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Summer seasons

Undoubtedly, summer is a time for rest, so I'd like to congratulate those who are already enjoying their vacations. It's a perfect opportunity to enjoy nature, which in summer is an obligatory attribute for a fully-fledged rest. One can spend a perfect holiday in Belarus too for both residents and visitors. For example, agrotourism is rapidly developing in the country and this year Belarus is ranked first in this category in the National Geographic rankings.

Today, Belarus has more than two thousand agro-estates. They are in the most picturesque parts of the country. The leader is the Grodno Region. And it is no wonder, after all, agrotourism in the Grodno Region is a centuries-old tradition. In the 17th century, the trailblazers of eco-friendly recreation were monks from the Camaldolese order. In the village of Radzivilki, 20 kilometres from the centre of modern Grodno, the holy order of Eremites organised an entire agro-complex. They cultivated vegetables, grapes and made cheese. Noble families from towns and cities arrived here to relax in the green surroundings of Radzivilki, while today tourists are welcomed. The Bartashevich family from Grodno put new life into this ancient place. Curiously, many agro-estates in the Grodno Region have been established and are run by former city residents. The **'Paradise**

Made by Our Own Hands' in this issue will describe the advantages of the agro-estate break in Belarus.

For some summer means relaxation, while for others, farmers for example, it is the most hard-working season. It's no accident that a phrase exists among rural workers that a day feeds a year. It's a commonplace

as it's important to gather crops without losing any time. Today modern technology helps with these tasks and recently Minsk hosted a presentation of agrarian know-how. Over five hundred companies from around the world demonstrated the newest agricultural machinery and latest developments in the field of agriculture, at Belagro International Agricultural Fair. Our publication, entitled **'People and Technology Driven by Agribusiness'** is dedicated to this event.

The political season is also in full swing, with Astana hosting the summit of heads of state of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the solemn opening ceremony of the international Expo 2017. The President of Belarus took part in both events. Initially, security was a priority for the Shanghai Cooperation

Organisation, inspiring comparisons with the OSCE among many experts. The focus is now moving towards economic dimensions, though security remains topical. The conversation in Astana can be viewed as a continuation of the recent discussion in Beijing, as part of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation.

Most of the heads of state who took part in the event tackled this topic in their speeches. Being on the western border of the organisation, Belarus, as a champion of stability, is ready to make its own contribution to strengthening

the SCO. Belarus' initiative to establish a new dialogue between East and West — similar to the Helsinki Process — remains pertinent.

All participants took part in the solemn opening ceremony of the international specialised Expo 2017 in Astana. This global exhibition is conducted under the motto 'Future Energy'. Belarus is represented by a national stand whose visitors can, in interactive form, learn about the latest Belarusian sci-tech developments and promising investment projects. Our **'Minsk Confirms Political Activity'** publication explores this topic further on.

These are summer seasons, if we look at them through the prism of the first summer month. Life continues and new events await us in the future. We'll tell you about the most important of them in the next issues. Hope to see you soon.

VIKTOR KHARKOV



► Dialogue expands borders

Number of followers of Belarus-EU equitable dialogue increases

The session of the Bureau of the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP), held in Minsk for the first time, saw representatives of Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia join colleagues from the European Committee of the Regions. The meeting was a stage of preparation for the Eastern Partnership Summit, due to take place in Brussels in November.

“Belarus is keen to expand dialogue with local and regional authorities of European Union member states and with Eastern Partnership countries,” notes the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Council of the Republic for Regional Policy and Local Self-government and Co-chairman of the CORLEAP, Alexander Popkov. “The Eastern Partnership is interesting to us in showing how we can become familiar with new technologies



CORLEAP
Conference of the Regional
and Local Authorities for
the Eastern Partnership

and new innovation projects popular today. We support the strengthening of the Eastern Partnership and hope that implementation of good neighbourly policy will enhance stability, security and successful economic development of our states.”

The meeting of the CORLEAP Bureau in Minsk saw discussion of recommendations for the Eastern Partnership Summit, being held in Brussels. The agenda included ideas

on stimulating economic growth and public employment, as well as the development of infrastructure and enhancement of energy efficiency. According to the President of the European Committee of the Regions, Markku Markkula, local and regional authorities should be more active in settling these issues. Meanwhile, the Head of the EU Delegation in Minsk, Andrea Wiktorin, noted significant progress in EU-Belarus cooperation. In this context, she tackled the topic of simplifying the visa regime, saying, “This process is progressing well. The first round of negotiations has taken place in Brussels while the second is to be held in Minsk. I’m confident that we’ll manage to solve all issues.”



► Presentation in Ho Chi Minh

Great Stone Chinese-Belarusian Industrial Park presented at Linh Trung Chinese-Vietnamese Industrial Park, in Ho Chi Minh

The Belarusian Embassy recently organised a presentation in cooperation with CUEC Corporation, hosted by the Chinese-Vietnamese Industrial Park. The event brought together investors from Vietnam, Japan, Korea and the EU states. The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Belarus to Vietnam, Vladimir Goshin, took part, as did the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Belarus to China, Kirill Rudy.

After the presentation, a discussion took place on the work of foreign enterprises within the Great Stone Park, with at least two companies from China showing interest in the project, and planning a visit to Belarus.



► Time for biometric passport

Biometric passport and national ID-card to be introduced by January 1st, 2019

According to Alexey Begun, who heads the Department for Citizenship and Migration at the Belarusian Interior Ministry, the passport will be designed exclusively for foreign trips while the card will be the main identity document. The ID-card will contain a digital signature and will ease dealings with e-government. The electronic chip in the passport will contain personal data, including a photo, electronic signature and fingerprints, helping at border control, to simplify visa

issuance, and increase the level of passport protection for Belarusian citizens.

Each biometric passport will cost around 30 Euros, while an ID-card will cost one base amount (at present, Br23). The new passports will differ in having a photo on the first page. Moreover, all pages will be different, to enhance the protection of the document. Biometric passports won’t be obligatory, with old document remaining valid, together with an ID-card.



Minsk confirms political activity

President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, takes part in Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit and Expo 2017 opening ceremony

Astana has hosted the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Heads of State Council and the solemn opening ceremony of the international Expo 2017. The President of Belarus attended both events. India and Pakistan have joined as fully-fledged members of the organisation. These two powerful states have been long liaising with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, as observers, with the decision to allow full membership made at the 2015 Ufa meeting. At that time, Belarus moved from a partner to an observer. So, we have been developing dialogue simultaneously with India and Pakistan, to some extent.



Undoubtedly, the two new SCO members enhance its authority, being strong nuclear powers. Having large populations and a solid level of influence, regionally and globally, they will make a significant contribution. Sadly, their bilateral relations are far from cloudless, historically and politically. However, they're keen to move to a more constructive position, via the platform of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

Speaking from the summit, Mr. Lukashenko called the acceptance of new mem-

Alexander Lukashenko and
Nursultan Nazarbayev



Alexander Lukashenko:

The SCO works to ensure that, if all members of the organisation desire stability, no one can destabilise the global situation. The SCO has huge potential, so that it cannot be ignored within the international arena

bers a 'courageous step', saying, "I'm convinced that, as new members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, India and Pakistan will not only come closer to settling their problems but will solve them. We'd very much like to see this."

Initially, security was a priority for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, inspiring comparison with the OSCE. Focus is now moving towards economic dimensions, though security remains topical. Speaking on this, Mr. Lukashenko noted the recent warning of the Russian President, on hypothetical col-



During Expo 2017, Belarus is represented by a national pavilion, where visitors can learn about the latest Belarusian sci-tech developments and promising investment projects in an interactive way



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lisions between the USA and Russia. Answering a journalist's question, Vladimir Putin suggested that no one would survive such a collision.

However, according to Mr. Lukashenko, it's possible to prevent it. He noted, "The SCO works to ensure that, if all members of the organisation desire stability, no one can destabilise the global situation. The SCO has huge potential, so that it cannot be ignored within the international arena. What is especially precious is that the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is growing its influence in a constructive way; there's no place for contrapositions or imposition of ideas."

Mr. Lukashenko gave his view, saying, "Growing social instability in various regions is connected with their level of development. I will say, sincerely, that Europe is suf-

fering from an inflow of refugees. If Europe hadn't fenced itself off, choosing rather to help, it wouldn't face such a problem. The announcement of Xi Jinping that China will be promoting the development of SCO member states and all countries along the perimeter of the organisation, is vital from the point of view of settling this terrible problem of illegal migration, which leads to global terrorism."

This leads to the necessity of strengthening the economic dimension of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. In this respect, Minsk suggests developing several economic, investment, logistics and humanitarian projects, with active involvement of observer states. Belarus is ready to help in promoting food security on our continent, working to gradually remove all bar-

riers to the free movement of goods, capitals and labour.

These goals harmoniously coincide with the Chinese initiative of the Silk Road Economic Belt. The conversation in Astana can be viewed as a continuation of the recent discussion in Beijing, as part of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. Most of the heads of state who took part in the event tackled this topic in their speeches. Being on the western border of the organisation, Belarus, as a champion of stability, is ready to make its own contribution to SCO strengthening. Belarus' initiative to establish new dialogue between East and West — similar to the Helsinki Process — remains topical.

Major international events are always a good platform for developing bilateral contacts. As part of the



summit, Mr. Lukashenko chatted with the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, who invited the Belarusian leader to visit his country in autumn. He also enjoyed substantial dialogue with the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, who plans to visit Belarus in August. There were also meetings with the heads of Russia, PRC, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and with the UN General Secretary, António Guterres. Negotiations with the Iranian Foreign Minister saw Mr. Lukashenko elaborate a new agenda for bilateral interaction.

The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, took part in the solemn opening ceremony of international Expo 2017, in Astana. Before the ceremony, the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, hosted a tour of the national pavil-

ion of Kazakhstan. There were presentations of the Expo 2017 complex and the city of Astana, focusing on the latter's architectural landmarks. Heads of delegations also examined an exposition dedicated energy sources of the future: a key theme.

A total of sixty delegations, representing high and top-ranking officials, arrived for the opening ceremony of Expo 2017. Among them were heads of state and heads of government, from various countries, and other officials, including those who took part in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in the capital of Kazakhstan earlier that day.

Before the ceremony began, Mr. Lukashenko had a few words with the presidents of Turkmenistan, Serbia, and Armenia.

The theme of Expo 2017 is Future Energy. The expo focuses on

one of the hottest topics concerning the international community: alternative sources of energy. The expo will last for three months, ending on September 10th. As many as 115 countries and 22 international organisations have confirmed their intention to participate.

During Expo 2017, Belarus is represented by a national pavilion, where visitors can learn about the latest Belarusian R&D projects and promising investment projects in an interactive way. The modern pictorial art exhibition 'From Lisbon to Vladivostok via Minsk, Moscow, and Astana' is part of Belarus' national exposition. It features works by artists from twenty-five countries, showing how much attention Belarus pays to integration processes across the Eurasian space.

By Vasily **Kharitonov**

No minor results in professional sport

Alexander Lukashenko re-elected President of the National Olympic Committee, at recent NOC Olympic Assembly sitting. Sportsmen, coaches and responsible officials in the sporting sphere are working hard to meet tasks set by the NOC Head. In his speech, Mr. Lukashenko outlined the strategy for development.



Ivan Tikhon, Sergey Makarenko and Darya Domracheva

Belarus has managed to declare itself as a sporting state. Owing to the striking achievements of Darya Domracheva, Ivan Tikhon, and other champions and Olympic medalists, the country has gained wider global recognition. While hosting major sporting events, Belarus is significantly expanding its circle of friends. Tourists come to the country, seeing its lifestyle, history and traditions. This is a positive role of sport as one of the strongest forms of public diplomacy.

