

MAGAZINE FOR YOU

No. 12 (1011), 2017
Беларусь. Belarus

BELARUS

Politics. Economy. Culture

ISSN 2415-394X



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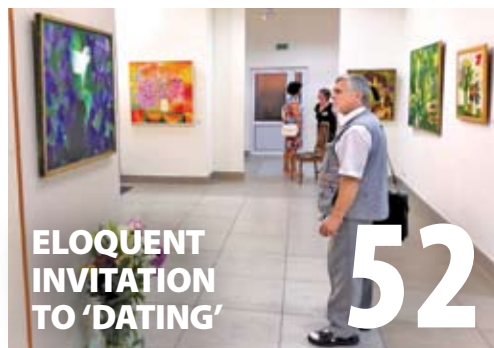
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Беларусь. Belarus

Monthly magazine

No. 12 (1011), 2017

Published since 1930

State Registration Certificate of mass medium No. 8 dated March 2nd, 2009, issued by the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus

Founders:

Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus

'SB' newspaper editorial office

Belvnesheconombank

Editor: Viktor Kharkov

Executive Secretary:

Valentina Zhdanovich

Design and Layout by

Vadim Kondrashov

Nadezhda Ponkratova

Беларусь. Belarus is published in Belarusian, Chinese, English, Polish and Spanish.

Distributed in 50 countries of the world. Final responsibility for factual accuracy or interpretation rests with the authors of the publications. Should any article of **Беларусь. Belarus** be used, the reference to the magazine is obligatory.

The magazine does not bear responsibility for the contents of advertisements.

Publisher:

'SB' editorial office

This magazine has been printed at Republican Unitary Enterprise 'Belarusian Printing House Publishing Co'.

79 Nezavisimosti Ave.,
220013 Minsk, Belarus

Order No. 3261

Total circulation — 2,313 copies (including 755 in English).

Write us to the address:

11 Kiselyov Str.,
220029 Minsk, Belarus
Tel.: +375 (17) 290-62-24,
290-66-45
Tel./Fax: +375 (17) 290-68-31

E-mail: belmag@sb.by

Subscription index in Belpochta catalogue — 74977

For future foreign subscribers to 'Belarus' magazine, apply to 'MK-Periodica' agency.

E-mail: info@periodicals.ru

Telephone in Minsk:
+375 (17) 227-09-10

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Meeting time halfway

The country is marching into tomorrow, relying on its new principles of independence and sovereignty: its determining characteristics. It's time to sum up the results of the year, with politicians,

economists and sociologists having their say. We should also assess events in our own life, seeing how these fit with the global footstep of the planet. We shouldn't be remiss in making personal plans, setting our own goals, just as in business. It's the best way to avoid wasting precious time. As we all know, the hours march on. If we set clear objectives, there's a better chance of success.

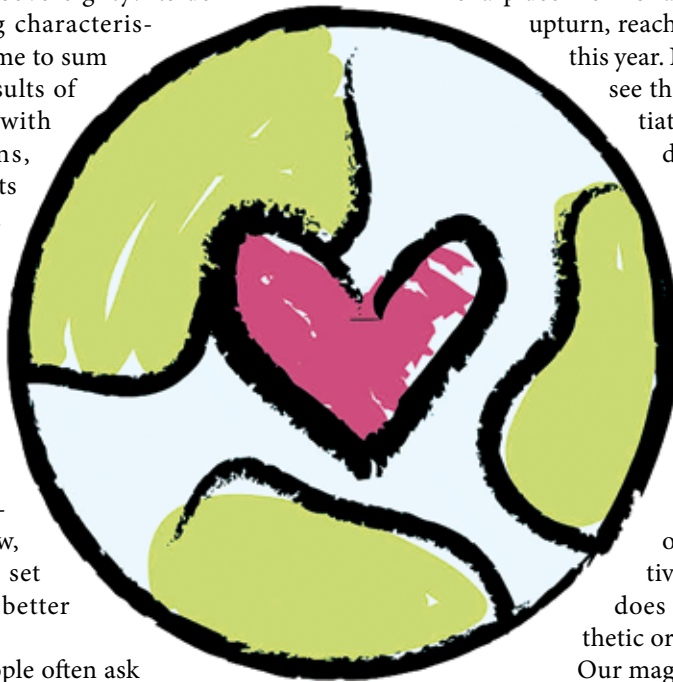
At this time of year, people often ask 'What are your plans for the future?' There's nothing unusual in planning ahead, either by a few days or weeks. However, long-term planning is another thing entirely: thinking of where you'd like to be in five or ten years' time. It's so difficult to make one's life run according to a detailed programme; after all, fate often interferes! Nonetheless, there are advantages to living with goals in sight. In many countries, this logic governs policy planning and detailed strategy development for a lengthy period. For example, an agreement on socio-economic cooperation is the major document of recent negotiations between Belarus and Kazakhstan, held in Minsk. This covers the period until 2026 and forms a strategy of strengthening Belarusian-Kazakh partnerships, offering new opportunities in developing interaction between our two states, across a whole range of areas.

The official visit of the President of Kazakhstan to Minsk took place against an optimistic background. After a recent, sharp decline in bilateral trade, figures have taken an upturn, reaching almost half a billion Dollars this year. Nevertheless, our leaders want to see this double, at least. During negotiations, they primarily focused on discussing mutually beneficial aspects of collaboration. Find out more in **Determining Prospects**.

I've been wondering what is meant by a person being 'cultured'. Naturally, education is important, but there is more to achieving an understanding of culture than formal learning. Those without prestigious diplomas can demonstrate intelligence and sensitivity, while an extensive education does not necessarily bring a sympathetic or spiritually-aware soul.

Our magazine offers news of various cultural events, particularly, how the rich creative heritage of the National Academic Theatre continues, after many decades: the theatre is now 85 years old! Read **Live Theatre for Spectators** and **Comedy Set in the Home** to explore further.

I'd like to congratulate you on the arrival of 2018 and hope that time will justify our optimism. Let's step forward to meet it, with confidence and a positive attitude.



VIKTOR KHARKOV

Best Games ever

Minsk is no novice in hosting major international sports tournaments, boasting considerable experience in holding significant political and professional events. In 2019, it will host the 2nd European Games. On meeting the President of the European Olympic Committee, Janez Kocijančič, the Belarusian Head of State guaranteed that the event would be held at the highest level.



"You have strong support in Belarus. You can always rely on our country, especially on the eve of a major and landmark event. Not long ago, our representatives reported on preparations for the 2nd European Games. I want to assure you that everything we've promised will be modern-

ised, built and tested by mid-2019. You'll have no problems, regarding accommodation or diet. No problems will arise regarding athletes, coaches, specialists or functionaries of Olympic committees. We'll do this in a Belarus-like manner: sincerely and openly," Mr. Lukashenko said.

The Belarusian President assured his guest that these will be the best European Games, since the whole Belarusian nation will live through this 'Olympics'. Janez Kocijančič noted that he'd no doubts regarding these plans. 'You're among the world leaders who always keep their word. If you promise that everything will be organised well, then it will be so... We're very satisfied with these preparations, which are following the time schedule. I'm convinced that the European Games in Minsk will be the best in history.'

► Security deserves special attention

Belarus' Foreign Minister, Vladimir Makei, noted, at the 24th meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Vienna, the continuing crisis of European security. He believes that polarisation is growing, trust is eroding, and challenges are multiplying.

"What should be done to stop this trend and bring about lasting stability, and what is the role of the OSCE? Firstly, we need to send a strong political message that the OSCE does matter as a unique forum for inclusive security dialogue. We should fully utilise its potential, to curb the risk of military confrontation in Europe. Belarus favours the

development of a new conventional arms control regime, adapted to current realities. We support ongoing structured dialogue on current and future risks to security and stand ready to further contribute," asserted the Minister.

Mr. Makei believes that the role of the OSCE should be strengthened in building partnerships to combat a range of complex transnational threats and challenges, such as terrorism, cybercrime, human and drug trafficking and migration.

The Minister mentioned the initiative of the President of Belarus to launch the new 'Helsinki Process' — aimed at overcoming contradictions and mistrust in relations between countries in our common Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian space.



► Transit to become more attractive

House of Representatives' deputies ratify Belarusian-Chinese intergovernmental agreement on international cargo transportations and cooperation for Silk Road Economic Belt concept

The Minister of Transport and Communications of Belarus, Anatoly Sivak, who has presented the draft law, notes that the agreement aims to strengthen collaboration in the transport-logistics sphere while promoting competitiveness for the international transport route between Europe and Asia.

In line with the agreement, countries will encourage enterprises and organisations to raise the efficiency of international transit while facilitating multi-modal transportation to third countries.

Participating states will aim to simplify and reduce procedures, using the declarative principle to speed up cargo movement through customs. Mr. Sivak notes that synchronisation of customs clearance and completion of paperwork will speed up processes at the border, making cargo transit via Belarus more attractive.



Thankful to hosts

November session of CSTO Collective Security Council crowns Belarus' year chairing the CSTO

Accepting the honour of the chairmanship, Minsk, last year, formulated its priorities: strengthening the CSTO's influence within the inter-

national arena, enhancing the system of prompt response to crisis situations, improving the operative readiness of the CSTO's collective forces, and implementing additional measures to counteract international terrorism and illegal drug trafficking, as well as providing a stable migration situation.

Summarising the year's results, specialists assert the development of the CSTO under Belarus' effective chairmanship. All planned events have been held: meetings, negotiations and joint decisions at various working levels. Not all received media coverage, partly due to the need for confidentiality and security.

However, the practical part included the following: 'Combat Brotherhood-2017', 'Search-2017', 'Interaction-2017', 'Enduring Brotherhood-2017', and 'Dushanbe-Anti-terror 2017' exercise. These, and similar events, aimed to enhance our military interaction, not only to protect against emergencies but to battle terrorism and extremism, drug trafficking and illegal migration, while providing information security. The efficiency of joint operations fighting drug trafficking has been apparent. The 'Canal-Volga River Boundary' operation saw 312kg of narcotic substances withdrawn on the territory of Belarus last year, and seventy-nine crimes connected with illegal drug trafficking detected. Similar events are held regularly and are of transboundary character, so their efficiency is measured in weightier figures.

2017 has been intensive in strengthening the collective security of CSTO member states, and our momentum should continue. Opening the session, Mr. Lukashenko expressed confidence that the Minsk summit would facilitate this. "Belarus is a consistent supporter of vigorous cooperation within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, supporting its activity and stronger authority within the international arena. I'm convinced that the current session will bring new impetus to CSTO development and will demonstrate positive dynamics in solving issues of providing common security."

The presidents of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan met behind closed doors, discussing the latest trends internationally,

and measures to strengthen CSTO collective security. For the plenary session, a wider range of issues came under discussion, in a meeting lasting almost two hours. Mr. Lukashenko commented, "I note with satisfaction our shared views regarding modern threats faced by CSTO member states, and the efficiency of our chosen strategy, aimed at their minimisation. Systematic work con-

and beyond, that we, the closest states in the world, enjoy open dialogue. The joint declaration, dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the Collective Security Treaty and the 15th anniversary of the CSTO, can be viewed as the major final document of the summit. This sums up the results of our common work. Nevertheless, other adopted documents are of no less importance. They fix common views of CSTO member states on important problems: from the Syrian



Belarus is a consistent supporter of vigorous cooperation within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, supporting its activity and stronger authority within the international arena

tinues, through our joint efforts, aimed at enhancing the CSTO's international authority and expanding its range of supporters. Important forms of foreign political co-ordination are being developed and we've managed to secure a common approach towards information security, bringing basic elements of the system of crisis response into compliance with advanced technical requirements. Particular steps have been made regarding peacekeeping. Meanwhile, we've prepared legislation governing CSTO partnership with international organisations and third countries. Much has been achieved in 2017 — a jubilee year for the organisation. I'm convinced that further joint efforts to strengthen the CSTO will preserve its progressive and dynamic character. We want everyone to see, in our own states

crisis and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to the provision of information security. Other decisions include the shift of chairmanship obligations from Belarus to Kazakhstan.

Like Minsk a year ago, Astana is now formulating its priorities. The President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, details these as the expansion of instruments of interaction for CSTO member states in the military sphere, organisation of practical military-technical collaboration of CSTO member states, participation of the organisation in the formation of an international system of global counteraction against terrorism, joint response measures towards cyber-crime threats, and the enhancement of measures to battle illegal drug trafficking.

By Vasily Kharitonov



Determining prospects

Belarus and Kazakhstan sign agreement on socio-economic cooperation until 2026

The agreement on socio-economic cooperation between Belarus and Kazakhstan is the major final document of official negotiations between the presidents of our

two countries. It covers the period until 2026 and forms a strategy of strengthening Belarusian-Kazakh relations, while opening up new opportunities in interaction across all areas.

Alexander Lukashenko believes the official visit by Nursultan Nazarbayev to Minsk will considerably enhance

the level of inter-state interaction. "We support each other everywhere and always. There's nothing closer on the planet than the three states which have created the Eurasian Economic Union. We should strengthen this friendship and our collaboration, forming a powerful economic basis.

We're ready for this," noted Mr. Lukashenko.

Nursultan Nazarbayev assessed our 25-year cooperation (dating from the moment of our diplomatic relations being established), saying, "Over these years, we've created an economic and political basis for friendship and cooperation, primarily by your efforts... Our relations have today entered a new strategic level."

The official visit of the President of Kazakhstan to Belarus took place against a rather optimistic economic background. After a sharp decline, mutual trade has begun dynamically increasing, to reach almost \$500 million. The heads of state believe this could easily double again, so negotiations have primarily tackled areas of interaction.

Mr. Lukashenko wishes to see more mutual investment into production, with an expanded sales market for goods and services. He suggests creating our own transnational corporations within the EAEU. Our governments have already seen some progress.

Integration of large national projects, implemented in both countries, also have good prospects. Astana is setting up an international financial centre while Belarus has the Great Stone Industrial Park. "Mutual participation in these projects should speed up and reinforce the integration of our countries into the world economy," noted Mr. Lukashenko.

The Astana Centre and the Great Stone Park were initially invented as supporting points along the Silk Road Economic Belt. In this context, the initiative of Mr. Nazarbayev to mutually supplement our two states' potential in transport, logistics and transit activities is topical.

Minsk also suggests that Astana unite efforts in building a digital economy, developing space technologies. Belarus is ready to share its expertise in creating unmanned aerial

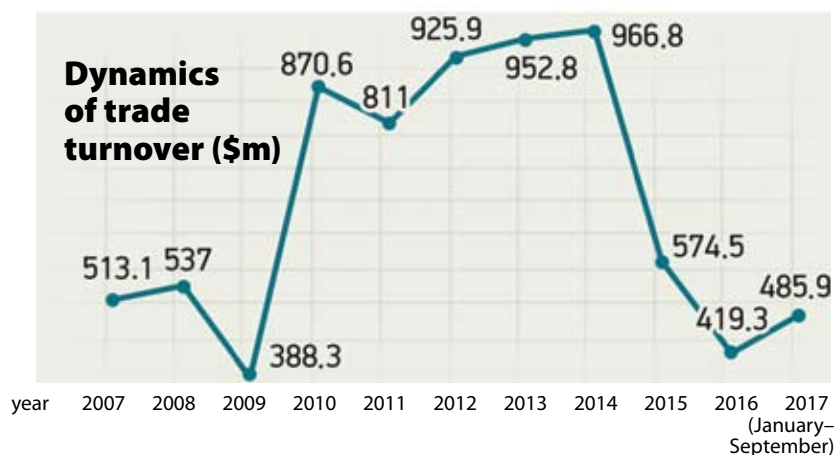
BELARUS — KAZAKHSTAN: trade-economic cooperation



Republic of Belarus

Republic of Kazakhstan

On September 18th, 2017, Belarus and Kazakhstan celebrated 25th anniversary since the establishment of diplomatic relations. In January–September 2017, the trade turnover between the two countries has increased by 64.8 percent compared to the same period of the previous year. Kazakhstan is ranked 11th among Belarus' largest trade partners.



vehicles and agrarian innovations, and is happy to share experience in housing and road construction. Our industrial cooperation supports increased localisation of joint manufacturing in Kazakhstan. Collaboration in science, education and medicine is also important, with Mr. Lukashenko determining the position of Belarus clearly and comprehensively. He noted, "Kazakhstan is a strategic partner for us. We highly appreciate our close ties and aim for productive interaction across all areas. I guarantee that, if we agree on particular issues, we'll meet our obligations. You won't ever

have any problems with us, as has always been the case."

The President of Belarus believes that the most important result of talks is their ability to drive forward a new stage in bilateral cooperation, focusing on innovations and high technologies. Mr. Lukashenko stressed, "Existing bilateral agreements will enable us to move to a new technological level."

Mr. Nazarbayev agreed, commenting that both states believe in developing partnerships for the sake of citizen wellbeing. He views this as being a vital motivation in our work.

By Vladimir Khromov



When mutual interests coincide

Belarusian-Kazakh Business Forum gathers around 400 participants in Minsk — an unprecedented event

Everyone present was keen to develop contacts, enjoying a wide range of spheres of interaction.

Speaking at the forum, the First Deputy Prime Minister of Belarus, Vasily Matyushkevsky, announced Belarus' eagerness to liaise with Kazakhstan to promote the move to a digital economy. Digital transit corridors are planned, with Belarus and Kazakhstan aiming to reach \$1 billion of trade turnover by 2020.

Our two counties have been interacting fruitfully in the industrial sphere, with quarry and mining machinery assembled in Karaganda. Belarusian tractors, grain and forage harvesters, as well as motors and bailing machines, are also

assembled in Semey, Kostanay, Pavlodar and Uralsk, in addition to various types of communal, firefighting and attachable agricultural machinery.

Of course, more can always be achieved. Several major contracts were signed at the forum, including BelAZ's agreement with AstanaBelAZServis to supply twenty-five quarry vehicles to Kazakhstan, with a load capacity of 90 and 130 tonnes: a contract worth almost a quarter of a million US Dollars. Gomselmash is to supply 500 assembly kits for harvesters next year to Kazakhstan's AgroMash Holding, while Minsk Automobile Works is to deliver a hundred assembly kits for heavy-duty dump trucks and communal equipment to Hyundai Trans Auto. Meanwhile, Minsk Tractor Works is to supply two thousand units

to the Belarusian Tractor trade house. Of course, this is far from an exhaustive list, following meetings between business circles from Belarus and Kazakhstan, in Minsk.

