusian Parliament within the international arena.

The geopolitical situation in the region is seriously changing, with tensions on the rise. Under these conditions, Belarus remains a hub of stability, making a weighty contribution to the provision of European security. The well-considered peaceful policy of the country and readiness for open dialogue has not gone unnoticed. The world community is beginning to understand the importance

of our country as a reliable and secure link between the West and the East, as was voiced many times at the plenary session, involving the President of Belarus. Alexander Lukashenko set the

it's the largest international organisation, covering three continents and more than one billion people. Initially, its task was to prevent conflicts in the region and to settle crisis situations. However,

*Belarus remains a hub of stability, making a weighty contribution to the provision of European security. The well-considered peaceful policy of the country and readiness for open dialogue has not gone unnoticed. The world community is beginning to understand the importance of our country as a reliable and secure link between the West and the East*

tone of the session by making important statements and suggesting initiatives. Before the beginning of the forum, the President met the leadership of the PA OSCE. At the plenary session, dedicated to solemn opening of the 26th annual session of the PA OSCE, the President delivered a speech, noting that the OSCE was founded in the 1970s in response to the aggravation of the Cold War. Today,

over time, it's become apparent that the OSCE has failed to fulfil its functions. The President of Belarus spoke sincerely of this with OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Christine Muttonen.

“Look how many negative things have happened in recent times in Europe. But what is our reaction? What is the reaction of heads of state? Zero. A war is going on in Europe, but there's no





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Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko participated in the Minsk forum

reaction. This testifies to the fact that the organisation has problems. These should be solved early on, as a disease should be cured in the beginning. If we neglect this process, you know what it will lead to. It has been suggested to reform the OSCE and make it more efficient and decisive,” noted Mr. Lukashenko.

Mr. Lukashenko considered the meeting of the heads of OSCE states as playing a vital role for discussing serious problems. He has guaranteed all-round support for such dialogue, saying, “You’re well aware of our opportunities and you may always count on us, especially if it refers to promotion of security in our European region. We need to bring everything in order, in a European and civilised way.”

This tackles not only such global problems as terrorism and uncontrollable migration, but the transit of drugs, human trafficking and illegal movement of radioactive elements.

Later, speaking at the plenary session, the President suggested discussion within the OSCE on the need to organise a new Helsinki process. This idea was supported by parliamentarians, with Vladimir Andreichenko, the Chairman of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus, asserting, “Only open and equal dialogue can help loosen the knot of international problems and give people what they need: a peaceful sky, stability and prosperity. We expect a constructive exchange of opinions and, importantly, avoidance of confrontational thinking. Parliamentary diplomacy should be used to construct bridges, destroy stereotypes and find mutually acceptable compromises. We need to avoid ambitions, by focusing efforts on unity and cooperation.”

On the first day of work, the President of Belarus also met Sebastian Kurz, the Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Aus-

tria and the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE. Mr. Lukashenko noted the considerable contribution of the Austrian politician to the improvement of relations between Belarus and Austria. Mr. Kurz thanked the President of Belarus for the opportunity to meet on the sidelines of the forum, saying, “I believe that the session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Minsk is an important positive signal. Of course, I’m ready to speak about bilateral relations between Belarus and Austria and to discuss OSCE problems; unfortunately, there are a great many of them”.

Discussions in Minsk lasted several days and resolutions have been accepted, which have become the basis for the Minsk declaration. Parliamentarians have made recommendations to national governments, parliaments and the international community, on how to respond to acute challenges and threats.

By Vasily **Kharitonov**

# Participants and guests

**Christine Muttonen, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President:**

Belarus occupies a special place in Europe, both geographically and politically. Minsk is recognised as a place of international diplomacy and of settlement of conflicts. Minsk is a synonym for efforts to achieve peace in Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine. We regularly support Minsk Agreements and call for their complete fulfilment.



President Lukashenko spoke of provision of trust in a way similar to Helsinki, as a path away from mistrust, as we see currently. We see very many manifestations that we're not moving in the right direction: due to xenophobia, fragmentation within Europe, or the intensification of clashes between the East and West, and long-drawn-out conflict. All these force us, politicians, to seek to redirect us onto the right course.

**Sebastian Kurz, Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, and Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria:**



I'm truly grateful that Minsk is establishing bridges between the East and the West, and has become a place for conducting dialogue. Unfortunately, block thinking (which should have become a thing of the past) is returning to the continent and radicalisation is emerging inside our societies. Therefore, we need to do everything we can to develop various forms of interaction and be ready for compro-



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mise. We should use this moment to bring our organisation to a new level and to restore trust between states.

**Kent Härstedt, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Vice President:**

I was one of those who promoted and supported the idea of conducting the session in Minsk. It's very important for Belarus as a country. We have a huge democratic society with the participation of more than 300 parliamentarians and representatives of over 57 states. Probably, this is one of the largest events of such a level ever hosted by Belarus. Of course, this influences your country and includes not only preparation and other events taking place in coming days, and beyond. Many people are



arriving in Belarus for the first time but I'm confident that they'll be welcomed very hospitably and will leave with wonderful impressions from your country. I've been to Belarus many times and it's always a pleasure to stay here. I enjoy it greatly.

**Boleslav Pirshchuk, Deputy Chairman of the National Assembly's House of Representatives:**

It's very important for us that our colleagues have seen Belarus with their own eyes. They've communicated with people and seen that it's a European state with European culture and a very high level of development. I'm convinced that most will drastically change their relations towards the Republic of Belarus.





# of the forum speak



**Stephen de Boer, Canadian Ambassador to Poland and Belarus (concurrent):**



One of the issues governing the renewal of our diplomatic ties is the constructive position of Belarus within the OSCE. We look with enthusiasm on what Belarus is doing and highly appreciate the work of the Belarusian side in the Minsk process. It's a very fruitful path. Canada also supports the activity of your country in the struggle against human trafficking. Belarus called for a top-level meeting on this problem in September and we're grateful for continuing work on this.

**Johann Wadeful, Deputy Head of the German-Belarusian Parliamentary Group of the Bundestag:**



Choosing Minsk as a venue to conduct the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly session is a signal of interest in continuing dialogue and expanding cooperation. Economies should become more intensive and we're keen that German firms invest in Belarus. You have well educated specialists, but investors are cautious, so it's necessary to continue creating favourable conditions. There's definitely a potential for growth, including in the form of scientific exchange. Germany doesn't have the lowest taxes but we definitely have good technologies, and not all our production facilities are located in Germany. Stability and mutual trust are necessary for this; moreover, parliamentary contacts are also important.

**Ivan Brajovic, President of the Parliament of Montenegro:**



There's much in common between Belarus and Montenegro. We also advocate the support of peace in the region. It's vital. However, we need to start more intensive collaboration, as our relations have greater potential.

**Andrey Rybak, a member of the Belarusian delegation at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly 26th session:**

The session's agenda includes various issues: from political to economic. It tackles the situation in various regions of



the OSCE, such as the development of green economy and many other issues which have a major influence on the security of OSCE member states.

**Filippo Lombardi, Deputy Chairman of the Swiss Parliament's Political Affairs Committee:**



It's very important that Minsk has become a venue for such a forum. I appreciate the role played by Belarus in establishing peace in Europe, as it often acts as an intermediary in settling important issues and conflicts. I hope that this role will increase. Switzerland will continue providing support to Belarus in all endeavours. We hope that our cooperation will only expand.



At the meeting in Moscow

# Integration rushes towards tomorrow

## Belarus and Russia aim to strengthen political and economic partnership

**T**he previously announced Moscow visit by the President of Belarus began with a meeting with the heads of Russia's largest media at the TASS Club of Chief Editors. Belarusian-Russian relations came under focus: public-political and trade-economic cooperation and interaction on integration venues.

The meeting also tackled prospects for development of the Common-

wealth of Independent States and rules for working within the Eurasian Economic Union. Chief Editors were keen to hear details of the Belarusian-Chinese dialogue, interrelations between Minsk and the West, and the problems of the Ukrainian conflict, as well as talk on other topics currently attracting public attention.

Conversation was dynamic and substantive, becoming a prologue to an intense second day of the visit, when presidents Alexander Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin joined a session of the

Supreme State Council of the Union State. Beforehand, they met to speak at the plenary session of the 4th Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia.

The forum at the Expocentre Central Exhibition Centre operated for more than a day. A range of negotiations took place, involving representatives of various enterprises from the two states. There were presentations in thematic sections. By midday on June 30th, contracts for up to \$450 million had been signed, and the final result should be even weightier.



In their speeches to participants of the forum, the presidents unanimously asserted the usefulness of Belarusian-Russian integration processes and called upon to unite efforts and build the smart economy of tomorrow in a new mode. Speaking about the present and future, Vladimir Putin noted, "Our countries are strategic partners in the fullest sense, and are the closest of allies. On a solid foundation of friendship and good neighbourliness, we're consistently developing bilateral relations across all areas. Our example stimulates the work with colleagues in the CIS, EAEU and CSTO. Together, we've managed to build an efficient structure of cooperation, creating a reliable basis for the expansion of business activity."

***Production cooperation and implemented Union State programmes testify to the efficiency of uniting the material and intellectual opportunities of our states. As a result, the economies of Belarus and Russia have received significant benefits***

"A new industrial mode is being formed, based on the launch of digital technologies, innovative materials, robotics and green energy. The long-term competitiveness of our states and their position in the global labour division will depend on how we jointly respond to these technological threats. Moreover, our fate will primarily depend on the way we solve this problem. I'll underline that Russia is ready for the closest collaboration with partners from Belarus to ensure sustainable and long-term economic growth. Mr. Lukashenko has praised the twenty years' work of the Belarus-Russia Union State. Truly, no other state in the world has advanced in the sphere of integration as our two countries have done," added Mr. Putin.

The President of Belarus summed up, "Production cooperation and implemented Union State programmes testify to the efficiency of uniting the material and intellectual opportunities of our states. As a result, the economies of Belarus and Russia have received significant benefits."

Inter-regional cooperation in these processes plays a defining role. Regional forums and events organised between the upper houses of the Belarusian and Russian parliaments are vital. The topic of the current event is especially acute, with Mr. Lukashenko stressing that it's important not to lag behind in terms of innovative development. Otherwise, it will be extremely difficult to catch up. We could lose our competitiveness, since the global market is a jungle.

In Belarus, 2017 is proclaimed the Year of Science, which began with approval of the state programme for innovative development of the country until 2020. The ambitious task of creating an IT country was set, adopting a package of legislation to help us move towards a 'smart economy', uniting the efforts of our closest partners, for the mutual benefit.

Mr. Lukashenko has called upon partners to promote deep cooperation, oriented towards the production of high-tech and science-intensive goods. He believes that the implementation of the agreed economic policy will considerably stimulate such manufacturing and enhance our export potential, while counteracting sanctions and measures of economic

pressure. The Belarusian President's words were welcomed with applause by participants of the meeting.

After a short trip, Mr. Lukashenko and Mr. Putin continued their work in the Kremlin. The Union State Supreme State Council session's agenda, alongside with traditional procedural issues, tackled two vital issues of practical and applied character. They included cooperation to preserve the machine building complex and interaction in the agro-industrial sector, creating instruments to stimulate the development of these spheres, the free supply of goods on each other's markets and the elimination of dependence on third country partners.

All the proposals submitted to the Council of Ministers of the Union State were accepted. Speaker of the Council of the Federation Valentina Matviyenko voiced another interesting initiative as well. She suggested that 'roaming' be outlawed within the Union State, with specialists from our two states being appointed to explore the issue further.

Summarising the results of work at the Kremlin, the President of Belarus, who is also the Chairman of the Union State Supreme State Council, noted, "We've approved documents for further promotion of the Union State integration. We hope that our adopted decisions and agreements activate a whole range of bilateral relations. The major results of our work are that we've confirmed our readiness to continue constructive dialogue and to solve the most acute issues across all areas of collaboration. Our states plan to promote the Union State's potential for sustainable development and to enhance the well-being of our nations."

Vladimir Putin agreed, "Mutually beneficial and equal integration with Belarus as part of the Union State is a strategic priority for Russia, as stipulated in Russian foreign policy."

By Vasily **Kharitonov**

# Vectors aim at innovations

## 4th Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia becomes a popular venue for efficient cooperation



BELTA

**O**n the eve of the Supreme State Council and the Forum, Alexander Lukashenko (at the meeting with Grigory Rapota, the State Secretary of the Union State) spoke about the importance of combining political dialogue and practical implementation of the will of our two countries, aiming for unity of potential across diverse spheres.

The forum started with an exhibition at the Expocentre Central Exhibition Complex, vividly demonstrating the topic of the event — ‘Vectors of Integration Development of the Regions of Russia and Belarus in the Sphere of High Technologies, Innovations and Information Society’. The exhibition was opened by the speakers of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of Belarus, Mikhail Myasnikov, and of the Council of the Federation of the Russian Federal Assembly, Valentina Matviyenko. The content of their welcome speeches sounded in unison.

“The exhibition demonstrates the achievements of our two states in the sphere of innovations, which create the basis for the development of a new, contemporary smart economy in Belarus and Russia. We shouldn’t delay this, as competition is increasing on the global market. We should shift from declarations towards action and real achievements to preserve our economic competitiveness,” notes Ms. Matviyenko.

Meanwhile, Mr. Myasnikov asserted, “The exhibition and the work in sections and the plenary session confirm that our economies have very good prospects. All the samples and technologies on display are of the highest world level. We are aiming at import substitution, and feel confident in our place in world markets. Companies from our countries are investing ever more into joint manufacturing, with the volume of investments calculated in billions of US Dollars. These are innovative projects popular both in foreign and our domestic markets.”

The Forum of Regions was a major discussion venue, with specialists from our two states solving diverse problems through professional dialogue. The Minister for Agriculture and Food of Belarus, Leonid Zayats, discussed mutual supply of food products, with his colleague agreeing that quality is vital.

The information space is another topic of interest, with Information Minister of Belarus Lilia Ananich believing that co-ordinated efforts are vital, not just regarding the media, but ‘in the sphere of modern information technologies’. “Young people are oriented towards the Internet. It’s where they receive most information. As for the Belarusian-Russian vector, it’s necessary to promote awareness that Belarus and Russia are mentally and historically close,” she noted.

Joint space projects have already become a business card for Belarusian-Russian collaboration. Sergey Zolotoi, one of the heads of the Belarusian-Russian Earth remote sensing project, tells us, “The memorandum between the Na-





*The exhibition demonstrates the achievements of our two states in the sphere of innovations, which create the basis for the development of a new, contemporary smart economy in Belarus and Russia. We shouldn't delay this, as competition is increasing on the global market. We should shift from declarations towards action and real achievements, to preserve our economic competitiveness*

tional Academy of Sciences and Roscosmos is organising work on the new space apparatus in a new way. The Belarusian enterprise is producing equipment for the satellite while Russian partners are developing the platform. Work is also underway to integrate Belarusian terrestrial infrastructure into that of Russia, with a protocol signed."

The Belarusian Health Ministry stand gathered crowds at the exhibition in Moscow. Ruslan Sakovich, the Head of the Positron Emission Tomography Centre at the Republican Scientific and Practical Centre of Oncology, tells us about the unique opportunities of Bela-

rusian doctors, saying, "The Republican Scientific and Practical Centre of Oncology is presenting the most contemporary opportunities for diagnostics and treatment of oncological diseases: positron emission tomography and a whole range of research into genetics and molecular technologies. We've become one of the most powerful centres in Europe, welcoming many patients from Russia. We treat oncological diseases, as well as cardiological patients suffering from neurological and psychiatric disorders."

Yulia Gulyaeva, the Head of the Immunology Department at the Republican

Scientific and Practical Centre of Oncology, adds, "Our laboratory is unique, boasting achievements in molecular genetics which ensure an individual approach to each patient. We know for sure that cancer is transmitted genetically. Each tumour tissue is unique. We're conducting investigations to select the most efficient therapy for each patient."