Having a certain reputation, the country now needs to maintain its level of sporting prowess, and keep pushing forward, overcoming obstacles. Our athletes performed well at the Olympics in Sochi and showed good results at the European Games in Baku. However, their Rio performance was poor, finishing in 40th place in the medal standings. Footballers, ice hockey and volleyball players, as well as some representatives of individual disciplines, underperformed.

Mr. Lukashenko believes that the country is spending a great deal on developing sports and has every right to demand a return — including living up to fans' expectations, and lifting their mood, in repayment for their support of our athletes.

The NOC President listed the main tasks aimed at taking our sport to a higher level. Among them is the determination and support of promising, potential 'winning' sports. "We'll financially support those who receive licences and pay even more



Valery Shary and Alexander Medved

if medals are won,” he said, noting also that student sport is to become a mainstay for professional sports.

Mr. Lukashenko also spoke of coaches’ training. From an organisational point of view, everything is available: the University, the Higher School of Coaches and the Institute for Qualification Improvement. However, it remains difficult to find highly trained specialists, necessitating us often inviting them from abroad. True, these are high-level professionals but — as the President wisely noted — ‘they can never put their soul into the work and never teach sportsmen to love their Motherland.’ With this in mind, domestic coaches are especially needed.

In addition, Mr. Lukashenko said that Republican Olympic training centres should optimise their work, paying special attention to sports science and medicine and setting goals for achievement. “It’s hardly possible to achieve serious results without high-quality medical and scientific support. We must make maximum use of the potential of the Ministry of Health, while understanding that sportsmen need an individual approach.”

Doping is the scourge of modern sports and, as seen from recent scandals, the problem is controversial. Of course, it’s bad to use prohibited drugs, but this issue sometimes becomes an instrument of pressure on teams. It’s important to oppose such an approach.



Speaking about the role of regions, Mr. Lukashenko notes that these should be strengthened, regarding sportsmen’s training. Many of our stars ‘have grown’ from local schools and — if support is provided — new stars will appear. Without this approach, promising athletes may be obliged to move residence (far from ideal) or may give up altogether on their training.

In relation to sports infrastructure, Mr. Lukashenko asserts that construction plans must clearly agree with the country’s concept for sports development. In addition, sports facilities must be used for specific purposes.

The work of sports federations should be intensified and the President proposes distributing duties and responsibilities among various sports organisations. The special role of the National Olympic Committee is that it should be a home for all — rendering methodological, financial and other assistance to federations, while quickly and efficiently solving problems.

Mr. Lukashenko outlined the general strategy, saying, “Sport is the most important sector of the national economy. It must work with benefits and dividends. We aren’t rich enough to spend money recklessly. The situation requires action to improve this sector and eliminate negative factors hampering the effective use of funds.”

By Vasily **Kharitonov**

Searching for happiness in the homeland

'Youth. Looking into the Future' — straight talking with pupils

What matters to the new generation of our citizens? The desire to benefit

the country, maximalism and the search for answers to complicated questions are peculiar to youth. Many of these issues were aired at the meeting.

Alexander Lukashenko said that the audience, at the end of May, gathered in the secondary school # 61 in Minsk, was one of the most difficult. Indeed, these were 300 inquisitive and curious boys and girls with positive leadership ambitions. They have not yet accumulated the experience of age, but they have already had time to show themselves in creativity, science, cultural, sporting and public life, and become initiators of children's and youth social projects. The day before saw an excursion to the Independence Palace, they even visited the holy of holies — the President's study. All this was captured by numerous press photographers to once again underline how these young personalities communicated with the President.

Among the participants of the meeting were laureates of the President's special fund for social support

of gifted pupils and students, winners of the Republican and international subject Olympiads and winners and participants of republican creative competitions. In informal circumstances, they spoke with the President for several hours and did not hesitate to ask questions.

incurious, apathetic and inert. Each new generation differs from the previous one but it is not always worse. Otherwise progress would have stopped long ago. While the complexity of the present is that pupils today, owing to the rapid development of technology has moved forward.

What matters to the new generation of our citizens? The desire to benefit the country, maximalism and the search for answers to complicated questions are peculiar to youth. Many of these issues were aired at the meeting

It is not easy to find a common language with ambitious young people. However, at the same time it is a direct and sincere audience. Such was the spirit of the dialogue in which the two groups spoke with frankness and openness. The conversation was substantial and warm, useful and interesting. It was obvious that it was greatly enjoyed by all the participants.

The senior generation is often inclined to complain of the younger generation, calling them both passive and

The President talks to the 9th former, Danila Yeliseev. The pupil designed a 3D printer with characteristics comparable to those of major companies. These companies sell such devices at a price of \$3-5 thousand, while Danila spent just \$250 producing it. Now he is working on a new, more advanced model which will print items from several materials of different colours. The boy has already decided on his aims: to establish serial production of 3D printers. He has even held initial ne-



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gotiations with suppliers of parts, answering the President's question about what support he needs, he admitted his lack of experience in negotiations and marketing, but he was not fazed by this. Mr. Lukashenko ordered that someone control the project and provide all the necessary assistance. He also advised that it would be a good idea to involve more peers in the work. Such a business will have a great future.

I listened to the discussion and found myself thinking that my peers at the same age designed radio-controlled models at best. This is one difference between the generations.

Another girl tells the President about a social project for the education of adults. It turns out that young people worry about the large number of divorces in the country. They believe that through intelligent dialogue with adults they could contribute to the preservation of families.

What conclusions can be made here? Our young people want to ride

the crest of the wave of life. They are very interested in topics that are important for the country, society and the development of the state. They have own opinion on issues and are willing to offer their solutions. They sometimes come to conclusions which don't always come into adults' minds.

“What qualities should a leader have?” was asked from the hall.

The President reasons that even if a person has inborn abilities, without constant self-improvement, certain self-restrictions it is impossible to achieve success. While the main thing is honesty and decency.

What is the role of knowledge today?

The advice of the President is not to waste time. Progress is fast today. What knowledge pupils accumulate by the beginning of their adult life will need to be used immediately.

Which of the meetings held in the Palace of Independence, are most memorable to you?

Having thought a little, Alexander Lukashenko told about the most difficult one. With representatives of the West who came to Belarus, with negative stereotypes. It was not easy to change their opinion about the country, but having visited our country, having walked around it and looked at real life, the visitors had a different opinion when they left the country.

What did the President dream of in childhood?

He dreamt of a professional football career. And, knowing the way of life of rural people, dreamt of making it better somehow, at least in one village...

Questions followed tirelessly one after another. The general conclusion was that the growing generation is strong and purposeful. Girls and boys do not look at life from a closed inner world. They are its high-quality participants. They take on board the President's advice to search for happiness in their country.

By Dmitry Kryat

Attractive investment

Facts and figures of investment in Belarusian industrial development over the last 25 years

In late July, a new conveyor at the BelGee Plant is to be launched in Borisov. This will become the first full cycle car production in the country: not a manual assembly, but an automated facility able to manufacture many thousands of cars annually.

As Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Semashko noted, the project is set to be a success. We consider the number of investment projects that have come to fruition since the independence of Belarus in 1991.

Money invested other states

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Belarus and its neighbours began receiving foreign investment as new markets opened to western companies. In the early years of its independence to the present day, Belarus has received approximately equal financial investments compared with Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) statistics, from 1992-2016, investment

in the economy of the abovementioned states made up 20 to 40 percent of GDP in each country. In some years, the flow increased and in others, fell. For example, 1993 and 1994 were the richest in terms of injections of funds for Belarus: the investment level reached 72 and 53 percent respectively. The economy was experiencing a phase of collapse at that point and our GDP at that time was not the highest. Similarly however, our neighbours received no more than 33 percent at the time.

Strangely, in the first few years of independence we paid little attention to direct foreign investments. The data is kept in the archives of the National Statistical Committee and covers the last 15 years since 2002. The Economy Ministry has previous information regarding organisations with foreign capital. In



line with this, as of January 1st, 1998, 1,200 legal entities whose assets included such capital were registered. According to the latest statistics (January 2016), their number rose to 6.8 thousand; in the last 17 years, the number of such entities has increased 5.6 times. Although this figure initially seems large, such companies account for only 4.8 percent of the total number of registered businesses. Moreover, there are no industrial giants among them.

ing, metallurgy, optical industry and electronics. “All these facilities were established in Soviet times and we’ve inherited them,” the Ministry states.

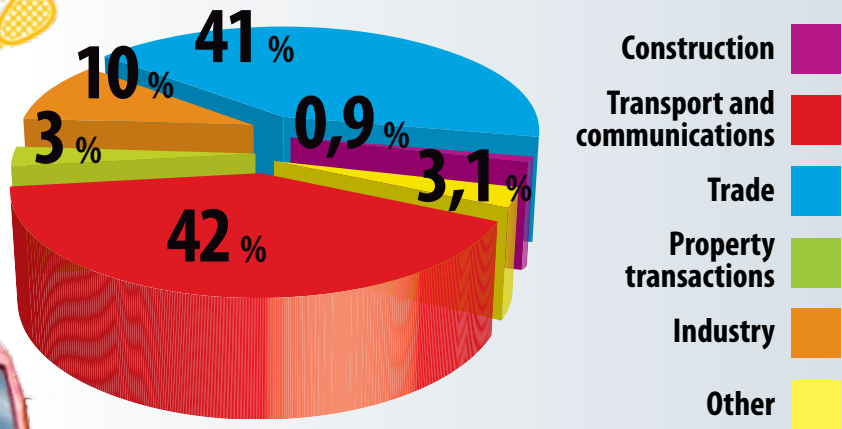
In the last 25 years, serious modernisation has been conducted at these factories and enterprises not only to technical upgrading but also mastering of new products. “New product lines in different industrial branches have been created at the existing companies,” say the Ministry’s specialists. “These include the production of urban, suburban and international buses, combine harvesters, caterpillar and powerful tractors, seamless hot-rolled



VADIM KONDRASHOV

Top 5 economic activities in direct foreign investments

(share in total amount of investments)



A good legacy

In response to our request, the Ministry of Industry has informed us that its system now unites over 220 organisations involved in mechanical engineering, agricultural machinery, machine tool mak-

pipes, diesel engines, household appliances and electronics, grain drying plants, meat-processing equipment and dumper trucks with a load capacity of 130-450 tonnes.”

Interestingly, these projects were financed mainly at the expense of the businesses themselves and with state support. To optimise efforts of the legal entities which are a part of the production chain, holdings were established. At present, 16 of them are operational.

Where did the investments go?

Of course, there were developments using foreign investment and there are many examples: i.e. the MAZ-MAN project aimed at production of trucks, wheel loaders and off-road vehicles. Many also remember Heineken, Coca-Cola or Henkel Bautechnik. Moreover, Swiss Stadler Rail virtually developed a new industry in the country of passenger train production. Even the President said that this project is a classic example of how direct foreign investment should look in action: an investor comes, injects funds and makes money for themselves and the country.

Meanwhile, out of the total volume of direct investments which our young state has received in recent years (\$76bn), only ten percent went into industry. The major investment was registered to the transport and communications sector (40 percent each) and retail. These spheres envisage less expense but a faster return.







At present, there are several promising projects in the sphere of industry. China is actively investing in the Great Stone Industrial Park; for example, in April, the Zoomlion Company began construction of a joint Belarusian-Chinese facility to produce machinery. Russia is helping modernise the Mozyr Oil Refinery. In the Lyuban District, the UK and Cyprus are involved in the construction of a mining and processing complex with an annual capacity of 1.1-2m tonnes of potassium chloride; construction is being carried out on the raw material base at the Nezhinsky site of the Starobinskoye potash deposit.