Participants of the business forum have their say

Yerlan Khairov, Vice Minister of Investments and Development of Kazakhstan:

Over the last nine months, trade-economic relations between our countries have been showing evident growth. This isn't the complete potential of our cooperation, but it's a pleasing trend. It's beneficial for Belarusian companies to work in Kazakhstan, gaining access to Central Asia and the Chinese market. Investments from Belarus are highly popular in our country, as are Belarusian technologies.

Din Kim, Chairman of the Board of Directors of AgroMash Holding:

Our company is liaising with partners from various states. However, we're enjoying the closest interaction with Belarusians. Localisation of Belarusian goods in Kazakhstan has risen from 40 to 50 percent. Since 2007, we've been producing Belarusian agricultural machinery and have already supplied more than three thousand units to the Kazakh market. The current forum is a good opportunity to reinforce our collaboration and launch new projects.

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

We meet quite often. Several months ago, Astana hosted the 'Made in Belarus' exhibition and a business forum involving prime ministers. The current forum is special, being the largest to date. It's great that it took place during the visit of the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, to Belarus. It's a very important signal for business, showing support and a serious attitude.

By Alexey Fedosov

► Fine clothes help to impress

The parade of athletes is always among the most anticipated elements of the opening of the Olympic Games, with teams wishing to appear stylish

Fashion designers do their best to invent uniforms both original and fashionable, while underlining our national identity. The costume for the 2018 Winter Olympiad, in South Korean PyeongChang, has already been chosen, designed by Lyudmila Labkova. Together with Bellegprom Concern, she has created an elegantly casual collection, in light-grey tones, accented with red. The T-shirts have details on the waist, while the suit jackets are embellished on the shoulders. According to Ms. Labkova, this underlines the athletic figure of athletes while motifs also act for good luck.

“I chose ornaments which symbolise motherhood, luck and success. Motifs in Belarusian culture have very clear meanings and, in this particular case, I wanted to use those bringing luck to our national Olympic team. As far as colours are concerned, grey is closest in colour to the Belarusian winter, while the snowflake pattern also fits well,” explains Ms. Labkova.

Work on the Olympic collection has been intense, with samples sewn

within two weeks. Our best light industry enterprises have helped create the parade uniform: Komintern, Svi-tanak, Eliz and Belwest. The lovely accessories for the women’s costume are an indispensable part of the collection, produced by Galanteya Factory.

Lyudmila’s collection (together with other variants) was praised by the President. At the instruction of Mr. Lukashenko, all the designs submitted are to be sewn, hitting major shops countrywide in time for the Games.



► Quickly and comfortably

Two-deck electric trains — assembled in Belarus — launched on Moscow streets

Eleven red-coloured electric Russian Aeroexpress trains assembled at Stadler Minsk JSC have become one of the most successful investment projects, with four of the new trains servicing the route from Kiev Railway Station to Vnukovo Airport by late 2017. Another seven will be launched soon, connecting Poveletsky Railway Station and Domodedovo Airport.

The General Director of Stadler Rail, Peter Spuhler, is calling the contract with Russia a ‘breakthrough’ since it not only enables the company to join the Russian railway market but to produce ‘a unique train, regarding technical characteristics and passenger capacity’. “The contract is an important stage for Stadler,” he notes.

Russia’s Transport Minister, Maxim Sokolov, comments that renovation of Aeroexpress’ fleet is timed to coincide with the 2018 World Football Championship. No doubt, Fanipol-produced trains will be much appreciated by Muscovites and foreign guests, owing to their business class carriages, free Wi-Fi, sockets and screens, and comfortable seats. The trains can travel at up to 160km/h. At present, the plant produces the longest trams in the CIS (34m long ‘Chizhik’ trams for St. Petersburg), while working on trams for the Czech Republic and Hungary. Moreover, Stadler Minsk is to manufacture ten trains for the Minsk metro.

► Stimulus to rise to higher level

Minsk National Airport receives Eurasian award in sphere of regional transportation

Over the last few years, Minsk airport has significantly improved, being completely reconstructed and modernised, gaining modern rest areas, and new cafes. It welcomed thousands of participants and guests to the 2014 IIHF World

Championships and now lays confident claim to being a major regional transit hub.

The aspiration of Belarus’ major air forces were highly assessed by experts. Minsk National Airport has received a Eurasian Award for 2017, in the nomination ‘Top 5 Best Airports’, showing its improvement. The award was bestowed at the 7th Regional Aviation of Russia and CIS international conference — the largest such meeting of professionals within the CIS.

Orienting points for 'roadmap'

After taking part in the CSTO Heads of State Summit, the President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, stayed in Minsk, to attend negotiations with Alexander Lukashenko, at Independence Palace, discussing bilateral interaction

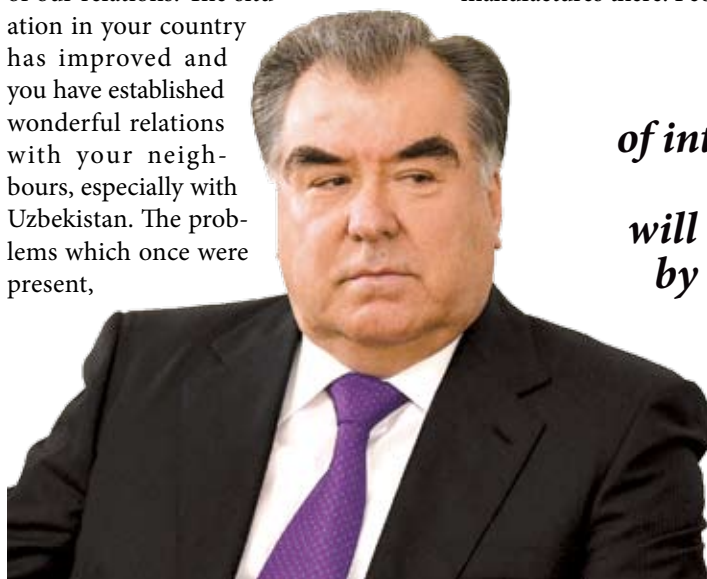
As always, economy was high on the agenda during the negotiations and the President of Belarus suggested the following algorithm of actions, "I have been giving much consideration to the direction for further development of our relations. The situation in your country has improved and you have established wonderful relations with your neighbours, especially with Uzbekistan. The problems which once were present,

especially in transit issues, no longer exist. At least, they've been removed. I think we need a true foundation for our relations, in the shape of the economic sector. We've had many meetings with the leadership and business circles of Afghanistan. However difficult the situation may be there, still this is the country where 30 million people live. They ask us to help them with technology and manufactures there. People want to live.

The war will end sooner or later. And I thought that if we set up such enterprises in Tajikistan, Afghanistan (with the participation of our people), we will be able to do it fast. You could be a good consultant and guide for us because you are best informed of the situation in Afghanistan, as I see it. It would be a good job if shared between the three countries."

Mr. Lukashenko said that he plans to send a delegation to Dushanbe compris-

New development strategy of interaction between our two states under new conditions will be set up by 'roadmap', outlined by Intergovernmental Commission on Trade-Economic Cooperation



President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon

ing of heads of Belarusian largest companies which manufacture goods that are in demand in Tajikistan. "We'll try to set up joint ventures in Tajikistan, working both on the Tajik market and on those of third countries. We should discuss this idea and give relevant instructions... I, like the whole Belarusian nation, would like to see Tajikistan grow stronger. If we can somehow facilitate this, after this visit, believe me, we'll be able to do much."

Emomali Rahmon perceived these initiatives with big interest and suggested to promptly set up work referring to these plans, "The reserves for opportunities of which you're talking about are huge. I believe we'll give the instruction to the inter-governmental commission to conduct the session and study all the details already in January-February."

Belarusian-Tajik joint projects have been also high on the agenda during the presidents' talks in an expanded format. Mr. Lukashenko started the conversation, stressing the primary importance of economic priorities, "I'm convinced that strong economy serves as a guarantee of the country's security and the best shield from external threats: terrorism, extremism and other negative modern phenomena."

Minsk is ready to lend its shoulder to a friendly country in strengthening its economic potential and the basis for this has been already laid. The city of Hisor has a production facility assembling machinery of Minsk Tractor Works and Bobruiskagromash. The President also suggested thinking about the expansion of the range of goods which are produced here. Tajikistan needs communal, construction and firefighting technique and our specialists are able to manufacture it. In total, the idea is to set up a multi-functional complex (on the premises of the existing production) that will produce and offer guarantee and after-sale services for a wide range of machinery.

One more reputable joint project is the equipment of Dushanbe public transport with an automated system of traffic control and payment, developed in Belarus. Mr. Lukashenko suggests



Probably, our Tajik partners will also be interested in our latest development — an electric bus which is currently being trialled on Minsk streets. They already have an invitation to view the unique project

further developing bilateral interaction in transport sphere relying on this starting point. Our specialists boast good experience in manufacturing buses, trolley buses and communal vehicles and actively renewing Dushanbe desperately needs this technique. Moreover, its reliability and high quality is proven by buyers from many countries. Probably, our Tajik partners will also be interested in our latest development — an electric bus which is currently being trialled on Minsk streets. They already have an invitation to view the unique project.

Hydraulic power industry and mining industry are the branches on which Tajikistan is focusing its strategy of economic development. We can produce practically the whole range of machinery for this. Moreover, Belarusian specialists have already demonstrated high mastery during the construction of the mining and processing facility in the neighbouring Turkmenistan. Their

experience can be also used on the Tajik land. We have also good achievements in power engineering and Belarusian and Tajik specialists also view education and pharmaceuticals as promising areas for collaboration.

Mr. Lukashenko and Mr. Rahmon have agreed to hold in spring a large-scale exhibition of Belarusian goods and a major business forum in Tajikistan, inviting representatives of Tajik business circles, as well as entrepreneurs from the neighbouring states: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and others. A corresponding instruction on the preparation of the business forum was given by the President to ministers of industry, agriculture and food. Meanwhile, a new development strategy between our two states under new conditions will be set up by 'roadmap', outlined by the Inter-governmental Commission on Trade-Economic Cooperation.

By Denis **Alexandrov**



Professionally made

It has taken five years to establish the launch of Geely vehicles in Belarus, an investment treaty having been signed in April 2012



Just two months ago, Atlas models came into production, under special Presidential decree. Alexander Lukashenko recently visited the launch of the major assembly line, chatting with employees, and sharing his pleasure in his old dream being fulfilled.

The President's dream of Belarus boasting its own factory making passenger cars began long before construction works commenced near Borisov, during the early days of his presidency. The facility demonstrates the country's intellectual potential, making a worthy addition to Belarus' production of powerful tractors, heavy duty dump trucks, trailers, buses and trolley buses.

Of course, our gratitude goes to our Chinese partners, who have helped make the factory a reality. President Lukashenko has thanked the President of China, Xi Jinping, for his support in realising the joint project, with its impressive results.

The President took part in the opening ceremony, viewing the whole assembly line: from the production

of car bodies to the finished product. The President was keen to view each detail of the production process, praising the line as impressive. Those eager to see high-tech production with their own eyes should pay a visit to BelGee, where the precise movements of robots dazzle in their perfection.

The President asked about marketing calculations and prospects, saying, "It's not enough just to manufacture; selling is vital."

The factory should be able to produce 60,000 vehicles annually, within five years, with growth taking into account existing agreements with Belarusian and Russian dealers. SKD, established slightly before, is seeing steady demand, and has laid good foundations for the future. Within two months of testing, it produced 437 vehicles, with many already destined for their new owners.

We now have a truly Belarusian automobile, with the help of Chinese partners. Almost a third of components are supplied locally, but the goal is to raise this to half in 2018, helping drive forward development of domestic production of automobile components. Even more precious is the laying of the foundation for our own school of passenger automobile building. The President has strongly recommended that the enterprise set up its own design bureau.

Word-for-word

President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko:

BelGee Plant is an example of the state promoting the implementation of potential. In no other country does the Government and, especially the President (of course, it's my job) pay so much attention to employment. Yes, jobs are being created; however, it's important for 'the cow to go to the hay rather than the hay to the cow'. We'll bring Zhodino into order, helping with housing and creating new jobs, for you and your children. This is your land and you know it well. My policy is to do everything well, to ensure employment for you and your children. In order to receive a good salary, a good education or skilled hands are needed. I've toured the assembly line and watched our young workers. I see that these people have come to earn money and are pleased at having such a clean and neat workplace. Most feel like this. These people will always have money and we'll always help such people.

* * *

With the help of our Chinese friends — it's very likely that it will be a present from Xi Jinping [the President of the People's Republic of China] — we'll construct the National Stadium of Belarus. I've asked my friend Xi Jinping to build it with Chinese flair, enabling everyone, not only Belarusians, to see that it's an example of friendship with the Chinese nation. We're now choosing the site.

As he chatted with the factory's employees, Mr. Lukashenko clearly stipulated the components of a successful project, the first being quality: a condition guaranteed by the President's promise to ensure thorough control. How can it be otherwise, when the success of the enterprise is his dear wish? Mr. Lukashenko has suggested extending the warranty period to five years. Only a few world manufacturers offer four years of warranty (as are currently offered by BelGee), so the recommendation is welcome.

Servicing is the second most important aspect, as the President asserts. A network of branded stations is needed, to allow prompt service countrywide.

The third condition refers to the promotion of produce. One young employee asked whether the state might help in buying some volume of the cars produced. Such questions usually refer to the desire for state support of young families, regarding the construction of housing, kindergartens and schools. Naturally, the state will support sales where it can, stimulating via leasing, loans, and various other instruments.

The factory aims to produce more than 60,000 vehicles per year, even doubling this figure if it secures a foothold. It surely boasts bright prospects. Before the President departed, our Chinese partners presented him with a Geely electric car for testing. Who knows! It may be a forerunner of future joint projects, using the most advanced technologies.

By Oleg Bogomazov





To benefit business

Decree on entrepreneurship development drastically changes mechanisms of interaction between state bodies and businesses

The key idea is simple: the state gives individual entrepreneurs and enterprises more freedom while simultaneously enhancing the responsibility of businesses towards society and the budget. Work began in this direction in February, when Alexander Lukashenko tasked authorities, saying, “Let’s not hamper small businesses but help them to develop.” He called for aiding entrepreneurs, rather

than burdening them with unnecessary demands, and punishing them.

After Decree #7, ‘On Entrepreneurial Development’, came into force, many businessmen and company heads feel more confident. They can now follow clear rules, defying the view that running a business is risky and difficult. The decree simplifies conditions of management, helping emancipate business initiatives and encouraging self-employment while creating new jobs, which are in great demand at present.

Several measures help businesses operate without needing to comply with numerous inspections: the notification principle to launch a business, a moratorium on new taxes, elimination of unnecessary administrative procedures, and reduction of fire and sanitary epidemiological requirements. This should improve our country’s position in the “Doing Business” international rankings, which is likely to be appreciated by foreign investors.

**The Chairman of the Presidium
of the Republican Confederation
of Entrepreneurship, Vladimir Karyagin:**



This decree is a 'good platform for developing business initiative in the country'. It's an address that is sure to inspire enterprising people: work and create! The state is on your side. As a rule, foreign and domestic investors take such documents seriously.

Sergey Novitsky, a businessman and a member of the Council for Entrepreneurial Development, says, "It's important for people to stop being afraid of opening their own businesses. This psychological barrier should be broken. The decree will help solve problems of self-employment and emancipation of business activity."

The Economy Ministry believes the document will show results as early as next year. The strategic goal is to increase the share of small and medium-sized businesses in the economy, from 27 to 40 percent within the coming three years.

**Inna Kustova, Director of Association of
Private Business Assistance — Edinstvo
(Unity), Gomel:**

At the moment, Decree #7 is a major step forward: the leg is on the move, but the step has not yet been made.



To understand the value of the document, we need to see how it will be applied in practice, for instance, in simplifying sanitary and fire regulations. We need to study the addendums and the documents adopted on the basis of the decree. After all, what do businesses want? A clear set of sanitary and fire regulations and norms, as well as a clear set of fines for violations (a set scale in-

***Decree is a 'good platform for developing
business initiative in the country'.
It's an address that is sure to inspire
enterprising people: work and create!***

stead of the fine being in the hands of an inspector). We want businesses to cease being afraid of inspectors, so they can work without worrying. The legislative act should be 'armour' against human factors. No additional internal instructions or regulations are needed. If you know and follow the rules, then you can develop, rather than being beholden to how your work is interpreted by others.

**Alexander Malykha, Head of the
Entrepreneurship Department, of
Brest Regional Executive Committee's
Economic Committee:**

One of the most important points of the decree is the permission for 95 percent of businesses to start their work immediately after notification. This will affect already existing enterprises which might wish to expand their activity. In short, a company can apply and then launch work the next month. Of course, it may take a month or two to put all documents in order. However, each firm or entrepreneur will be able to earn money during that time.



Previously, to launch a business, all agencies (firefighting, sanitary, veterinary and others) needed to make an inspection, which took 6-18 months. As a result, the company was unable to earn an income, and employees lost money. People weren't receiving salaries and the state failed to receive taxes, on which our budget relies.

The decree produces obvious benefit to the state. More enterprises ensure more tax income and more jobs. This year, over 600 small and medium-

sized enterprises opened in the region and even more are expected in 2018. In addition, the decree is attractive for investment: the country's rating is growing, which is important for foreign investors.

**Olga Bashlakova, PhD in Economics,
Head of the Department of Finance
and Credit, at Gomel's
Skorina State
University:**

It's important to understand and guide people, showing that Decree #7 is not the final point in supporting entrepreneurship. It's only the basis for our future legislation to develop entrepreneurial initiative. For example, it focuses on small businesses, which need 'greenhouse' conditions: comprehensive support and minimal prohibitions and punishments. Small businesses help solve the problem of self-employment, creating jobs without budget financing, while producing tax revenue. Any serious fees imposed can lead to bankruptcy and closure. That's why I'm talking about 'greenhouse' conditions.



Advisory centres should be established at our executive committees and administrations — to ensure local authorities not only register, punish or regulate but also consult the population on issues of new business launching. Establishment of venture funds with state guarantees are also needed to support interesting business ideas. These are the fruitful sprouts of entrepreneurial development, which can and will emerge as a result of the decree's implementation.