We could go on. The exhibition presents the latest achievements of Belarusian and Russian specialists across various spheres in concentrated form, and uniting our potential increases our reach many-fold.

By Alexander **Pimenov**

# Geographical distance is no obstacle to friendship and cooperation

## President of Vietnam Tran Dai Quang came to Belarus on an official visit

**T**he Vietnamese President, Tran Dai Quang, has been welcomed to the Independence Palace for a solemn welcome ceremony and negotiations at top level in narrow and extended formats. Several final documents have been signed by Alexander Lukashenko, and the two heads of state attended the opening of the Belarusian-Vietnamese Business Forum.

The President of Belarus characterised the essence of our two states' relations, saying, that although 'the distance is great, our hearts are close'. Our friendship has a long history, since

Vietnam enjoyed partnership with the USSR. Belarusian universities, both military and civil, have trained many of Vietnam's specialists, who have reached the summit of their profession. No one is surprised to hear Russian spoken in the corridors of Hanoi authorities. Meanwhile, many retain memories of good relations.

Tran Dai Quang visited our country for the second time, having been to Minsk for the first time two years ago, when he worked as the Minister for Public Security. Back then, he spoke of his warm feelings towards Belarus and about the need to develop interaction across all areas. His attitude matches that of the President of Belarus.

Mr. Lukashenko believes Vietnam to be a key partner in South-East Asia. In each region of the world where Belarusian business is present (regardless of the form of property), there are states which help promote our economic interests across wider territories. Together, we implement mutually beneficial projects and arrive in third countries with particular results. The basis for collaboration with Vietnam is industrial cooperation, as well as infrastructural and agrarian projects, and extraction of mineral deposits. During negotiations at the Independence Palace, much attention was paid to the creation (by the end of this year) of an assembly production plant for MAZ

Alexander Lukashenko:

*Friendly relations between the peoples of Belarus and Vietnam were established back in the days of the Soviet Union, and have never stopped growing. They've been rising to a new level in a comprehensive and consistent manner. In those times, people described relations with Vietnam with the words 'the distance is great, but our hearts are close'. This expression still perfectly describes Belarusian-Vietnamese relations*





Tran Dai Quang:

***We highly appreciate good political relations and the level of trust between our two countries, reinforced over the past twenty-five years, since the time of establishing diplomatic relations in 1992. Vietnam and Belarus have traditionally had friendly relations and a huge potential to develop cooperation across many areas. I'd like to express the wish and determination of the leadership and the people of Vietnam to strengthen efficient interaction with Belarus, for the sake of both states***

vehicles in Vietnam. The discussion also touched upon the supply of Belarusian heavy-duty dump trucks and tractors.

Assembly production of urban passenger buses is viewed as a promising area for liaison, alongside with the participation of Belarusian specialists in the construction of metro tunnels and the development of oil and mineral resources. Moreover, Minskmetroproekt has a representational office in Vietnam, and plans for the 'Minskaya' metro station in Hanoi and the 'Belarusian' metro station in Ho Chi Minh have been accepted with interest.

A free trade zone between Vietnam and Belarus has opened good prospects for expanding trade-economic interaction, with opportunities for promoting joint goods to members of the Association of States of Southeast Asian Nations and the Eurasian Economic Union.

The President of Belarus believes that, within

one or two years, we could see \$1.5 billion turnover, as our partners agree. Moreover, statistical data testifies to the feasibility of these plans. Last year, bilateral trade slightly fell, due to the complicated world situation; however, over the first four months of this year, it rose almost by 36 percent (compared with the same period of the previous year).

Documents signed during negotiations aim to promote further progress in business interaction. They fix mutual intentions to develop collaboration in the manufacture of motor transport, as well as in the spheres of geology, science, education, sport, tourism and culture, alongside with inter-regional ties. The presidents of our two states signed a joint statement reflecting the similar positions of Minsk and Hanoi regarding issues of international and bilateral relations, and confirmed a course for the development and strengthening of ties between our nations.

Tran Dai Quang has invited Alexander Lukashenko to visit Vietnam at his convenience and the invitation has been accepted, with the terms of the visit to be agreed via diplomatic channels.

By Vasily Kharitonov

From the joint declaration of the presidents of Belarus and Vietnam:

*The sides have agreed that the state visit to the Republic of Belarus of the President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Tran Dai Quang, has made an important contribution to strengthening an atmosphere of traditional friendship and all-round collaboration and is an important step on the way towards establishing strategic partnership between the Republic of Belarus and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam*

# Business mission possible

## The Belarusian-Vietnamese Business Forum took place during the visit of the President of Vietnam to Minsk

**T**he Belarusian-Vietnamese Business Forum took place at the Independence Palace, with the presidents of the two states arriving to open the event.

Our country's stand, showing its export potential, occupied the whole floor of the huge building, showcasing everything from models of machine-building goods to unmanned aircraft and the latest medical developments.

Before the forum began, businessmen from the two states were calling the event a historic moment in our countries' relations. The presence of the heads of both states added significance to the event, which gathered more than sixty Vietnamese companies and around a hundred representatives of business circles. Clearly, the geographical distance is no obstacle to mutually beneficial cooperation and sincere friendship. Mr. Lukashenko expressed the topicality of such meetings,







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saying, “Businesses should communicate while politicians should ensure the necessary favourable conditions.”

There’s no need to doubt the benefit of such contacts. Experts are calling Vietnam the ‘prowling tiger’ of Asia. According to forecasts, over the coming 15-20 years, its economy is set to grow by 6-7 percent annually, which is impressively dynamic. Meanwhile, our country leads in the CIS in some positions. The complementarity of our economies and Hanoi’s joining to a free trade zone with the Eurasian Economic Union is the foundation for our relations. We’ll move from assembly production of trucks and buses to the launch of a pilot project to manufacture dried milk goods in Vietnam.

Our construction industry technologies are in demand in Vietnam, with cooperation in the spheres of information communication and high technologies also gaining momentum.

The President of Belarus has formulated six promising areas for bilateral interaction and has invited Vietnamese businessmen to use Belarus as a venue to master European markets.

“Rest assured that you’ll be given the most comfortable conditions for work-

ing in our country. Come to us, produce goods and sell them in Belarus, as well as within the common economic space of the Eurasian Economic Union. Taking into account the proximity of Belarus to the Baltic Sea, this large-scale market makes such projects very beneficial,” asserted Mr. Lukashenko.

The President of Vietnam, Tran Dai Quang, also promised support to companies searching for opportunities to cooperate with Belarus.

“Belarus is our strategic partner in the Eurasian region. Vietnam will be welcoming Belarusian investments, especially in machine building, and the production of industrial equipment. Taking into account the complementarity of our economies, we can unite our manufacturing to create new production goods and to jointly export to the global market,” he noted.

After the forum, various agreements and contracts were signed (the exact sum is currently being calculated). However, the benefits go far beyond this. We’re finding new partners and entering new markets, which is the most vital guarantee of economic security.

By Vladimir **Khromov**

## Participants of the forum speak

### Lee Quang Huan, Head of Ba La Xanh Corporation:

*Our company has been working in the Vietnamese market for twenty years, selling fertilisers and energy saving technologies. We’re very keen to use Belarusian experience in agriculture. Your products are attractive through their quality and competitive prices. We’re now studying an opportunity to supply potash fertilisers to our country.*

### Sergey Morgunov, Deputy Director General of Belshina JSC:

*We’ve already worked through issues of supply of natural rubber from Vietnam, with an agreement for the export of tyres for large machinery for Vietnamese coal pits. I believe we’ll organise the first deliveries by the end of the year.*

### Vadim Savich, First Deputy Director of the Powder Metallurgy Institute at the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus:

*We’ve been working with Vietnam for eight years. We’ve fulfilled a contract in the sphere of machine building and have organised joint production of friction discs for large machinery. We’re now studying new projects. I can’t discuss the nature of those yet. However, I can say that we’re ready to present technologies relating to ammunition recycling.*

### Vladimir Ulakhovich, Chairman of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry:

*Today, our partnership is on the threshold of a new situation, connected with Vietnam joining a free trade zone with the Eurasian Economic Union. About 60 percent of customs duties in mutual trade will be abolished very soon. By 2025, these will be almost absent, opening the way to ASEAN markets, which encompass ten states and 600 million consumers.*

## Stem cell research and growth: in focus

It seems that stem cells can treat anything — from burns and venous ulcers to periodontal diseases or corneal damage. At present, the Republican Scientific and Medical Centre for Cell Technologies at the Institute of Biophysics and Cell Engineering, which is part of the National Academy of Sciences, is in the preparatory stages of growing unique cells for a thousand patients annually. It has also created a bank to store cells. Our reporter visited the establishment to see how this valuable biomaterial is being grown.



### Under sterile conditions

“Remove your clothes, and put on the medical uniform and shoes,” instructs junior researcher Irina Vasilevich, adding, “This is the first stage: you’ll be passing through several zones of sterilisation.”

These complex preparations are essential. In a few minutes’ time, I’ll be allowed into the production department: a sacred place, where medical

specialists undertake the vital work of cultivating mesenchymal stem cells for later use in treatments or to be frozen. Modern doctors can use a patient’s own stem cells to treat sores (some of which may have failed to heal for years).

Of course, it’s not easy to grow cells: regulations for servicing the department and stipulations regarding its cleaning and disinfection alone cover several weighty files. Stem cells are primarily being grown for use in transplant operations, so the most stringent

conditions of sterility are vital. Taking this into consideration, Ms. Vasilevich carefully cleans my microphone and the camera with antiseptic.

Doors open and I enter the first zone of sterilisation, which is separated from the second by a low bench. Irina tells me to put on another pair of booties. Once one leg is ready, I should step over the bench, the second leg being allowed into the new zone only after the second bootie is on my foot. I also don a mask and a cap and



my hands are carefully disinfected. The next sterilisation zone is situated behind a closed door.

There are still more precautions: Ms. Vasilevich gives me a protective suit with a hood, gloves and cloth boots. It's not easy to put these all on quickly without practice. I approach the mirror and see that I look like a character from a futuristic film. The mirror isn't there for vanity, but to check that all body areas are covered. No hair or neck can be exposed.

The production department resembles a spacecraft, comprising several sections, each separated by a door. High-level security means it's only possible to move through the doors after scanning a card: then the door quietly opens.

I feel more than ever as if I'm a character in a futuristic film, but senior researcher Sergey Pinchuk goes on to say something that astounds me even further. "Mesenchymal stem cells are derived from the patient's fatty tissues. As you can see, we receive them in a special container. The primary cell culture is sent to the production block, with manipulations conducted in a laminar flow hood. Its ventilation system removes all bacteria, so they can't fall on biological materials. Cells then begin multiplying. Microbiologi-

cal control is the next step: if the material is clean, growth is conducted in another box."

The latter has four incubators, allowing large amounts of biomaterial to be grown. To this end, stem cells are placed in special bottles filled with pink liquid. The incubators foster ideal conditions for the proliferation of cells: 'resort conditions'. About 4 million stem cells are grown, monthly, from 2-3 grams of fatty tissue. Cells from younger patients tend to divide at a faster rate, while the elderly have around ten times fewer stem cells. Accordingly, those donated by older people or by those suffering from certain diseases have a much slower rate of division.

### Stem cells: life-saving properties

When you examine the strange pink liquid, it's difficult to believe that this is a salvation for many people. Treatment of venous ulcers is just one of the unique abilities of stem cells. Many more discoveries lie ahead. Mr. Pinchuk explains, "This year, we've launched several projects. We plan to develop methods where stem cells may be used to treat severe burns, pressure sores, periodontal disease, corneal damage and even stress-related urinary incontinence in women."

After treatment, it's possible to freeze stem cells for future use. Anyone can contact the Centre to store their biomaterial — in case of future medical needs. Collecting biomaterial and cryo-freezing costs from Br150, while cryo-storage costs Br70 a year. Cells are kept in a special cryo-storage bank.

Mr. Pinchuk uses his card to open the access system, saying, "Stem cells are stored here. They can be frozen in two modes: under a temperature of minus 85, for six months, or, at minus 150 degrees, for years."

I watch as he puts on heavy rubber gloves (necessary to lower his arm into the cryo-storage, which is like a large refrigerator). All stem cells are stored in containers, each numbered and encrypted, with cryo-protectants added, to protect against the damaging effects of freezing. At present, the bank keeps an incredible 1.5 billion mesenchymal stem cells.

The wider medical community informs us that stem cells can be used to make drugs for cardiology, endocrinology, hepatology, surgery and traumatology. Even the modern use of stem cells in traumatology is impressive: injuries which had previously seemed incapable of healing can now be healed. Belarusian scientists are not simply watching from the sidelines; they're participating in stem cell research and development,

exploring the possibilities of this unique biomaterial, and making new discoveries.

By Taisia Azanovich



Stem cells cultivated in bottles filled with pink liquid

In the USA, the cost of cell isolation and cryo-preservation reaches \$2,000, with \$100–150 paid annually for their storage. In Russia, this number is 1,000 and 100 US Dollars respectively, while in Belarus you will pay respectively \$75 and \$40



# When you do your business in a careful and innovative way



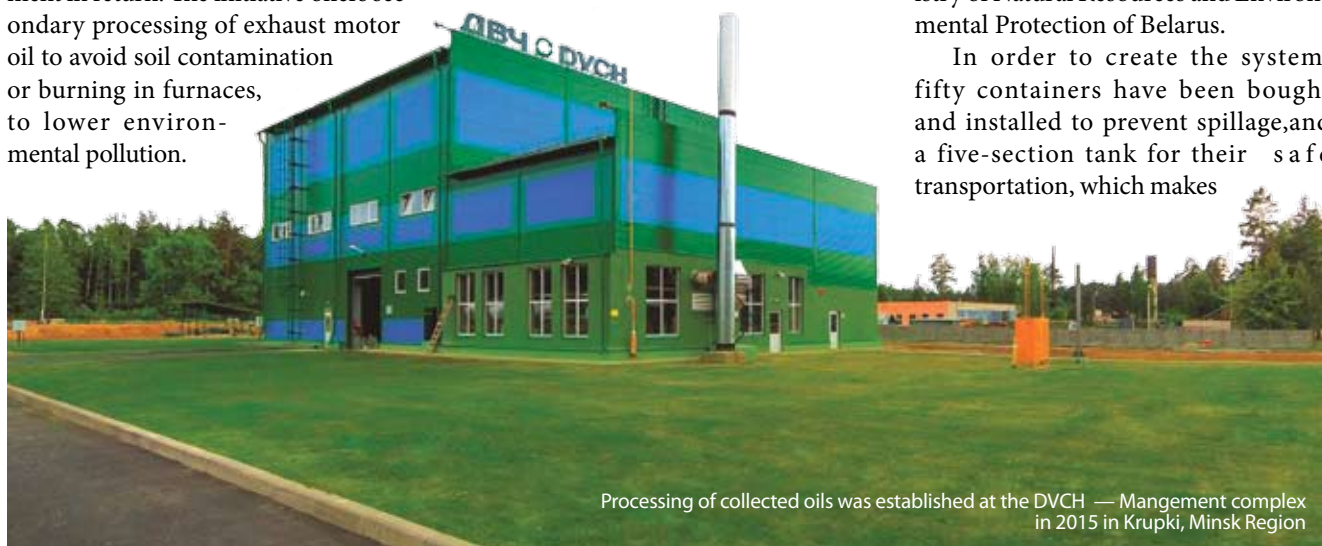
## Complex system for collection and processing of exhaust motor oil created in the Borisov and Krupki Districts of the Minsk Region

**B**oth individuals and enterprises in the districts are able to contribute to this green project, thanks to fifty new collection points for old exhaust oil. Six of them even offer payment in return. The initiative offers secondary processing of exhaust motor oil to avoid soil contamination or burning in furnaces, to lower environmental pollution.

Exhaust oil is dangerous waste, because just one litre penetrated into the soil can contaminate 1,000 tonnes of ground water. Meanwhile, combustion oil products contain heavy metals and carcinogens. Creating a system for collection and processing should lower the negative impact on nature and public health.