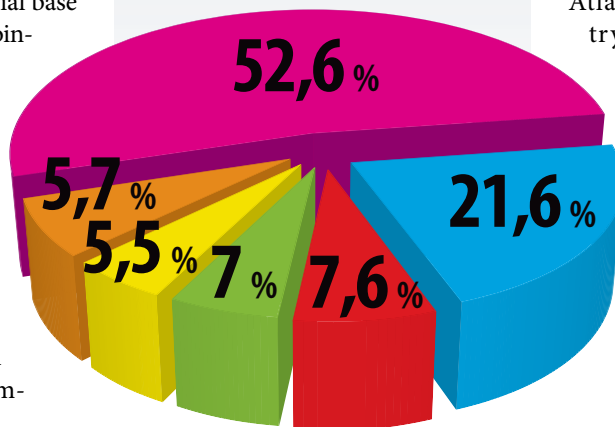
At the same time, one of the largest investment projects was realised not at the expense of western, but eastern credit: the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB) and Belarusbank. The project deals with the production of products at the Belarusian Steel Works. "From now on, the com-

*In 25 years of sovereignty, Belarus received over **76** bn of direct foreign investments*

pany can ensure complete processing of cast billets and blooms. This has enabled it to reach high value-added production. After a new rolling mill was launched, the complete production cycle has been ensured," the Ministry of Industry commented.

Top 5 countries for direct foreign investments

	Russia	
	UK	
	USA	
	Cyprus	
	Switzerland	
	Other	(share in total amount of investments)



Who was most generous?

It is interesting to look at the structure of the above mentioned \$76bn of direct investments by country. More than a half of investment in our economy (\$40bn) from 2002 to 2016 was provided by Russia. Another \$16bn came from the UK. The USA allocated around \$6bn, while Switzerland and Cyprus invested \$4bn each.

It should also be taken into account that part of the money coming from Cyprus had a Russian origin. This state is a well-known offshore zone which attracts businessmen with low taxes and simple operating conditions. Accordingly, it can be concluded that Belarus has seldom witnessed real western capital. Moreover, those funds rarely reached the real sector of the economy — mostly going to trade and services. The industry was developed and modernised mostly on account of state funds or foreign loans — which are worse than investments. In general, we are often left alone with our industrial problems.

It's quite probable that Belarus will develop MAZ independently at another time. Not long ago, Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Semashko said that around \$500m is to be injected into the plant development. "We are now settling the issue of the source of funding," he added evasively.

Belarus is constantly working to attract investment — focusing on the Schengen zone and going beyond the Atlantic Ocean. However, the country most often finds money from elsewhere: Russian investors or our own treasury. The Chinese are our latest significant investor, promising considerable amounts of capital on the condition of connected lending. Simply put, the normal operation of industry is exclusively our concern — grown by taxpayer's money.

By Vladislav Kuletsky

Small business reaches maturity



Boris Panshin, Professor
at BSU's Faculty of Economics

We often speak of the development of a long-term strategy for innovation and entrepreneurship, currently the major source of new jobs and a guarantee of high growth rates for both new and traditional economies. The task of elaborating on such a strategy is a complex one, but feasible nonetheless.

We often speak of the development of a long-term strategy for innovation and entrepreneurship, currently the major source of new jobs and a guarantee of high growth rates for both new and traditional economies. The task of elaborating on such a strategy is a complex one, but feasible nonetheless.

Small business in the country accounts for 28 percent and the non-state sector employs more than 1.2 million people — practically one in every four or five workers. In most developed countries, these figures are twice as high. However, we must consider that in these states, especially in the USA, the economy has been growing for almost 200 years, starting with small enterprises. Our economy on the other hand, has had just 20 years to establish itself in its modern form, and relies primarily on large enterprise. This determines our many contemporary problems and difficulties while simultaneously creating new opportunities for the quick renewal of industries, using their production and intellectual potential.

Small innovative business is unable to grow and strengthen if high-tech industry doesn't develop nearby. Examples of Belarusian high-tech enterprises show that all except the 'virtual' businesses, have established themselves on the premises of state enterprises and scientific research institutes.

Countries with sustainable development (Germany, Denmark and France) have a level of small enterprises accounting for 70 percent, medium-sized 22 percent and the share of large companies is 8 percent. This enables them to involve the maximum number of citizens in active economic life and ensure a sustainable economy. The same situation is seen in Asia, where scientific-production clusters have been established, dozens of medium and hundreds of thousands of small companies are working on the principals of cooperation. All benefit because they spend most of their efforts on bringing technology and production techniques to a high standard rather than on a competitive struggle for survival.

Under current conditions, the foundation for the creation of Belarusian clusters are the large enterprises, as well as academic and branch scientific research institutes

and higher and secondary educational establishments. The success of the High-Tech Park is primarily explained by significant state support, and the fact that IT companies began to compete for talented students while creating their laboratories and centres in leading universities. In the real sector, it's more difficult to do this and more effort and time is needed; however, it's necessary to move in this direction at an accelerated rate.

It would be a rational step to set up a range of national centres of excellence (knowledge hubs) in universities covering those activities in which Belarus has indisputable achievements. These would be linked to large enterprises, with the aim of introducing innovations and, at the same time, preparing personnel. Moreover, many experts see the future of universities as a cluster of high-tech companies with highly intellectual services.

The future of the economy relies on human capital, which is of great concern to new, promising technologies and production facilities that we can develop independently. Without this, an increase in living standards is impossible, since one job in the high-tech sphere creates 4-5 others in related production and services.

Time to collect the Stone

Will new privileges for residents help attract high-tech companies into Industrial Park



NADEZHDA PONKRATOVA



The Great Stone Chinese-Belarusian Industrial Park is called a pearl of the Silk Road Economic Belt. Despite the high hopes pinned on it, businesses were in no hurry to join the Park and foreign investments were not forthcoming. The reason was simple: there were not enough attractive conditions for residents. Now, Decree #166 has entered into force which envisages new privileges for the participants while also making the legal regime of the Park objectively the best in the country and in the EAEU.

The administration of Great Stone doesn't hide the fact that they have been waiting for this decree for a long time. Work on it took almost two years and consequently the inflow of new investments is expected to arrive.

What revolutionary powers does this decree have? The Ministry of Economy enumerates the most progressive innovations: the improvement of conditions for conducting inspections regarding residents and investors; the enhancement of availability of residency; numerous tax and customs privileges; the reduction of cost of energy carriers; free pricing; the functioning of the bond zone; visa-free entrance; and 'stabilisation' clause for 10 years.

The First Deputy Director General of the Industrial Park Development Company, Kirill Koroteyev, underlined the introduction of a principle of 'one station' which will significantly simplify the work of companies operating in the Park. Such a format has been successfully proven in China and Singapore and will be operating in our country from now on. Its significant difference from the 'one stop shop' principle is that representatives of state authorities will arrive at the Great Stone Park themselves and will fulfil all the necessary procedures on site. Investors don't need to worry about the number of procedures and approvals.

As far as the change of residency conditions are concerned, there are also innovations here. Primarily, the list of types of activities has been enlarged, adding informatics, pharmaceuticals, electronic

commerce, activity connected with the storage and processing of big data volumes, and socio-cultural activity. Moreover, the limit for joining the Park has been reduced: initially the amount of injected investments stood at \$5m while now this figure has been reduced to \$500,000. The Park's Administration hopes that this measure will attract large, as well as medium-sized and even small businesses. Customs privileges have been also envisaged for the residents, alongside the reduction of prices for energy carriers and a visa-free regime for up to 180 days for those who are interested in investment. Considerable changes also include the so called 'grandfather clause' — a principle of protection of investors from legislation changes for the worse for the whole period of an investment project.

Tax and customs privileges will become big advantages for investors: exemption from import VAT and taxes for income, property, and land tax. Moreover, companies in the Park will be able to use customs preferences of the 'bond zone'. This proposal was made by the Chinese. The decree also envisages that Minsk National Airport is included in the boundary of the Great Stone Industrial Park.

Summing up all these privileges and preferences we'd like to draw attention to the fact that Belarusian and Chinese experts, working on the document, studied best practices on site and the working experience of industrial parks in China and in a range of Asian and European countries. They also analysed unsuccessful projects and, as a result, borrowed only the best. However, there's no need to believe that tomorrow a queue of investors will appear. It's necessary to understand that demand for the industrial park is not elastic; it won't grow proportionally to the reduction of definite norms. Struggle for investments should be continued rather than resting on our laurels. We can't but be pleased to see that we have a significant trump card which can help us win in the competitive struggle with other privileged zones.

By Polina **Konoga**



▶ The modern Silk Road: fast as the wind

Container trains running from Shenzhen, China to Belarus

The new train route runs through the territory of four states, including Russia and Kazakhstan, and has become a visible achievement of the implementation of the Belt and Road initiative. The destination for these container trains is Kolyadichi station, near Minsk, making it part of the multi-modal logistics hub. It has a dry port, accepting cargoes from various countries and very often from the People's Republic of China.

Cargo has been travelling along the Silk Road to the Great Stone Industrial Park but, originally, these were only one-way journeys: fulfilling special orders for the supply of construction materials, used to build administrative and business centres, as well as warehouses, for the Park. Now, the launch of the China Railway Express train along the Shenzhen-Minsk (Kolyadichi) route is viewed as a strategic project.

During the recent Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, in Beijing, President Alexander Lukashenko agreed with Chinese President Xi Jinping to develop joint collaboration on this project, including the construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt.

Connecting Asia and Europe, this large-scale infrastructural project will open up a wealth of new opportunities. The first container train has now left Shenzhen.

People and technology driven by agribusiness

Over five hundred companies from around the world demonstrate newest agricultural machinery and latest developments in the field of agriculture, at Belagro International Agricultural Fair

During Belagro's opening, Prime Minister Andrei Kobyakov didn't hide his pride at our achievements, saying, "We're now among the top five exporters of dairy products. To occupy this important place in world production, to support it and strengthen our position, we need to keep improving, remaining at the cutting edge of science, while rising to meet competition from our partners, domestically and abroad. It's important for us to demonstrate new developments, and to be familiar with the products of our partners, friends and business rivals — to make good decisions for further cooperation."

The Minister for Agriculture and Food, Leonid Zayats, spoke to journalists about the efficiency of the agricultural sector, mentioning some figures: from 2011-2015, the budget allocated \$8.3 billion to support the agricultural sector, while foreign currency proceeds from selling agricultural products reached \$25 billion. "The injected money works for the state's benefit," he concluded, urging agrarians to use all funds rationally.

The fair was rich in new exhibits. Among them were goods by machine

builders, who placed their vehicles in the open air — occupying a large area. Amkodor presented its first tractor, which has been almost half a year in development. The head of the frame-steered tractor design bureau at Amkodor JSC, Sergey Yuzefovich, explains that their tractor differs from MTZ vehicles. He tells us, "Our vehicle comprises two half-frames superimposed on each other in the horizontal and vertical planes: 42 and 13 degrees respectively. What does this mean? Due to its construction, it's much easier to move through marshy terrain. It's comfortable to operate, like driving a car. In fact, we're aiming for our own niche, as occupied by St. Petersburg tractors. We'll try to drive a wedge in the neighbouring market."

The new tractor is now undergoing tests, on Amkodor's agro-farm, in Shklov. By late 2017, two more prototypes will be produced, with more powerful engines. Serial production is scheduled for 2019.

Meanwhile, Belkoopsoyuz presented its live Scandinavian minks. About 90 percent of Belarusian fur is produced at Belkoopsoyuz's fur farm. Finished products were demonstrated at Belkoopsoyuz stands, which covered over 60 square metres. The site included several leading

sectors of Belkoopsoyuz — including the industrial branch and public catering. The Deputy Head of the Department of Industry, Quality and Standardisation at Belkoopsoyuz, Tatiana Kosyakova, commented upon the company's new developments, saying, "This is our special bread, which has bacon, onion and garlic added (accounting for 10 percent of the weight). It's sold in our branded stores in Minsk — such as at Rodny Kut shop, on Pobediteley Avenue, which also sells bread with oat flakes, wheat bran, flax seed and fruits added (apricots and plums). We strive to ensure that our products are natural and useful. Actually, Belkoopsoyuz operates sixty-six bakeries countrywide, producing over a thousand varieties of bread. Bakery and confectionery production accounts for over 35 percent of the gross industrial production of the branch."