► A clear trajectory

Government reviews strategy of science and technology development until 2040

The strategy draws on proposals from the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly and the Presidential Administration, as well as from state authorities, and various institutions and organisations, including academic. The programme is divided into three stages (2018-2020, 2020-2030 and 2030-2040) aiming to raise the share of innovative goods in the total volume of production, from today's 16 percent to 25 percent.

The Chairman of the Presidium of the National Academy of Sciences, Vladimir



Gusakov, has no doubt that a clear trajectory of development requires strict orienting points, and goals, as well as indicators of success. "All this is being laid in the strategy," he explains. "Financing of science is being expanded but, more importantly, we're moving to a new stage of industrialisation. The world is on the threshold of a new industrial revolution, entitled 'Industry 4.0', based on intellectualisation, informatisation, and a digital economy. We're relying on our current manufacturing, specialisation and large industry but we need to keep up with global developments in IT, artificial intellect and robotics. Our country shouldn't lag behind; we have good potential, well-equipped science, and well-trained personnel, with a high qualification level."



► Green light for high-tech

Belarus lacks deposits of non-ferrous metals but isn't held back in developing its information technologies, becoming an IT-oriented economy. Thanks to the High-Tech Park, which unites over 150 residents and over 25,000 IT specialists, the dream is becoming a reality.

Belarus boasts a developed pharmaceuticals sector, with success in bio- and nano-technologies, involving about fifty organisations. In 2019, the

first block of the Belarusian nuclear power station will be commissioned, enabling the country to receive sufficient volumes of electricity to automate production. Meanwhile, the Great Stone Chinese-Belarusian Industrial Park will soon be complete, housing high-tech production facilities.

The High-Tech Park is annually increasing its volumes and, this year, may achieve \$1 billion in export of computer services. Residents of the High-Tech Park have entered new markets: Japan, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Exports to Singapore have risen ten-fold, and those to Denmark five-fold, while exports to the Netherlands are up 2.5-fold. According to Alexander Martinkevich, the Deputy Director of the HTP Administration, the HTP is working to create venture funds, and conditions for the attraction of large international corporations to Belarus. "Our country is known globally but has some way to go. Belarus is positioned as one of the largest IT clusters in Europe, but much work lies ahead regarding worldwide status. Another important task is the promotion of the Belarusian IT industry abroad, presenting our business potential and IT investment opportunities," he says.

► In line with estimations

Minsk named among top thirty greenest cities in Europe — ahead of Moscow, Rome, Vienna and Paris

German urban researcher Philipp Gärtner has been studying the greenest European capitals, comparing forty-two major cities via images from the Sentinel-2 satellite, focusing on a radius of eight kilometres from the official centre of each city. His programme has analysed green zones, creating a 'green index' of NDVI (Normalised Difference Vegetation Index).

Interestingly, the largest capitals tend to have least greenery, while those on the coast are in the middle of the list. Among those with over a million in population, Kiev leads, occupying 15th place, with 0.389 points. Minsk is close behind: having 0.2718 points, ranked 26th — ahead of Berlin, Vienna, Amsterdam and Rome.

Moscow (0.1426) is at the bottom of the list (37th) but is ahead of London, Lisbon and Paris — although the Russian capital's population is several times greater. Greek Athens closes the list.

Midea Group's ambitious plans



Microwave oven production line at Midea-Horizont

Midea Group Corporation is a pioneer among Chinese investors into the Belarusian economy. It arrived on our market a decade ago, with a solid manufacturing project: microwave oven production with Horizont Holding. From a starting position of 150,000 units per year, they now achieve over a million, and aim to produce two million units annually before long.

Their production of water coolers and boilers, opened last year, is also gradually gaining momentum. Moreover, prospects are being studied to manufacture other household appliances, particularly, refrigerators and washing machines.

On meeting the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, the Head of the Midea Group Corporation, Fang Hongbo, told him about these plans and Mr. Lukashenko promised support for new ideas, saying, "You're always welcome here. We've always paid great attention to cooperation between Belarus and the People's Republic of China, and your company provides testimony to this. It's great that the company intends to expand its presence in our country. We're ready to support any of your projects. You've invested your funds and technologies, promoting exports and creating new jobs. We welcome such investors. We're waiting for them, and we're ready to continue working with them and with those who've decided to invest their money in the economy of Belarus."

The activity of the Midea Group in Belarus completely meets our strategic



Fang Hongbo:
We have received good results and laid a good foundation for the expansion of our presence in Belarus

vision for the development of the private sector of the economy. The investor creates high-tech jobs where goods are produced which are in demand both today and in the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, high level of political mutual understanding between our two

countries and sincere friendship between our heads guarantees successful business interaction. Mr. Lukashenko commented on the long-term agreement with the President of China, Xi Jinping, that no closed topics exist for Chinese partners in Belarus.

Undoubtedly, businesses appreciate such openness. Fang Hongbo summarised the result of our 10-year joint work, saying, "We've received good results and laid a good foundation for the expansion of our presence in Belarus. This testifies to strengthening of cooperation between China and Belarus, including as part of the Belt and Road project... We also plan to position Belarus as a basis from which we will, in future, cover all CIS states and will develop the production of microwave ovens and water boilers. Then, we plan to launch the manufacture of such household appliances as refrigerators and washing machines."

Midea Group's prospect investments are approximately assessed at \$0.5 billion, with total annual production output of various produce being up to 1 billion.

By Denis Kirillov



Innovations are here to stay

First production of office paper from waste paper launched in Belarus. Implementation of this initiative became a final accord of the Green Economy project.

The new production was launched in Borisov. Experts are convinced that the pilot initiative will help preserve forest resources thanks to the replacing cellulose with waste paper when producing office paper and will expand the use of waste paper as raw material. It's an innovative technology for Belarus, because previously none of waste paper processors, including Bellesbumprom Concern, has manufactured office paper from recovered materials.

Technological conditions for the production of high-quality office paper on the basis of deep recycling of waste paper have been created within the large-scale project 'Supporting the Transition to a Green economy in the Republic of Belarus', funded by the European Union and implemented by UNDP, in partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus.

Before the implementation of the pilot initiative, the factory in Borisov produced only low-quality paper from recycled paper, blanks and labels and

other types of low-grade paper. For the creation of a full-scale recycling line to produce high-quality office paper, the existing line of the enterprise was equipped with additional machines procured for the EU funds. In particular, the production facility has got new equipment. Moreover, a new building was constructed on the territory of the enterprise for the installation of the new equipment. Thanks to the initiative, a technological process was created with a complete cycle of waste paper cleaning and its deep pulping, i.e. for producing office paper from waste paper of lower quality. The new equipment will allow



to increase the volume of waste paper recycling to 2.5 tonnes per year.

Belarus' First Deputy Minister for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, Iya Malkina, has called the initiative 'a gem' in Belarus' transition towards a green economy. "All in all, twenty-three initiatives have been put into practice in Belarus so far, but this is among the most expensive and interesting," she noted.

Environmental, economic, and social effects were explained at the presentation. For instance, a new trail camera reduces the use of fresh water for paper production and the concentration of suspended particles in urban wastewater. Meanwhile, energy-efficient equipment saves up to 100kW per tonne of office paper produced from waste paper, reducing gas consumption by 50,000 cubic metres a year. In total, around 17,000 Euros a year should be saved on fuel and energy, thanks to the project.

Thus, the pilot initiative has helped create an environmentally sustainable production and ensured reaching environmental, economic and social impact.

"European Union provided over 12 million Euros for the green economy

projects in Belarus," said Andrea Wiktorin, Head of the EU Delegation to Belarus. "This programme supported 23 demonstration projects over the last two years in Belarus. Goznak Paper Mill was one of them. As a result, here in Borisov there will be significant fresh

paper waste recycling and preserving forest resources."

The new production of office paper from recovered materials at Borisov's Goznak Paper Mill will allow to create new jobs while also improving the working conditions for employees.

*The budget of the EU-UNDP pilot initiative at the factory in Borisov is **860,000** Euros. The budget of the 'Supporting the Transition to a Green Economy in the Republic of Belarus' project for 23 pilot initiatives is **5** million Euros*

water and energy savings, reduction of expenses on raw materials and creation of new green jobs in the region."

Meanwhile, Zachary Taylor, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Belarus, noted, "Pilot initiative on the launch of the first Belarusian production of high-quality office paper from recovered materials will contribute to the solution of the global problem of

The implemented pilot project will allow to position the Goznak Paper Mill as a 'green' producer of high-quality office paper.

The outcomes of the project 'Supporting the Transition to a Green Economy in the Republic of Belarus', funded by the European Union and implemented by UNDP in partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environ-



mental Protection, have been presented in Minsk. It was noted that within the framework of the three-year long project focused on generating green economic growth, the work was carried out in eight sectors of economy: waste management; biodiversity conservation; green transport; organic farming; ecotourism; phyto-production; water management; eco-innovation.

The project allowed to expand public knowledge of the principles and ideas of green economy, contributed to developing green economy in the re-

gions through implementation of pilot initiatives. Successful implementation of the project ensured the creation of effective mechanisms for partnership and joint actions with NGOs, local administrations and businesses to implement economically feasible projects based on green growth ideas.

Twenty-three pilot initiatives have been implemented within the project, including 16 pilot initiatives implemented by NGOs in different regions of Belarus in partnership with local authorities, business community, farmers.

Implementation of pilot projects and initiatives ensured the achievement of environmental, economic and social impacts.

One of the most important social impacts achieved by the project was the creation of new jobs and providing people with opportunities for engaging in additional employment.

Information campaign was also an important part of the project. www.Greenmap.by website has been supported and information on important Belarusian ecological sites has been represented on the resource thanks to the project. Moreover, the 'Green Economy' game for smartphones has been developed.

Moreover, 45 billboards on green transport, separate waste collection and energy efficiency have been created and installed within the project across all Belarusian regions. Three social ads have been created within the project and today are broadcast at the central TV channels and in public transport.

* * *

Pilot initiatives have been implemented across seven economic sectors: phyto-production, water resources management, eco-tourism, support of biodiversity, eco-innovations, waste management and organic farming.

Initiatives of the Green Economy project

- **The first Belarusian high-quality office paper production from recycled resources has been organised at Borisov's Goznak Paper Mill within the project.**
- **A grouse nursery was built in the Naliboksky Republican Landscape Reserve.**
- **A complex for processing wood waste into biofuel has been established in Brest. Production of highly effective organic fertilisers by deep processing of sapropel has been launched in Zhitkovichi.**
- **Eco-tourism and marketing strategies for Pribuzhskoe Polesie and Svityazyansky Republican Landscape Reserves have been developed by the project experts. Ecotourism and information-ecological centres of the reserves have been developed.**
- **The green transport development strategy has been worked out for the Radziwills' Palace and Park Complex and the first touristic electric-bus in Belarus has been provided to the complex.**



BELTA



Phyto-production does exist

Herbal Medicine of the 21st Century production and training centre has been opened in the Myadel District. A sustainable system of collection and primary processing of wild medicinal resources has been created. The conditions and infrastructure for the cultivation of medicinal plants by local residents on the lands of private farms have been created in the district for the local residents to generate additional income.

The territory of four villages in the Kamenets District has been transformed into a phyto-tourism destination and a place for phyto-tea production. The phyto-route 'The Flavour of Bialowieza' has been also developed.

Treating water resources wisely

9,000 rural residents of the Mosty District, including 735 people with disabilities, gain uninterrupted access to drinking water. Innovative experience in the construction and installation of environmentally friendly local treatment facilities has been successfully tested in Belarus thanks to the initiative in the Uzda and Braslav districts.

Along the exciting path of ecotourism

The First Belarusian Regional Forestry Environmental Education Centre has opened in the Gorni Park of the Lida District. Four complex tour packages have been developed for both the Ozery and Naliboksky reserves. Moreover, www.itourist.by site with the information on Belarusian ecotourism services has been created. The unique Centre of Mythological Tourism has been created inside the Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve, showcasing the unique and rich world of Belarusian mythology.

Reaching biodiversity creatively and in a variety of ways

Conditions for the creation of a system of collecting wild berries and mushrooms and a complex for freezing these products have been developed in the Naliboksky Reserve.

Wonderfully 'smart' technologies

The first school green roof has been created in the Maryina Gorka gymnasium. The first Belarusian eco-friendly coolant production line was launched in Gomel.

Unexpected approaches towards waste

The complex system of used engine oils collection and recycling has been launched in the Borisov and Krupki districts. Conditions for 100-percent recycling of dairy products wastes by withdrawing them from the circulation and further processing into a product with high added value have been created in Khoiniki.

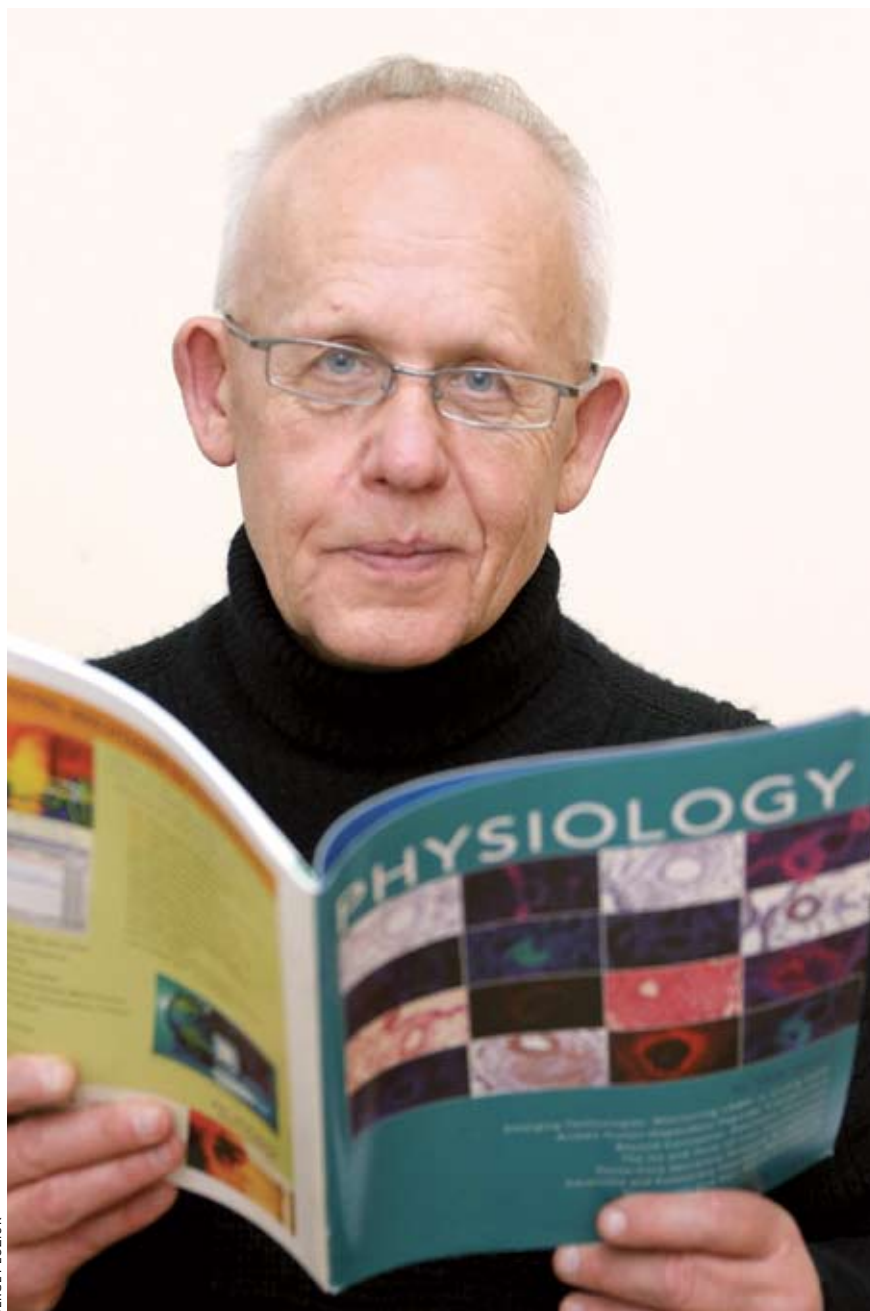
Much-in-demand organic farming

Farmers and agricultural producers in the Smorgon, Oshmyany and Volozhin districts are embracing European standards in organic farming thanks to the project. The areas occupied by organic agriculture in the target areas has increased by 43 hectares.

A unique mobile technological unit for the production of organo-mineral fertilisers from peat and sapropel has been created and tested in the Cherven District. Three demonstration sites on organic farming have been created in the Smolevichi District to grow environmentally safe products for school meals and promote sustainable land management among the youth.

By Vladimir **Mikhailov**

On the eve of the 2nd Congress of Scientists, held in Minsk in December, the National Academy of Sciences elected new members: five academicians and twenty-two corresponding members. Over a hundred scientists were nominated but only the best of the best won — including the Deputy Director for Research at the Physiology Institute, Vladimir Kulchitsky.



SERGEY LOZIUK

Academician Vladimir Kulchitsky:

‘I always wanted to help people’

We talked with Vladimir Kulchitsky just before the Congress, meeting at his modest office in the evening, when his colleagues had already gone home. He often stays late to finish the work. Sometimes, time-consuming experiments take the weekend, although, as all common people, he prefers to rest on Saturdays and Sundays.

Regarding the Congress, he stated that it provides the opportunity to discuss valid problems and unite the work of professionals across various fields of knowledge, helping achieve breakthrough results and aiding further joint work. In the speech President Alexander Lukashenko made at the plenary session, certain suggestions were voiced regarding the applied development of socially significant fundamental research, which, by the by, should be considered at any scientific stage. As for the key document under discussion, it was the Science and Technologies 2018-2040 strategy.

As Mr. Kulchitsky explains, Belarusian neurophysiologists' major task is to develop technologies aimed at restoring the brain's neural networks and the function of the spinal cord when destroyed by pathological processes. The impossibility to solve this problem was clearly demonstrated in the situation with Michael Schumacher's traumatic brain injury. "In collaboration with the National Scientific and Practical Centre for Neurology and Neurosurgery, the Belarusian Medical Academy of Post-Graduate Education, the Minsk Emergency Hospital and Minsk's 9th Clinical Hospital, we've managed to clinically test a method of perineural intranasal introduction of stem cells as a key component of comprehensive therapy, to restore neuronal relationships and control of motor and cognitive functions," he explains. It's vital work, and little understood to the newbies.