The NGO 'Ecological Initiative' is organising the initiative as part of the 'Supporting the Transition to Green Economy in the Republic of Belarus' project financed by the European Union and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus.

In order to create the system, fifty containers have been bought and installed to prevent spillage, and a five-section tank for their safe transportation, which makes



Processing of collected oils was established at the DVCH — Mangement complex in 2015 in Krupki, Minsk Region





it possible to sort oils at the collection point. In the near future, the number of containers should rise to seventy.

Fifty enterprises in the Borisov and Krupki Districts are partners of the initiative and host collection points. Among them are such large enterprises as Borisovdrev paper-mill and the Krupki man-

expected to be handled each quarter. Some can be recycled, with oleochemicals used to make building panels for houses, reagents for potassium transportation and cycle oil.

Experience of the Borisov and Krupki districts will be used to establish a nationwide system. If half of all waste

exhaust oil in Belarus (approximately 40,000 tonnes) is collected, it should save nearly \$18 million a year in tax revenue and import substitution. Meanwhile, the initiative brings employment.

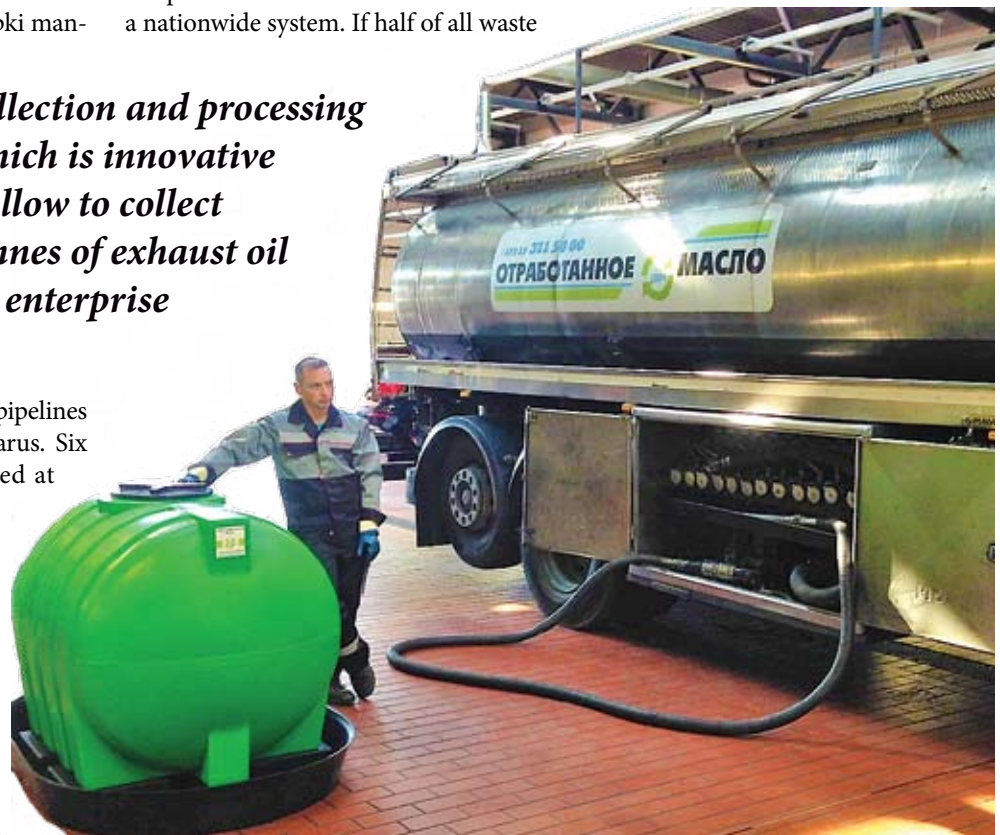
By Vasily **Kharitonov**

***This system for collection and processing of exhaust oils, which is innovative for Belarus, will allow to collect and process 10 tonnes of exhaust oil per quarter at the enterprise***

agement office for the main gas pipelines of OJSC Gazprom Transgaz Belarus. Six collection stations have opened at public recycling locations.

Exhaust oils are then transported to the DVCH — Management processing facility, which opened in 2015 in Krupki, Minsk Region.

European experience has been considered in developing the new system for collection and processing of exhaust oil, with 10 tonnes





# Ecological paths in enigmatic land

## Unique Mythology Tourism Centre opens in the Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve

**T**he Centre has been established by the Country Escape Belarusian Public Association and the Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve, and is part of the large-scale 'Supporting the Transition to Green Economy in the Republic of Belarus'

project. The latter is financed by the European Union and implemented by the UN Development Programme in cooperation with the Ministry for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus.

The Mythology Tourism Centre celebrates the rich world of Belarusian mythology, which is relatively unexplored in tourist programmes, yet boasts major potential for the de-

velopment of ethnographic tourism. The Centre includes the Museum of Mythological Creatures, the open-air display entitled 'A Mythological Farmstead', and the 'In the Land of Myths' ecological route.

Experts believe that the opening of the first Mythology Tourism Centre in Belarus will create conditions for the development of ecotourism in the Lepel District and attract new





visitors to the country's only biosphere reserve.

The idea of the unique initiative is to promote Belarusian nature while using images from national

The Museum of Mythology, in the Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve, uses an innovative approach in interpreting Belarusian mythological heritage, based on the model of the

about the mystery of solar energy in a modern way.

The ecological path has seventeen unusual installations, created by famous Belarusian designers and sculptors, depicting Rusalka (Mermaid), Arzhaveinik, Polevik (the spirit of the fields), Pushchevik (the spirit of the pushchas) and other mythological characters.

You can take a night tour of the centre, passing through a special 'portal' and pronouncing a traditional Belarusian spell, which protects from dark powers.

The 'Supporting the Transition to Green Economy in the Republic of Belarus' project aims to promote our economic growth, based on green principles. These include the use of natural resources, promotion of ecological manufacturing and consumption, creation of green jobs, and changing behaviour among target groups to encourage ecological sustainability.

By Vladimir **Mikhailov**

***Ancestors of modern Belarusians believed that each biotope (forests, marshes, water reservoirs or fields) had its own 'protector'. It could be Leshy, Bolotnik and Polevik... Relations between nature and people were guided by these creatures. The same concept is reflected in all objects of the created centre***

mythology. Ancestors of modern Belarusians believed that forests, marshes, water reservoirs and fields each had a 'protector': Leshy, Bolotnik and Polevik. Relations between nature and people were guided by these creatures, as the centre aims to show.

'World Tree', an enigmatic and unusual world of mythological creatures and spirits, recreated with the help of theatrical sound and light installations, and contemporary audiovisual methods. Moreover, the museum is equipped with a small solar powered generator, telling visitors

# Welcome, Tourist!

**Number of foreigners entering Belarus on the five-day visa-free programme has reached 2,000 since February**



VITALY PIVOVARCHIK

**M**any travel agencies have prepared interesting programmes for their guests but are still waiting to see an influx of foreign visitors. Hospitality experts note that the five-day visa-free regime for citizens of eighty countries has not yet received a proper response, largely because it's still relatively unknown overseas. However, the situation is repairable.

Anna Mukha, Head of the Department for Marketing and Quality of Tourism Services at the Tourism Department of the Sports and Tourism Ministry, explains that tourists from sixty-five countries have so far used visa-free entry (effective from February 12th, 2017). The National Tourism Agency adds that, most often, Belarus is visited by guests from Germany, Poland, Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States and the Netherlands... Foreign travellers are not yet lining up for Belarus, although there are obviously more foreigners in Minsk streets.

Why are they here and what might interest them?

"We're mainly visited by business tourists," says Irina Gordiyenko, who heads the Marketing Department of the National Tourism Agency. She mentions neighbouring Lithuanians on business in Belarus, arriving by air, although tickets aren't cheap. "At the same time, we get complaints from travel agencies: 'Where are foreigners? We have no more orders.' Indeed, those who come to Minsk via the National Airport, trav-

elling alone, are most likely to be found in conference rooms or, conversely, partying in Zybityskaya Street, rather than in offices of travel agencies."

We don't yet know much about visa-free tourists, who may not arrive as part of an organised group. There's no statistical data on what brings them to Belarus, their social status or their financial capabilities, nor whether they're aware of the wide range of services offered by the country. It's difficult to track every tourist coming to Belarus, although the National Statistical Committee of Belarus is ready to announce information on organised groups (as provided by travel agencies). The National Tourism Agency prefers the statistics of the State Border Committee, which show the number of foreigners crossing the Belarusian border. Clearly, some come to visit relatives or as part of a business trip. However, these people are also tourists, since they spend money.

The visa-free regime for short-term trips has spawned a new segment of travellers, as confirmed by the marketing manager of the Minsk Marriott Ho-

## Facts

■ **Medical tourism is among the most promising areas for attracting foreign visitors to Minsk. In the capital, over 120 health institutions offer highly qualified assistance to patients from abroad. The most popular services are dental and cosmetic, as well as organ transplants, plastic surgery and spa procedures.**





Upper town in Minsk. View of the Trinity Suburb

tel, Yegor Denisenok. “Marriott is not a hotel for common tourists; it’s rather a place for business people and organised groups. In recent months, we’ve observed no significant change in the flow of customers: 30 percent come from Russia, Belarusians take second place and citizens from Turkey are third,” he explains.

To increase tourist flow to Belarus, it’s necessary to promote the country overseas. Mr. Denisenok recalls his presentation on the occasion of the opening of the Minsk hotel. He ‘reached out’ to foreign partners, telling them about Belarusian technical developments: the MSQRD application for social networks, Viber and The World of Tanks online game. The hospitality industry cannot rest on its laurels, and the European tourist industry — which has only recently discovered the Baltic States — knows little about our country. Accordingly, it’s time to promote Belarus.

Local initiatives are welcome and the district centre of Glubokoye, in the Vitebsk Region provides a good example. It boasts rich natural and historical

and cultural sites and, in recent years, has regularly hosted diverse festivals and other intriguing initiatives. Its famous Cherry Festival will be held very soon: from July 18th to 22nd.

The five-day visa-free regime applies to guests arriving only through Minsk National Airport, which gives a certain advantage. Grigory Pomerantsev, a consultant in aviation and former head of the National Tourism Agency, asserts, “Transit is a good resource for the development of inbound tourism. In my

## Plans

■ **The term of the visa-free stay for foreigners may be extended during the Second European Games. The international sports forum will be held in Minsk from June 21st to 30th, 2019. Some competitions may begin the day before the official start of the Games. As expected, the European Games will be attended by 4,000 athletes and 2,000 officials.**

## Word for word

**Alexander Surikov,  
Ambassador  
Extraordinary and  
Plenipotentiary of  
Russia to Belarus:**



*We [Russia and Belarus] are working on the next stage of the document on mutual recognition of visas. If Belarus, for example, issues a visa to a German citizen, then this visa will be automatically recognised in Russia. As a result, this citizen of a third country can enter Russia without any restriction, and vice versa. As I understand, by the end of the year, this intergovernmental agreement will be ready.*

*(From an interview for the ‘Main Broadcast’ programme on Belarus 1TV Channel)*

opinion, Belavia’s representative offices abroad could more actively ‘sell themselves’, with flight services in a package, offering the opportunity to visit the country for several days without a visa and with a tourist programme. To make a foreign guest stop in Belarus, we need to consolidate efforts from all interested parties, from our side and with foreign partners. It’s also worth considering the possibility of launching regular flights, including those run by foreign companies, into regional Belarusian airports.”

Visa-free stays may be extended, for example, to allow trips to sanatoriums and health-improving organisations, where treatment lasts no less than 18 days. However, even the five-day period is underdeveloped. Ideally, we’d like to see at least 2-3 percent of transit air passengers decide to stay for five days, spending nights in a three-star hotel and sightseeing in Minsk. Belarusians are known for their hospitality and benevolence, so a mini-break to Minsk could encourage guests to return for a longer holiday.

By Alexander **Nesterov**



SERGEY LOZLUK

## Life-giving source of inspiration

**Festivities in honour of Independence Day arrived in the capital on July 2nd, with a venue near the Sports Palace hosting entertainments, almost as a rehearsal for the main holiday, on 3rd July. Guests enjoyed not only their shopping opportunities, but the colourful holiday of the Day of Vyshyvanka as well.**

**T**he festival was very national in colour and is a perfect companion to Independence Day. It was held on the same day for the second year in a row, and all the main guests noted that it has become a good tradition which shouldn't be broken.

"It's bad that we're celebrating such a wonderful holiday only for the second

time in our history. However, I'm confident that each true Belarusian has this vyshyvanka pattern in his or her heart. Laws and borders have changed many times but this code — the core of the nation — has preserved among Belarusians. This ornament has helped all generations retain the traditions of our people, reflecting our attitude towards the world, life, ancestors and our victories. It's very important that we celebrate this pattern through culture and



arts, and remember its value,” noted Maxim Ryzhenkov, the First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, as he welcomed guests.

‘Belarus is a Country of Inspiration’ was the slogan of the holiday, which major symbol is the vyshyvanka pattern in all its variations. The folk ornament was seen on shirts and dresses, on ceramic pieces and on gracefully embroidered towels, or rushniks. Its geometric patterns are distinctive, and were often embroidered onto our ancestors’ headgear. Participants of historical societies were seen in the streets, wearing wonderful costumes, while catwalk models demonstrated how the pattern can be incorporated into modern clothes design.

Judging by the approving and loud applause, the audience was ready to see these patterns not only on the improvised catwalk but also in their own wardrobe. In thoughtfully arranged tents, a wide range of goods were on sale, bearing folk motifs: from cups and jugs to sports shirts and tablecloths. Long queues were seen at some, with many keen to purchase crafts items, as it has been popular for centuries.

The representative delegation from Rogachev had a ‘household’ section, which shelves were completely covered with wooden utensils, richly decorated with delicate carvings, and a ‘food’ section, offering tasty cakes. Moreover, there was a ‘horn of plenty’: baked rolls and small-white loaves flew from a baked horn — a true masterpiece of bakery art.

Marina Rozhkova, who cut the ‘horn’ into pieces, smiled at our compliment and said that it couldn’t be otherwise, “Rog [translated as horn] is a symbol of our town so we’ve brought the horn of plenty for the holiday. Here, we show what the bakeries of our district are proud of. Moreover, we offer useful herbs, which were used by our ancestors instead of tea.”

The town of Postavy is deservedly proud of its craftswomen, whose tent was lined with embroidered rushniks from top to bottom. Each region of the country has its own designs, as Tatiana Petukh underlined, sharing her secrets, while

knitting. “Postavy linen rushniks aren’t so bright, we use soft tones and numerous stars in the pattern.”

Folk entertainments included a wheel of fortune, where guests were obliged to perform tasks depending on the month chosen by the wheel. For example, July, being the month of Ivan Kupala, requires us to jump over a fire (to avoid worrying firefighters, they used only a skipping rope!) while September requires potato harvesting (imitated by passing through skittles blindfolded).

A major art parade saw all regions represented in a long line, with outfits from all ages and social categories. Those in peasant costumes took selfies with the ‘nobility’ and vice versa. Alexey Rum and Ksenia Vaispek from Lida, dressed in richly ornamented costumes, were kept busy.

“We’re representatives of a historical animated group, with no name so far. We primarily work at Lida Castle, conducting demonstrational fights and, each Saturday, we organise a competition with knightly amusements. At the parade, we showed some battle moves, as we usually stage for tourists at the castle, wearing chain armour and helmets. The costumes worn by us today imitate those of the 14th-15th century; they aren’t completely historically accurate, but they look beautiful. Next year, we’ll join the parade again, but with the name of our group.”

The Day of Vyshyvanka is becoming a traditional holiday. Next year, the Sports Palace will be again filled with folk colour.