The fair also presented non-alcoholic beverages, produced by Belkoopsoyuz's twelve companies, in addition to mineral water. Another attraction was the presentation of Belarusian fast food cuisine, at the Lepim Sami (Cooking Ourselves) dumpling bar. The Chairman of Belkoopsoyuz's Board, Valery Ivanov, comments that cafes in district centres are to be restructured: its interiors will be re-



newed stylishly to attract young people and families with children. Dumpling bars will offer ravioli with a choice of fillings and colours — all cooked in front of customers' eyes. Pizzas and smazhni will also be on the menu. The first cafe already operates in Senno and the company plans to launch similar bars in each region by late 2017.

Guests enjoyed a rich and busy agenda during Belarusian Agricultural Week.

Modern agricultural machinery, technological know-how, animal-record holders, food novelties, high-yielding varieties of plants have been demonstrated at the large exhibition venue near Minsk. Those visiting to the site could also deepen their professional knowledge, enjoy new experiences and conclude profitable contracts. These five days in June have been traditionally held under the auspices of Belarusian Agricultural Week and the Belagro International Agricultural Fair which gathered participants and guests for the 27th time.

8,000 square metres of the indoor exposition and 42,000 'open-air' square metres at the Globus trade and logistics centre in agro-town Shchemyslitsa gathered the most advanced trends of Belarusian and foreign companies in the field

of agriculture. 21 official foreign delegations arrived — with a record number of participants: 507 companies from 25 countries as far apart as Germany and Australia. This is natural: in nearly three decades of its existence, the forum has gained a reputation and recognition both within the country and abroad. Belarus — positioning itself in the global field as a state with highly developed agribusiness — demonstrates strong industry development trends. The First Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food — Leonid Marinich — confirms this with figures, "Last year, exports of products exceeded \$5bn. Villagers gathered a high grain harvest of 9m tonnes, including maize. There is progress in animal husbandry: this year, the task is to receive up to 6,000kg of milk from each cow."

These figures could hardly be possible without the strenuous physical and intellectual work of agricultural workers; the prospects of the branch rely on innovation. High-performance technology and advanced technologies are a good way to overcome the difficult challenges of the risky agricultural zone. It is no accident that, as in previous years, considerable expositions at Belagro were represented by scientific and practical centres of the National

Academy of Sciences. Agricultural machine building companies also had exhibits to amaze the public.

Apart from the new venue and a record number of participants, this year's Belagro had some popular features: i.e. the ploughman contest — held under the auspices of the exhibition for over 5 years — has become international this year (apart from Belarus, teams from Russia and Kazakhstan participated).

For the first time, an auction was held for the best Belarusian breeding farms: they sold their animals — cows, pigs and goats. This was not merely a fascinating spectacle but a profitable economic activity: the auction enabled farms to learn the real cost of breeding animals and this will help them to make money.

Another innovation was the Belarusian-Africa Forum organised by the For-



eign Ministry's initiative. African states were represented by around 90 people who focused on the discussion of such issues as agricultural development and mutual cooperation. Guests were showed agricultural and processing enterprises. According to Mr. Marinich, the forum will contribute not only to strengthening mutual partnerships but also to the promotion of Belarusian products to African markets and the expansion of their range.

By Alexey Fedosov

Clean, ecological...

Belarusian scientists have developed 'healthy fertilisers' for agriculture. Safe and harmless biological products stimulate the growth of plants and increase productivity by over 20 percent, effectively fight diseases and improve the quality of the soil. At the same time, they do not contain chemicals. Fertilisers work immediately: it is possible to use them and then, on that very day, harvest the crop. Our correspondent has learnt about these new scientific developments in detail.

With 'chemicals' we have problems

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, annual world losses of crops due to vermin and plant diseases, amounts to 30 percent or more. Damage reaches \$75 billion — a huge figure. To avoid or minimise losses, people apply weed and pest-killer chemicals.

The remains of these pesticides get into fresh-water reservoirs — up to a third of cases of dead fish in rivers and lakes occur because of this. Chemical fertilisers accumulate in the ground, get into the soil and are transferred to other regions — insects, birds and animals suffer. And, of course, people: the WHO (World Health Organisation) annually registers up to half a million cases of poisoning with pesticides.

“The problem is of great importance. Because our quality of life, and the health of all creatures on the planet are at risk. People all over the world have begun to approach the application of chemicals in agriculture responsibly. While many refuse to use them,” Irina

Feklistova, Candidate of Sciences describes alternative safe ways to increase productivity.

The head of the scientific-research laboratory of molecular genetics and biotechnology of the Biology Department of BSU holds small test tubes — biological preparations which have many advantages, “It is possible to receive a good crop and not worry about our health. Our developments are not toxic. Unlike chemicals, they do not lead to mutations, benign or malignant tumours.”

The main feature

Bacteria, which are part of our innovative biological solution, also synthesise a large quantity of phytohormones and vitamins. In addition, live microorganisms are capable of creating atmospheric nitrogen — its proportion may reach 60 percent, sometimes even 90. While the absorption of phosphorus is also important for a good crop.

“Up to 75 percent of all combinations of phosphorus in soil are sparingly soluble, and they are not available to plants,” Irina Feklistova continues. “While microbial preparations make phosphorus

available. Thus, agricultural crops grow faster, their productivity increases.”

The feature of modern fertilisers is safety and the absence of a waiting period. It means that it is possible to apply fertilisers on plants, and if needed, to harvest the crop in the evening. There is one more important bonus: harmful organisms, pathogens, do not adapt and do not get used to the preparations, as is often the case with chemicals. The accumulation of useful microorganisms also improves the soil.

“Bacteria successfully stop the development of a variety of phytopathogenic fungi and bacteria which are widespread in the country,” the scientist shows us the results of their tests. “They affect plants on protected ground and even greenhouse plants. They also damage grain crops. While using biological products — it is possible to increase the crop by 20 percent.”

All is qualitative

The laboratory of molecular genetics and biotechnology has been developing this area of unique biological fertiliser for more than 20 years. The preparations





Irina Feklistova:

Each person, whether it be the owner of a large-scale farm or a simple summer resident, has the possibility of improving their own kitchen garden and growing pure products without chemicals



Preparations successfully stop the development of a variety of phytopathogenic fungi and bacteria which are spread throughout the country

'Baktogen', 'Aurin', 'Guliver', for example, protect crops from diseases. While 'Stimulus' activates their growth and development, increases the quality of production, productivity and immunity of plants. Irina Feklistova adds, "Besides greenhouse plants, the preparation is registered for long-stalked flax. It improves the quality of the fibre and increases the percentage productivity of the seeds.

'Zhiten' increases the quality of the soil, improves it and prepares it for sowing. It is the first microbiological fertiliser in the country which accelerates the rates of decomposition of stubble and straw. It is a good alternative to nitric fertiliser and allows us to have a crop useful for health and safe for nature.

"Our usual situation in the autumn, after harvesting, is that fallow fields are sprayed with chemicals, then the fields are ploughed in. Biological fertilisers can cope with this task even better." The procedure will be cheaper, the biologist believes it is better for us to stop using chemical fertilizers, preferring organic fertiliser.

After all, many people have considered up to now that modern microbial preparations do not give visible and fast

results. It is not so. The world understood long ago that using chemicals does not result in anything good. Thus, with each year, the efficiency of crops lessens, the natural potential of the soil's fertility is exhausted, the ecological environment worsens as well as the quality of production. The concept of the development of agriculture gradually changes: it is more and more focused on the use of possibilities of agro-eco-systems and minimisation of application of chemicals.

Why do we continue to destroy nature?

Our country is making huge steps towards the development of organic agriculture. Biological methods are already produced in two large factories where the total volume of output of our preparations per year exceeds 12, sometimes even 15 tonnes. Today everyone, whether it be the owner of a large-scale farm or a simple summer resident, has the possibility of improving their own kitchen garden and growing pure products. Biological preparations have the fourth degree of danger (harmless substances), it means that there is no reason to be afraid

of them. Even if you spill them on your hands — it is enough just to wash them off with water.

So why do we continue to poison ourselves and nature? It is a rhetorical question, after all many people frequently treat innovations with mistrust and scepticism. However, we are making progress. Today more and more buyers are ready even to pay more to buy safe products. People believe that we are what we eat. There is one small problem however, our shops do not sell enough ecologically safe goods. More often they are delivered from other countries, which follow national programmes aimed at the decrease of applied chemicals.

Looking into the future, "Farms which are oriented towards ecology, receive special subsidies — on production, receiving certificates of quality, and goods popularisation. While we still do not have legislation on organic agriculture. The state has supported our scientists in the field of industrial biotechnologies. Probably, with obligatory certification for ecological production we would reap the fruits of success."

By Yulia **Popko**



Everything about health

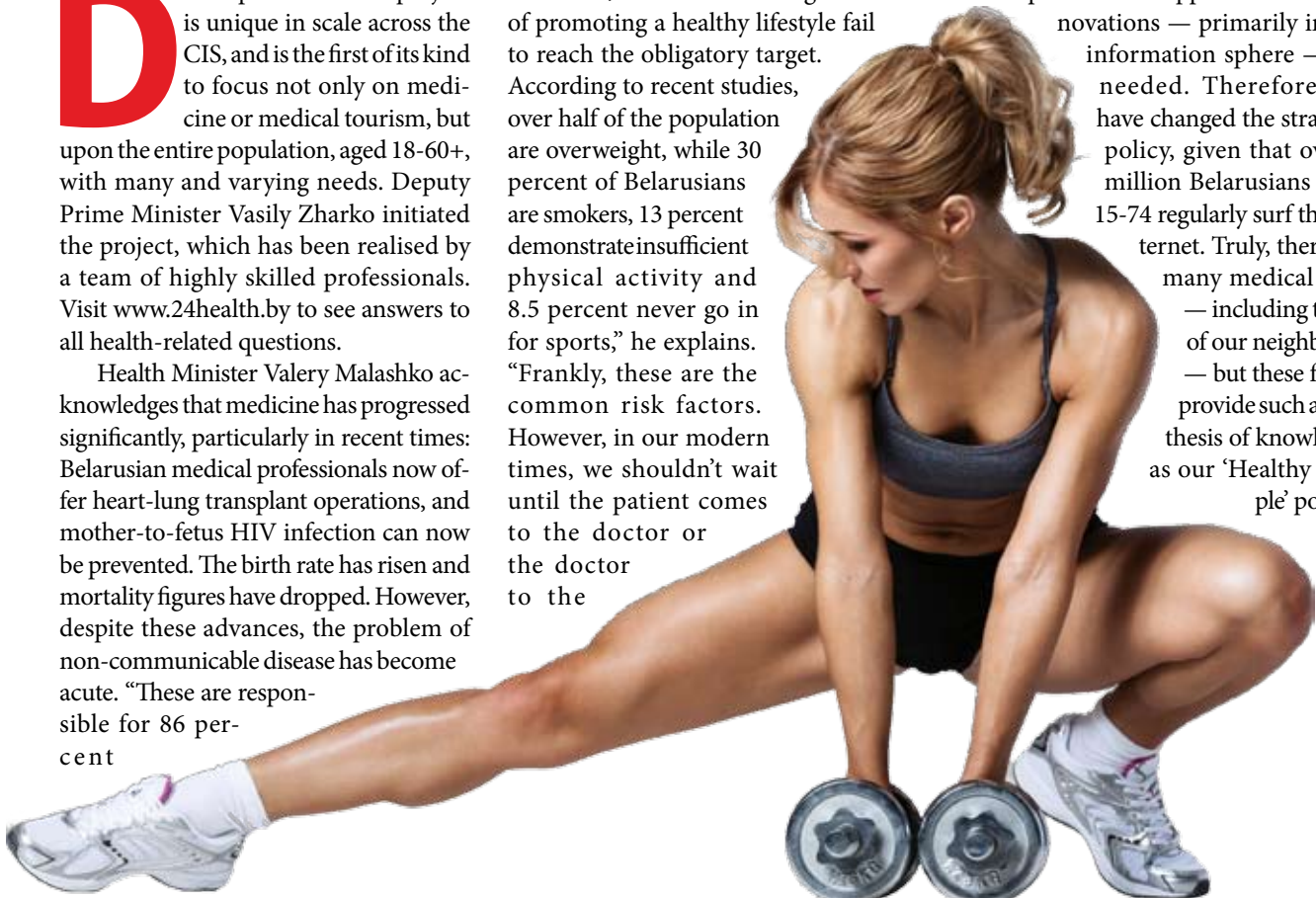
Health Ministry has launched national Internet portal to promote and inform a healthy lifestyle for all

Developers claim the project is unique in scale across the CIS, and is the first of its kind to focus not only on medicine or medical tourism, but upon the entire population, aged 18-60+, with many and varying needs. Deputy Prime Minister Vasily Zharko initiated the project, which has been realised by a team of highly skilled professionals. Visit www.24health.by to see answers to all health-related questions.