We met after the Congress to learn more about stem cells and how Belarusian scientists and physicians are using them

for their unique operations. How important has 2017 been for Belarusian science? We've also questioned Mr. Kulchitsky on his path to the academic 'Olympus'.

Mr. Kulchitsky, do you think the Year of Science in Belarus has contributed to its further development?

Definitely. The ill-wishers may call it declarative, however, when the Year is announced, the society pays attention to the problems to be solved and achievements of scientists. We've had media coverage and are now talking of promising ways forward in scientific research. Many of my colleagues are outlining projects they previously viewed as unattainable. I'm keeping track of this tendency of the year, via articles published in the Belarusian and international media, looking at how we're comparing globally. Some articles are featured in prestigious scientific editions.

According to preliminary programmes from the Congress, there will be interesting reports on our achievements during sectional meetings [as discussed in early December, while the Congress took place from December 12th-13th]. In particular, Oleg Rummo will deliver a report. Belarus offers not only liver and heart transplantations but multi-organ operations. Not all countries, even the advanced ones, can deliver liver or heart transplantations, lacking our level of medicine, but our Belarusian scientists and physicians are progressing rapidly. Multi-organ operations are the 'aerobatics' of transplantation.

Oleg Rummo (recently elected as a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences) and his colleagues have been highly praised this year.

This is well-deserved! In 2017, the Year of Science, we conducted the 500th liver transplantation for children, showing how far we've come in this important medical avenue. These technologies have been developing in our country for over a decade, and many patients are living for a long time afterward surgery. Of course, we're eager for scientific and practical work to continue, especially as we're seeing such good results. We're

dealing with miracles, as people once thought, with surgery helping them recover from fatal diseases. Such achievements seemed impossible in the past but are becoming commonplace. The agrarian sphere is developing sustainably too, which is vital to the country. Laser and IT technologies are also impressive, with world-level achievements registered. I'm truly happy for colleagues. We can be proud not only during this Year of Science but onwards.

Has your Institute received more funding for research and equipment this year?

Yes. Important state actions — like the Year of Science — are accompanied by large funds for development, with certain spheres given priority for the time being. We've prepared applications and bought expensive equipment, which we've wanted for a long time, having learnt of it from foreign colleagues, or from reading in scientific magazines. As regards reagents, we have no problem with them as a rule but — owing to the Year of Science — we've managed to acquire expensive equipment. Of course, this year is a breakthrough in certain respects but we haven't performed our five hundred operations in a single year. We've been focusing on key priorities, wanting the public to better understand our work. People may take for granted our progress in science, engineering and technologies, but so much of interest is happening around us. Scientists are mostly modest and rarely blow their own trumpets, so the Year of Science, bringing with it media attention, has been important in raising public awareness of the achievements and scientific thoughts of our Belarusian researchers.

Should we be more objectively evaluating our successes?

It's important for everyone to be aware. Even scientists can become wrapped up in their own field, so it's good for them to learn about colleagues' work, in other spheres. Scientists may read scientific articles related to their own sphere of research but it doesn't

mean that they know of everything that's going on. This year, we've seen so much more coverage, and this may help scientists unite efforts, domestically, and with those from abroad.

Despite public attention this year, not all young people with talent pursue a career in sciences. Tell us of your own experience.

It's partly good luck that I've been elected as an academician this year; someone in the heaven has decided this should happen, not people. The election campaign was quite difficult, as many worthy scientists were nominated. There were thirteen places for academicians but only five were chosen, as the selection process was strict. I'm happy to join the list but I'm also sad that others were not so lucky. Believe me, there were many decent candidates.

Let's look back at your childhood. Did you begin dreaming of science as a youngster?

I don't think anyone dreams of becoming an academician in childhood. I've often asked myself when I began to feel the pull of science; many ask me about it. Probably, it began at the Medical Institute or, perhaps, at school, at physics and chemistry.

Tell us about your parents.

Both originated from Belarusian peasants. My father's family came from the Minsk Region's Slutsk District, from the village of Zhaly. My mother was born in the Gomel Region's Morokhorovo (a village near Zhitkovichi, not far from Chervonoye lake). They met while studying at Gomel's pedagogical school and later became teachers of Belarusian language and literature. Before the war, my father was drafted. Since he had an education by then, he was taught to become a light tank commander. My father participated in the war against the Finns and, when the war against the Germans began, in 1941, he served in the army — fighting on the Karelian front. He told me that, in the first battle, he managed to knock out a very heavy German tank. Being a private or a sergeant at that time, he received his



Vladimir Kulchitsky, with employees, at the neurophysiology laboratory

first award: a medal 'For Courage', which was viewed as the most valuable. In 1944, my father was sent to the Military Academy and he married my mother after the war. He continued to serve as a military officer as though he wished to retire, it wasn't easy to do so. He was sent to serve across the former great USSR. Initially, in Zabaikalie (jointly with my mother) and later in Nerchinsk, Chita and Irkutsk. He was then sent to a small town near the border, called Dauria. Some time later, I questioned my parents about where it was situated, also studying the map independently, and found that it was around 5km from the border with Mongolia and China. Interestingly, I was born at the same station, in 1948, while my mother was travelling through. Our family stayed in that remote area for a long time; in 1956, in Nerchinsk, I even went to school.

I understand now why your Belarusian has such a beautiful Russian accent!

Yes, I lived in Russia for a long time. I studied at the gymnasium built by the Decembrists, in Nerchinsk. Meanwhile, in Sretensk, my younger brother Nikolay was born. I wasn't great at school, at first. Descendants of Decembrists lectured there and their approach was very strict. I remember this well. I've not forgotten

the gymnasium building, which was constructed from red stone or brick and had three storeys. It was spacious, with large windows.

Some time later, my father was sent to Kuibyshev (now known as Samara), on the Volga River. I began my second school year there, becoming an A-grade pupil, and finished school successfully, passing all exams with the highest grade, to enter Kuibyshev Medical Institute. My father was demobilised during my studies and my family immediately moved to Minsk, closer to our relatives. I was studying to become a surgeon and graduated from the Medical Institute in 1972. I was then sent to a district hospital in Sharia (Kostroma Region) to work.

Did you enjoy working as a doctor? Did you realise immediately that it was your path?

Yes, I liked medicine. I always wanted to help people; this was how I was brought up by my parents. On returning to Kuibyshev, after my work in the remote town, I was employed as a traumatologist at the Oil Refinery's medical department. By that time, I'd married Natalia, a wonderful girl from Kuibyshev: a neurologist.

Now, thinking back, I realise that a surgeon or a traumatologist can do lit-

tle. There were cases, particularly in the district hospital, when it was impossible to help a patient. I was, sometimes, absolutely powerless, especially in cases of brain trauma. Therefore, I wanted to research this complex mechanism, learning how to save a human life in the most difficult situations. With this in mind, I returned to the Medical Institute, to devote myself to research. I went to the Department of Physiology, where Mikhail Sergievsky, corresponding member of RAMS, chaired (he was investigating these problems). I defended my thesis in 1981, which was devoted to prevention of sudden stops in breathing, under various circumstances. Over time, I examined problems of the respiratory and circulatory systems, studying at Leningrad's Institute of Experimental Medicine.

How did you gain a place?

I attended various scientific conferences, delivering speeches and meeting others who were interested in the same problems I was investigating. I asked for permission to visit their laboratories, travelling during my holidays. Most were good people, who responded to my requests readily. Such exchanging of experience continues among the scientific community and is very useful. I used what I'd seen and learnt for my thesis. For some time, I worked at Bogomolets Institute of Physiology [now bearing the same name] in Kiev, carrying out a series of experiments, and worked at Moscow State University, at the Department of Physiology.

Did you work as an assistant?

During my holidays, I was a visiting researcher. I would receive an official pass-card, allowing me to work with equipment, issued by the head of the laboratory, who was often a professor, an academician or a corresponding member. Most of the interesting research was conducted in St. Petersburg [known as Leningrad at that time]. I began my career at the Military Medical Academy. General Vladimir Samoilov, corresponding member of RAS, former Deputy Head of the Academy, still works there, heading the Department of Physiology (then,

he headed the Department of Medical Physics). Mr. Samoilov promoted adherence to principles and detailed analysis of events at any stage of complex experiments. We enjoyed good equipment and the opportunity to conduct testing on animals to study pathological processes. Jointly with Mr. Samoilov, we made hypotheses which were later debated and corrected. I also had the opportunity to get crumbs of knowledge at the Institute of Evolutionary Physiology and Biochemistry (named after Ivan Sechenov),



I attended various scientific conferences, delivering speeches and meeting others who were interested in the same problems I was investigating. I asked for permission to visit their laboratories, travelling during my holidays. Most were good people, who responded to my requests readily

studying biochemical aspects of pathological processes, details.

You've been a busy bee, visiting various flowers to gather nectar, not only in Samara, but in St. Petersburg, Kiev and Moscow...

This is true. However, I'd love to repeat my time in those places. My major research took place in St. Petersburg. I can't help but mention its wonderful Institute of Physiology (named after Ivan Pavlov); it's situated in the suburbs of Koltyshy, built by famous physiologist Pavlov, Nobel laureate, in natural environment. Several laboratories and an administrative building are situated within the city, in Makarov Quay. I wrote my first monograph with colleagues there. Most of my experiments were conducted at the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences' Institute of Experimental Medicine, in partnership with Sergey Polenov, Professor, and Boris Tkachenko, academician. I entered its post-graduate studies for a doctoral degree in 1988, though I'd already moved to Minsk by then, as my father was provided with accommodation in the Belarusian capital.

It's fascinating to learn how your Belarusian grandparents shaped your personality...

I received enormous life experience from them. We visited my grandparents and always helped around the house; it was our everlasting tradition. We were taught feasible work that way. Since childhood, we went to my mother's parents (who lived near Zhitkovichi) jointly with my cousin, Volodya Agievich. After the war, his father, Vladimir, worked as the Academic Secretary of the Department of Humanities at the Academy of Sciences (his grave at the Military Cemetery is near the graves of Pavlyuk Trus, Kuzma Chorny and Mikhas Klimkovich). Volodya followed his father's steps, starting as the Academic Secretary of the Department of Humanities and proceeding at the Institute of Philosophy of our Academy of Sciences, and became a famous scientist and philosopher. In particular, he prepared major research

on the first Belarusian printer, educator and Doctor of Medicine, Georgy (Francysk) Skaryna. We also wrote joint books. Sadly, in 2014, he died. He was older than me and often accompanied me to the village, introducing me to local places of beauty and to my distant relatives, whom I hadn't known before. The idea of a large family was new to me and I loved it. Thanks to Volodya, my family circle widened. He became interested in philosophy while at school, applying a philosophical approach to all things, until his last days. We also visited my father's parents all together (me, my brother, mother and father, Adam). My brother, Nikolay, later graduated from the law department but died young.

Let's return to science, and your interest in everything relating to the brain.

I've been investigating this all my life. As a second-year student, I began attending a neurosurgery club. In my student years, my works were published in reputable magazines, including the nationwide 'Neurology and Psychiatry' edition named after S. Korsakov (not all scientists in my specialisation have enjoyed the chance to be published there). During my fifth year at the Institute, the 1st Congress of Neurosurgeons of the Soviet Union took place. Jointly with my student-colleague, Vitaly Skupchenko, we delivered key speeches, thanks to our Professor, Lev Nesterov, inviting us. We were the youngest there, and I saw famous scientist Natalia Bekhtereva, who headed the USSR Academy of Sciences' Institute of Experimental Medicine (on the basis of which the Brain Institute was later established). She was appointed director of the latter and chaired the Academic Council at the Institute of Experimental Medicine (where I defended my doctoral thesis). Boris Tkachenko, who later replaced Ms. Bekhtereva as Director of the Institute of Experimental Medicine, was my tutor.

Even minor brain traumas can be fatal, and surgeons may be unable to help. Why does this happen?

A major problem arises when the respiratory centre stops functioning as a re-

sult of trauma. If no artificial respiration is provided (by rhythmic pressing on the chest or lung ventilation with the help of special equipment) irreversible changes occur in the brain within seconds, or minutes. It's very difficult to understand the structure of a neural network. The creation of artificial intelligence is now being discussed globally. Still, no effective functioning of a neural network in a millimeter-wide area of the brain has been simulated. In the European Union, a special programme, 'Human Brain Project', has been launched to unite the potential of top scientists of Europe for the above simulation. The result has not been achieved yet.

However, we are seeing progress in many areas. The challenging problem of head transplantation is connected with these vital functions of the organism: maintaining of cardiac and respiratory rhythms. The respiratory centre is situated in the medulla oblongata, which is part of the brain. The cores through which impulse-signals are transmitted to the diaphragm and other respiratory muscles are situated in the spinal cord.

Does this mean that we fatally disrupt the respiratory centre if we sever those links?

Exactly. There are only two systems in the body called vital: the respiratory

and cardiovascular systems. If they're destroyed, you'll die within a few seconds or minutes. Of course, other body systems are also important — such as the endocrine organs and muscles. However, their destruction doesn't result in immediate death. Doctors have time to restore injury but if breathing isn't restored quickly, then irreversible changes occur.

What do you think about statements that some surgeons have transplanted a head?

I've heard of this; even in 1908, there were experiments to transplant animal heads (using cats and monkeys), conducted by American surgeons. Based on those experiments, Soviet science fiction writer Alexander Belyaev wrote his novel in the 1920s: 'Professor Dowell's Head'. When Vladimir Demikhov began his work, he understood the problem and approached it in stages: he implanted a new head onto a dog. We should remember that there are 13-14 million axon ways along which signals are exchanged between the head and the body.

One Italian surgeon, speaking of possible head transplantation, admits that he'd need hundreds of colleagues to help him. He realises what a serious task he'd face. Another problem is that nerve fibres grow slowly, at just one millimetre per day. As a result, the process of tissue



Working in the laboratory

recovery would take months, or years. Could we connect everything accurately? What about the scars which would inevitably form? All these problems would need to be solved, otherwise such bold ideas would remain idle speculation.

Do you still assert that life is a miracle?

Yes [smiling]. Life is a miracle we are gifted. The same can be said of our brain. It's an amazing creation we should be careful with.

Some interesting books by foreign authors state that our brain relies on proper nutrition. One American cured his dementia using this approach...

This is true. Good food is the basis of our health. However, we shouldn't forget that we need to take a personalised, individual approach. We're all different. Even twins have differences. The approach which helps one might negatively affect another. Nutrition certainly affects neuron function and supports metabolic processes, taking certain substances to the brain. Nobody denies this. On the other hand, there are various customs, rituals, philosophies and diets. For believers, fasting is necessary to get pure. Most people really need it, for the stomach not to interfere with repentance. However, some wouldn't benefit from such an approach and should follow medical advice (the sick ones, the weakened ones, etc.).

Have you ever studied what happens to the brain during fasting?

I haven't personally but it's been practised since time began, not just through religious ritual but during the days when we needed to hunt to eat. We've not always been able to browse the refrigerator, or simply go shopping. I think cannibalism's roots come from those days of food being scarce. Not long ago, I watched a film about the Arctic, where researchers met around three hundred bears and only one baby. They immediately guessed that the small animals had been eaten. This rarely happens with bears but they must have been forced to do so to survive. Something similar was probably natural for primitive people; the stronger



Conquering summits because we can! Vladimir Kulchitsky praises mountain tourism

would eat the weaker. These are severe laws of nature and evolution.

On eating junk food, our brains slow down. Can you explain?

We don't all realise that this happens, but it does. We need to know our own body, paying attention to what's 'normal' for us. The human organism is filled with bacteria, inside and out: inside our gastrointestinal tract, on our skin and within our mucous membranes. Their number differs but each person is host to around 2-5 microbial kilos. Each of us has a special complex of microflora, including bacteria and fungi, which are useful; so, non-pathogenic microorganisms coexist with the human body. This is symbiosis. Staying inside the body or on the skin, microbes contribute to the immune system, while producing essential amino acids which cannot be synthesised by our living cells. We must receive them from food or in this way. They also generate vitamins, and various mineral and regulatory substances. Microbes help us adapt to various conditions and are used to a certain regime and rhythm of life. If you suddenly change your eating habits, you'll change how substances are released into the blood. For example, micro-organisms secrete toxins into the blood from the lower intestine during constipation, which poison us.

This affects our process of thinking?

Probably you've experienced this. In some cases, doctors even recommend colon-cleansing enemas. We should bear this in mind during fasting — when our usual eating habits change.

Does this mean that excessive cleanliness and refined food aren't good for our health? Being fanatic about sterility, we deprive our immune system of irritators and, accordingly, it gets lazy...

I'll give you a careful answer: just in case someone might wish to experiment. Indeed, why should we wash our hands before eating at home if we've been working with books or the computer? We might break our usual symbiosis with 'good' micro-organisms. However, we must take care to ensure no pathogenic microflora affects us. Public transport is host to bacteria which may be harmful, depending on who has been travelling and touching rails. They could have an overt form of tuberculosis...

Do you have any exercises for your brain?

It's not quite an exercise, but I take a cold shower for five minutes every morning. I've done so for many years. Some prefer to simply pour a bucket of cold water over themselves but I love the shower. When needles of cold water hit my skin, different receptors react, and I wake up; my working capability is enhanced. I then do some exercise, to stretch my muscles — for 10-15 minutes. I complete some yogic exercise for my breathing, borrowed from the East. Then I read a short prayer. That's all. This allows me to concentrate (if necessary) and to relax.

Interviewed by Ivan and Valentina
Zhdanovich

Around the world on solar batteries

Famous traveller Fiodor Konyukhov arrives in Minsk to become a pilot



Russian traveller Fiodor Konyukhov has been hopelessly in love with the sea for many decades, having made six round-the-world journeys by yacht. This adventurous man's motto is never to rest on his laurels, inspiring him to keep setting new challenges in terms of destination and mode of travel.

He's now turning to the sky, having aspired to fly for more than a decade. In 2016, he took the first steps, making a round-the-world trip by hot air balloon. Mr. Konyukhov has next decided to fly around the world by solar sailplane. His son, Oskar, who's heading the expedition headquarters, tells us that only one such flight has been made so far: by Swiss balloonist Bertrand Piccard, in 2016. In order to circumnavigate the Northern Hemisphere, Piccard's team took 558 hours, or 23 days and 17 stops. Inspired by Piccard's example, Mr. Konyukhov is attempting to fly around the world using a plane powered by solar panels, without

stopping. The trip is to take place in the Southern Hemisphere, from Austria to Australia, in November and December 2020, and should take 5-6 days.