By Alexander Pimenov



# Tasty travels

## Gastronomic festivals gain popularity

**M**any travel around the world with a simple goal: to taste true real Italian pizza, Lithuanian zeppelins or French croissants. Each country boasts unique recipes and, in Belarus, each region amazes with its own delicacies. People coming to the Republic can not only taste local potato pancakes but also 'bulbyaniki' (made from boiled potatoes) and vodka soup. Gastronomic festivals are becoming trendy, with fais, cooking classes and concerts all drawing visitors..

### Sample mouth-watering treats

**WHAT:** Motol Delicacies  
**WHERE:** Motol agro-town, Ivanovo District, Brest Region  
**WHEN:** August

**A**fter visiting the Motol festival, Italian culinary critic Renato Cucinotta concluded: 'Motol residents are truly lucky since they eat better than in the capital'. You bet! Minsk is unlikely to offer its guests slow-baked hock, pumpkin porridge, potato 'tarkavanka' with dried apples or meat baked inside bread. Even in the times of the granting of the Magdeburg Right, in 1555,

Motol was famous for its original cuisine and sincere hospitality.

Its people were masters of all trades, being able to reap, weave, make ovens and produce the best leather coats in the region. Its children and adults speak the local dialect. Even tourists from abroad



notice that Motol's language is as beautiful as French or Italian.

The Motol Delicacies Festival — first organised in 2008 — is attracting an increasing number of guests. The agro-town, where around 4,000 people live, has just as much to offer as the European capitals when it comes to mouth-watering cuisine and entertainment, with street chefs making 'peacock designs' from meat cold cuts, 'kings' from sausages, and 'churches' from butter. Motol's cooks have even made a portrait of the Mona Lisa from sausages.

You can visit the Motol house where the first president of Israel, Chaim Weizmann, was born, as well as the Traditional Medicine Museum (Grandma's Towers, in the village of Strelna), and







## Cherries from Munchausen

**WHAT:** Cherry Festival  
**WHERE:** Glubokoye village, Vitebsk Region  
**WHEN:** June

The Glubokoye District has always been popular among tourists, offering so many wonderful sights: the 17th century Cathedral of Nativity of the Holy Virgin, the 18th century Trinity Church, the tomb of famous painter Jazep Drozdovich, the Museum of Plane Designer Pavel Sukhoi — in Glubokoye, Mosary Roman Catholic Church, and the beautiful cultural and forest complex surrounding it. In 2013, the Cherry Festival joined this list, proving popular with families from across Belarus and abroad. Of course, Glubokoye residents have been blessed with these 'red rubies' for centuries. Residents of neighbouring districts and even Minsk make the trip, especially to buy cherries.

According to the legend, cherries were brought to the city by monks, or by Boleslav Lapyr. Some even say that Baron von Munchausen did so on the day that he tried to kill a deer with a cherry stone. A two-metre tall iron cross with Munchausen's name on it can be found in the local cemetery.

During the first Cherry Festival, a sculpture of a stylised tree trunk and branches of mature cherries was erected in the centre of Glubokoye. It was immediately 'surrounded' with good beliefs: if you want happiness, then touch the berries, money — rub the leaves, for a smooth road through life — touch a branch. After the four-day festival, the sculpture shines after having been rubbed so many times.

By Lyudmila **Minkevich**

the village of Dostoyevo, where writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky's family lived.

## Golden heads

**WHAT:** Host's Cheese  
**WHERE:** Slavgorod, Mogilev Region  
**WHEN:** April 30th

Belarusian producers have been replicating foreign parmesan, ricotta and mascarpone cheeses, but many would say that these are no competition for the local traditional cheeses, as presented at the Host's Cheese Culinary Forum in the Slavgorod District. This year, local cheese-makers presented over fifty varieties of natural cheeses: hard and soft, processed and cottage cheese, syrnytsa and cheesecakes, sweet and salty, with various seasonings and fillers. Not every supermarket can boast such a selection. Meanwhile, those coming to the festival not only sampled cheeses but learnt how to make them.

Despite its title, the Slavgorod Festival is devoted not only to cheese; its programme includes concerts by local groups, thematic tours, games and contests, a craft fair, a mobile sauna, hiking, horseback riding and camping. You can also go to the memorial complex in Lesnaya agro-town to drink water from the miraculous Blue Springs, a place of national significance. Alternatively, you can raft across the Sozh.



### It's interesting

It's now easier to travel around the country: the gastronomic map of Belarus was released last year. Its authors covered 4,000 kilometres, spent 66 hours travelling, and sampled thirty unique dishes, as well as twenty-eight original products. They've united the most iconic and tasty dishes on a single map — including eel from the village of Murashki, honey from the Vitebsk Region, venison from the Nalibokskaya Pushcha and marbled meat from Turov.

# Sheer mysticism

VADIM KONDRASHOV

**Are you attracted by blood-curdling stories of the castles of Dracula and the Countess of Bathory, mysterious Stonehenge and Loch Ness? Belarusian attractions can also make your nerves tingle.**

## Cooler than Casper

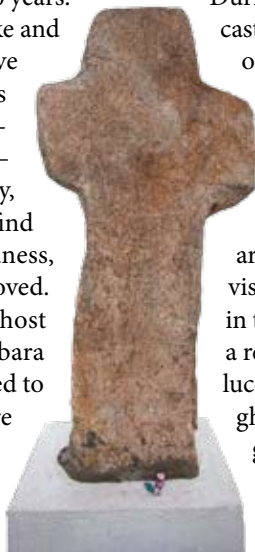
The most famous Belarusian ghosts are the Black Lady of Nesvizh and the White Lady of Golshany. The story of the former has lived on in ancient Nesvizh for over 400 years. According to the legend, the great Lithuanian Duke and then Polish King Sigismund II Augustus fell in love with the beautiful Barbara Radziwill. His love was returned and the two even secretly married. However, Sigismund's mother — Queen Bona Sforza — was against the marriage and, according to the story, it was she who poisoned Barbara. The king could find no peace after her death and, to alleviate his sadness, invited alchemists to summon the spirit of his beloved. They agreed but insisted he did not touch the ghost under any circumstances. When the ghost of Barbara appeared, Zhigimont forgot his promise and rushed to embrace his love with the shout 'My Basenka!'. There was an explosion, a cadaverous smell followed and the ghost disappeared.

From then on, Barbara has wandered the castle in a black mourning robe, with no way to

rest in her grave. People say she appears mostly as a warning on the eve of misfortune. She was said to have been seen in 2002 when most the castle was burnt.

The White Lady of Golshany has her own tragic story. During construction of a Franciscan monastery near the castle, the builders faced an incomprehensible problem: one of the walls was constantly collapsing. Deciding that the place was cursed, they conducted a rite of sacrifice: by walling in a woman alive. A bitter fate befell the wife of one of the builders who happened to be the first to bring dinner to her husband. Since then, the White Lady has wandered around Golshany and often appeared to residents and visitors — especially those who decide to spend a night in the monastery. Eyewitnesses say that they have seen a reflection of the White Lady in the mirror, her translucent arms coming out of the wall. Unsurprisingly, the ghost particularly dislikes men; on seeing it, they turn grey and become confused.

Another ghostly woman is believed to live in the Loshitsa manor in Minsk. It can be seen next to the unusual Manchurian apricot tree when it is





in bloom, which coincides with the full moon. It is believed that this is the ghost of Yadviga, the wife of the owner of the Loshitsa manor — Yevstafy Lyubansky. One day after a quarrel with her husband, she left for the river and was found dead in the water the next day. It is still unknown how she drowned — by her own hand or with someone's 'help'. After the tragedy, Yevstafy ordered that the window of Yadviga's room be bricked up and he left the estate. Before leaving, he planted a Manchurian apricot in the park, near which the ghost of Yadviga has appeared in modern times. It seems to be seen mostly on the eve of a lucky event: people believe Yadviga can help them in love affairs.

### Live crosses

Many have heard of the Turov crosses in the Gomel Region; these grow from the earth. The first of them became famous in the 1980s, when a stone appeared between two graves. There were failed attempts to move it. Since then, the stone has been growing: at present, it is around 40cm high. There have been many miracles claimed in connection with it: babies born in childless families, sick people healed and girls dreaming of love have met their sweethearts. In 2008, the Turov cross got 'a small brother' at the site of the St. Boris and Hleb Church in Turov. A small stone appeared initially and then its side 'wings' began to grow.

Less known but no less impressive crosses have grown in the Ushachi District; these were first reported by the 'Narodnaya Gazeta' newspaper in 2011. After arriving at Zamoshie cemetery (25km from the district centre) together with a guide, the reporter saw stones of various shapes and sizes — rising from under the moss in a dense forest. It appeared that up until the early 2000s, nobody had any idea that there were graves at that place. They were noticed by a Minsk native who bought a land plot for her summer cottage in Zamoshie. Exploring the surroundings, she came across an area in the forest where the stones were 'rising'. They were later proved to be 12th-15th century monuments. Some are now as tall as a person. Scientists try to explain the anomaly with temperature changes in the soil but the locals have a single explanation: these crosses are a sign of God.

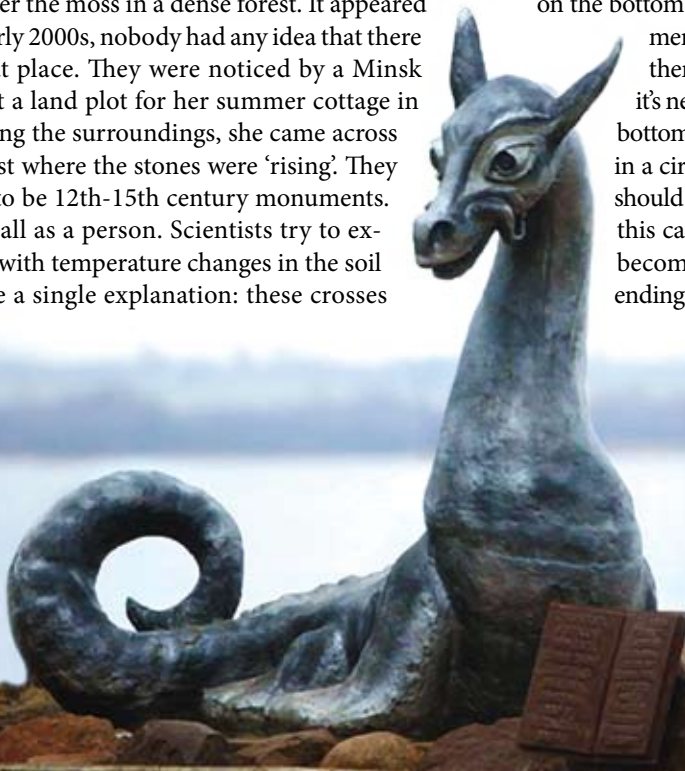
### Lakes shrouded in mystery

Most come to Mir Castle to enjoy the architecture and the spirit of history. Others search for mystical legends associated primarily with the pond near the castle. To make the pond in the late 19th century, the owner of the castle — Nikolay Svyatopolk-Mirsky — ordered to demolish the flowering garden. Residents knew that it was a bad idea to cut down flowering trees but this did not stop the owner. During the tree cutting and pond digging, many people died. The mother of one of them who — according to the legend — was a witch came to Svyatopolk-Mirsky and cursed both him and the pond, saying that people would perish in it: one for each felled tree. The first victim was 12-year-old Sonechka, Nikolay's daughter. A few years later, he himself drowned in the pond.

In turn, Lepelskoye Lake in the Vitebsk Region is a Belarusian version of Loch Ness. According to locals and the classic of Belarusian literature and connoisseur of our history — Vladimir Korotkevich, Tsmok lives here: this is a fantastic creature like a seal, with the head of a fallow deer, fins and a long neck. Some believe Tsmok still comes out from the depths of the lake, turning into a handsome man and seducing girls — punishing them if they behave badly. However, in Belarusian mythology, Tsmok is known not only as protector of water but also as a patron of the family. Couples who live in harmony and love can always count on his support. Many visitors gather annually at the festival of mythology — 'Visiting Lepel's Tsmok'. Those who don't see it with their own eyes can touch its sculpture in the city.

Another lake in the Vitebsk Region (situated in the forest near Gorodok) is also inhabited by mythical creatures. People say the devil drowned a church there and since then those appearing on the bottom are sent directly to hell — assisted by local mermaids. The latter lure travellers and drown them in the lake. If you meet these mermaids, it's necessary to resist the hypnotic effects of their bottomless blue eyes. To do this, you should stand in a circle drawn on the ground (in which a cross should be drawn) or say: 'Keep away from me!' In this case, a mermaid will go home with you and become an industrious mistress. This is a good ending to a frightening tale...

By Lyudmila **Minkevich**



# Treasures close to home

**Belarus is home to unique monuments, natural wonders and traditions which many people know little about**

It's now easy to travel around the world, if you have money. Many people have visited a variety of other countries and enthusiastically share their impressions. When asked about Belarusian landmarks, most of them will mention the well-known Mir and Nesvizh castles, the Belovezhskaya Pushcha and the Brest Fortress. Some might think that Belarus has nothing special to boast about. However, the State List of Historical and Cultural Values of Belarus alone includes over 5,000 objects!

## Krevo — Golshany

This little trip to the north of the Grodno Region takes tourists back several centuries to Krevo Castle where the well-known Krevo Union was concluded — to mark the beginning of the unification of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish Kingdom. Here, by the order of Grand Duke Jagiello, his uncle Kęstutis was strangled, but his cousin Vytautas escaped, disguised as a woman. Only the ruins of the castle have been preserved, but they allow tourists to easily imagine the events.

Golshany Castle is in no better condition but has a wonderfully romantic atmosphere. A visit to the local Golshany Castle Festival is a must: this year, it took place on May 20th. Surrounded by medieval music, ladies in historic costume, knights in armour, Sofia Golshanskaya and Jagiello, the 21st century is left behind and visitors are sent back in time.

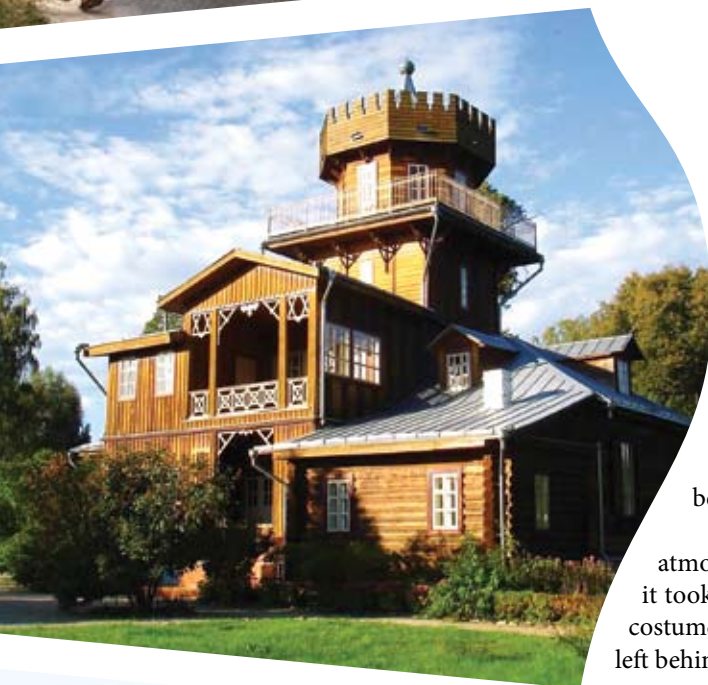
## Vitebsk — Zdravnevo

Vitebsk attracts attention not only during its 'Slavianski Bazaar': many local sights are impressive. Among them are historic buildings, the graceful town hall, the monumental Palace of the Governor (where Napoleon Bonaparte stayed) and majestic churches.

Art lovers should visit the Marc Chagall Museum and the Ilya Repin estate in Zdravnevo, 16km from the city. Travellers can see the artist and his family's belongings, while walking under lime trees personally planted by Ilya Repin.