Health Minister Valery Malashko acknowledges that medicine has progressed significantly, particularly in recent times: Belarusian medical professionals now offer heart-lung transplant operations, and mother-to-fetus HIV infection can now be prevented. The birth rate has risen and mortality figures have dropped. However, despite these advances, the problem of non-communicable disease has become acute. “These are responsible for 86 per-

cent of deaths, while the existing methods of promoting a healthy lifestyle fail to reach the obligatory target. According to recent studies, over half of the population are overweight, while 30 percent of Belarusians are smokers, 13 percent demonstrate insufficient physical activity and 8.5 percent never go in for sports,” he explains. “Frankly, these are the common risk factors. However, in our modern times, we shouldn’t wait until the patient comes to the doctor or the doctor to the

patient: new approaches and innovations — primarily in the information sphere — are needed. Therefore, we have changed the strategic policy, given that over 5 million Belarusians aged 15-74 regularly surf the Internet. Truly, there are many medical sites — including those of our neighbours — but these fail to provide such a synthesis of knowledge as our ‘Healthy People’ portal.”



Olga Svetlitskaya, project manager and a Doctor of Medical Sciences, agrees that our life has changed drastically. Innovations, aimed to make our world more convenient, are eventually leading to the situation where people move less, are isolated, often feel lonely and experience fear and stress (lacking traditional, community support mechanisms). Many occupations are disappearing, being replaced by new professions, which require different skills. On the other hand, women aged 40 and over can now

The project is the first of its kind to focus not only on medicine or medical tourism, but upon the entire population, aged 18-60+, with many and varying needs

give birth, and nobody identifies with the idea of retiring at the age of 55-60.

“Our Internet portal is a social project,” Olga stresses. “Food, physical exercise and regular daily routines are no longer believed to be solely responsible for happiness. Happiness is rooted in people’s satisfaction with their lives. If a single link is dropped from the chain, then the need to consult a doctor arises. That’s why we aim to cover all the most important questions: from how to raise children to how to lead an active life.”

The ‘Healthy People’ portal has seven sections and many possibilities: social networks, emergency first aid videos, stocking the home medicine cabinet, and a ‘health card’, with useful addresses. All articles are unique, with no rewriting used. Users can leave a request for a certain topic and it will be addressed. A special mobile application will be launched this summer. The site has a Belarusian language version and, developers hope to eventually launch a version in English. ‘Healthy People’ is one of three ambitious online projects; others are in the making but remain secret for the time being.

By Lyudmila **Gabasova**



Top treatment for children

Magnetic resonance imaging unit for Minsk’s Children’s Infectious Diseases Clinical Hospital

Valery Malashko, Belarus’ Health Minister, notes that children countrywide are being treated with the new equipment, including those with serious infections, radically changing our national approach, to meet the most modern standards.

The Children’s Infectious Diseases Hospital appeared in Minsk thirty years ago. Annually, it treats around 30,000 children with infectious diseases and problems with breathing, digestion, or their urogenital or nervous systems. The launch of a new ward is bringing new opportunities, adding 240 beds and ensuring more comfortable con-

ditions for patients and their parents. Twin-bedded rooms have contemporary furniture and colourful interiors. However, the major innovation is an ultra-modern MRI machine: the Philips Ingenia 1.5T (last September, similar equipment began operating at the 10th clinical hospital in Minsk). Suitable for patients of various ages, build and physical condition, it allows scans to be conducted with ease and in comfort.

The Chairman of Minsk City Executive Committee, Andrey Shorest, believes that the hospital now boasts the most contemporary equipment, able to diagnose quickly and efficiently.

By Alexander **Nesterov**

Close yet distant ocean

Belarus is numbered among 44 countries without a sea border. However, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea gives such countries the opportunity for access to the 'common heritage of mankind' and to receive benefits from the exploitation of the resources of the international seabed as envisaged by the Convention.



All to protect the Ocean

One could argue that our existence on the planet depends on the sea. The ocean is the birthplace of all life on earth, since more than half of all organisms live there. The air we breathe and the water we drink are inseparably connected with the ocean which also influences nature and stabilises the climate...

To understand the importance of the ocean for humankind we should look at the statistics. It's difficult to believe that the oceans cover three quarters of our planet's surface and account for 97 percent of all water reserves. Practically half the Earth's population — over three billion people — depend to some extent on the biological diversity of our oceans, seas and coastal territories. The production chain, connected with fish stocks, directly or indirectly, ensures employment for more than 200 million people. The oceans provide food, energy, water, jobs and economic benefits for people in every country, even those that don't have access to the sea.

According to data from the International Maritime Organisation, more than 90 percent of the world's transportation is by sea. Furthermore, the oceans

are the 'lungs' of our planet, producing the greater part of the oxygen necessary for people and animals and absorbing around a third of the carbon dioxide generated by people, thus helping to



neutralise the consequences of climate change and global warming.

Nevertheless, in recent decades the health of the world oceans has begun to decline. Agenda 21, adopted in 1992,

noted the excessive exploitation of marine resources: over the last decade, the scale of deep-sea fishing has significantly increased, while the amount of fishing in waters under national jurisdiction have increased almost 5-fold. According to UN data, around 30 percent of world fish stocks are subject to excessive exploitation while more than 50 percent are exploited at the level of reproduction. However, it is not only fish stocks that are exhausted; in recent decades, around 20 percent of the world's coral reefs have also been lost.

Another pressing problem for the world's oceans is postconsumer plastics and unwanted fishing accessories. This pollution causes more than a million sea birds to die annually, as well as hundreds of thousands of aquatic mammals and innumerable fish. The issue of postconsumer plastics has become so acute that the United Nations Environment Programme launched an unprecedented global campaign aiming to eliminate marine litter by 2022; its major sources are micro-particles of plastics in cosmetic produce and over-use of single-use plastics. The campaign calls on governments and the public of all states without exception to reduce



the production and the use of plastics, to minimise the application of plastic packaging and to create a new culture of consumers' attitudes towards the issue before the consequences for the sea are irreversible.

community agreed to conduct an international meeting to protect the oceans. From June 5th-9th, under the UN aegis, New York hosted the high-level United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Develop-

We should put aside short-term national benefits to prevent long-term global catastrophe. By preserving our oceans and ensuring their sustainable development we try to preserve life itself on the planet

According to expert data, land-based activities account for around 80 percent of pollution of the marine environment. Problems for the ocean reflect on vulnerable populations who live in coastal territories.

The issue of human influence on the World's oceans has become so acute that the motto 'Our Oceans are our Future' was announced as the topic of World Oceans Day for June 8th, 2017, while the global

ment Goal 14: 'Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.' Speaking at the Conference, the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, called on countries to find new ways to use ocean resources responsibly. He also warned that the condition of marine eco-systems will worsen if states are unable to overcome their disagreements connected with territorial issues and resources.

"We should put aside short-term national benefits to prevent long-term global catastrophe. By preserving our oceans and ensuring their sustainable development we try to preserve life itself on the planet," emphasised the UN Secretary General, addressing the participants at the Ocean Conference.

Great attention was paid to the youth at the conference. Speeches focused on the fact that the situation is in crisis and it's essential to act without delay. It was noted that young people can be the initiators of positive changes and make their own contributions to the protection of oceans from pollution. Participants at the meeting were unanimous in the necessity of preventing overuse of the seas and promised to show political will and new partnership relations for the implementation of the adopted Oceans Action Plan.

Project in concrete

On June 8th, on World Oceans Day, the Oceanography Centre's cultural and educational institution, with the support of the Administration of Minsk's Oktyabrsky District, the National Academy of Sciences, the UN Office in Belarus and the Republican Centre of Innovative and Technical Creativity, launched a new educational project: the Open Ocean mobile museum-laboratory.

The mobile museum-laboratory is a unique Belarusian museum of the history of the submarine fleet, an ocean museum with a mini-aquarium, with demonstrations of modern digital and mobile technology, as well as a scientific and educational laboratory for the young.

The project's motto is 'Mobilis in mobile' — mobile in a mobile environment. It's actually a mobile piece of live ocean. Children are keen on the romance of the sea and enjoy fantasy stories about it. Jules Verne was an enthusiast of sci-tech breakthroughs to the stars and deep-sea abyss and electricity was his religion. In this way, the new project uses the energy of action. There are already plans for the mobile museum in Minsk, with trips

through Belarus scheduled and international programmes outlined.

Interestingly, the new mobile museum-laboratory is stylised as a submarine invented by Belarus-born General K. Schilder, who invented the first Russian metallic submarine. Autonomous power supply is envisaged, using alternative energy (with installation of a solar battery and master controllers, and a mobile wind turbine), as well as maximum automation, control and work using the Internet with the help of virtual robots.

Of course, fully-fledged use of mo-

station on the website, the use of video feeds from the mobile museum and remote access through the site to gadgets. Four interactive sections of the website are guided by virtual robots: a robot-meteorologist, a robot-energy worker, a robot-oceanographer and a robot-excursion guide.

Visitors will also be able to see the Belarusian fortune-telling crab, Petrovich, and around a hundred species of live marine and freshwater inhabitants, including shark pup Baltik, who was born at Minsk's Oceanography Centre.

The project's motto is 'Mobilisinmobile' — mobile in a mobile environment.

It's actually a mobile piece of live ocean: children's romance and dreams of the sea

bile technologies and gadgets, alongside 3G (4G) devices, is also planned. Visitors will be able to take part in Wi-Fi excursions and in the work of the collective radio station. Moreover, the website of the project will be actively involved in attracting as wide an audience as possible both inside Belarus and abroad. This includes broadcasting the training for the Internet weather

In this way Belarus — a country which has no access to the sea — makes its own contribution to the popularisation of knowledge about the world oceans and the achievement of the goal to: 'Conserve and use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development'.

How important is the topic of the ocean for Belarus

In 2006, Belarus joined the Antarctic Treaty. As part of this document a system of measures and conventions exist which protect marine biological resources and individual species of marine animals. Economic activity in the Antarctic is forbidden, though some types of strictly regulated activity is allowed in this area under the control of the UN.

We speak to Alexey Gaidashov, participant and head of nine Belarusian Antarctic expeditions, and Deputy Head of the Republican Centre for Polar Research at the National Academy of Sciences:

Can measures to protect the Antarctic serve an example for the world community?