Mr. Konyukhov spent several years preparing for his hot air balloon flight, taking courses in Russia. However, he needs a further three years of training to fly a light aeroplane, to receive certification and earn the necessary number of flight hours. Each course lasts six months, and he'll then go to Minsk to attend the aviation-training centre, located in the suburbs. Mr. Konyukhov considered others, in Spain and other EU states, and the Baltic States, but Belarus won out.

"I've been in hospitable Minsk since September 12th. For me it's the start of realising a long dream — to make a non-stop trip around the Earth using solar energy: the first in history. Everyone has recommended Belarus, saying that you have a good reputation. For me, it's a very close country because I spent my adolescence there: I studied at Bobruisk's art school. Now, I'm studying

to become a pilot. There are good specialists and courses, so I'm convinced of a good result," he tells us.

The training programme is divided into several stages: theory, followed simulator exercises (modelling various flight conditions), and then ground and flight training.

"I may be 65 years old, but I'm sitting alongside young men who've decided to connect their life with the sky and aviation," he writes in his personal blog. "I'm pleased to be in the company of these romanticists. We're united by having a dream connected with the sky. After passing my courses and exams, I plan to receive an amateur pilot state certificate."

Within three years, the unique plane should be built, using Russian-made solar panels, and a special energy storage system, alongside other high-tech equipment. His future plans include sailing around the world in a rowing boat and taking a hot air balloon into the stratosphere.

By Alena **Prokina**

Guests welcomed heartily

2018 children's festival to be again hosted by Minsk

It's not the first time that the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) has chosen the host country. A few years ago, the winning country was always chosen to host the forthcoming event but it's no easy task to organise an international competition within a single year: preparing the venue, finding financing, selecting a jury, arranging transparent voting procedures and many other aspects.

"All EBU members had the opportunity to apply to host the Junior Eurovision Song Contest in 2018, but the Belarusian application

of competing for the honour of hosting the following year's event. "This aspect has always been its highlight, for adults and children alike," notes Minsk's Svyatoslav Babarik, aged 15.

The Belarusian TV and Radio Company — which is an EBU member — is co-ordinating Junior Eurovision 2018, already selecting a slogan and

logo. "We can organise this event at the highest level," says the head of the Belarusian TV and Radio Company's Press Service, Svetlana Smolonskaya-Kraskovskaya. "We'll attract creative young people, the best professionals, volunteers, designers and operators. We'll organise an extensive programme not related to the competition, acquainting guests with local sights and our culture."

Belarus is among the few countries which hasn't missed a single Junior Eurovision since 2003. Belarusians have won twice: in 2005 and 2007. In 2010, the country hosted the musical forum and, that year, Eurovision was acknowledged the best in its history, with an amazing show. The Euroweek was full of diverse events and large-scale TV broadcasting across not only the fourteen participating European states but in Australia and New Zealand.

By Yulia Kononova

was the best. We're absolutely confident that the country will begin preparations with enthusiasm," notes the Executive Director of the contest, Jon Ola Sand.

However, some participants lament the change, saying that they like the idea





Lena: When my father learnt that my boyfriend has a twin brother, he immediately told us: 'You're set!'

Lesha: How did we get to know their parents? We called them and said that we wouldn't come alone. Our mother was initially worried about the first meeting: she thought that Minsk girls were capricious. However, she loves Lena and Katya.

Double happiness

There are many examples of twin sisters marrying on the same day. However, how many times do they marry twin brothers? A registry office in Minsk's Leninsky District can recall no other such marriage ceremony, when Katya and Lena Naskovets said 'yes' to Sasha and Lesha Ustinovich. These four now share a common family name. Meeting us for a cup of tea, they tell us how they met.

“

met Lesha through a shared acquaintance,” Lena remembers. It was a cold January day and she remembers what she was wearing, as well as

what they chatted about and what impression her future husband made on her. She admits that she loved him from the first moment. It seemed they had so much in common. Lesha, too, believes it was love at first sight.

When their father learnt that Lena's young man had a twin brother, he pre-

dicted that Katya and Sasha would hit it off. They began dating within a couple of months and both couples were soon organising their wedding. The chief specialist at the registry office, Olga Kozak, was surprised on seeing them, as she'd never before heard of twin sisters marrying twin brothers. She suggested

Sasha: For our honeymoon, we plan to go to Milan. Lena and Katya have long dreamed of visiting this city and we're ready to follow them to the edges of the Earth.



VITALIY PIVOVARCHIK

a simultaneous registration, noting that it would be more convenient for guests as well.

Katya is the most talkative, telling us, “Did my sister and I dream of getting married on the same day? Never! Our men decided to propose to us at the same time, and we answered almost in unison. It may be a coincidence, or fate...”

When asked whether they ever confuse one with another, Katya looks at her husband and laughs. There was once a situation. On the day of the wedding, when the grooms arrived to pick up their brides from their parents’ house, the photographer gave them a test. He invited the girls to turn their backs, inviting the men to choose their bride. The grooms were unfamiliar with the wedding dresses and hairstyles, which led to Sasha almost heading towards Lena. Happily, he noticed his mistake immediately.

The couple spent the whole wedding day together, without observing the old tradition of the bride being ‘stolen’. The sisters admit that their only qualm in marrying is leaving their family home, since Lena and Katya have been inseparable since childhood. When Katya was staying with her grandmother, Lena wouldn’t go to bed without her, obliging her parents to drive her sister over there in the morning. The girls graduated from the Minsk College of Entrepreneurship together and began working as sales assistants, later meeting the twin brothers.

Katya notes, “Of course, my parents say that — sooner or later — we’ll

Katya Ustinovich:

What’s happiness for me? It’s not yet born. To be more correct, I want to have at least three small ‘happineses’ with Sasha. Then, our family will be truly happy

have to part. I don’t think that’s necessarily so. We’re renting a flat and will probably buy two on the same floor in the future. I can’t imagine it any other way. In summer, I went to Georgia with Sasha for ten days and felt that part of me was missing...”

Lesha and Sasha agree that it’s more fun to stay together. Although they’re less attached to each other than their wives, life has prepared its own scenario. The young men were born in Polochany, in the Molodechno District. They had decided to study different specialties in different cities but also both submitted

documents to Berezhinsky Agro-Technical Vocational Lyceum, where they were accepted. They now work as welders on the same site.

Speaking of how the two young families spend their spare time, Lesha tells us, “We all like cooking new dishes. We made individual cheese patties today. It’s great: with one forming them, another turning and the third trying, while the fourth controls the process.” The wives boast that their husbands’ food is better than that at restaurants.

Speaking of priorities, they express themselves differently, but agree that family life is vital. They want to have children, with each couple wanting at least three babies. Some say that a single child can be selfish. Interestingly, the ladies have a third, elder, sister. On learning of their marriage, she was pleased, saying that she’d be gaining two brothers! Sasha and Lesha also have a younger sister, who was a witness at their wedding.

The young couples tell us that their guests offered some unusual gifts, from which they had to choose: cooking buckets of salad or preparing a sauna, for example. Aunt Lena was the winner, offering to sew enough baby clothes for a whole year. “When the time comes, we’ll remind her,” they say.

By Nadezhda **Dekola**



City with nine hundred year history

The city — which celebrated its 900th anniversary last year — was named after the Sluch River. These days, it is narrower and less as deep: no longer the major trade route it was. Decades ago, merchant boats — loaded with fabrics and furs — cruised from afar.

City from 'Tale of Bygone Years'

In the 'Tale of Bygone Years', Slutsk is mentioned as being in the Turov Principality. Archaeologists have proven that, at those times, it was a wooden village surrounded by a palisade and a deep ditch. In the 17th and 18th centuries, it lived a European life — inspired by the well-known Radziwill magnates. Apart from factories and manufacturing workshops, they erected buildings which continue to form the city skyline.

Slutsk gymnasium, founded by Janusz Radziwill in 1617, has a stark sil-

houette, lacking embellishment. It's amazing in its simplicity. It is still attended by schoolchildren, being the oldest school in the country.

Walking through Slutsk, don't fail to stop by the House of Nobility Assembly. Imagine: for two centuries, until 1917, it gathered local nobility to sign important agreements, as well as to dance at balls, and so on. It now houses the Local History Museum, which is a 'must' for tourists to learn more about the city's secrets.

Weave a Slutsk sash

In 1757, a loom (a novelty at the time) was smuggled from Istanbul for

Duke Radziwill, and the production of silk sashes launched in Slutsk. Only men were allowed to handle this technological miracle, it being said that the silk threads would fade if touched by female hands.

Domestic weavers began introducing local patterns to fashionable oriental ornaments and the result was impressive: Slutsk sashes gained global recognition. Luxurious sashes, containing up to 100g of gold and silver threads became a symbol of wealth. There were even four-sided sashes, tied to show gold and red on festive occasions.



BELTA

Slutsk sashes were marked 'SLUCK' or 'SLUCIAE' but were still forged, often in France and Austria.

Belarusian Joan of Arc

Duchess Anastasia Slutskaya's life resembles a legend. She was born in the Mstislavl District and, at the age of 18, was married to local Duke Semen. Their marital happiness failed to last long as, in 1505, Tartars attacked the Principality. Apart from wars and destruction, medieval epidemics were common. The Duke bravely defended his lands but failed to gain victory over disease.

When the city was on the verge of capture by the enemy, people hid in the castle and prepared for the worst. It seemed that only a miracle could save them. Anastasia was that miracle. She put on the armour of her deceased husband, took his sword and led the townspeople to fight. The enemy left with nothing.

In 2003, Belarusfilm presented the historical drama 'Anastasia Slutskaya' — known as our Belarusian Joan of Arc, focusing on the Duchess' life and destiny. A monument to her was erected in the city centre — which is now a favourite place for wedding photographs.



Praying to St. Sofia

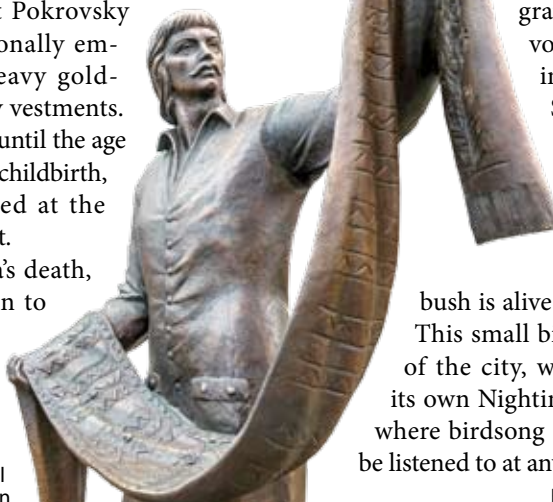
Sofia Slutskaya is an Orthodox saint and a patroness of Orthodoxy. Her holy relics rest in Minsk's Holy Spirit Cathedral.

In 1596, the church Unia with Rome was established in the Rzecz Pospolita, to accept the Catholic doctrine. Sofia persuaded her husband to procure a charter from the king of Poland, which prohibited her nationals from changing Faith. Slutsk was the only city within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania where Orthodoxy ruled.

Sofia built Pokrovsky Church, personally embroidering heavy gold-thread priestly vestments. She lived only until the age of 26, dying in childbirth, and was buried at the church convent.

After Sofia's death, miracles began to happen near her tomb. It is believed

'Revival of Slutsk Sash' memorial sign



that the city was saved from cholera in 1847 owing to a procession of her relics. The saint is worshipped by Belarusians as the patroness of women preparing to become mothers.

Listen to the nightingale's song

Ornithology is among the most fashionable hobbies in Europe. Professionals and amateurs travel thousands of kilometres to observe birds and their migration. The most vociferous nightingales live near Slutsk. Those who fail to believe should come in May, when every lilac bush is alive with birdsong. This small bird is a symbol of the city, which even has its own Nightingale Museum, where birdsong recordings can be listened to at any time.

By Kristina **Khilko**

Roots are in Ashgabat



Prose writer, poet, playwright, publicist and author of children's books Vasily Tkachev (born on January 1st, 1948 in the village of Guta, in the Gomel Region's Rogachev District) is well known in Belarus. Since 1980, he has lived in Gomel. Vasily has written many books, including the 'House of Commune' novel. In 2011, he was awarded the Prize of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, in the field of literature, for his 'Snooker' prose collection. Dozens of performances have been staged in theatres across Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan based on Mr. Tkachev's plays. Interestingly, he has also spent time living in Turkmenistan.

In 1973, Vasily Tkachev graduated from the Journalism Department of Lvov's Higher Military-Political School of the Soviet Army and the Navy, and was sent to the capital of the southernmost and hottest republic of the former USSR — Ashgabat. He began working at the editorial office of a large-circulation newspaper for soldiers: 'Za Rodinu' (For Motherland). At that time, its Editor-in-Chief was journalist Yuri Povalyaev, who was well known in Ashgabat. Mr. Tkachev worked as a military correspondent until 1978 and, after his discharge from the army, was employed as a senior editor of the newspaper and magazine at Turkmentorgkhlama Facility. In 1980, he returned to his

home of Belarus and began working as a correspondent for the large-circulation 'Selmashevets' newspaper and 'Gomelskaya Pravda' (Gomel Truth) newspaper. In 1989, Mr. Tkachev joined the Writers' Union of the USSR and was immediately elected to the post of chairman of the regional writers' organisation (which he headed for fifteen years).

Before his move to Ashgabat, the journalist was engaged in literary work. From 1965, he was published in the Belarusian 'Literatura i Iskustvo' (Literature and Art) newspaper and, in 1967 and 1970, Mr. Tkachev's poems were included in the 'We Have Written Book Ourselves' and 'Spring' collections.

When Vasily entered Military School, after his military service, he continued

writing literary works in Belarusian. He sent stories and poems to the magazines 'Beryozka' and 'Veselka' (Rainbow), and the newspaper 'Litaratura i Mastatstva' (Literature and Art). In 1973, stories by the young writer were published in 'Vo Slavu Rodiny' (Glorifying the Motherland), the newspaper of the Belarusian Military District, now published in Minsk as 'Belorusskaya Voennaya Gazeta' (the Belarusian Military Newspaper) and 'Chyrvonaya Zmena' (Red Shift).

After coming to Ashgabat in 1973, the young journalist began writing articles not only for 'Za Rodinu' but worked with the district 'Frunzevets' newspaper. The latter's editorial office was situated in Tashkent and, interestingly, People's Poet of Belarus Yakub Kolas also wrote for the newspaper, during the Great Patriotic War (having been evacuated to the capital of Uzbekistan). Many years later, Vasily published a lyrical article of his first impressions of Ashgabat: 'In 1974, my mother came to visit me in Ashgabat. She was a teacher, lecturing in Belarusian language and literature and geometry, at the Bykhov District's Iskan eight-year school. In those days, Turkmenistan was in mourning: its national writer, Berdy Kerbabaev, of whom everyone was proud, had died. My mother knew his works so we bought a beautiful bouquet of flowers and went to the funeral. When my mother approached the coffin, she shed tears and gazed at me as if to say: 'Look, this great person has died. He enjoyed glory and should have lived... This is life, my son...' Later, a museum was made of Berdy Kerbabaev's house and I took my sons there several times.'

Mr. Tkachev met many Turkmen writers and became a friend to Azat Rakhmanov. He also often met the wonderful poet Yuri Ryabinin. "What artistic plans did I have back then?" Mr. Tkachev muses. "My acquaintance with colleagues from the literary and journalistic sphere benefited me. I remember meeting soldier-writer Ashir Nazarov, who'd been fighting in Belarus. Ashiraga told me about battles near Vitebsk,"

confirms Vasily. "He was a wonderful man. I wanted his works to be translated into Belarusian word for word but those plans somehow failed. I met the remarkable poet and prose writer Berdinazar Hudaynazarov, and Russian writers Nikolay Zolotarev, Vladimir Pu, Ikar Pavseviev and Eduard Sklyar, who lived and worked in Ashgabat. When I last visited Ashgabat, in 1991, I met writer and publicist Vasily Shatalov, near Aeroflot's box office (on Svobody Avenue, where the Ashgabat Hotel was located). He's a surprisingly handsome and kind man. We talked for a long time, recalling many of our common acquaintances."

Nothing in life passes without trace. The work of Belarusian writer Vasily Tkachev is no exception. Ashgabat has left its mark. In Turkmenistan, he wrote many of his works — including his first play in Belarusian: 'Incognito'

In the 1970s and 1980s, many Belarusian writers came to Turkmenistan. Among them were Oleg Loiko, Maxim Tank, Lyubov Filimonova, Pavel Martynovich, Victor Shimuk, Yanka Sipakov, Rygor Borodulin, Bronislav Sprinchan, and Gennady Pashkov. The latter wrote remarkable poems about the country. "Among them is the poem 'Karakum Canal'. I know him from Gennady Pashkov's 'Engravings of Roads' book."

"In the 1970s, I met Rygor Borodulin in Ashgabat," adds Mr. Tkachev, who'd known Rygor from his Minsk days. They met in Rygor's apartment, which he shared with children's poet Mikola Chernyavsky. Mr. Borodulin had come to Ashgabat with Belarusian film-makers to shoot a documentary about Turkmenistan.

"I often went to the Russian Pushkin Theatre and had come to know its Chief Director, Belarusian Georgy Nester," Mr. Tkachev explains. "I was friends with ac-

tors Yuri Morozov, Vladimir Bershansky, the Krasnopolsky brothers and their father, Vladimir Kolomak. I once came to the theatre to see that it was hosting an artistic party for writers. Mr. Borodulin embraced me and was evidently happy to see me."

In 1975 (when Mr. Tkachev lived in Ashgabat), his first book of stories for children was published in Minsk: 'Sly Danki'. Mikola Chernyavsky sent fifteen copies to his 27-year-old friend in Ashgabat, and fourteen were distributed among Vasily's Turkmenistan friends.

1976 was particularly fruitful for the young writer. "That year, my Bela-

rusian stories were published in Minsk by 'Byarozka' and 'Vyaselka' (Rainbow) magazines, while my short stories appeared in 'Gomelskaya Pravda' (Gomel Truth) and 'Uchitelskaya Gazeta' (Teacher's Newspaper)," he recalls.