## Sula History Park — Rubezhevichi

A visit to the Sula History Park — 49 km away from Minsk — is better than any computer game. Here, the noble Lensky family lived and anyone coming to the site can participate in the construction of the castle, watch the forging of weapons in the gunsmith's workshop, ride a viking drakkar, visit the Hall of Knightly Glory and admire its collection of tapestry and pictures, listen to live sounds of 18th century bagpipes and harmonium, learn a historic dance and taste traditional Belarusian dishes and drinks.





Rubezhevichi (Stolbtsy District) has bordered on different states at various times in its history. Visitors can buy tea in an old pharmacy selling medicinal herbs — known as Belarusian Herbal Therapy Mecca, and listen to the organ in St. Joseph's Church.

### Mogilev — Buinichi Field — Bobruisk

Mogilev is rich in architectural monuments — such as the beautiful town hall, Belarus' oldest theatre and an unusual sculpture of an astrologer. The city suburbs also have unique attractions: tradition lovers will enjoy the Belarusian Village ethnographic exhibition, while enthusiasts of military history can visit Buinichi Field. The memorial related to the dramatic events in the first months of World War II always impresses visitors with its military equipment exhibition. Following the wishes of the writer Konstantin Simonov, his ashes were scattered there.

Another landmark military historical object will prove interesting for Bobruisk tourists: the local fortress overwhelms with its majesty and power. The city is also famous for its Jewish history. In the early 20th century, Jews accounted for over half the local population but are just 1 percent at present. Modern tourists can visit the synagogue, taste kosher food and listen to the well-known Jewish 7:40 melody played at the clock tower.

### Mozyr — Turov — Lyaskovichi

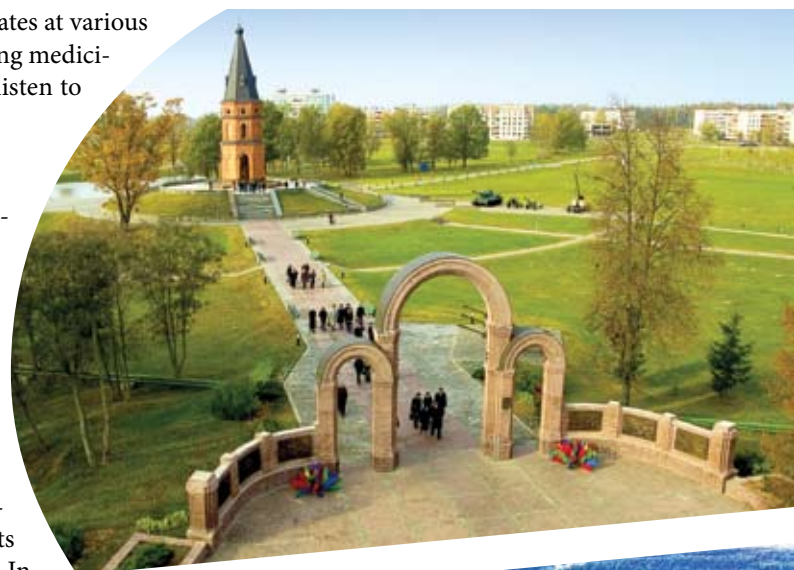
There is no better trip for nature lovers than a visit to Polesie. Those wishing to have a true course of 'Polesie Therapy' need to get in touch with the Pripyatsky National Park's administration in Lyaskovichi. Local employees will advise visiting the Museum of Nature and the Safari Park, walking through the river jungles, visiting a floating hotel and a barge-restaurant, going fishing and hunting. These places are known not only for their unique nature. The historical and archaeological Ancient Turov Complex attracts people with its glass canopy, on which travellers can see the remains of the stone church destroyed by an earthquake in 1230. Visitors to the site can see stones, plinfa, remains of the church bell and even an 800-year-old stone sarcophagus discovered in the ruins of the castle.

### Pinsk — Kobrin

This is a trip for those who wish to get acquainted with several cultures and even eras in a single weekend. Pinsk harmoniously combines modern hotels and 18th-19th century buildings, Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches and synagogues. The Polish Wegierska Gorka hatch is found in Belarusian Zavalnaya Street and the former Jewish bakery in Lenin Street offers nostalgic smells. Any tourist will find rest for their soul here: they can kayak or take a mini-cruise, go fishing and have dinner on the boat, see the Belarusian exotics such as a wooden bike and oak canoes in the local museum, look at the house where Napoleon Orda lived and visit the bakery of Microsoft President Steve Ballmer's uncle.

Kobrin is also an incredibly tolerant place. Here neighbour majestic temples of different faiths from the 17th-19th century. Travellers to the city should visit the Suvorov Museum and an ostrich farm near Kobrin — the largest in the CIS.

By Lyudmila **Minkevich**





# Blue-eyed charm of Belarusian Poozerie

SERGEY PLYTKEVICH

**Unspoilt natural corners can be found in any region of Belarus, with their special status helping to preserve them. We invite you to walk through the Vitebsk Region with us.**

## Following the tracks of bears

Most of the Vitebsk Region is covered with forest containing plentiful and varied wildfowl. The north-west of the region is called the 'Belarusian Poozerie' after the famous wetland area: it boasts many beautiful lakes rich in fish.

The Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve deserves special attention. It's the oldest and the only natural area of protection in the country at the highest level. The reserve is registered in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves of the UNESCO intergovernmental programme — 'The Man and the Biosphere'. Its special value is its huge area of untouched forests (around 70,000 hectares). The flatlands of the Berezina River are of special importance, especially for migrating birds. Many rare and disappearing species of plants and animals are protected here. Almost two dozen marsh-

es, forming an area from several hundred to many thousands of hectares, connected by an extensive network of small forest streams and small rivers, form a single water-and-bog complex. Due to these peculiarities, the reserve is registered on the Ramsar List of Wetlands and is of international importance.

The trip to the reserve from Minsk takes only two hours. Its centre is in the village of Domzheritsy (3 km from the Minsk—Vitebsk highway). Interesting routes have been developed for tourists which can be taken in any weather. For example, in spring it's possible to listen to the mating call of black-cocks and in autumn — the call of roaring deer. Recently, photosafaris have also been gaining in popularity. Visitors can travel on foot, by bike or on horse-back, and visit the Museum of Nature. There are many wild animals in the reserve, and you can see roe deer, wild boar, auroch, wolves, bears and other local

fauna in open air cages. Children are delighted with the Bolotnik trail — a mythical character, a relative of Leshy (a forest spirit) and Kikimora (a female house spirit in Slavic mythology). Bolotnik is a guide in summer while in winter it's replaced by Father Frost.

## From the Varangians to the Greeks

Part of the area's historic legacy is a legendary trading waterway used by the Varangians and the Vikings in the 10th-12th century to travel from Scandinavia to Constantinople along the Zapadnaya Dvina and Dnieper rivers and the Black Sea. Those keen on journeys by water try to emulate the path of these courageous forefathers. Canoe rafting enjoys great popularity. For those who aren't so keen on water, the beauties of the Belarusian north can be appreciated by driving alongside the Zapadnaya Dvina River in comfort.



## Migratory island

One can fall in love at first sight with Osveiskoe Lake in the Verkhnedvinsk District. It's the second largest lake after Naroch (52.8 sq.km) in Belarus. If you're lucky, you may also see a migratory island. Don't miss the Yelnya Landscape Reserve. It occupies part of the Miory and Sharkovshchina Districts. Yelnya is Europe's largest highland bog, preserved in its primeval state.

## Belarusian roots of Scarlet Sails

A trip into the world of nature can be combined with other sites. For example, there are lots of beautiful churches in the Verkhnedvinsk District. The magnificent neo-Gothic Roman Catholic church in Sarie constantly astonishes visitors with its grandeur, while the Roman Catholic church in Rositsa still arouses controversy: was it built in neo-Gothic or neo-Roman style?

The Belarusian smallest town is in the Verkhnedvinsk District — Disna — where slightly more than 1,500 people live. However, it boasts a rich history: on a large island where the Disna River joins the Zapadnaya Dvina River, ancient people settled. In the times of Ivan the Terrible, a castle stood in the water, constructed by Stephen Bathory. The fortification embankments have been preserved. In Soviet times, such films as 'The State Border', 'People of



the Marsh' and 'The Black Birch Tree' were shot here.

Once this town was a centre of trade on the banks of a wide, navigable river. Typical merchant brick buildings and cobbled streets remind us of those times. Disna has preserved the house of the father of the famous writer, Alexander Grin, and the oldest functioning rail-road bridge over the river.

## How about a giant iron!

The Vitebsk Region has 70 geological monuments of republican importance, including the 'Big Stone' — the largest boulder in Belarus. It's found near the village of Gorki, 15km

from Shumilino and 17km from Beshenkovichi. It's 11m long, 5.6m wide and its perimeter is 28.2m. Part of the boulder is under the earth, so its real size is considerably greater: it rises 2.8m above the ground. The boulder weighs several hundred tonnes and from one side resembles a gigantic iron. It also has an unofficial name — the 'Devil's Stone'. According to the ancient legend, if a person visits the stone on a moonless night he will be circling it before dawn. People believed that evil spirits hide their treasure under it. Remarkably, the stones in Shumilino were used during the construction of St. Sophia Cathedral in Polotsk.

## We have the only one

The only cave in Belarus is located on the steep bank of Ginkovo Lake, near the village of Sakhnovichi in the Glubokoye District. It was formed in ancient sandstone around 25,000 years ago. The depth of the cave is approximately 10m. According to the legend, the treasures of the Warsaw members of the Polish gentry were hidden in it after the partition of Rzecz Pospolita, as well as Napoleon's treasures. However, the whereabouts of all this wealth is now unknown.

By German **Moskalenko**



# Krichev has seen a lot of history

**The town on the Sozh River is one of the oldest in the Mogilev Region: it was first recorded in the charters under the name of Krechut**



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## Visiting Duke Potemkin

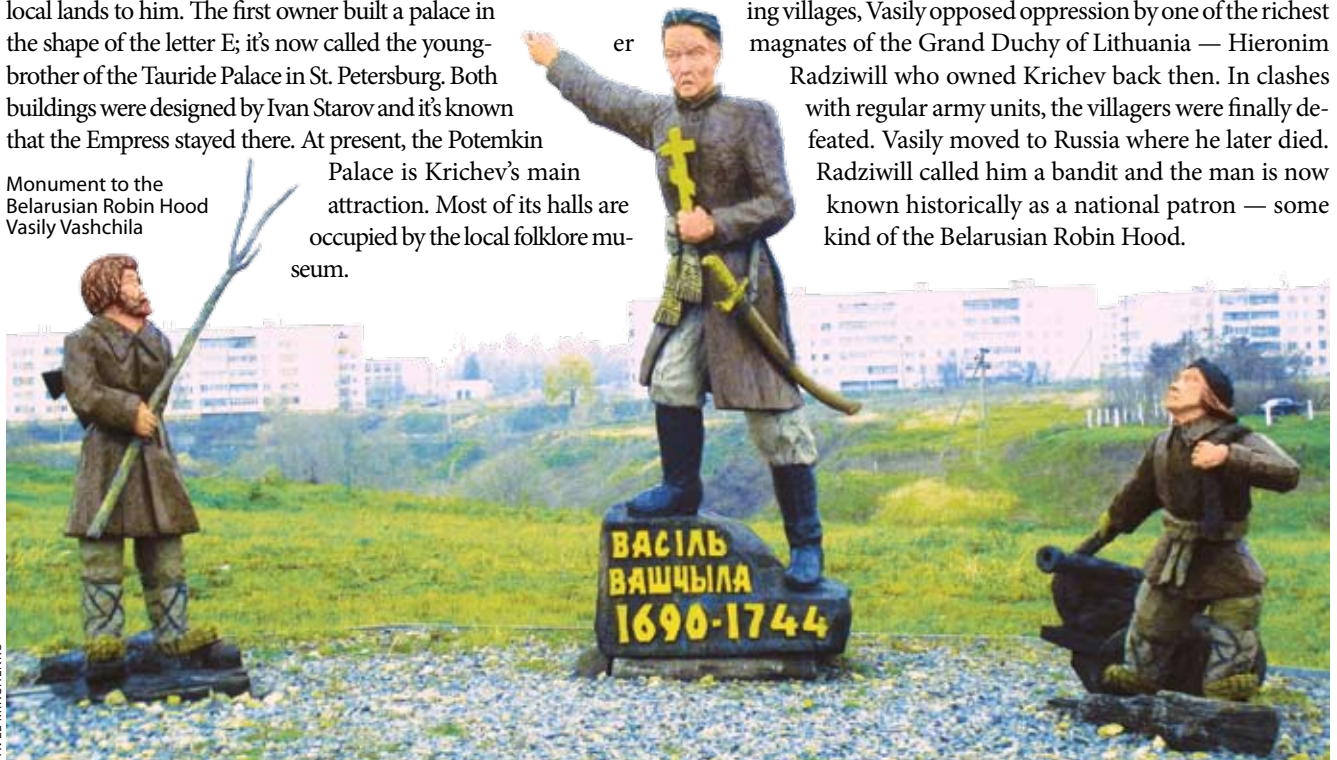
In the late 12th century, a stone castle was built at the site of the ancient city, which was destroyed during the Northern War. Only the foundation of its tower remains as an example of its former greatness. The history of the area is closely connected with the name of Yekaterina the Great's favourite — Duke Grigory: The Empress presented local lands to him. The first owner built a palace in the shape of the letter E; it's now called the young-brother of the Tauride Palace in St. Petersburg. Both buildings were designed by Ivan Starov and it's known that the Empress stayed there. At present, the Potemkin

Palace is Krichev's main attraction. Most of its halls are occupied by the local folklore museum.

Monument to the Belarusian Robin Hood Vasily Vashchila

## Learn the history of the Belarusian Robin Hood

A wooden sculpture of a warrior with a cross in his hand and a sword on his belt greets anyone entering the city. This is Vasily Vashchila — the leader of rebels who called himself a grandson of Bogdan Khmelnytsky. Gathering peasants from surrounding villages, Vasily opposed oppression by one of the richest magnates of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania — Hieronim Radziwill who owned Krichev back then. In clashes with regular army units, the villagers were finally defeated. Vasily moved to Russia where he later died. Radziwill called him a bandit and the man is now known historically as a national patron — some kind of the Belarusian Robin Hood.



PAVEL MINCHENKO



The Potemkin Palace in Krichev has become a venue for traditional ball seasons



### Drink healthy water from the Peter spring

The local streets are of interest as they've preserved a layout similar to 19th century Russian district towns. There are even houses here built more than a hundred ago. In Krichev, much is connected with the history of the Russian state. The local name of a spring on the outskirts of the city is the Peter spring in the Peter meadow: in 1708, a camp of Peter the Great was situated close by. Near the village of Molyatichi (close to Krichev) advanced detachments of Russian troops faced Swedes who were forced to retreat.



### Walk in the footsteps of Hannibal and Athanasius Nikitin

The great-uncle of Alexander Pushkin — General Ivan Gannibal — was an engineer, building a shipyard on the Sozh River in the city. It was put into operation in 1785 and was one of the largest in Russia. Overall, 25 sailing and rowing vessels were launched from there to the Black Sea. Krichev is also perhaps the final resting place for the great traveller, Afanasy Nikitin, who reached India on foot in the late 15th century. It's unknown where Afanasy was buried but, according to documents, when returning from overseas, he died somewhere near Smolensk, on the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Belarusian historians believe

that it happened in Krichev. Historical records indicate that it was here where Nikitin gave his world famous notes to merchants travelling to Moscow from the Crimea.

### Work as a station master

Krichev's post office was built in the mid-19th century. It was then an important crossroads on the state route from Moscow to Warsaw. The one-storey building had corners marked with pilasters and arched niches in its walls. Rectangular windows appear as arches. Sadly, the station stables that were once part of the complex have not survived. However, it's now possible to visit stone stables in Krichev where, judging by the rich stucco, the estate owners were extremely fond of horses. Ancient traditions are still alive in the Krichev District — even in these modern times. Local farmsteads offer horse riding, in addition to the traditional Belarusian hospitality such as fishing, hunting, steam bath and tasty pancakes and machanka.