It's one of the best examples of successful cooperation on the issue of marine environment protection. A model of interaction between various countries has been developed in the Antarctic. Even at the height of the Cold War, when there was division in the camps, we found a common language in the Antarctic. People see untouched nature and how fragile it is, because ecological catastrophes did occur there.

The UN is concerned about the large number of consumer plastics which contaminate the oceans. Have you faced such a problem in the South Ocean?

We didn't record such a serious problem in the Antarctic. Only vessels which strictly observe the Protocol of the Antarctic Treaty are allowed into the region. Moreover, the Antarctic is washed



Open Ocean museum-laboratory is stylised as a submarine of General Karl Schilder



In the Open Ocean Oceanography Centre

by its cyclonic polar stream around the circle. The ban is observed near the Antarctic regarding the discharge of sewage water and waste from ships, and these bans are strictly applied. In open international waters however, the situation changes: one can see whole fields of waste and plastics. It is especially obvious in the coastal waters of large cities.

What are the prospects for Belarus' presence in Antarctic? Which projects will be implemented?

In 2017, the 10th polar expedition to the Antarctic will be organised. The Republic of Belarus takes its place in the Antarctic seriously and we are committed for the long haul. We conduct scientific investigations which play an important role in our research. We have very serious intentions. For the second year, the Republic of Belarus has been working to construct the national Antarctic station. The project is progressing successfully, in line with the plan. There

are plans that in 2019-2020 we'll move to winter events, twelve-month studies and a year-round personnel presence, as well as to the expansion of ground and atmospheric investigations and research in the coastal waters of the South Ocean.

This year, we have made a serious step in this direction. For the first time in the practice of Belarusian Antarctic expeditions we have trialled a submarine using pilotless apparatus. In previous years, we performed biological research with the help of light diving equipment. The pilotless device, and perhaps several such devices, will enable us to take photos and videos while also conducting comprehensive research.

Furthermore, in the next one or two years, biologists plan to join the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. This will enable us to give new impetus to the work we conduct in the Antarctic. This will also enable us to take part in the devel-

opment and decision making regarding the waters of the South Ocean and living marine resources.

How important is it for Belarus — a state which doesn't have access to the sea — to support such institutions as the Oceanography Centre or Open Ocean mobile laboratory-museum?

The Oceanography Centre cultural and educational intuition is a unique place which annually welcomes thousands of children. Even if only a few of these children become scientists and researchers, it will be a big achievement. Here children adopt universal human values.

This year has been announced as the Year of Science in Belarus and the Oceanography Centre is conducting awareness-raising, as well as scientific-research work.

Such high-profile institutions rely on enthusiasts, but they always need a wide range of support from the state and the public.

By Vladimir **Mikhailov**

■ **The Open Ocean Oceanography Centre opened in 2008 and acquired the status of one of the most unusual and visited places for family and children. The museum is annually attended by more than 200,000 children and their parents. The exhibits have been collected over many years and contains authentic items from all over the world. These include unique devices of the under-water and surface fleet, shells, coral and personal**

belongings of sailors, alongside exhibits from the Belarusian expeditions to the South and North poles. The historical exhibition area covers naval communication, emergency radio stations, and portable communication tools. For many years the museum has been conducting serious research for children and students which has resulted in scientific publications, TV projects and international expeditions.

Some interesting sights

The focus of the International Exhibition of Arms and Military Machinery MILEX-2017 which took place in Minsk was showcasing

M

ost of the advanced developments of the Belarusian defence industry introduced there were not simply static exhibits. Spectators, including potential buyers from thirty countries, saw real mini-military exercises, where armoured vehicles

such as the 'Cayman' showed driving and shooting on the move. The armoured personnel carrier BTR-80 danced a waltz, showing off its manoeuvrability, while wheeled motor traction vehicles manufactured by Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant and MAZ climbed over obstacles.

Experts consider MILEX to be the calling card of the domestic defence sector of the economy, an important link to the system of military-technical cooperation. "This forum promotes



Experts consider MILEX to be the calling card of the domestic defence sector of the economy, an important link to the system of military-technical cooperation

the strengthening of the international authority of our country,” said Prime Minister Andrei Kobyakov at the opening ceremony. So many different developments were introduced in the exhibition that organisers had to use several arenas — the airport Minsk-1, the skating stadium at Minsk-Arena and its vicinities. In general, there were about three hundred armament samples. One third of them new. According to the Chairman of the State Military Industrial Committee, Sergey Gurulev, the export volume of these products for the next five years has doubled to about \$1 billion.

At the same time, we co-operate with 52 countries. Belarus is 18th in the list of the largest exporters of major weapons in the world. This is a great indicator for a small state. Demand for armaments is growing all over the world. In the last five years, it has increased by 8.4 percent. Belarusian businesses are ready to compete with world manufacturers on both quality and price. For example, the controlled fire weapon system ‘Adunok’ was delivered to Indonesia, while a number of countries use the unmanned vehicles ‘GrozA-S’. Interest in Belarusian developments at the exhibition was expressed by many countries: Russia, China, the Persian Gulf states, the Philippines and South-East Asia, for example. Demand for our robots and unmanned vehicles is also very high.

In general, it is possible to increase the fighting power of any army in three ways: buying arms abroad, developing one’s own analogues or modernising existing armaments. MILEX is a plat-

form allowing buyers to see the most modern and effective defence systems. There were resources to suit all needs. Tanks (among them the notable modernised T-72BME similar to the newest T-90) and armoured fighting vehicles, anti-aircraft missile systems and various defence weapons, unmanned vehicles and radar stations, ultra-precise gunsights and a flight simulator. However, the armoured ‘Cayman’ was of great interest to the foreign visitors, developed by the Borisov 140th Repair Plant. This mobile ‘off-road vehicle’ has been created for patrolling and tracking columns and carrying out peace-making operations. It is very reliable (capable of protecting the crew from bullets and shrapnel) and is very mobile. It can cover cross-country terrain and water obstacles, if necessary the vehicle is able to turn into a boat.

The well-known ‘Polonez’, the pride of the Belarusian defence system also attracted considerable attention. The multiple artillery rocket system, which last year became part of our country’s weapon defences was thoroughly examined, while all those interested had the chance to have a closer look at it and discuss its specification. Also exhibited was a rocket made at the Precise Electro-Mechanics Plant in Dzerzhinsk District, it can hit a target at a distance of 280 kilometres. While the reliable PSN-V gun, compact and light, can be easily hidden not only under uniform, but also under civilian clothing. It has been developed specially for operations staff.

By Dmitry **Umpirovich**





Start-ups: wholesale and retail

Belarus is a hub of innovative ideas and projects, and successful start-ups, ranked 45th worldwide. However, our scientific environment lacks the market and opportunity for commercialising projects. Belarus and China have been liaising with countries located along the renewed Silk Road, beneficially bringing ideas into production.

Recently, the 2nd Association Forum of Scientific and Technological Parks and Areas of High and New Technologies 'Silk Road' (SRSPA) concluded in Minsk. Explaining its major task in simple words, Alexander Shumilin, the Chairman of the State Science and Technology Committee, explains, "Our developers are very talented people, quickly generating ideas. However, we lack a sufficient market. By uniting efforts with China, we've received the opportunity for quicker commercialisation. Extensive production can be quickly set up in China, which is beneficial and comfortable for us. We're keen on China investing into the development and creation of innovative infrastructure in our country. This forum will give us an opportunity to unite our efforts. The involvement of our country in the Belt and Road project will enhance its investment attractiveness and form new productions, innovation centres and infrastructure."

Minsk has been recently visited by more than sixty representatives of Chinese companies working in high-technologies; our cooperation with them promises to be productive and beneficial for both sides.

The Silk Road is more than an opportunity for selling goods. It's a way of transferring information and innovative technologies. Mr. Shumilin reminds us that pilot projects are being established in Belarus and in China, with twenty-eight sci-tech collaborative projects currently underway. These include developments in radio location, electronics, nano-materials, and genetic engineering.

Recently, Chinese partners allocated \$10 million for the realisation of these projects. The State Science and Technology Committee hopes that cooperation will help activate research and developments, driven by the Belarusian-Chinese Venture Investment Fund (established in summer).

By Galina Kovalevskaya

Books without borders

For the first time, the 'Books from Belarus' stand is being exhibited at Book World Fair in Prague. The event coincides with the 500th anniversary of book printing in Belarus: our first printed Bible was published by Francysk Skaryna on August 6th, 1517, in Prague.

"Have you really come from Belarus? You've never been here before," visitors to the Belarusian stand ask. They are told this is so, and are offered Belarus-made sweets. Of course, Prague residents and visitors to the Czech capital come to the exhibition primarily for intellectual and spiritual fare. To their delight, the latter abounds at the Belarusian stand (though sweets are definitely a nice bonus).

"We've been preparing for this trip carefully," comments Yelena Pavlova, who heads Publishing and Book Trade Department at the Information Ministry. "We've ordered a large stand and gathered a good team of professionals: publishers, distributors and printers. We've taken seminal books to Prague: on art, culture, Minsk and Belarus — in addition to Skaryna's editions. How can other book publishers celebrate this date? By issuing quality titles and participating in book fairs. The purpose of our participation is to present our book publishing and our achievements of recent years, as well as books on Francysk Skaryna."

On the opening day of the exhibition, the Belarusian Ambassador to the Czech Republic, Valery Kurdyukov, read

Skaryna's famous lines about love for his native land. This year, it seems Belarus and the Czech Republic are strongly united by their appreciation of books as cultural treasures.

Up until now, few Czech people may have heard of Francysk Skaryna and of the birth of Belarusian book publishing in Prague, with his opening of the first printing house. With this in mind, many exhibits at the 'Books from Belarus' stand — attended by almost all visitors to the fair — were a true revelation. Foreigners were able to learn that the tradition of Belarusian book printing is over 500 years old and could acquaint themselves with beautiful and high-quality books published in our country. In actuality, almost 10,000 books with a total circulation of 23 million copies are released annually throughout Belarus. Although circulations of printed books are falling worldwide, with the predominance of e-book publishing, Belarus boasts two and a half new books per capita every year — which is a strong indicator. Moreover, production of Belarusian language books is a new trend of recent years: around 28 percent of all books published in the country are in the native language.

Belarusian books for children aroused the greatest interest. "Children's



Yelena Pavlova near the 'Books from Belarus' stand at International Book Fair in Prague



books are popular all over the world," confirms Ms. Pavlova. The Belarusian exhibit also attracted representatives of the Czech National Library, Klementinum. One wall of its building features a memorial plaque in honour of Francysk Skaryna. Its representatives planned to obtain some Belarusian books to replenish their collection, and the Belarusian team was only too happy to oblige.

It's not only for the Czech Republic that Belarusian books are topical. The Belarusian diaspora is now represented around the world; with libraries serving its needs. The newly initiated 'Culture of Belarus' programme is to give Prague 127 editions, at the launch, soon to be hosted by the Embassy of Belarus and the Belarusian-Czech Chamber of Commerce.

The 'premiere' of Belarusian books in Prague has proven successful and it seems a new tradition has been born: Belarusian publishers laid flowers at the monument to Francysk Skaryna.

By Inessa Pleskachevskaya

Fact file

- The greatest number of agro-estates in Belarus is found in the Vitebsk and Minsk regions — nearly 600 in one region.
- In 2015, 294,300 people used agro-estates.
- Average duration of visit — 4 days.
- Citizens of Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Germany and the USA more commonly visit estates.
- Minimum cost for the night — from 700 Russian Roubles.



BELTA

Paradise made by our own hands

Agrotourism is rapidly developing in Belarus. The number of estates has multiplied since 2006 — at that time there were only 34 in the country, and now the figure is almost 2,300. This year, Belarus has won first place in the Agrotourism category of the National Geographic Traveler Awards.

The reasons are plain to see. Having grown tired of city life, people are rushing to the outdoors to reinvigorate their lives and taste ecologically clean products directly from the vegetable plot, which can't be found in the supermarkets.