While staying in Ashgabat, Mr. Tkachev worked on stories later included in his 'Day in the City' (Minsk, 1985). Among them were 'Kazan', 'Hat', 'Garmoshka', 'Two', 'Bag', and 'Son Comes'. Some contain Turkmen motifs. Interestingly, I also moved to Ashgabat after graduating from Lvov's Political School, in 1985, and even worked at the same editorial office as Mr. Tkachev (that of 'Za Rodinu' newspaper). I made friends with Vasily's brother, Mikhail, who lived in his elder brother's flat, at 19 Atabaev Street. I also met radio journalist Vladimir Grachev, who knew Vasily well. At that time, Mr. Tkachev lived in Belarusian Gomel. Both the writer's brother and the radio journal-

ist told me much of Vasily, recalling his work on Belarusian texts. Mr. Tkachev kept various dictionaries, at home and at work, diligently recalling and recording Belarusian words, sayings and proverbs in his notebook. Moreover, he studied all printed media received from Minsk.

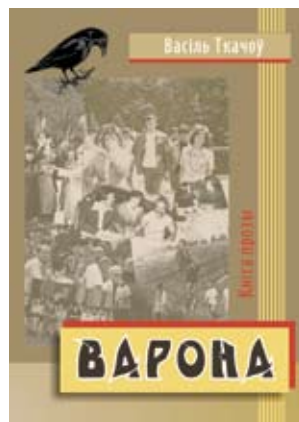
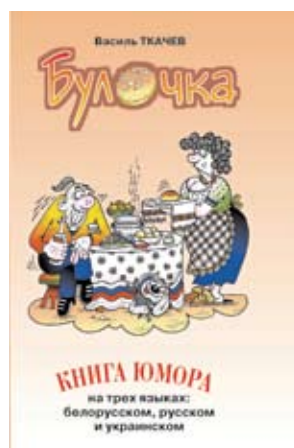
Mr. Tkachev recollects that, in the late 1970s, he received letters and postcards from relatives, friends and editorial offices, at his Ashgabat address (19 Atabaev Street) for five years. “Newspapers and magazines from Minsk were also delivered,” he explains. “Among them were ‘Literatura i Iskustvo’, ‘Krasnaya Smena’, ‘Byarozka’, and ‘Vyaselka’ — all those editions in which my works had been published.

One day, I found a copy of ‘Zvyazda’ in my mailbox. It had been delivered by mistake, as I saw the subscriber’s name: N. Kalinkovich. I knew he must be one of my countrymen but his name meant nothing to me. A few days later, I opened the door to see a round-faced, handsome, tall, well-built guy. His smile immediately made me recognise him as my countryman! There, in remote Turkmenistan, it was rare to meet

someone from my homeland. The guest introduced himself and I learnt that he was the owner of the ‘prodigal’ ‘Zvyazda’ issue. Mr. Kalinkovich brought my own copy of ‘Krasnaya Smena’, and apologised for opening it, while I did the same!”

So, Mr. Tkachev met his fellow writer-countryman in Ashgabat: Nikolay Kalinkovich had been born in the Luninets District of the Brest Region and lived in Ashgabat from 1979 to 1984. In 1984, he joined the Writers’ Union of

the USSR and, in 1981 and 1990, had two different books published in Minsk: both called ‘Luninets’. In 1985, his essay on local history, ‘Polesie Days of Alexander Blok’ was released and, in Ashgabat, ‘The Earthly Connection’ (1982), ‘My Name is Freedom’ (1984), and ‘Return of the Dawn’ (1987). In Turkmenistan, his



articles were often published by local newspapers and magazines, in ‘Komсомоlets Turkmenistana’, and ‘Vecherny Ashkhabad’ (Evening Ashgabat), ‘Tashauzskaya Pravda’ (Tashausz Truth), ‘Turkmenskaya Iskra’ (Turkmen Spark), ‘Ashgabat’ and ‘Sovyet Edebiyati’.

“I discussed my first works with Nikolay,” recalls Mr. Tkachev. “I also attended matches featuring Ashgabat’s Kolhozchi football team, and watched with interest as Kurban Berdiev’s techni-

cal ‘seven’ played. I’ve followed Kurban’s life attentively: he’s become an outstanding coach and his talent has produced impressive results with Kazan’s Rubin. Yakub Urazsakhmatov — a former excellent central defender with Kolhozchi — also works with him. I’m happy to see their successes. They’re great.”

Mr. Tkachev continues, “Thinking of Ashgabat, I can’t help but recall poet Muhammad Murad Komekov, who published translations of my first

Russian-language stories for children in Turkmen language, in ‘Mydam Tayar’, which is a children’s newspaper. The debut was a success and I gained recognition. Azat Rakhmanov suggested publishing my short story about the army in ‘Pioner’ (Pioneer) magazine. I introduced Azat to Mikola Chernyavsky, and the latter translated Azat’s poems into Belarusian. Meanwhile, jointly with Atamurad Atabaev, for the

first time, I gave a reading at a textile factory. I don’t remember what I spoke about but I do remember that Atamurad gave me a copy of ‘Friendship of Peoples’ (featuring his poetry). I left for Gomel, taking the magazine with me, and still have that issue in my library. Holding it makes me think of Atamurad Atabaev: young, handsome and talented... Sorry, dear friend, that it happened so. Atamurad’s poems warm me now, reminding me of my beloved Turkmenistan.”

Nothing in life passes without trace. The work of Belarusian writer Vasily Tkachev is no exception. Ashgabat has left its mark. In Turkmenistan, he wrote many of his works — including his first play in Belarusian: ‘Incognito’. The writer dreams of returning to Turkmenistan — returning to the country of his youth, at least for a few days. He has someone to shake his hand there.

By Ales Karlyukevich



Among top ten

Belarus among world leaders for Internet availability

The country is gradually enhancing its position in the world of digital technologies. According to BDRC Continental (an independent consulting company) and the British provider Cable.co.uk, Belarus is ranked seventh worldwide

for availability of broadband Internet. Moreover, according to the National Statistical Committee of Belarus, we also lead in information and communication technologies within the CIS.

Foreign analysts have thoroughly studied the cost of more than 3,000 broadband Internet packages across 196 countries, comparing prices for

August-October 2017 and orienting on a monthly average salary (converted into US Dollars). In Belarus, twenty-four proposals by Internet providers were assessed by the jury and the average price stood at \$12.77 per month (about Br25). Meanwhile, Iran leads, with average charges of just \$5.37 monthly. Burkina Faso is most expensive, at \$954.54. Ahead of Belarus are Ukraine (\$5.47) and Russia (\$10.10) while Georgia is ranked tenth, boasting average costs of \$16.68 per month. Our western neighbours charge slightly more: \$19.39 in Poland and \$70.50 in Lithuania.

Undoubtedly, we can improve, being ranked 64th for speed. It's also still difficult to find Wi-Fi hotspots, which are yet to become commonplace in schools, hospitals and on public transport. However, the International Telecommunication Union has called our rates of development 'rather high'.

Belarus was assessed across eleven positions. Despite being ranked first in the CIS, we came only 32nd worldwide. As of January 1st, there were 11.1 million subscribers (up 1.6-fold on 2012, and including legal entities and individuals, as well as individual entrepreneurs). Moreover, 9.5 million subscribers (or 85.4 percent of the total) had broadband Internet. Almost 92 percent of organisations had fixed broadband access while wireless Internet was available to 20.7 percent. As of the end of the previous year, mobile operators had 6.4 million subscribers of broadband Internet (or 79.9 percent of those who use a mobile phone to surf the Internet). Meanwhile, TV viewers saw the greatest increase in new technologies: the number of digital format subscribers has increased more than 10-fold over the past five years.

By Olga **Pasiyak**

Respecting others, to respect yourself

While a GULAG prisoner, poet Piotr Bitel translated 'Pan Tadeusz' by Adam Mickiewicz into Belarusian, from a Polish edition. Belarusian prisoners so yearned to hear their native language, to help them forget their hellish situation for a while. The beautiful verse enabled them to remember that they were human and that a different life could exist, full of poetry and love. Mr. Bitel wrote in brilliant green ink, which he took from the medical point, upon cement bags, sitting in a quiet corner behind stacks of firewood, while the other prisoners performed his daily work for him.



ALEXANDER KUSHNER

Traditional Minsk book trade fair always offers a rich choice of various editions

Just imagine: those people, so near death, were ready to work harder, simply to hear the lines of the great poet in their native language! It was more important to them than the risk of a punishment cell or having their period of imprisonment prolonged.

The role of Mickiewicz in Belarusians' consciousness was recently debated in Krynki (near Bialystok) at the Trialogue Festival. Founded by Belarusian prose writer and essayist Sokrat Yanovich, it's now organised by his followers, promoting Belarusian and European languages on equal terms. It focuses on the historical culture of the region — Belarusian, Polish and Jewish — gathering historians, artistes and writers in little Krynki. Arriving from all over Europe, performers took to the stage of the Caucasian synagogue, with exhibitions and performances also hosted in other venues. The curator of the Villa Sokrates Foundation, globally-recognised Belarusian painter Lenik Tarasevich, invited the best of the best.

The recent Trialogue was dedicated to Adam Mickiewicz, who is claimed by various other cultures besides that of Belarus. Of course, we are a European nation, our history comprising not only the stories of peasants but of educated, intelligent people, with their own aristocracy and romantic characters, such as Pan Tadeusz.

Francysk Skaryna was also an intermediary between cultures. Irrespective of how many debates take place, nobody can succeed in erasing this great Polotsk man from history. Poet Ales Ryazanov's brilliant translation of Skaryna's prefaces into modern Belarusian language is enchanting!

Young Spaniard Ángela Espinosa Ruiz's amazing poetic collection, 'Pomme de Ciel', is written in Belarusian. However, can it be 'Belarusian poetry' when written by a foreign citizen? It seems that she has learnt the language and has fallen in love with it, showing more skill even than some native speakers.



Pope Francis receives a copy of 'The Name of God Is Mercy', translated into Belarusian, and signs two copies: one to be kept at the Belarusian editorial board of Vatican Radio and the other to return to Belarus

*With fears, cautiously and late,
Like May — warm and winged,
In secret shadow of the day
Creeping along the planet like a snake...*

The trend for translating world classics into Belarusian continues, with various young people doing so for 'love' rather than money. Two volumes of the Sherlock Holmes adventures have been released and money is now being generated to publish a pocket-sized series, including translations of such writers as Ken Kesey, Chuck Palahniuk, Charles Bukowski and Margaret Atwood. Meanwhile, Yanushkevich Publishing House has launched its 'Noblesse Oblige' series: books by Nobel laureates in Belarusian language. 'Hunger' by Knut Hamsun has sold out successfully and 'Love in the Time of Cholera' by Gabriel García Márquez is next in line, translated by an amazing writer, Karl Sherman. He was born in Uruguay, to where his father

emigrated, from Western Belarus, before the war. Mr. Sherman returned in 1956. He translated Márquez's novel into Belarusian long ago but it has remained unclaimed until recently.

Belarusian is now popular among state and private publishing houses, with experienced and new translators. Among recent releases is the 'Poets of the Planet' and 'Light Signs: Poets of China' series. Meanwhile, there is the first translation of 'Rig Veda' from Sanskrit (the oldest in Indian civilisation), by poet Igor Kulikov. 'Kalevala' is now available in Belarusian and a translation of a Moyshe Kulbak novel has been republished, to great acclaim. He belonged to the Molodnyak era, writing brilliantly in Yiddish. His style can be compared with that of Babel and Sholem Aleichem. His novel 'The Zelmenyaners' is about the life of ordinary Jews living where Kommunarka Factory is currently situated. His novel 'Nadberezyńcy' (translated from Polish) details events on Belarusian lands in the early 20th century: author Florian Czarnyszewicz emigrated from Belarus to Argentina, where he wrote about life in his native village, near the Berezina River.

I don't believe we should praise some writers more than others, since all deserve our appreciation, having created something important. Adam Babareko — a wonderful critic who suffered under Stalin's repression — compared Belarus to a hill, on the top of which a lake was situated, feeding the rivers of other cultures.

When Polotsk hosted the Day of Belarusian Written Language, Mogilev presented an animated version of 'The Little Prince', in Belarusian — based on Antoine Saint-Exupéry's novel. I've no doubt that the hall was full, as were other screenings during the Belarusian Weekends project. The truth is that we must love our own and respect others, and we can only join the world cultural space by bringing something unique from our own culture — as Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno asserted.

By Lyudmila Rublevskaya

Feeling harmony

Famous pianist tells us about her music, life and cuisine



Hostess of the
'Musical Saloon'
— pianist
Tatiana
Starchenko

The 'Musical Saloon' is one of the most successful and long-term projects of the Belarusian State Philharmonic Society. It has been taking place for more than 15 years and enjoys invariable success. The concerts are always a special event. Famous pianist Tatiana Starchenko, author and Hostess of the 'Musical Saloon', producer, anchorwoman and performer of many programmes, creates the unique atmosphere.

What do you think is the secret of longevity of the 'Musical Saloon'?

I could say, 'because I am its artistic director. And it would be true, because all the musical ideas are mine. However, ideas arise because you know who can turn them into reality. In this respect, the 'Musical Saloon' is unique. My artistes are the best soloists of the Belarusian State Philharmonic Society, singers of the Bolshoi Theatre, soloists of orchestras, famous dramatic actors and foreign artistes. To each new programme I invite those with whom I have a strong friendship, those who I admire, not only their talent and professionalism, but also their human qualities. In general, it is a source of great happiness to make what you want, and work with excellent musicians and friends. I think any head of a creative collective would only envy me.

The concerts of the 'Musical Saloon' always have a new theme, something

special. For many years you have been full of ideas, inventing ways to bring them to life to entrance the spectators, and at the same time, perform as an equal with the other soloists. How do you nourish your creativity?

Sometimes, there are moments when my resources come to an end. After all, behind these seemingly calm events, on the stage there is a great deal of hard work. Each month you are facing the conditions of a premiere and a huge amount of stress. However, thank God, there is also the love of the audience which gives us inspiration. The main thing that feeds creativity is being on the stage, and of course, my kind and understanding family who help me to see things in perspective.

Some may ask what is difficult about a 'Musical Saloon': people gather together, sing, play and it is an easy, pleasant pastime...

It may appear so to those who have never visited our concerts. The Saloon showcases different music and a broad spectrum of genres: instrumental, chamber, choral, theatrical, soloists. As a matter of fact, it is a philharmonic society within a philharmonic society.

And you always have a full-house.

The spectators understand it is a bit of luck to get into our concerts. After all, during the concert you hear things which you won't hear anywhere else. It is important, and it works. I don't have any illusions that everyone is delighted with what I do, but the reality is that people come to us.

What is your target audience?

They are all different. For us, it's not true when people say that you have your own audience. We have a lot of programmes, and I know, for whom and what each is suitable. For example, the premier concert 'Terra Incognita' of magnificent modern chamber music which has not been performed in our country previously, will be interesting to the intellectual and thinking public. I understand that someone who has never been in a

philharmonic society, might decide to come along too, having seen our poster 'Music by Isaac Schwartz'. This composer wrote a good deal for cinema. 'The White Sun of the Desert', 'The Straw Hat', 'The Station Master', 'Zhenya, Zhenechka and 'Katyusha', dozens of his wonderful melodies are widely known. But at the end of his life, Schwartz created a fantastic thing — his concerto for orchestra 'Yellow Stars', the largest symphonic work. We also introduce such spectators to extracts from it. There are many other programmes which can be interesting for such an audience. As a rule, people come to see us again and again.

In the 'Musical Saloon' you are an excellent hostess. I've heard that you are a good hostess at home too, have culinary skills and like to cook.

I won't deny it. Cookery is part of life, the taste of life. I adore all the cheesecakes, baked puddings, cabbage soup-borsches, potato pancakes, gravy. Returning from different countries, I like to experiment with dishes of foreign cuisine. I am never too lazy to bake pies. I believe that a woman whose house does not smell of pies should remember that it's a smell of family, cosiness and happiness.

And what about calories, which everyone counts. Do you eat pies or look after your figure?

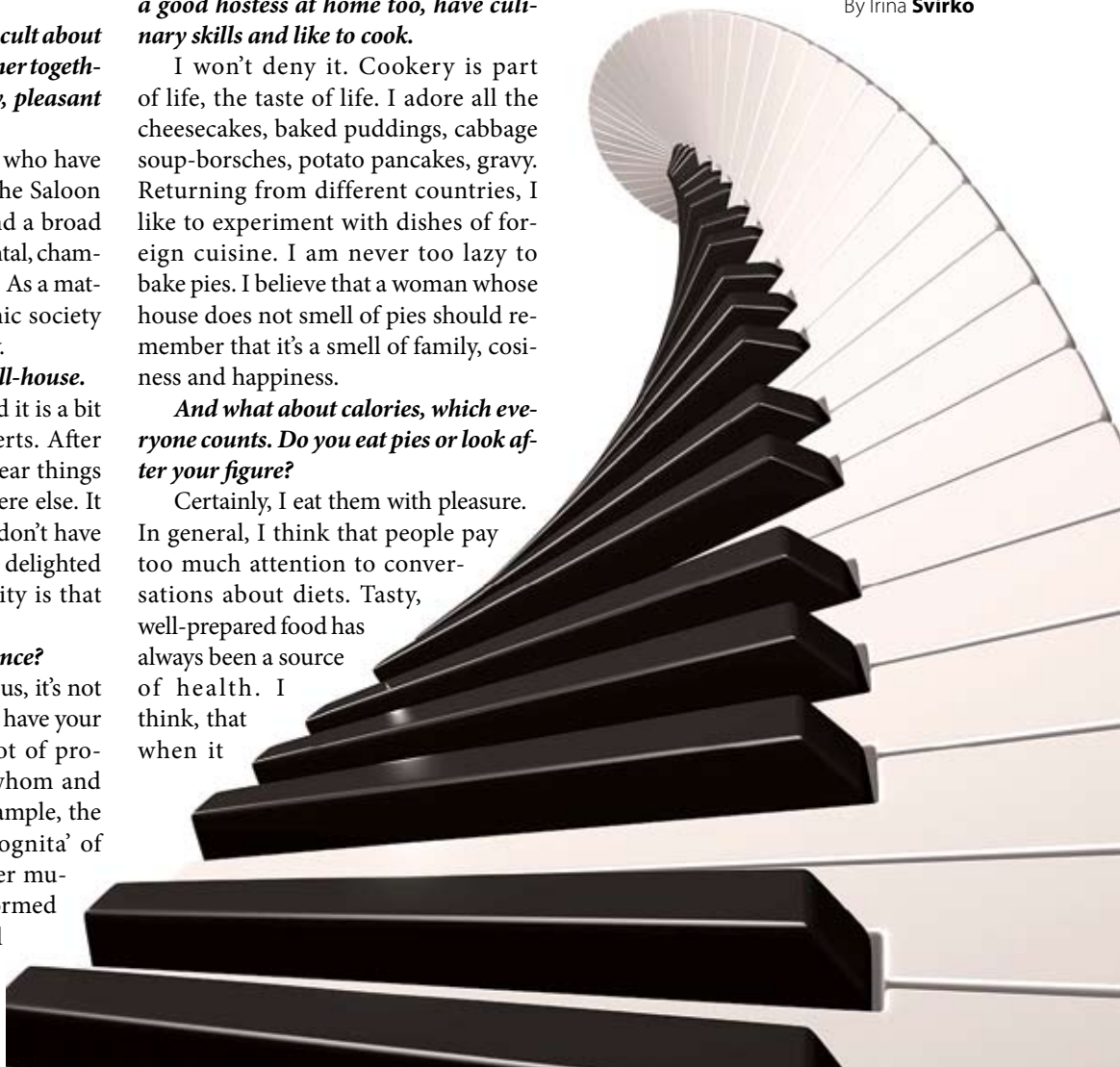
Certainly, I eat them with pleasure. In general, I think that people pay too much attention to conversations about diets. Tasty, well-prepared food has always been a source of health. I think, that when it

comes to a healthy way of life, it is necessary to speak about enthusiasm for work, mobility, danger of excesses, but not about what we should or shouldn't eat.