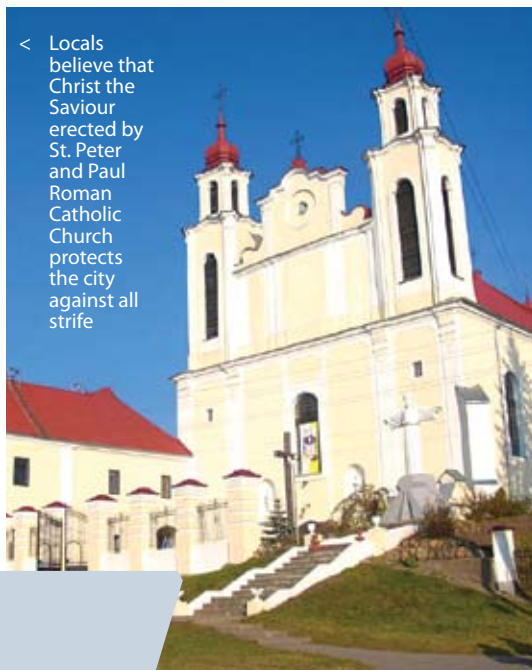
By Svetlana Markova



Post office in Krichev



< Locals believe that Christ the Saviour erected by St. Peter and Paul Roman Catholic Church protects the city against all strife



# 5

## reasons to visit Ivye

The Grodno Region town is the unofficial capital of the Belarusian Tatars, who participated in the famous Battle of Grunewald, fighting as united Slavic regiments against the Crusaders in 1410. After those events, the first Tatar settlement was established in the Ivye District, where the followers of Mohammed received land in reward for their service.

### Sightseeing 'capital' of Belarusian Tatars

**1** Experts assert that the name of the town comes from the Tatars' 'oue, eve' — translated as 'a nest or a house'. Local residents share their own legends associated with place names. One states that the wife of Duke Gediminas of Lithuania loved the land so much that her husband ordered a castle built on the hills near the Ivenka River for her. The coat of arms of the ancient town features Princess Eva; accordingly, Ivye is the town of Eva.

When the Tatars were given the right to hold titles of nobility, many began to marry local beauties of Christian faith, taking Belarusian names. At the same time, they remained faithful to Islam. The oldest mosque in Belarus is located in Ivye, built in 1882, funded by Polish Countess Elvira Zamoyskaya, who owned much of the town and was Roman Catholic.

Present-day Sovetskaya Street, where the mosque is located, was named Tatar for hundreds of years, and the district is named in Tatar-style: Muravshchizna. A Muslim cemetery (mizar) is nearby, featuring gravestones engraved with the Islamic crescent and Arabic script. Eastern names neighbour on those typical of Belarusian families. Stones also depict the symbol of Tatar families: a drooping willow twig, with leaves and falling tears.

The first spring vegetables and herbs in Belarusian markets come from Ivye. Migrants from the Crimea helped encourage local horticulture. Minsk even has a district named Tatarskiye Ogorody (Tatar Vegetable Gardens). Ivye greets those arriving from the Grodno motorway with huge greenhouses: true vegetable jungles.

It's best to visit Ivye during the festivals of Kurban Bayram and Eid al-Fitr, to see how locals celebrate.

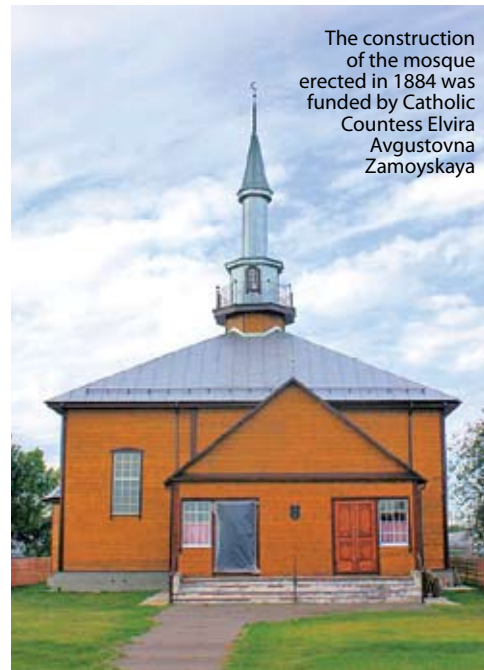




Synagogue courtyard (built in the late 19th c.)



Monument entitled 'In Honour of Friendship and Unity of Confessions in the Ivye Area'



The construction of the mosque erected in 1884 was funded by Catholic Countess Elvira Avgustovna Zamoyskaya



## Approaching the monument of four shrines

**2** An unusual monument is situated in Ivye's central square, with its four arches symbolising the beginning of the path to four shrines: the Orthodox church, the Roman Catholic church, the mosque and the synagogue.

The Orthodox church, with its golden bulbil-domes, is famous for its icon of the Kazan Mother of God, as presented to the town by Ivye-born Viktor Shutov, who worked with the Russian Space Agency. The icon spent ten days in orbit.

The town boasts a well-preserved two-storey Jewish quarter of artisans and merchants. The synagogue building, in traditional architecture, now houses a sports school. During the war, almost half of all Ivye residents died in the ghetto; on May 9th each year, their descendants come from all over the world to hold a requiem service.

## Seeing 'twin' of Rio's Christ

**3** The cosy provincial town lives a quiet and measured life. It's better to observe it from the hill on which the Saint Peter and Paul Roman Catholic Church — built in the late 15th century — is situated. Wars and people have changed the original appearance of the Gothic church, so that its present style combines Renaissance, Baroque and Rococo elements. It's truly worth visiting. The statue of Christ in Ivye was erected over a decade ago and is a perfect copy of the famous Christ the Saviour monument in Rio de Janeiro. Of course, it's much smaller than the original but offers an interesting comparison with the other in remote Rio.

Many stone Roman Catholic churches are situated in Ivye, and each deserves recognition. Among them is the early 20th century

neo-Gothic church in Subbotniki, and one of the oldest Belarusian Roman Catholic churches — Nikolaevsky (1519) — in Geraneny. There are also the ruins of a 15th-16th century castle.

Another Ivye attraction is the Museum of National Cultures, which hosts unique exhibits — such as an ancient Koran and Talmud. Melety Smotritsky's Grammar is said to have been published by an Ivye publishing house, and was named by Mikhail Lomonosov as 'the gateway to education'.

## Visiting royal Łazienki

**4** Warsaw's Łazienki is the famous residence of the last king of the Rzecz Pospolita, Stanislaw August, and is known as the 'palace on the island'. To see this masterpiece of architecture, there's no need to go to Poland. Just visit the Ivye District's village of Zhemyslav, which retains its palace and park estate; it's almost an exact copy of royal Łazienki.

The local nobility's nostalgia over the 'wonderful' days of the Rzech Pospolita led local magnates to view themselves as equal to kings. Only their architecture remains.

## Hunting in the Nalibokskaya Pushcha

**5** The Nalibokskaya Pushcha National Park is a pearl on the tourist map of the region. Boundless forests begin almost on the edge of the city, once home to powerful partisan brigades during the war. At present, the Pushcha is a perfect place for hunters, as wildlife abounds. It's even possible to hunt royal pheasants.

Zimnik — Father Frost's brother — lives in the village of Zaleiki. Baba Zavirukha (Lady Snowstorm) also resides there, welcoming hundreds of families every winter.

By German **Moskalenko**

# Power of the Chinese dragon



**The Chinese theme is more actively penetrating Belarusian scientists' minds: researchers are focusing not just on Belarusian-Chinese relations. Historians, political scientists, economists and philosophers are attempting to consider centuries of Chinese history to understand what has enabled the Heavenly Empire and its people to achieve its unprecedented success, while overcoming many political feuds. Our reporter met political analyst and Candidate of Historical Sciences — Victor Germenchuk — to talk about how Belarus can learn from the Chinese experience. The expert in this great country's past and present answers our topical questions.**

*Your 'China: Dragon's Wings' book has recently been released by the Zvyazda Publishing House. What inspired you to conduct this research? Much has already been written about China...*

True, much has been written but not all the materials are correct — especially those dealing with political modernisation. The latter is the focus of our book. The unsolved mysteries of the East are the focus of most studies of old and new China. Due to its historical circumstances and 'splendid isolation', the country only became well known to Europeans in the 17th-18th century. Admiration for it was endless: people were attracted by almost 5,000 years of ancient civilisation, huge territory and population, its wealth and wonderful Chinese culture. Nobody then thought of China as an underdeveloped state. At that time, the Chinese economy accounted for around 30 per cent of the global GDP and the country could rival other powers in technological and organisational fields. As for politics, China even surpassed the European states.

It is well-known that the invention of the 'West' and western civilisation belongs to the era of Enlightenment. Confucius became the holy patron of the Enlightenment and Confucianism — not Christianity — was proclaimed the faith of reason, free from superstitions and legends. Over two thousand years ago, a unique state mechanism controlling a huge state (bigger than the Roman Empire) was created on its basis; it appeared to be one of the most viable political systems ever created by man. According to Voltaire, the Chinese political regime is despotism only in its form. In reality, it is an enlightened monarchy with an emperor-philosopher on the throne. As Holbach wrote, go to China to find happy people thanks to the institutions where politics is closely linked to morality, where people and the state system meet the ideal and deserve emulation by European governments.

It was some time later that serious contact between China and the West began to resemble a one-way street. After earning the right to be called a universal civilisation, in addition to the concept of

progress, development and capitalism, Europeans also began to develop and distribute the myth of the inert, stagnant and despotic East.

*There were even theories which are not taken seriously at present...*

Among them is this belief. Montesquieu explained the superiority of Europeans over the Chinese by the invigorating climate of Europe saying that 'the softness of people in hot climates always made them slaves.' That company of 'well-wishers' was immediately joined by Linnaeus, David Hume, Kant and other recognised scientific personalities who attempted to convince their readers that Chinese were another kind of people — 'yellow Asiatic'. They were called 'bastards' descended from Indians and Mongols. In contrast to the white race, they were believed to be completely unable to present civilisation and historical creativity. As a result, European civilisation began living according to its own rules and understanding — while claiming its exclusive mission.

*Those aspirations to 'exclusiveness' were strange...*





The energy of thought fuelled the energy of action. It turned the drive to succeed into the basic property of a person and European society. It proclaimed expansion and colonialism as the basic principle and method of civilised leadership for a long time. Comparative world history, the direct contact of ancient Chinese and young European civilisations resulted in the 'triumph of modernity' in Europe and America and the 'era of humiliation' in China. These two extremes of the development of civilisation pose the question of what would happen to the world when the main players change places: when the West still prefers to deal with the New China as if it is a 'yellow threat' rather than a partner.

*Ever since the beginning of perestroika, many Soviet and later sovereign Belarusian political scientists and policy practitioners looked mainly at the West and America when choosing a model for development. In your work, you note that the West itself decided to learn from the East. Where can it be seen? What state-building models does the West take from the experience of China and other Southeast Asian states?*

History is always written by the victors. However, Western civilisation, in its passionate desire to act as the universal standard for humanity, simply overestimated its strength and capabilities. The development of the market economy and democracy and the advantages of globalisation for peoples of all countries have become more accepted modern goals. The Chinese advice is to 'Seek the truth in facts.' The idea of the 'end of history', its completion in the cosmopolitan era of the free market economy and liberal democracy has ended for the West and the United States in embarrassment.

***Does this mean that many theories simply failed?***

I would explain it differently. It's not a failure but more of a systemic crisis of the politics of militant western individualism and persistent pursuit of their own interests. This is payback for constant expansion, slavery, colonialism, the stolen history and futures of billions of people. Many of them have long questioned the nature and advantages of modern capitalism and the advantages of the western political system.

Moreover, thoughtful analysts have noticed that Western civilisation itself lost faith in progress. This explains the constant prophecies about the collapse of the West. In Spengler's 'Decline of Europe', history transforms into a process 'with enhanced aimlessness' when civilisations 'appear, mature, fade and never repeat'. Weariness from history is a serious disease. It is dangerous in its quest to transform one's own funeral into a memorial service for the entire human civilisation. The Chinese have obvious advantages in this respect. They learned long ago not to pay attention to nonsense about their own country and their prospects for global development. The West suggests looking for a 'new homeland' through 'reorientation' while the Chinese view modernisation as a 'return to themselves'. From the beginning, new China had no plans to repeat the experience of the West and follow its advice.

The successes of the modernisation of China and other countries in South-east Asia can be explained by this circumstance. While beginning their rise to the heights of growth and development,

these 'Asian tigers' created a 'smart state' based on traditional Confucian values. It is rooted in public agreement between the government and controlled population in relation to the goals of development, overcoming economic backwardness, poverty and inequality. It ensured active support for reforms, social peace and political stability. The significance of these factors for successful development is best understood by those governments where these conditions are absent. Discontent and indignation of citizens with the inability of their leaders to ensure economic growth and improve the situation with equality has destroyed many political regimes and buried the most ambitious reform plans. This caused numerous crises of leadership, impeachment, constitutional and military coups, and the emergence of a significant number of failed states.

***A separate chapter of your book — 'State Enemy #1' — is devoted to corruption. What is the status of this in China?***

It's not yet possible to repeat the positive example of Singapore in fighting corruption for many reasons. Corruption has its own distinct national colour and deeper roots associated with the traditions of kinship in traditional Chinese society. However, the party leadership fully supports the idea of 'clean government' and the need for tough measures to combat this scourge. Chairman Xi Jinping acknowledges that if corruption is not restrained, this will 'inevitably lead the party and the nation to death'.

***Such open views of the state leader contradict the principle of showing only success...***

The Chinese leadership is the most severe critic of its own activities. They



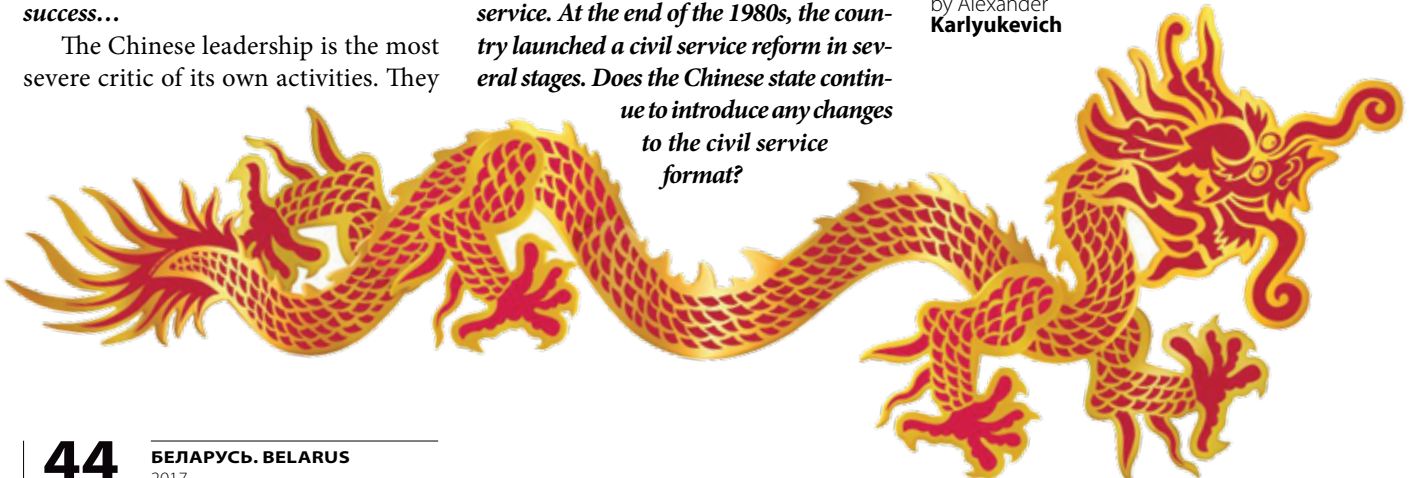
believe that knowledge of weaknesses simplifies understanding of their power. The country has declared a permanent campaign against 'four crazes': formalism, bureaucracy, epicurean and desire for luxury. Large-scale elimination of several entire industries and spheres of the party and state activity have been conducted and — in line with the principle of 'zero tolerance' and the return of a high 'personal power measurement' — hundreds of thousands of party members have been prosecuted. The purpose of this 'great campaign' has been formulated in the spirit of the time: all officials must 'be afraid — be unable — have no wish' to abuse their official position and take bribes.