Monastic dinner

Today Belarus has more than two thousand agro-estates. They are in the most picturesque parts of the country. The leader is the Grodno Region with nearly 400. And it is no wonder, after all, agro-tourism in the Grodno Region is a centuries-old tradition. In the 17th century, the trailblazers of eco-friendly recreation were monks from the Camal-





Reference

Best agro-eco-estates of Belarus

■ Since 2013, the country has held a competition for the 'Best Agro-eco-estate of the Year'. Last year, the Grand Prix went to complex 'Farmstead at Rys' (in the Grodno Region, Svisloch District). As well as rest in green surroundings, the estate offers guests the opportunity to visit the craft village and has all the necessary facilities for the rehabilitation of disabled people.

Previously, the main award had gone to the 'Mazichi' estate (in the Brest Region's Kobrin District) for the atmosphere of a Belarusian village, ethnic cuisine and high level of service.

In the category 'Eco-estate of the Year', the winners were 'Homestead Yedishki' (Vitebsk Region, Braslav District), and the 'Cheerful Hut' estate (Minsk Region's Kopyl District).

'Homestead Stolinskiy' (Stolin District in Brest) and 'Over the Niemen' (Grodno Region, Lida District) received an award for 'Style and Harmony'.

The title of best 'Ethnic Complex' went to 'Guest House' (in the Mogilev Region, Bykhov District).

While the estate 'In Zarechnaya Street' (Brest Region's Kobrin District) and 'Marchukova Hut' (Grodno Region's Shchuchin District, urban-type settlement Zheludok) won in the category for 'Belarusian Traditional Cuisine'.

dolese order. In the village of Radzivilki, 20 kilometers from the center of modern Grodno, the holy order of eremites organised an entire agro-complex. They cultivated vegetables, grapes and made cheeses. Noble families from towns and cities arrived here to relax in the green surroundings of Radzivilki, while today tourists are welcomed. The Bartashevich family from Grodno put new life into this ancient place. Curiously, many agro-estates in the Grodno Region have been established and are run by former city residents.

Initially, the Bartashevich family simply sold their shop in Grodno, and spent the money on the purchase of a derelict estate in Radzivilki, to restore and create an agro-tourist complex. "It is impossible to say how much money has already been invested here," says head of the family Viktor Bartashevich. "The money could have been used to build a large manufacturing business and the income may have been larger, but we've concentrated our efforts instead on the comfort of our guests and their wellbeing.

Eco-friendly food is guaranteed by poultry, turkey, potatoes, beet, carrots, and an orchard. Nearby is a pond with

plenty of carp, crucian and perch. Our hospitable hosts set the table in an ancient refectory, constructed by the Camaldolese monks with vaulted ceilings and walls made of clay bricks. Each dinner is a journey into history.

Cosy haven in the forest reserve

Every year Belarus holds a competition for the best agro-estate. Last year 'Folkark u Rysia' 10 kilometers from Volkovysk won the award. The story is very similar to Radzivilki's. A city family, tired of the concrete jungle, moved closer to nature and consequently far from the noise, one more piece of paradise was made, where the hosts are happy to receive visitors. There are five comfortable small houses on the river bank near the forest reserve. Here visitors can not only enjoy the open air and try the fresh products, but also learn the ancient crafts of pottery, woodcarving and weaving. The uniqueness of this agro-estate is that it provides conditions for the recreation and rehabilitation of disabled people, with the help of hippotherapy — horse riding.

By Boris **Orehkov**



Ancient city

Zaslavl is the closest suburb to Minsk. Many residents of this small town work in the capital but live virtually on the sea shore. Zaslavl is an ancient town — founded in the late 10th century by Duke Vladimir Svyatoslavovich.



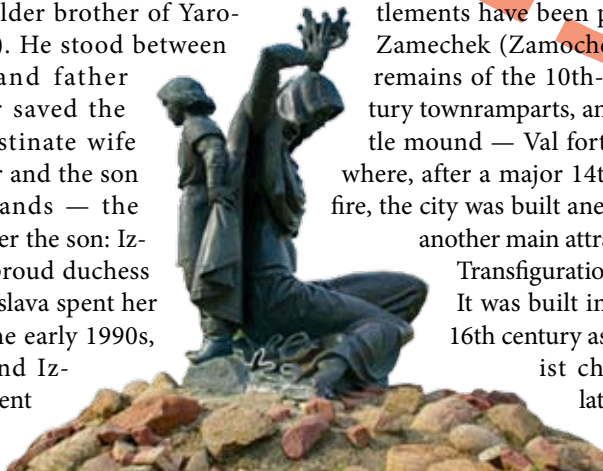
Holy Transfiguration Church

Zaslavl water reservoir



Learn Rogneda's history

According to legend, Kiev's Duke Vladimir married Rogneda (a daughter of Polotsk's Duke Rogvolod) by force. Being the bride of his brother Yaropolk, she refused Vladimir's offer of his 'hand and heart'. The duke did not forgive her. He captured Polotsk, killed Rogneda's parents and married her. Later, Rogneda tried unsuccessfully to kill her unloved husband on many occasions. The duchess was saved from death by her small son Izyaslav (an older brother of Yaroslav the Wise). He stood between his mother and father and Vladimir saved the life of his obstinate wife — sending her and the son to Polotsk's lands — the city, named after the son: Izyaslav. Here, proud duchess Rogneda-Gorislava spent her last days. In the early 1990s, a 'Rogneda and Izyaslav' monument was erected in Zaslavl.



Living history

Zaslavl is a museum-town. It's a paradise for lovers of antiquity. This is a rare place where two ancient settlements have been preserved: Zamechek (Zamoček) — the remains of the 10th-12th century town ramparts, and the castle mound — Val fortress from where, after a major 14th century fire, the city was built anew. Val has another main attraction: the Transfiguration Church. It was built in the mid-16th century as a Calvinist church and later became the Roman



Zaslavl Castle. 11th-16th century Val citadel

Catholic Church of Archangel Michael; at present, it operates as an Orthodox church. Initially, it was simultaneously a church and a defensive structure — having slits in the top and on the 30-metre-tall tower. The Transfiguration Church is



Mlyn ethnographic complex



Medieval settlement of Zaslavl — the home of Rogneda and Izyaslav. Monument to the 1,000th anniversary of Christianity in Belarus

not only an architectural pearl of Belarus; it is also a visual image of the country's history, indicating its antiquity and uniqueness. Moreover, Polotsk also has the Roman Catholic Church of the Nativity of Virgin Mary, built in the Vilno Baroque style.

Getting acquainted with home spirits

The local Mlyn ethnographic complex enjoys great popularity among city guests; it unites several 19th century buildings — such as a steam mill, a barn and a blacksmith's shop. The rich Pshezdetsky family — who owned the site for several centuries — built a magnificent palace and park complex with a manor in Zaslavl. Only fragments of the complex remain, in addition to some barns, ponds and a park. The most valuable 'exhibit' is the building of the Palace Hermitage in the Upper Park; it now houses the House of Children's Art, in Engels Street. Children enjoy the Museum of Mythology and Forests. There is

style is also widely represented at the local museum which displays archaeological finds, works of local artists and a collection of musical instruments: accordions, dulcimers, violins, pipes and drums. Live music is also played.

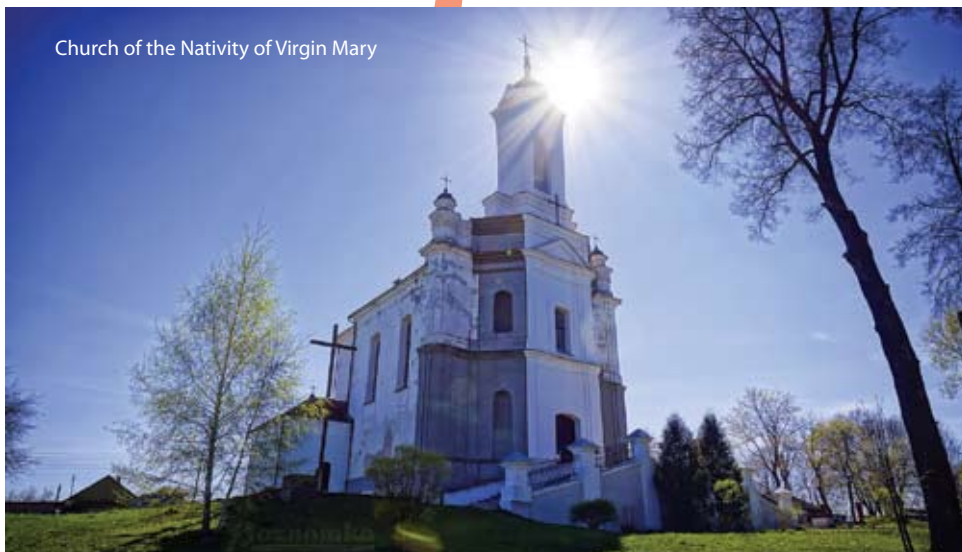
Visiting Stalin's Line

The Stalin Line Historical and Cultural Complex is one of the most impressive fortifications in Belarus. The open-air military-historical museum is situated 10km from Zaslavl, on the site of Minsk's Great Patriotic War fortified area. The museum is worth visiting as it demonstrates two machine-gun bunkers, an artillery semicaponier and part of the fortified border strip. Where else can you see all kinds of trenches, anti-tank ditches, dugouts and 'hedgehogs'? Tanks, self-propelled anti-aircraft guns, cannons, armoured vehicles and rocket engineering are placed on observation grounds in lines and anyone can touch them and even sit in them. The experts at the museum complex are restoring the vintage military equipment, while conducting unique historical reconstruction.

Dipping into the Minsk Sea

Zaslavl is one of the most environmentally friendly suburbs of the capital, bordering the Minsk Sea which is Zaslavl's reservoir. It is surrounded with numerous health resorts and clinics: sanatoriums, holiday houses, farmsteads — all popular among Belarusians and Russians. Anyone can find a place to their taste: with and without medical treatment, with fishing or mushroom gathering, horse riding and surfing. There are also exclusive places: Alexander Lukashenko's residence and the large village of Laporovichi are situated on the bank. A summer residence of the famous Soviet 'Pesnyary' band singer, Vladimir Mulyavin, was also to be found. The house, which boasts interesting architecture, could have become a museum of the genius musician had his heirs not sold it to be demolished to make way for the new owner's mansion.

By German **Moskalenko**



Church of the Nativity of Virgin Mary



also a section of the forest with stuffed rabbit, grouse, raccoon and other animals and birds. Moreover, the site offers an exhibition of sculptures of fairy-tale characters: a vampire, a forest host, a home spirit and a water spirit. Belarusian culture and life-

Exhibit from Stalin's Line

We are peaceful people...

Tolerance of Belarusian residents isn't some new phenomenon; it has deep historical roots. The genes of modern Belarusians as if contain the wisdom of our ancestors who always thought that 'better a bad peace than a good war'. We continue to be guided by this principle in building relations globally, and with themselves.

Our own place under the Sun

Searching for its place under the Sun, each nation develops its own distinctive worldview, down the generations. Every significant achievement discovered and mastered, to promote harmonious living, must be preserved. Proverbs, legends and fairy-tales play their part in handing down wisdom, as much as any law. Meanwhile, we aim to bring up our younger generation with strong spiritual and patriotic values, while having understanding of other nations and cultures.

We reap as sow, of course. Since ancient times, our forefathers have been great farmers, foresters, beekeepers and fishermen. Their occupation has required diligence, care, spiritual sensitivity, observation and patience. The success of their hard work and, even, their lives, depended on it. Both neighbouring and distant nations have contributed to

the polyphonic melody of local people's life. While establishing their state, back in 1529, our ancestors created laws of joint co-existence, as reflected in the first Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. From the point of view of statesmen and law makers, it was a landmark event for all Europe.