However, a busy kitchen also means mountains of dirty dishes. What about the hands of a pianist which should be protected?

There are, of course, moments when after the guests have gone I say to my husband that my finger-tips have become absolutely dried up. But with several good creams, the problem is easily solved, the next day everything is all right. In general, the most important thing both in the kitchen, in music, and in life is to work cheerfully and take pleasure in the process."

By Irina Svirko



Live theatre for spectators

National Academic Drama Theatre turns

85



The National Academic Drama Theatre is often referred to as 'Russian'. There's something about this name which appears cosy, encouraging a family atmosphere.

At the recent festive night, that special theatrical air reigned, even in the theatre's lobby, before the performance began: that feeling of anticipation.

Just standing at the ticket office, breathing in unison with those excited to be in their favourite theatre, you can't help but feel that something wonderful is waiting for you, behind the stage curtains. The Russian Theatre is filled with talent; it's the place to go — as one poet

said — 'to heal the soul and find salvation from everyday life'.

Those guiding you to your seat smile like old friends, and there's beautiful music playing. I guess it's a piece by Chopin being performed by a quartet of charming girls. A male figure in a gilded mask stands frozen beside them: a bronze 'sculpture' portrayed by an actor so realistically that I forget he's alive. TV cameras are reporting on the solemnity of the event, searching out audience members who may like to offer a few words.

I spot famous writer and film director Vladimir Orlov in the audience, as well as Nina Yankovskaya (the widow of theatre-lovers' favourite Rostislav Yankovsky, who died last year). Theatre critic Nelli Krivosheeva sits writing,

while Richard Smolsky enters, followed by Vladimir Prokoptsov, the General Director of Belarus' National Art Museum. We greet playwright Alexey Dudarev, who's come with a long white rose in his hands, to congratulate the theatre as the Chairman of the Union of Theatre Workers of Belarus. It's lovely to exchange bows with Natalia Gaida, a People's Artiste of Belarus and the prima of the State Academic Musical Theatre of Belarus. She looks wonderful! We also greet the Chief Artist of Belarus' Bolshoi Theatre, Alexander Kostyuchenko, who worked at the Russian Theatre as chief artist from 2001-2008; not long ago, he was awarded a State Prize of Belarus. Jointly with other colleagues from the Bolshoi Theatre,

he received the award for his special contribution to 'The Grey Legend': the opera composed by Belarusian Dmitry Smolsky. Alexander is elegant, wearing an evening jacket and celebrations and black tie. He smiles happily, saying that he's been invited to the party.

Maestro conductor Alexander Anisimov, the Artistic Director of the State Symphony Academic Orchestra of Belarus, is there with his wife and, as I guess, his granddaughter. Alexander makes a stop at a small display of theatrical props, sitting in the huge black armchair, which is imbued with the energy of the past. He touches the surface of an old, 'experienced' table, while his granddaughter takes his photo. Mr. Anisimov is known countrywide for his musical legacy; his emotional immersion into music while conducting is unrivalled in Belarus. This October, he celebrated his 70th birthday. We sit in neighbouring stalls, exchanging bows, and I wonder if he recalls our past interviews, for the magazine...

When curtains slide apart and the brightly lit stage appears, I prepare myself for solemn speeches, despite knowing that Valentina Yerenkova is stage directing the party. I expect the usual congratulatory telegrams and long welcome addresses, with various representatives of the theatrical community coming on stage to receive gifts. Such things can be rather tiresome, I've found. It's hard not to yawn!

However, this time, events proceeded quickly. Vasily Zharkov, the Deputy

Prime Minister, read the Belarusian President's welcoming address so sincerely that the faces of the actors coming on stage shone with gratitude. The older generation, sitting on chairs at the front of the stage, and on the left side, by the curtains, included such People's Artists of Belarus as Olga Klebanovich, Alexander Tkachenok and Bella Masumyan. The permanent director of the theatre, an Honoured Worker of Culture of Belarus (who's been heading the theatre since 1983), Eduard Gerasimovich, sat on the right, next to the Art Director and Honoured Figure of Arts of Belarus Sergey Kovalchik (who joined the Russian Theatre in 1913). Boris Lutsenko, the Stage Director of the Theatre, a People's Artiste and an Honoured Worker of Arts of Belarus, joined the company after being praised by the hosts on stage. He was Chief Director from 1973 to 1981, becoming Art Director from 1991 to 2008, having joined the company in 1967. One of his landmark productions was 'Macbeth': based on William Shakespeare's play and staged in 1974. It was, for many years, a calling card of the theatre and of Boris Lutsenko. Wikipedia tells us that Mr. Lutsenko staged three masterpieces in his 'golden period': 'Macbeth' (which was awarded the Grand Prix at the Stuttgart Festival), 'The Threepenny Opera' (by Berthold Brecht, in 1976) and 'A Man's Tragedy' (based on Imre Madách's play, in 1979).

The past year has been rich in jubilees for the Russian Theatre. Bella Masumyan



They devotedly serve the theatre

Reference

The theatre launched in the early 1930s: in 1932, the BSSR State Russian Drama Theatre opened in Bobruisk, from a troupe of touring actors — led by Vladimir Kumelsky. In late 1940, it was decided to relocate the company to Minsk. However, the invasion of Soviet territory led to the company being sent to Moscow, in 1943, as a frontline theatre. Later, the troupe worked in Mogilev and Grodno. Its bright premieres continue to delight theatre-goers arriving in Minsk's Volodarsky Street. President Alexander Lukashenko has also congratulated the troupe on the anniversary.

DARYA ANDREEVA

and Boris Lutsenko celebrated their 80th birthdays, while Honoured Artiste of Belarus Ivan Matskevich turned 70. He's in his artistic prime, as all who've seen him in Andrey Kureichik's 'Submariners' — a new performance — will testify. Strong, handsome and charming, Ivan has true charisma, commanding the audience's attention in a way that younger actors rarely manage. 'Lion in Winter', by James Goldman, where Mr. Matskevich plays Henry II, the King of England, and Bella Masumyan appears as Eleanor of Aquitaine, the Queen of England, provides the best proof. On the night of celebration, Mr. Lutsenko read one of Shakespeare's sonnets, adding a nostalgic note, demonstrating his rich artistic life.



DARYA ANDREEVA



*When I consider everything that grows
Holds in perfection but a little moment,
That this huge stage presenteth nought
but shows
Whereon the stars in secret influence
comment;
When I perceive that men as plants
increase,
Cheered and cheque'd even
by the self-same sky,
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height
decrease,
And wear their brave state out of memory...*

It was impossible to watch the video featuring the names of actors and

directors long and recently deceased without sadness: Vladimir Malankin, Yevgeny Polosin, Vera Redlikh, Dmitry Orlov, Alexandra Klimova, Yuri Stupakov, Yuri Sidorov, Olimpiada Shakh Paron, Valery Maslyuk, and Vladimir Shelestov. Their names are inseparable for the Russian Theatre. Valentina Yerenkova, hosting the celebration, praised past masters without emphasising their deceased state, making us feel that they still walk the stage of the theatre.

I couldn't help but ponder on the fact that many young actors — such as Sergey Zhbakov, Andrey Senkin,

Vladimir Glotov, Vasily Grechukhin, Yulia Kadushkevich, Yelena Stetsenko, and Veronika Plyashkevich, who are currently popular on the theatre's stage — only know of those amazing actors from history and from old recordings, as are sometimes hosted by the Russian Theatre.

Valery Maslyuk, the charismatic director, was invited to the BSSR Maxim Gorky State Russian Drama Theatre in 1983, working as the chief director until 1992. Mr. Maslyuk combined psychology with the figurative convention of modern theatrical aesthetics. His best performances were spectacular, metaphorical and associative, revealing actors' individuality. His 'Sign of Trouble', based upon Vasil Bykov's novel, was awarded the State Prize of the BSSR. Sadly, there was no reference to the play during the celebration. For some reason, the characters of Stepanida (played by Olga Klebanovich) and Pyatrok (Alexander Tkachenok), weren't mentioned, although both actors participated in other mise-en-scenes that evening. It's no surprise that they're the top stars of the Russian Theatre. It's impossible not to be enchanted by them, even if they speak only a few words, or appear in less than perfect shows. Ms. Klebanovich and Mr. Tkachenok have chemistry: organic and inimitable.



Participants glitter in mosaic of festive party



Alexander performed brilliantly in 'The Only Heir' (by Jean François Regnard): a show staged over a thousand times. Meanwhile, Olga sparkled alongside Honoured Artiste of Belarus Lyudmila Bylinskaya, in a scene from Lyudmila Ulitskaya's 'Esther'.

Actors of the ‘middle generation’ also deserve respect and recognition. Oksana Lesnaya, Anna Malankina (a daughter of Vladimir Malankin), Yekaterina Shatrova and Yelena Pastrevich appeared in beautiful evening dresses, their eyes sparkling as they walked elegantly on stage. Honoured Artiste of Belarus Andrey Dushechkin — son to Alexandra Klimova — also attracted attention. Dressed in a black tail coat and bow-tie, he announced the names of actors (young and old) given special awards by the Culture Ministry, assisted by Culture Minister Yuri Bondar. Certificates of honour and gratitude also went to public departments which help with the theatre’s operation.

It was pleasant to see Yelena Matkevich awarded. As the troupe's head, she organises rehearsals and sets up the theatre's schedule. Any shortcoming in her work would inevitably affect other production processes.

I believe that everyone involved in theatre should be encouraged: not only actors young and experienced, direc-

tors and their assistants, but make-up artists, costumers and stage engineers. Anyone who connects their life with the theatre is working to ensure the entertainment of the audience, and its enlightenment. The theatre shows us the immense value of life, and the importance of living to the full. On stage, we see a reflection of our own joys and sorrows, each performance producing a revelation of emotion and understanding. The theatre shows us the many variations of human fate and our shared humanity. It offers catharsis and inspiration.

On the occasion of the 85th anniversary of the Russian Theatre, Sergey Kovalchik recited a poem by Fiodor Tyutchev:

*Life is given to us to love,
To love without border or measure,
To devote our mind, our blood
and our body
To all sufferers.
Life is given to us to console
The humiliated and insulted,
To warm and comfort
The injured, weak and homeless.
Life is given to us
To fight with passion and lies
until the end
And to sow in brotherly hearts
The single holy truth of God.*

The celebration was akin to joining our own family at the kitchen table, while being elevated in style, official congratulations being mixed with poetry, short scenes from performances and the above-mentioned video. Eduard Gerasimovich spoke warmly and intimately, stressing how many lives have been connected with the theatre's work, and how many people have been touched by its performances. He even mentioned the millions of electric bulbs illuminating the hall, dressing rooms and stage. Who else but a diligent master would think of such a thing? Eduard also thanked the audience, stressing that the theatre will

only continue to exist as long as it has an audience.

The evening left me with the impression that we, audience-members, are not separated from those on stage. Each performance invites us to interact, intellectually and emotionally. As the lines are spoken, we are transported. We, too, are part of the theatre's history.

By Valentina **Zhdanovich**

P.S.

Sadly, since this article was written, Ivan Matskevich has died. He was a leading master of the theatre and a true favourite with the public. On the theatre's jubilee night, he joined other actors on stage — smiling, joking and receiving congratulations...

At his funeral, it was noted that the theatre has lost a dear child: such brilliant actors as Mr. Matskevich are rare. Boris Lutsenko admitted that — while admiring Mr. Matskevich's talent — he had never been able to dissect the actor's secret. Truly, his mastery was obvious since his youth. Mr. Lutsenko likened him to Jean Gabin, being a man of hidden depths.

Whatever role he played, Ivan showed audiences the strength of the human spirit. He appeared in 'Run', 'Pane Kokhanku', 'Lion in Winter', and 'Submariners' (about the accident on board Soviet nuclear submarine K-19), and was soon to appear in the premiere of 'Zoika's Apartment'.

With the theatre since 1996, he played dozens of stage roles, and embodied more than 130 film roles, including in 'I'll Take Your Pain', 'The Black Castle of Olshany' (by Mikhail Ptashuk), 'People of the Marshes' (by Victor Turov), 'The Tale of the Star Boy' (by Leonid Nechaev), 'Khrustalev, Send the Car!' (by Alexey German), and 'Anastasia Slutskeya' (by Yuri Yelkhov). He also appeared in numerous TV series.

Ivan Matskevich's friends, relatives and colleagues will mourn him, as will journalists and the many fans of his work. This great, charismatic actor was wonderful in all respects, inspiring not only in his acting roles, but in person.

Comedy set in the home

'Red Hot Mamas' performance, based on David W. Christner's comedy and staged by artistic director Sergey Kovalchik, is a sell-out, receiving wild praise from audiences



The beginning of the performance

DARYA ANDREEVA

The National Drama Theatre performance's popularity may be laid at the doors of its theme: the enduring ups and downs of family life. It's a theme we can all relate to. We may not always appreciate our parents, and they may not always understand us, but we know that, no matter what occurs, love binds us together.

The play tackles the tension between mothers and their children, particularly, and the dynamics of adult children coping with aging parents. It explores the concepts of familial love and honour, and personal comfort, through the relationships of mother and son, and mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. What compromises must be made, to enable us to live alongside one another?

Such themes have been explored in literature for thousands of years, but remain just as relevant today. Each of us must learn for ourselves, it seems. Perhaps parents and children will never fully understand each another, chasing ideals that never exist. The play highlights to us the need to listen to one another, to attempt to achieve empathy.

The actors of the Gorky National Academy Drama Theatre deserve praise for their work, as does the playwright, whose comedy, in the best traditions, both entertains and enlightens. It offers an original interpretation, blending the bittersweet with wit. Like an alchemist, the director, Sergey Kovalchik, gives us a cocktail of problems, presented stylishly.

From the very start, we feel the important issues at the heart of the play, despite the comedy of the performance. In the funeral scene, following the death of Cheryl Casey's husband, we sense the darker truths which lie beneath the irony of everyday life, and the humour we use to deal with difficult situations.

Alla Sorokina's sets are minimal, and all the stronger for that, whether we are in a kitchen, or a cemetery. Often, there is no more on stage than a few chairs

and lamps, with lighting used effectively to set the mood.

People's Artistes of Belarus Bella Masumyan, Olga Klebanovich and Alexander Tkachenok, Victoria Kovalchik, and Andrey Dushechkin are joined on stage by Honoured Artist of Russia Alexander Brukhatsky, as well as Sergey Savenkov, Valery Shushkevich and Dmitry Mazuro: a team of talent and strength.

The play at the Gorky Theatre certainly has a message to deliver, and is effective in stirring our emotions. I noticed quite a few damp eyes, and family members offering gestures of support to each other. Of course, the very essence of the play strikes to the heart. I was greatly touched, remembering my mother and father, as I watched the play.

How strange it is that we can laugh and cry in the same breath, applauding clever dialogue and insightful portrayal while feeling an ache in our heart. How can we not to laugh when respectable and middle-aged widows Cheryl Casey (played by Bella Masumyan) and Claudia Adams (Olga Klebanovich) throw house shoes with fluffy pompoms at each other, and argue over toilet paper and perfume. They divide rooms and return late from parties, tipsy from drink. I felt quite sorry for their children — Abby Adams (Victoria Kovalchik) and Dan (Andrey Dushechkin and Sergey Savenkov) — who have brought their mothers to live with them.

As we see Cheryl's husband buried, and all return home, son Dan doesn't yet know that Abby has invited her heartbroken mother-in-law to live with them. Dan is only too pleased with the current situation, of their mothers (both in good health and well-off) living independently, as their daughter does. While Abby outwardly agrees, she has already made up her mind, which infuriates Dan, as he learns the truth. Dushechkin acts the role very well, moving believably between emotions, while Ms. Kovalchik is soft and intelligent as Abby, trying to calm her husband.



Victoria Kovalchik (Abby Adams)
and Andrey Dushechkin (Dan Casey)

The theatre offers you a story which might be real, since it tells of adult children and their parents. Everyone has the right to be happy — even if their ideal of happiness shocks others...



DARYA ANDREEVA

Humour is the best means to bring good mood to the family

Abby's relationship with her mother-in-law is difficult, yet she acts with compassion. Gradually, the dialogue between Abby and Dan becomes more dramatic and we cannot help but be drawn in. The scene culminates with Dan inviting Abby's mother, Claudia, to live with them, bringing double chaos! Cheryl enjoys drinking while Claudia flirts outrageously, and pursues a healthy lifestyle. Abby and Dan don't understand their mothers and lament their wild behaviour. They think that their mothers should behave as befits their age, going to bed early and resting more time while their mothers demonstrate a greater zest for life.

Both the mothers charm the audience, despite of (or because of) their outrageous actions. Cheryl totters in high heels, while trying to grow closer to her son, offering the tenderness which she failed to give him in his childhood. The scene where Cheryl sits in an armchair and talks to Dan is touching. Of course, at last, the walls break down, and we see them begin to connect.