***The 'cultural revolution' in China is largely marked by the fact that it has virtually destroyed the institution of the civil service. At the end of the 1980s, the country launched a civil service reform in several stages. Does the Chinese state continue to introduce any changes to the civil service format?***

Restoration of the civil service began in new China with the return to practice of competitive examinations for public office and creating the world's best recruitment system. The foundations of this system were established over two thousand years ago in Imperial China. During a long period of reform, the civil service acquired a modern look; it now resembles similar institutions of other countries. The basic principles of enlistment are openness, accessibility and fairness. On January 1st, 2016, a new oath for public servants came into force: they now swear to be faithful to the state and defend their Constitution, while observing all laws and duties, being faithful and loyal to the motherland and people and sincerely devoting themselves to their duties. They promise to maintain the integrity of the state through people's management and work with dedication in order to build a prosperous, democratic, civilised and harmonious socialist country.

These are principal features of the legal status of Chinese civil servants. The main condition for admission to the civil service is 'possession of satisfactory moral features'. The employee's list of responsibilities also includes the obligation 'to serve people and be under their constant supervision with all their hearts and with all their thoughts', 'be an example of respect for public moral standards'. The assessment of moral features and honesty of officials — taking into consideration collective opinions and views — is an integral part of their regular performance review.

Interviewed  
by Alexander  
**Karlyukevich**





## ► Honoured to stand on the podium

**Belarusian students are once again amongst the best at the International Contest for International Law in Washington**

At the 'Olympic Games' for future lawyers, held since 1957, the team of the International Relations Faculty of the Belarusian State University won in the 'Demonstrative Performances' category.

This year, the competition gathered students from over 90 countries. The tasks have traditionally represented a game model of the UN International Court of Justice, while the topic for improvised litigation was the equitable use of water resources, the right to water and responsibility for its violation. Speakers also lectured on the protection of cultural values.

The BSU was represented by third-year student Lilit Yeritsiyan and fourth-

year students Margarita Zmachinskaya, Yelizaveta Chekanova and Darya Bogdan. In its winning category, the team beat competitors from 17 countries, including Sorbonne University, the University of Verona and Kiev University (named after T. Shevchenko). Darya Bogdan also celebrated a personal victory, being recognised as the best speaker in the 'Demonstrative Performances' section. The girls were trained by the experienced Yelena Konnova — a senior lecturer at the Department of International Law at the Belarusian State University.

Last year, the team from BSU's International Relations Faculty also celebrated victory: Tatiana Zinyakova, Yelizaveta Tarasevich, Yelizaveta Trakhalinova, Yekaterina Shkarbuta and Alena Khodartsevich were placed second in the 'Written Legal Argument' category. In English, the students developed tactical methods of protection and accusations on the topic of cyberspace crime.



## ► Route 'from the Varangians to the Greeks'

**Archeologists have found a unique site of an ancient settlement of Vikings in the Vitebsk Region**

It appears that an important point on the way 'from the Varangians to the Greeks' was on the bank of the Western Dvina between Vitebsk and Polotsk. Experts called the settlement Kordon — in honor of the neighboring village, while the National Academy of Sciences has included the discovery in the top-10 discoveries of 2016.

A large quantity of artefacts, including Roman coins, were found in Kordon. The oldest one was minted in the 790s. Arabian dirhams were also found, implying a trading centre on the site. A large embankment protected it from attacks from the river. There was also a bay for merchant ships. It's likely the centre lost its importance and ceased to exist because of expansion of the Polotsk Principality towards Vitebsk.



## ► Polotsk resident captures international attention

**History enthusiasts and book-lovers around the world are talking about Francysk Skaryna**

Humanist, translator, book-maker, and one of the first book-printers in Europe, this Belarusian historical

figure took the spotlight at the national stand, 'Books of Belarus', and was a significant attraction at the recent 8th Warsaw Book Fair. The exhibit was dedicated to the 500th anniversary of Belarusian book printing.

Rumyantsev readings at the Russian State Library were also devoted to the great Polotsk resident and his printing of the first Eastern Slavonic Bible. Presentations of Skaryna's facsimile edition took place at the Latvian National Library and the National Library of Estonia. Mean-

while, the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania hosted a round table discussion: 'Francysk Skaryna: 500th Anniversary of Book Printing in Belarus and Lithuania.'

To commemorate his contributions to the history of the printed word, London now has a library which bears the name of Skaryna. A scientific and practical conference is to take place in Belgrade, while Wrocław will be hosting a special session during the IFLA World Library and Information Congress.

# Holy simplicity hidden in an icon



If you fly high above the clouds and look down on the earth, Polesie will appear as a dark green spot covering four states: Belarus, Ukraine, Poland and Russia. It will appear dark due to the masses of forests and swamps. Over the past century, the forests have thinned and the number of marshes has become several times smaller. The total area of Polesie is now around 130 thousand square kilometres. Returning to earth, we can look into the houses of Polesie residents — poleshuks. Much has changed but even today icons are still placed in the corner. Some families have old examples that have been inherited from their great-grandfathers and others have modern versions. They sometimes differ from those seen in Minsk's churches but people still honour and respect them. Recently, a book dedicated to icons was released in the Ukraine — featuring pictures from Gomel's Polesie. This is no surprise, as many years ago these lands were one huge state: the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

I'm sitting in the workshop of collector and artist Igor Surmachevsky. On the monitor of his computer one picture replaces another, with the faces of saints appearing and disappearing. The Mother of God, The Saviour, The Resurrection, The Ascension... Original large and small icons are seen on the walls; the same were once found in poleshuks' houses. The icons in the workshop are bare, lacking rushniks and frames, but it's impossible to call them simply boards.

"This is a type of art belonging to three or even four nations. When I saw them for the first time (not in a museum), I realised that this is a very unusual form of art — similar to the pictures of the Georgian Niko Pirosmanshveli, French Henri Rousseau and Yugoslavia's Ivan Generalich. I think that Polesie itself has such a uniquely particular reading of the Bible," says Mr. Surmachevsky.

*Igor, I was once told about the icons of Vetka's Old Believers by Fyodor Shklyarov. He said that the faces were drawn to illustrate the Bible. After all, most of our ancestors could not read.*

*Icons replaced books, television and cinema for the believers. An artist had to depict the biblical story so that an illiterate tiller, a fisherman or an artisan could understand.*

Yes, exactly! How could a local worshipper see the real Jordan, Golgotha or Jerusalem? Andrew the Apostle could be depicted with a fishing rod or a 'tap-tukha' (a type of fishing tackle) on the Pripyat River bank. Then Christ appears, resembling a resident of a neighbouring village, and tells Andrew to follow him. A similar story is that of St. George slaying a serpent with a spear. Most often





the terrible snake looked like a fairy-tale creature which could live in a swamp. Almost all Polesie icons reflect the folk calendar and local fairy tales. All the beautiful flowers in our icons symbolise Paradise, while the black background stands not for darkness and horror but for infinity and the Universe.

***Tell me more about the stories contained in the art.***

There are almost no festive stories in the Polesie icons. People wanted to have representations of the world in which they lived in their homes: these were horses, children, wives, and peasant's work. Do you know why the icon with the image of the Mother of God with Three Hands is so popular in Polesie? Poleshuks believed that this icon helped people steal something with impunity! I received a call one day and was told that an icon with the inscription of 'Belarusian Mother of God' had been discovered. I was intrigued, when it turned out to be the Mother of God with Three Hands, I studied its inscription and discovered it was painted in a monastery in Bryansk, in Bely Bereg; the icon was called Beloberezhskaya.

***My grandfather was presented with the Pochaev icon of the Mother of God by his father. What did it symbolise?***

It brought peace to spouses and defended the family home. It was most probably painted in the Pochaev Lavra, now the Ukraine. Most likely, one of your ancestors went there on a pilgrimage and brought the icon to the village in Gomel. The Akhtyrka icon of the Mother of God was also very popular, associated with an amazing folk ritual. Over the year, the icons became darker as the soot of lamps and candles settled on them. Before the holidays, it was carefully washed away and the water was considered curative, helping with the fevers common at the time in Polesie. In turn, the St. Varvara icon protected people from unexpected death. It related to water and the marshes. Varvara protected children and prevented people



from drowning. Every mother wanted to have such an icon at home. Meanwhile, St. Paraskeva was a female icon helping with housework. This saint in the folk calendar was represented by a poor old woman who ensured the mistress of the house did not work on holidays.

***What saints looked after the master?***

Those were St. George, Frol and Lavr, in addition to St. Nicholas of Myra. The latter is the patron saint of the poor. Even today, people advise those in need to ask him for assistance and protection. The daily life of our ancestors was ruled by saints.

***When did the first Polesie icons appear?***

In the early 18th-mid 19th century. They are described differently as folk, Uniate or peasant art and are not of a high professional standard, but are original and unusual. They were once treated with snobbery and scepticism — similar to the attitude shown towards Pirosmanni's paintings. However, over time collectors have begun to understand their value and are now actively collecting them. Some of these icons echo the paintings of great artists of the Renaissance: Raphael, Titian or Giotto. Pictures existed in the form of paper engravings and local artists copied them — adapting to the wishes of their customers and their own understanding of holiness and beauty.

***There are many stories and saints but usually only three or four icons are in a house...***

No. If you look at old photographs of the beginning of the last century, you'll notice many icons in poleshuks' houses. Sometimes they hang in lines starting from the red corner — in two or three rows. Today's minimalism did not exist. It was believed that the more the better.

Many professionals treat naive art with disdain as the self-taught artists had no professional education. The authors of folk songs and fairy tales didn't graduate from literary institutes and conservatories as well as the builders of many of our fine buildings.

By Vladimir **Stepan**



# On the wings of love



Yana Shtangei (Ora) and Takatoshi Machiyama (Orr)

## Impressions of the global premiere of the ballet 'Orr and Ora' which closed the Bolshoi Theatre's 84th season

**I**t is difficult to find adequate words to express my admiration for one of the most beloved and respected theatres in the country, where every visit is a joyful experience of high art — be it opera or ballet. Once again, the Bolshoi has shaken my imagination with its new production so much that I am keen to see it again with a new score in September, when the theatre opens its 85th jubilee season.

Whilst returning from our Indian holiday, waiting for a flight from Cochin in Kerala via Abu Dhabi and then a morning flight to Minsk, I was overcome with treacherous thoughts. As exhaustion and jet lag took hold, despite looking forward to my return, I decided sleep would be preferable to attending the premiere at the Bolshoi Theatre on the day we landed. My husband offered no comment on my decision, given my well-known love for ballet it's not surprising he didn't take me seriously.

A welcome home dinner arranged by our children soon revived us. We decided to attend the premiere no matter how tired we were, it was an opportunity not to be missed. We set

MARAT SHAKHMATIEV



off for the Bolshoi accompanied by our fatigue and with the unreal feeling we were still on holiday. India and its enchanting flavours followed us that night. It seemed that we were still there and could hear the birds singing and the sound of the ocean, see the Indians' smiling faces and smell magnolias and orchids, smoking incense and spices... Although we had left India behind, it did not let us go. Psychologists call this phenomenon banal acclimation: a traveller, who has not rested, cannot seem to break away from the place they visited. This is a well-documented sphere of psychosomatic medicine and mental healers believe it gives a positive energy which keeps a person alert and happy.

Parter magazine, learning a little more about the background to the ballet. The libretto's author is Vyacheslav Zarenkov — an artist, writer, scientist, inventor and businessman born in the Orsha District, Belarus. He lived there until he turned 17 and then moved to St. Petersburg (known as Leningrad at that time). As Yelena Balabanovich — the Chief Editor of the Marketing, Information and Advertising Department at the Bolshoi Theatre — told us, Mr. Zarenkov's work and philanthropic activity is permeated with the idea of creation. He helps talented artists, writers and painters, while also drawing independently and travelling a great deal. The plot of his libretto for *Orr and Ora* — like those of his other works — is based on real events.

pretations of what we see and familiarity with other people gives birth to new works in literature, art and journalism. I certainly felt this after visiting India last summer and shared my impressions with magazine readers in my essay reviews (#12-2016). I approached the premiere with my recent experiences in mind.

The story of the ballet, that of *Eagles and People*, was described by Vyacheslav Zarenkov during his briefing with journalists. He first came across it in Cyprus. While listening to Yelena speak, I felt my 'Indian cloud' slowly dissolving; I silently rejoiced that we were in our seats and musicians were tuning their instruments in the orchestra pit.



MIKHAIL NESTEROV

Soloists Lyudmila Khitrova and Oleg Yeromkin (centre) and ballet dancers of the Bolshoi Theatre in Belarus

Even the Bolshoi's sparkling chandeliers, its solemn lobby atmosphere — which fascinates me each time — failed to take me out of the Indian 'enveloping cloud' I found myself in. I was greeted by Vladimir Gridyushko — the Theatre's Director; he was in celebratory mood, dressed traditionally in a tuxedo for the premiere: with white shirt and black bow tie. It was good to see how much pleasure he took from sharing the global premiere with the audience. Before the performance started, we perused the

It has often been said that travelling opens a new perspective on the world and on ourselves, contributes to creativity and our understanding of life. The characters of Jack London, Alexander Grin, Antoine De Saint Exupery and other authors travel too. As St. Augustine said, the world is a book: those who don't travel around it, read only a single page. It is difficult to argue with the fact that travelling expands our consciousness and we become spiritually richer through it. Creative inter-

The story tells how, one night, a great eagle flew onto his balcony and began to beat on the glass. Vyacheslav managed to catch the bird and soothe it. In the morning, he let it go free, but the eagle, instead of flying away, circled around and returned to the balcony of the next apartment. It broke the glass and, after some time, returned with a female eagle. The strange couple then flew away, leaving Mr. Zarenkov extremely interested in what had happened. It soon became clear that the birds had helped to reunite

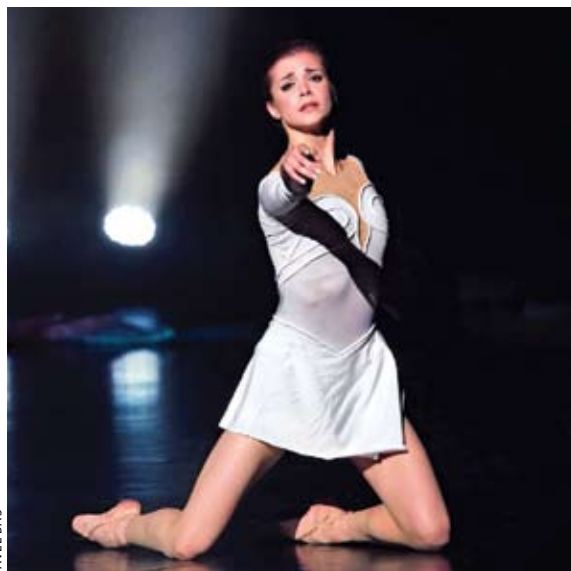


PAVEL BAS

his neighbours. He learnt that friends had presented an eagle to the lovers some time ago. The bird found its own 'lover' which the young people also accepted. Sometime later, the man and the woman parted; each of them going to different cities — taking one bird with them. The male eagle, unable to bear its loneliness, left the man to search for its friend and eventually found it — demonstrating true devotion. Thanks to the birds, the lovers were together again and Mr. Zarenkov's libretto was born. According to the author, it's based on the idea of the love and happiness that everyone deserves, including birds.