Dan allows his mother to bring a cat into the house, as she's dreamt of all her life. Meanwhile, Claudia has lived her own life as a free soul; she is full-blooded, wearing her biker clothes. She radiates vigour, a love for life and fearless-

ness. It's not long before she's inspiring her son-in-law and her daughter, while destructing our preconceived notions of decency. Even Cheryl begins to have a soft spot for her, agreeing to attend a party. Gradually, the children see how extraordinary their mothers are.

Other characters include admirers of the widows: recovering heavy drinker Peter Mason (Alexander Tkachenok), who has his eye on Cheryl, and the various men who pay attention to Claudia. Of course, we know that the performance will lead to a happy conclusion.

On the fourth night of the premiere, the hall was primarily filled with an older audience: those with grown children and grandchildren, now having time for their own entertainment.

Stepping back for a moment from 'Red Hot Mamas', I'd like to tell you a story about a friend of mine. Her mother had read a book where a woman had brought her mother to live with her but had used a screen to create privacy in their home, and relegated her elderly parent to that part, effectively isolating her, with the help of the screen. Although my friend was only ten years old, and her mother not even forty, at the time, the story played on the moth-



Claudia Adams (Olga Klebanovich) with her admirers: Stan Walker (Alexander Brukhatsky) and Russ Niari (Valery Shushkevich)

er's mind. Once, when my friend behaved ungratefully to her mother, she'd berated her, saying that she'd be the sort of person to 'send her mother behind a screen when she became old'. Of course, the words were spoken in the heat of the moment, but both recalled the story when the 80-year-old mother moved in, many decades later.

In fact, the old mother led a full life, with the family: listening to music, watching her favourite TV programmes, reading books and attending concerts and theatrical performances with her children. She went to visit friends and chatted with neighbours, and made visits to places from her childhood. She'd lived through the Great Patriotic War, and was given respect at the family table.

On the occasion of her 90th birthday, her great-grandchildren attended her party. She was given comfort, as she knew, once telling me: 'I live in paradise, in my room, with my family. In my whole difficult life, during which I've seen war and hunger, I've never seen such joy and have never eaten so well'.

I was there, another time, when she asked forgiveness for having accused her daughter of, one day, neglecting her with 'that screen'. My friend and I jokingly said that everyone is afraid of old age, but the story came back to me during the performance. I remembered another, too, as told to me by my good friend Alena, who is a medical nurse and a massage therapist. She has her own family: a husband, two daughters, aged 11 and 12, and 66-year-old mother, who still works, and who now lives with them. However, questions arise as to the future, including the cost of repairs and other practical matters. Her mother is clearly afraid to leave the family, and her granddaughters adore her. However, shouldn't she have her independence?

The topic is a delicate one, as artistic director Sergey Kovalchik obviously knows.

The theatre programme reads: 'What do you think about your mother? Do you think she enjoys knitting socks, gardening and playing with her



Premiere of 85th season dedicated to Bella Masumyan, having played more than a hundred roles, with the actress eagerly appearing on stage in role of Cheryl Casey, to celebrate her theatre's anniversary

grandchildren? How do others perceive her? What does she want for herself? The theatre offers you a story which might be real, since it tells of children and their parents. Everyone has the right to be happy — even if their ideal of happiness shocks others.'

The actors bring this concept to life, showing us a new way of perceiving life through humour; all the best comedies work in such a way, allowing us to muse

on serious subjects while entertaining us. Very cleverly, we are guided to ruminate on what might otherwise disturb us. The play offers no advice on whether it's right to live with your parents or not, or how you should behave; it simply shows us that we should not make assumptions about others, and that we have a duty to live our life in a way that makes us happy.

By Valentina **Zhdanovich**



VITALY GIL

Homecoming

Napoleon Orda's legacy includes over 1,150 watercolours and drawings dedicated to Belarus' architectural wealth

Until recently, few of our compatriots knew much about Orda, despite every self-respecting educated family in Belarus owning at least one book of Orda's reproductions in the late 19th and early 20th century. Our countryman, Napoleon Orda, achieved so much in sketching the architectural wealth of his country, saving it for his heirs. Orda was an artist and a composer, a teacher and a writer. However, he is most recognised as a patriot of his homeland.

Napoleon Orda was born on February 11th, 1807, in the village of Vorotsevichi, in the Pinsk District of the Minsk Province (now known as the Ivanovo District of the Brest Region). His father, Mikhail Orda, was a poor nobleman, the head of Kobrin. In the wake of great Napoleon Bonaparte, who thundered across Europe, his parents named their son Napoleon. Mikhail Orda had no time to become disappointed in his French idol, as he died in 1809. Brave and resourceful Yuzefina Butrimovich took sole custody of two-year-old Napoleon and his four older sisters.

It wasn't easy living with the name Napoleon after the War of 1812, which

saw Bonaparte's invasion, with Moscow razed, and the Russian people fleeing. Blood flowed across Borodino Field. However, Orda graduated from the famous Svisloch gymnasium, where his artistic capabilities were revealed, and announced his intention to enter the Physics and Mathematics Department of Vilno University.

Having passed the entrance exams, he began there in 1823: a year of unrest, when the police uncovered a secret filaret society at the university. They failed to destroy the spirit of free thinking, however, and a new secret society — Zoryane — was created by the students. Its members maintained contact with the Decembrists, sharing their desire for radical change. Orda was among the first to join.

A year after the unsuccessful rising of the Decembrists, in Senate Square, in St. Petersburg, the Zoryane society was unmasked and, alongside his friends, the namesake of the French Emperor was expelled from his fourth year at the university and arrested. After spending fifteen months in jail, Napoleon Orda was released to his family estate, under police surveillance.

Many young men would have been in despair but Orda remained outwardly calm, continuing his education independently, studying the university's fifth year programme. Afterwards, he quietly agreed to join the Lithuanian Horse Guards' military service. In the national liberation uprising of 1830-1831, he immediately joined the rebels, fighting Tsarist troops with initiative and special courage. As a result, he was awarded the Golden Cross of the Order Wojenny Virtuti Militari, also receiving the rank of rebel army captain. However, the rebellion had no chance, as the forces were unequal. It was suppressed and Captain Orda was sentenced in absentia to death, as 'a military person who had betrayed his oath to the Russian throne'. A fairly generous reward was promised to anyone who could find Orda, so Napoleon was forced to flee abroad.

After spending some time in Austria, Italy and Switzerland, he settled in Paris and, in September 1833, received the status of immigrant. Orda made friends with Adam Mickiewicz and Frédéric Chopin, and met such prominent figures as Franz Liszt, Gioachino Rossini, Giuseppe Verdi, Charles Gounod, Hector Berlioz, Honore de Balzac, Stendhal, Pauline Viardot and Ivan Turgenev.

France inspired Orda in his passion for music and painting and, with the support of Chopin, he published a collection of musical works in Paris: polonaises, waltzes, mazurkas, nocturnes, ballads and serenades, which brought him great popularity.

Already familiar with Orda's works as a composer, the French came to appreciate his paintings in the 1840s. His first series was created after travelling through France and the Rhineland, from 1840 to 1842. His watercolour landscapes with architectural structures are so evidently painted with love.

Charming and successful, as an artist and musician, Orda attracted the attention of many women, leading to his marriage to a French beauty, who gave birth to his son, Vitold.

In 1847, Orda was invited to head the Italian Opera in Paris. He also taught music and his life was fulfilling. However, he could not help but feel nostalgia for his Slavonic homeland. His desire to return was sometimes unbearable, leading him to forsake his life in France, and his family, in January 1857, at the age of 49.

Alexander II's amnesty was not yet complete, obliging the former rebel to lease the estate previously owned by his mother. After her death, it had been transferred to the state. He might have regained his rights to the estate if it were not for his seeming participation in the 1863 rebellion (we have little firm infor-

mation on that time). In 1866, two years after the uprising had been suppressed, Orda was arrested and exiled. However, he was released in 1867.

The homeless artist and composer went to stay with his sister, on the Molodovo estate, in the Kobrin District, where he was supervised by the police. Not wishing to be pitied, Orda accepted an invitation from a Ukrainian tycoon, General Adam Rzehussky, to teach his son music. This solved Orda's financial problems and, after receiving absolute freedom of movement in 1875, he decided to release a series of art albums featuring the wonders of the empire. He travelled, on foot, for fifteen years, with paper and pencils, drawing them, and being heartily welcomed by families rich and poor, as well as by monastery monks.

Sadly, he died from a cold caught during one of his trips. According to his will, Orda was buried in Yanovo (now known as Ivanovo, in the Brest Region), in the family vault. His legacy includes over 1,150 watercolours and graphic works devoted to his homeland. More than two hundred are Belarusian architectural landscapes. In restoring our national legacy, lost during war and disaster, we rely on Orda's sketches, which enable us to imagine the original appearance of each historical and cultural monument.

By Irina **Maslenitsina**
and Nikolay **Bogodyazh**



Senno



Polotsk



Kamenets Tower

Napoleon Orda's
Museum in the
Ivanovo District's
Vorotsevichi





'Moment of Joy'

Eloquent invitation to 'Dating'

Svetlana Katkova — a laureate of Belarus' State Award — presents over seventy original paintings and graphics at her personal exhibition in Minsk



'March'

'Autumn Chrysanthemums
and Pumpkins'

'Christmas'

On opening the show, the Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Union of Artists, Leonid Khobotov, stressed, “Svetlana creates beauty; not banal still-life works but a true holiday of light and colour, subtle philosophy, emotionality and the spirit of all that is good and eternal.”

Svetlana Katkova enjoys painting all seasons. Some might think she would prefer spring, with its young leaves, or honeyed summer or ochre autumn, but her winter works are no less beautiful.

“Svetlana is a highly original person,” stresses Zoya Litvinova, an Honoured Figure of Arts of Belarus. “Vrubel is her favourite painter but she isn’t directly influenced by anyone. Her artistry is permeated with love: for nature, children, and those she loves. Many are impressed by Svetlana’s ability to keep the purity of her soul, for decades.”

A poet once said: ‘Everyone writes as they hear. Everyone hears as they breathe. They write as they breathe — not trying to please anyone.’ Ms. Katkova’s breath is evident in her pictures. For example, her still-life with flowers is the keynote of the ‘Dating’ exhibition. Other pictures feature lilacs, irises and chrysanthemums. Svetlana says that she most loves meadow flowers and simple bells. Interestingly, the artist’s daughter, painter Zoya Lutsevich, loves them also, often painting these flowers.

Visitors to the show are captured not only by Ms. Katkova’s picturesque watercolours of Belarusian landscapes, but views of Sakhalin Island, and Spanish and Italian scenes.

Svetlana Katkova’s studio is at home, filled with numerous objects; their description would take many pages. Some are old and others new. Jointly with the house, the garden, birds, trees and bushes, neighbouring cats, flowers and pets, inspire her works. All surrounding objects are eventually depicted on canvas or paper — to remain forever.



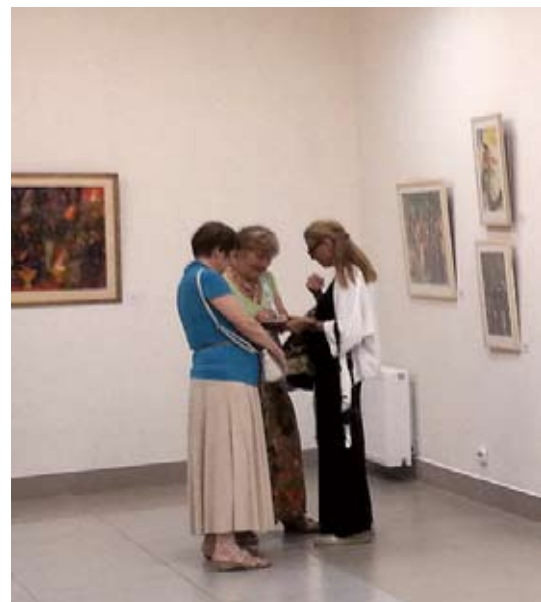
Svetlana grew up taking lessons in her father's studio, where Sergey Katkov taught schoolchildren, most of whom she remains on friendly terms with. Some even taught Svetlana.

Famous architect Leonid Levin — one of Sergey Katkov's pupils — invited Svetlana to join in designing the memorial in Krasny Bereg, devoted to teenagers who died under the Nazis during WWII. She agreed, proposing to transform children's drawings into stained-glass windows. Mr. Levin liked the idea. Svetlana made sketches and then cardboard models. The memorial is a school class situated in the old apple orchard; it has white concrete desks and a board. In addition, several dozen children's drawings glow in frames, sparkling near the blackboard. Ms. Katkova was awarded the State Prize for this work.

Each artist has their own reputation. Ms. Katkova is often associated with artistic bohemia. Her works combine the earthly with the cosmic and oriental, in delicate colours, revealing the mysterious harmony and beauty of our world, while hinting at higher meaning, for the sake of which everything has been created.

Svetlana is fond of rings, earrings, pendants and bracelets, transforming herself into a piece of art. Her aura is bright and pure, perhaps influenced by the artistry of her father, Sergey Katkov — that famous painter and teacher, who nurtured more than a single generation of Belarusian artists.

Ms. Katkova is most well-known as a pictorial artist, though she trained as a ceramist. Her entry into the Department of Monumental and Decorative Art was the result of there being such great competition for places at the Theatre-and-Art Institute's Painting Department, in the early 1960s. At that time, young people from the provinces received most of the places, rather than artists from Minsk, so that they might be sent into the remote countryside more easily afterwards,



for employment. "Later, I didn't regret having mastered the ceramist's craft," Svetlana comments. "On the contrary, I'm very grateful to fate for having given me the opportunity to comprehend the diversity of modern technologies."

Studying at the Institute, Svetlana began participating in exhibitions. Jointly with Zoya Litvinova, she had two major jobs in the mid-1970s: painting Minsk's Vilnyus Cinema, and the Palace of Railway Workers. Later, she 'painted' the Planeta and Zeleny Lug restaurants in Minsk, in addition to public buildings in Slutsk and Mikashevichi. Despite being created three decades ago, these works remain powerful, being more than symbols of a bygone age, and certain dominating ideological canons in art.

"It's no secret that, in Soviet times, artists were dependent on state commissions," admits Svetlana. "They were dependant on artistic councils and exhibition committees, needing the sympathies of certain leaders. Like my father, I never painted portraits of leaders to order; I was remote from politics. I tried to keep to my own path."

She believes that it's much more difficult for a woman to declare her-



self in art than for a man. “The ability to preserve ourselves is no less important. There are many temptations and it’s easy to waste time on meetings and chatter. I believe the work of an artist requires dedication; we must avoid wasting energy fruitlessly,” she says.

In her youth, Svetlana demonstrated an unusually strong character and a huge capacity for work. After her daughter was born, she took her into her workshop. Later, when the child grew up and her musical abilities became apparent, Svetlana took her to a school teaching music and choral singing, although it was situated far from home and Svetlana spent much time commuting, in the morning and in the evening. Svetlana began working at night, since she needed to earn money. She could hardly live without art. Even now, she feels passion for painting, picking up her brush while travelling and at home. Over the past few years, she’s created many new works, storing them in various rooms of her home.

Ms. Katkova is an artist not only by profession but in her soul. Everything she touches shows her personality and originality. The wardrobes in her house are made to her own design,

their doors covered in embroidered silk. A large oval table in the living room can seat up to twenty-five, made from an old grand piano. An old chest of drawers, salvaged from friends, she has transformed into a piece worthy of the most exquisite house.

Her garden is without fruit or vegetables, as Svetlana prefers trees. As to whether she paints them, she comments, “Not at all. I’ve actually never drawn from nature. My compositions are always fantasies. I really love flowers — like my father. I remember him coming home after painting in the open air with a bouquet of wildflowers. His soul was always full of a sense of beauty. Probably, I’ve inherited this feeling.

Flowers in Svetlana Katkova’s works ‘bloom’ with all shades of human feeling and emotion, portraying tenderness, passion and love. Their joyous colours are bright and pure, while their contrasts and harmony are an expression of her love for the world. Showing her nobility of taste.

Ms. Katkova draws not only flowers but household items: beautiful fabrics and carpets, dishware, fruits, animals and birds. Her still life works feature old cupboards, burning candles and articles illuminated by stained-glass

***Svetlana Katkova
is an artist not only
by profession
but in her soul.
Everything she
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and originality***



'Evening Ring'

light. She paints what surrounds us in everyday life while taking routine household items to another level: one that is vibrant and poetic...

Some of Svetlana's paintings depict theatrical objects; her 'Spanish Still Life' is a bright example, showing a fan, dish, bowl, gemstone beads, beautiful dark fabric and red roses. We have the impression of luxury, thanks to the exquisite choice of colours. You feel as if Ms. Katkova painted from backstage at a theatre, showing the articles as if they'd just been put down by the actors, after their performance. However, Svetlana has never worked in a theatre. She simply adores picturesque scenes, achieving theatricality naturally.

Her theatricality is apparent in her landscapes of Croatian and Bosnian towns, which she visited in the 1970s. Among them is one of 'Split', featuring an old city street and a small square. Some might call it a locked space surrounded by low buildings, in the fading evening light, with the slightly lit shop windows. Only a small donkey is routine, but there is an intimate warmth to the picture, as well as a sense of intriguing mystery. It's as if something is about to happen, or a

meeting take place. The street-stands resemble illuminated decorations; even the street itself, leading onwards, looks decorative. Houses are seen in the background, forming a theatrical backdrop, though one that has a vivid reality to it, rather than seeming only to be a stage set.

Ms. Katkova's depiction of Sarajevo is similar, as is her 'Recollecting Rome' or 'Evening Promenade'. In Spain, she attended a theatrical performance, which inspired her painting of a medieval tournament of knights. After her return to Minsk, Svetlana painted a small picture: a puppet tournament at a puppet theatre.

Her landscapes of the Kola Peninsula and Murmansk are less decorative yet remain theatrical. The houses in her 'Sky Over Murmansk' seem illuminated by a spotlight, while restless clouds over the city (resembling giant birds) could easily form a stage set.

Whatever her inspiration, Ms. Katkova avoids depicting national or ethnographic features. She rather depicts her personal experiences, as well as her emotional associations, and she succeeds.

By Veniamin **Mikheev**



'Rosy Persian Lilac' by Svetlana Katkova