What is love between a man and a woman, between humans and the environment? How sublime and beautiful can it be? What hinders love between human beings? What do love of humanity and the belief in a heavenly life after death look like? These and other eternal topics are seen in *Orr and Ora*. The ideas are perfectly represented by the choreographer, the co-author of the libretto — Alexandra Tikhomirova — and the dancers (there are several for each character). *Ora* is performed by nine dancers and *Orr* is

danced by six men. The second part featured soloists Victoria Trenkina and Nikita Shuba. The character of Man was danced by Honoured Artiste of Belarus, Oleg Yeromkin, and Woman was performed by Lyudmila Khitrova — winner of an international competition and a holder of the Francysk Skaryna Medal.



PAVEL BAS

Lyudmila Khitrova (Woman)

Everything in the play is harmonious and the dancing spectacular, the creative staging by the company of Belarusians and Russians is truly mean-

ingful, informative and full of vivid images created by scenography director Vyacheslav Okunev — People's Artiste of Russia. The settings consist of two layers: our earthly world and the heavenly, angelic, divine world. The theme of how it is born in our souls through love and the topic of forgiveness are vividly seen in the show. According to Ms. Tikhomirova, each person is the bearer of a divine spark. Our lives are an attempt to approach perfection. When we forgive each other, we become more pure. *Orr* and *Ora* show spirituality, they stand for a supreme, divine idea of Man and Woman who are ordinary people and who can make mistakes because of their earthly restless nature.

The solo parts of the four main characters seamlessly fit into the rapid ensemble dances. The music is beautiful and melodic, composed by Russian Mikhail Krylov with arrangement by Belarusian Oleg Khodosko; the latter's modern approaches underline the severity of ballet forms. In the words of Ms. Tikhomirova, the theme of flight is very close to the concept of creativity. She has repeatedly turned to it in other





Final scene of the performance

productions, trying to answer the question of what it means for the artist to fly and to create. In a continuation of this theme, the story about people and birds was born — artistically interpreted by Vyacheslav Zarenkov.

The performance begins with the dawn. The grey sleeping world appears on the stage; no one is yet born. People are in cocoons. Two white birds fly here and there, choosing a man and a woman to breathe life and love, light and hope into. The world becomes coloured and spring arrives... The love the man and the woman feel blooms and their wedding follows. However, their daily routine spoils relations; misunderstandings and squabbles overshadow their life. They are confused at their loss of happiness. The performers' hands fall like whips, Man and Woman are frozen in disbelief or rush across the stage...

Peace and joy are returned by the birds. They come to inspire people to recall their former feelings. The gestures of Victoria Trenkina and Nikita Shuba demonstrate angelic love and compassion for Man and Woman. Oleg Yeromkin and Lyudmila Khitrova con-

vey the idea of a higher nature. It alone can transform someone and help them communicate with others. The world becomes colourful again. Meanwhile,



Oleg Yeromkin (Man)

the envy of other people's happiness is haunted by the grey mass of people deprived of love. This grey mass attacks — trying to separate the lovers... It destroys the marriage bed and tears the colourful matrimonial blanket... Man and Woman no longer understand each other again. Ora is also caught. The theatre strengthens the focus to

show that we are dead without spirituality.

The performance has another strong theme: a person achieves true happiness only when the two sides of their nature coexist: the earthly and the divine. This happiness is reflected in the excellent dance quartet of people and birds. The dance of Ms. Yeromkina and Mr. Shuba is sensual and refined. It seems the characters of Orr and Ora will soar over the walls: their movements are incredibly light. They fly with their favorites among the people. According to the plot, the aggressive crowd devours Woman, and Man falls into despair. He does not want to live without her and the lovers meet in heaven.

The dance makes us think of how to keep our love here on earth and at the same time do something to make the world a better place. How is it possible to resist unconsciousness and evil? The finale is sad but optimistic. A multitude of white birds perform their dance of love, reminding us of the spark of the divine which each of us holds. It awakens hope that we can all one day become better people.

By Valentina **Zhdanovich**

# Energy, expression, symbolism and... dreams of Marc Chagall

July 7th saw the 130th anniversary of the birth of one of the greatest painters of the 20th century, our fellow countryman Marc Chagall (1887-1985). In commemoration of the landmark date, the National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus and the Marc Chagall Museum in Vitebsk have organised 'Marc Chagall: The Colour of Love', an exhibition that will be on display in Minsk at the country's major museum until mid-September 2017

**M**arc Chagall is rightly considered to be one of the greatest artists of the 20th century. The painter's work is notable for its unusual diversity: he is a draftsman, printmaker, painter, scenographer, illustrator and author of works of monumental and

applied arts. Among the variety of his creative interests and narrative themes, Marc Chagall consistently addressed the theme of love, about which he spoke straight up to his death. For several decades, he identified both sacred and profane love with his wife Bella. In Marc Chagall's works, Bella was the incarnation of his Muse, Bride, Wife and lover, but he also loved his country especially his native Vitebsk, Paris and France, his people and literature.

Chagall's profound illustrations for his autobiography 'My Life' and Bella's books ('Burning Lights', 'The First Meeting' and 'My Notebook') are well known, as are the illustrations for Gogol's 'Dead Souls', with their sharp characteristics and fine details, and the accompanying pictures for Lafontaine's 'Fables' which are characterised by a unique variety of images and colour-plastic solutions. Chagall is also known for his illustrations to the novel by ancient Greek writer Long, 'Daphnis and Chloe', which blaze with colour, as well as accompaniments to the 'greatest source of poetry of all time', the Bible. "I've always wanted to work on these books," Chagall wrote.

The 'Mark Chagall: The Colour of Love' exhibition is also associated with books and literature. The lithographs presented at the exhibition were made by him mainly in the 1950s-1960s as illustrations to various publications, alongside with those dedicated to Chagall himself. There is a rich range of work which distinguishes his creativity: the landscapes of Vitebsk, Paris, couples in love, and a mother with a child, fantastic creatures







and symbolic animals, musicians and of course, the image of the master himself.

The Parisian publishing house of Aimé Maeght published the monograph 'Chagall' in 1957, by famous French art critic and art historian Jacques Lassaigne, with whom the artist enjoyed many years of friendship. In addition to the text, the photographs and reproductions of Chagall's works, the book included 13 coloured and 2 black-and-white lithographs made by the artist in the famous Parisian printing workshop of Fernand Mourlot. Among them there are eleven coloured and one black-and-white ('Village') lithographs represented at the exhibition.

Jacques Lassaigne published the book 'The Plafond of the Paris Opera' in 1965, which was dedicated to the history of the creation and description of the painting, on which Marc Chagall had been working in 1963–1964. The solemn opening of the new Grand Opera's plafond took place in September 1964. The artist created the frontispiece for this richly illustrated edition — the original lithograph representing one of the fragments of the ceiling paintings. In addition to Chagall's

lithographs and a large number of photo-illustrations, the book was complemented by six lithographs, executed by Charles Sorlier and based on the works by the artist.

Marc Chagall once wrote, "It seemed to me that I was missing something if I didn't engage in engraving and lithography at a certain moment in my life... When I picked up a lithographic stone or a copper plate, it seemed that I had a talisman in my hands. I felt I could put

all my joys and sorrows in them. Everything that filled my life - birth, weddings, death, flowers, animals, birds, poor workers, parents, lovers in the night, biblical prophets on the streets, in the temple and in the sky..." During his impressive career, the artist created numerous graphic works — drawings, etchings and lithographs, proving that he was not only a great painter and colourist, but also a master of line and tone.

The graphic heritage of Chagall is extraordinarily great. The publishing house of André Sauret in Monte Carlo (1946–1980s) published the first part of the six-volume work — the catalogue 'Chagall. Lithography' in 1960 (the last volume was published in 1986). For this edition, with the texts in French and German, Chagall completed 21 colour and 7 black-and-white lithographs. The exhibition presents three of the lithographs from the first volume — 'Self-portrait', 'The Bay of Angels', 'Vision of Paris' — and two from the second (1963) — 'Heaven of Lovers' and 'Nocturne at Vence'.

At the exhibition in Minsk, visitors can see the lithographs created by Cha-



gall specially for 'Derrière le miroir' and 'Verve' magazines, which possess the exclusive rights for the publication of the original prints. 'Derrière le miroir', founded by the Parisian collector, gallery owner and publisher Aimé Maeght in 1946 (first issue printed in October 1946), was one of the largest media in circulation until 1982. In total, 253 issues of the magazine were published in this period. Issue 99-100 of July-August 1957 was dedicated to the exhibition of Marc Chagall in the Galerie Maeght. The author of the accompanying text was the famous French writer and essayist, Jean Paulhan. For this issue, the artist created 3 black-and-white and 4 colour lithographs, two of which — 'Concert' and 'Painter and his Double' — are shown at the exhibition.

Chagall enjoyed a long-standing friendship and fruitful cooperation with the Verve Publishing House owned by French-Greek art critic and collector Eugene Tériade. 'Verve' magazine was published from December 1937 to 1960; 38 issues in 10 volumes were printed in this period. Chagall produced the cover for issue #24 (1950), and his eight lithographs were published in ##27-28 (1952) of 'Verve', three of which ('Place de la Concorde', 'Mother and Child in front of Notre Dame' and 'Vision of Paris') are presented at this exhibition. The famous 'Bible' by Chagall was published



in ##33-34 (1956) and ##37-38 (1960) of 'Verve', and it is seen as the pinnacle of the artist's creation.

"In art, as in life, everything is possible, if the basis is love," Marc Chagall once said. He was an artist-humanist who not only loved life in all its manifestations, but has also transformed this love into his works, glorifying it as a divine gift.

The exhibition entitled 'Mark Chagall: The Colour of Love' continues the

tradition of presenting the art of the great master at the National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus.

Belarusian audiences had the opportunity to see Marc Chagall's art for the first time in 1997, when the painter's heirs, his granddaughters Bella and Meret Meyer, the organisers of Chagall's exhibitions at the National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus and at the Museum of Marc Chagall in Vitebsk, planned to celebrate the mas-



## Origins of an incredible love and longing for the homeland

**Vitebsk celebrates the 130th anniversary of Marc Chagall with performances and exhibitions**

**T**he celebrations began in January, with the opening of an exhibition dedicated to artist Hermann Struck, from whom Chagall learnt the art of engraving in 1922. Then followed the presentation of the 4th Chagall Collection. On the eve of the May holiday, the 130 Years — 130 Masterpieces. Retrospective of Marc Chagall's artistry from the Museum's Collection opened at the Art Centre, followed by the presentation of Victor Borisenkov's art project; combining photos taken over a century, he





ter's birthday with exhibitions of his work. This tradition continued for some years, until 2005. The exhibition 'Marc Chagall. The Works of Mediterranean Time. Gouache Paintings, Watercolours, Lithographs. 1949–1985' was followed by others: 'Marc Chagall. Dedication to Paris' (2000), 'Marc Chagall. Landscape Paintings' (2002), and 'Marc Chagall and the Stage' (2004) at the National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus. The exhibition 'Marc Chagall.

Colour in Black-and-White' took place at the National Museum of History and Culture of Belarus in 2005 (since 2009, the National History Museum of the Republic of Belarus). His works were also shown at the exhibition 'Marc Chagall and Painters of European Avant-Garde' from the collection of the Museum of Marc Chagall in Vitebsk at the National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus in 2010. From November 2012-January 2013, the exhibition 'Marc Chagall: Life

and Love' from the collection of the Israeli Museum in Jerusalem took place.

The exhibition was organised by the Israeli Museum with the financial support and assistance of the Ministry of Culture of Belarus which initiated the idea, the Belarusian Embassy in Jerusalem and the Israeli Embassy in Minsk. The event ended the 125th anniversary year of the birth of the world-famous artist. French Ambassador in Minsk Michel Raineri delivered an opening speech at the presentation of the exhibition in the National Art Museum. He said that, when speaking of Chagall, one of the most interesting and well-known artists of the 20th century, who lived and worked in France for many years, the French never forget that he was born in Belarus. He stressed that although Belarus is the true home of Marc Chagall, it was only a few years ago that it didn't have any of his works. We can now see how the influence and spirit of the great artist is evolving in Belarus. Mr. Raineri thanked everyone who had helped attract sponsors to allow more of Chagall's pictures to be seen in his homeland. "This is undoubtedly a new stage in the cultural life of Belarus," noted the Ambassador.

Chagall's time in France is of great interest to his admirers. In the 1920s, the French capital was visited by many artists from Europe and America who rented workshops in Montparnasse. In

showed how the Chagall environment has changed. Recently, Pokrovskaya Street, where the Chagall house museum is situated, underwent significant change. Its fences and facades are now decorated with poetic and prosaic quotes from the artist which, on the one hand, act as an art object in themselves and allow us to look at Vitebsk differently, to understand the origins of Chagall's incredible love and longing for his native land.

Exhibiting the painting with Chagall's poetic dedication — To My City of Vitebsk — became part of the com-

memorative events. The Yakub Kolas National Academic Drama Theatre staged its Chagall performance, a well-known work by Vitaly Barkovsky, who received several prestigious awards at international festivals. The celebrations were in full swing in Pokrovskaya Street: laying of flowers at the monument to Chagall was followed by a procession. The whole street seemed to come alive: there were musicians, artists, dancers and acrobats. Mark and Bella drove in an open chaise to the house-museum where the festivities began. The Sha-

lom band from Lida gave a concert of Jewish music and, some time later, an open-air performance was staged — Chagall. Exodus — by the Belarusian Lyalka Theatre. Another unusual activity took place at the cultural-historical complex 'Golden Ring of Vitebsk City: Dvina'. Those visiting the site could enjoy the Cornflower art performance, with the amazing atmosphere of the early 20th century and Chagall's paintings coming to life with fiddlers on the roof and lovers all over the city...



their spare time, they met in cafes and attended themed balls typical of the artistic life of Paris at the time. The city fostered creativity, the 'Hive' occupying a special place for those looking for inspiration. This was a communal hostel for artists from different countries, and acted as a base for the well-known masters of the Parisian school, including the Belarus-born Zadkine, Kikoin, Soutine, Arkhipenko, Kremen and Chagall. Alfred Boucher, who set up the 'Hive', aimed to not only provide a home: he also charged a small fee of fifty francs for a workshop on the ground floor of the house and Chagall recalled that no-one was obliged to pay. Mr. Boucher's goal was to create a true cultural centre.

Chagall often recalled the happy days he spent at the 'Hive'. "The Montparnasse life is great! I worked during the night, while in the neighbouring workshop an artist's model sobbed, Italians were singing to the accompaniment of a mandolin. Soutine returned from the market with a pile of old chickens to draw, while I sat alone in my wooden cell in front of the easel, by the light of a kerosene lamp..."

Many famous pictures were born in these workshops, while in the Parisian café Rotunda, anxious artists gathered to share their hopes and ideas. Chagall remembered, "In the evening, the room was full of people. Cries and disputes were common. Guests argued about art, recited poetry, quarrelled and reconciled..."

The exhibition 'Marc Chagall: Life and Love' continues the tradition of the great master's works at the National Art Museum of Belarus. Among the pieces



were pictures donated to the Israeli Museum by the artist and his daughter Ida Chagall, as well as those presented by numerous private collectors from Europe, America and Israel.

The art works of Marc Chagall from the corporate collection of Belgazprombank JSC and the Museum of Marc Chagall in Vitebsk were displayed in 2012 at the exhibition 'Artists of the Parisian School Originally from Belarus'. At the same time, following a decision by Belgazprombank's shareholders, two graphic works by the artist were donated to the National Art Museum of Belarus. In 2014, Chagall's works from the collection of Belgazprombank were again presented at the exhibition 'Ten Centuries of Belarusian Art', and in 2017 — at the exhibition 'Dottori, Chagall, Soutine, Khodasevich-Léger. Energy, Expression, Symbolism and Dreams. A Look at the Art of Italy in the First Half of the Twentieth Century'. Thus, Belarusian spectators have had a unique opportunity to familiarise themselves step by step with the vast and multi-faceted creative heritage of our outstanding countryman.

By Veniamin **Mikheev**





The Bay of Angels, 1960

# NEW DIMENSION



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