We may find interesting reasoning on this subject in an article, entitled 'The Peace Loving Multi-Vector Foreign Policy of Belarus as a Conscious Choice to Meet National Interests' (released in 'Belaruskaya Dumka' magazine, March-April 2017). Its author — the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, Vladimir Makei — writes that even detractors had to admit our successes. Many clichés and stereotypes about our country have been disproved. 'European Belarus' has risen from comments about the 'last dictatorship in Europe'. Of course, a combination of factors — external and internal — has played a role. We shouldn't forget

about the tolerant mentality of the Belarusian nation, which has long-standing, deep-rooted traditions in all spheres of life — from religious to political. Belarusian history presents rare examples of religious or ethnic conflict, and manifestations of force against neighbouring states. Tolerance — understood as respect for all people without exception, and acceptance of other cultures and ways of development — is natural for Belarusians. We rely on dialogue, as a nation and as individual representatives.

Then it refers to well-known researchers and diplomats born on the Belarusian lands: Ignaty Domeiko, Nikolay Sudzilovsky, Osip-Yulian Senkovsky, Ivan Chersky, Michał Kleofas Ogiński, Iosif Gashkevich and Andrey Gromyko. The author emphasises that they 'are united by respect not only for their country but also for other peoples, without diminishing their civilisational significance'. The article continues: 'In our time, peace is a



IVAN ZHDANOVICH

Representatives of various nationalities near Ivenets

Belarus is a polyethnic and multi-religious country, with over 9.5m population as of early 2017. These are representatives of

140

nationalities. Most of them are Belarusians, accounting for

80 percent while there are about

10 percent of Russians and

4 percent of Poles. Almost

2,5 percent of Ukrainians also live

in the country, alongside Jews, Tatars, Lithuanians and representatives of other nationalities

natural continuation of tolerance; it distinguishes equally our ancestors and our contemporaries. Long before gaining independence, in 1991, Belarus pursued a policy aimed at establishing a fair world order'. The Belarusian President's initiative to recognise diverse paths as being of value to human civilisation (as put forward at the UN Summit in 2005) is also mentioned. A decade later, at the 2015 UN Summit, the President of Belarus proposed an 'integration of integrations' as a key principle of cooperation, aiming to jointly find the best ways of unifying growth and sustainable development, as

well as co-ordinated counteraction to global threats and challenges.

Living like good neighbours

Undoubtedly, Belarusian folk sayings reveal all sorts of tricks and psychological truths, invented to ease the soul in times of hardship. We all experience times of injustice. Sometimes, we endure violence, selfishness or cruelty. None of us are saints. Our ancestors needed to survive under various authorities. Importantly, the positive and tolerant outlook of Belarusian society prevails.

People say

It's time to turn to people's wisdom. Below are some sayings from the collection of the famous linguist, researcher, teacher and writer Fiodor Yankovsky. They reflect the Belarusian worldview on what's important in life, and on how to build strategic relationships, at home and abroad.

Those who don't appreciate others' value, have none of their own

Live with people and die with God

The Fatherland cannot be sold or bought

There is no tastier water than that of native springs

Make new friends but don't forget old friends

Kindness is essential

Within a good family, there are no strangers

Know when to talk and when to keep silent

Words are silver only when actions are gold

Large oaks don't grow from small roots

Cheerful people live longer

Honour people and they'll honour you in return

These wise folk sayings demonstrate well that Belarusians like to live in justice, having love for their native surroundings and respect for other people's traditions and customs.



Researcher Sergey Gruntov

Sergey Gruntov — a Candidate of Historical Sciences and researcher at the Department of National Study of the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences' Centre for Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature Research — shares his views on our roots.

Mr. Gruntov, I've heard that the 'best' Belarusians are Jews and Tatars, having lived here since ancient times, jointly defending our shared national values. Many speak Belarusian and are familiar with our culture. Belarusian literary legend Zmitrok Byadulya is a bright example. He wrote in three languages: Yiddish, Russian and Belarusian. Academics from the National Academy of Sciences have been studying the role of various nationalities in preserving and strengthening traditions of tolerance within Belarus. You reported on this during a round table discussion last year. What do we know about the history of Jews and Tatars on Belarusian lands?

In honesty, I've not studied this deeply. However, I've read that they lived close to Belarusians for a long time. Back in 1388, Grand Duke Vytautas (who headed our ancient state of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) granted privileges to Jews, to allow them to settle in a number of the principality's cities, in-

Tolerance was facilitated by BSSR (established in 1919) being home to four official languages between the two major wars: Belarusian, Russian, Polish and Yiddish. This indicated the fundamental significance of these four nations in the formation of Belarus' history and culture

cluding Berestie (now known as Brest). As a result, Jews received refuge from persecutions in Central Europe, while the Grand Duchy obtained the opportunity to rapidly develop its trade and crafts, since Jews were known for their skills, knowledge and experience. This positively influenced the development of Belarusian cities and towns. Moreover, living side by side, Belarusians learnt much from the Jewish community, and vice versa. This interaction of languages, cultures and traditions is an extremely interesting phenomenon.

The first Tatars appeared within Belarusian territory thanks to Duke Vytautas, who invited them to a permanent settlement in the Grand Duchy at the end of the 14th century. Tatars engaged in military affairs, assisted in border protection and later shifted to more peaceful crafts and trades.

Those settlers were under the patronage of Vytautas and therefore without opposition in their new home, although their religious practices were 'exotic'. Did conflict ever occur?

Reading various documents, we've concluded that there was a high level of tolerance among Grand Duchy of Lithuania residents. In particular, the processes of reformation and counter-reformation in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were without bloodshed. Noble families were

of various religious faiths, with the Nesvizh Radziwiłłs (from Krzysztof Radziwiłł Sierotka) being Catholics, while the Birza Radziwiłłs were Protestants. It was natural for a family to baptise one child as a Catholic and another as a Uniat, showing their respect for other people's beliefs. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania became known for its tolerance, and attracted asylum-seekers of various faiths, from across Western Europe, in the 17th century, including Scots. Of course, tolerance did not always equate to equality for differing ethnic and religious groups, but they all found a place in society, becoming integrated into cultural, economic and social life.

Deep roots of the tree of peace

Belarusians' desire for peace and tolerance has always been well-known. Our national anthem begins: 'We, Belarusians, are peaceful people'. However, it seems that we're becoming even better known for this. Belarus not long ago became a venue for important negotiations at the high international level regarding the events in Ukraine, making 'Belarusian tolerance' better known than ever. Is this an old concept with a modern face?

Indeed, Belarusian tolerance, as expounded upon by the media and text-

books, and through official speeches, has become part of our national identity. However, it has deep, historical roots. We've mentioned the Jews and Tatars. I think Vytautas made his decisions with care. Even then there were some traditions of tolerance, and an early form of the joint Belarusian-Lithuanian state.

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania emerged and developed as a multi-national and multi-religious establishment, with confessional tolerance as an important factor at all stages of state development. Conditions for comfortable coexistence of ethnic and religious groups were consciously promoted, making the Grand Duchy of Lithuania home to Tatars, Old Believers, Karaites and Jews. People came to escape the religious-based persecution of German principalities, as did the Irish and Scots. Belarusian tolerance is not a new phenomenon; it has deep roots.

It's always been said that Belarusians are tolerant and patient, having never initiated conflicts with foreigners or with people of differing religious beliefs. How did this tolerance come about?

We believe that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's early leaders' religious indifference, in the 13th-15th century, may have played a role. Opinions vary but, in the 16th century, Protestantism gained

popularity; later — in the 17th and 18th century, the Uniate faith (or Greek-Catholicism) also became influential, resulting in families taking up the trend of baptising their children as Catholics and as Uniates. People were 'educated in tolerance', smoothing contradictions which might have arisen from coexistence of various ethnic and religious groups.

Under the burden of 20th century

The tumultuous events of the 20th century greatly contributed to Belarusians developing a calm and balanced approach to national and religious differences. In the village of Yatskovshchina (near Kletsk, in Western Belarus) where I was born, the authorities changed significantly across the 20th century. One of Yatskovshchina's old-timers, born in 1910, experienced all these changes. Under the burden of such civil change, many 'family-religious labels' vanished. People learnt to take people as individuals, and judge according to their nature.

Of course, the environment in which we live affects our character, behaviour and outlook. Academics argue that the crucial factor in the development of our tolerance has been conditions during the 20th century, as shaped our Belarusian nation. I would add that Belarus

emerged as a republic within the Soviet Union as a beyond-religious establishment. At that time, all confessional differences were deliberately levelled, which meant that many points of tension in the region's religious life (as observed in the early 20th century) largely lost their meaning. At that time, the Belarusian nation (known as the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic) was developing as an inclusive community: anyone viewing themselves as belonging to this culture, and invested in its fate, could become Belarusian. Literary legend Zmitrok Byadulya — born Samuil Plavnik — is a good example, being a Jew born in the village of Posadets (Logoisk District). Tolerance was facilitated by the Belarusian SSR (established in 1919) being home to four official languages between the two major wars: Belarusian, Russian, Polish and Yiddish. This indicates the fundamental significance of these four nations in the formation of Belarus' history and culture.

It appears that the Belarusian nation has taught us to focus not on religious or national problems but upon solving them harmoniously, to live in concord...

You could say that. More formally, tolerance in Belarusian society has created favourable conditions for development, and the cultural and social life of various ethnic groups, whose representatives view Belarus as their second homeland. In days gone by, each ethnic group occupied its own social and economic niche (unlike today, when such groups occupy diverse niches). In a traditional static society, inter-relations of ethnic groups and their communication with the state were determined primarily by the social order — formed independently or through conventions of behaviour and practices. This is impossible for modern society, which necessitates the functioning of national associations, who help small ethnic groups to make themselves known to the state, while taking on a fully-fledged role in society.

By Ivan Zhdanovich



Presentation of books about Belarusian Tatars in the Yakub Kolas Central National Library, at the NAS of Belarus

IVAN ZHDANOVICH

Vavassore's map: tracing Belarusian history

According to Belarusian collector and historian Vladimir Lihodedov, there are very few old maps that actually identify Belarusian lands. However, they do exist, and one will soon be launched to the public as part of the historical-cultural project 'Looking for Lost Values'. This unique version will be recreated from the original map, made by Giovanni Andrea Vavassore in the early 16th century in the Republic of Venice.

Venetian heritage

Little information exists about Vavassore and his life. Ilya Andreev, a Belarusian cartography researcher, explains, "Giovanni Andrea Vavassore was a wood engraver, a publisher and a printer for the Venetian school of cartography. The exact date of his birth is unknown, but it's thought that he died before 1572."

By the late 15th and early 16th century, the Venetian Republic had achieved significant economic development and prosperity. Its ships sailed the Mediterranean and Black seas, reaching as far as the harbours of the North Sea. The frequency of voyages by Venetian trade ships contributed, not surprisingly, to the development of the science of cartography, and the Venetian Republic produced several distinguished cartographers: Marco Beneventano, Bernard Sylvanus, Matteo Pagano and Giovanni Andrea Vavassore.

Vavassore was a member of the Artists' Union. He published a book of patterns for embroidery and lace, which

was probably the first special edition for women. However, he's primarily known for his geographical maps. While they may not have boasted the latest geographical discoveries of the time, they were truly informative and were of high quality. These maps are very rare today and some are only available as copies of the originals.

Among the major and most well-known works of Vavassore is his map of Constantinople, most likely dated around 1520. He also prepared maps of Spain (1532), France (1536), the Eastern Mediterranean (1539), Greece (1545), Great Britain (1556), Hungary (1553), the world map of Caspar Vopel (1558), Italian Friuli (1557) and Toscana (1559).

Recreated by Belarusian enthusiasts as part of *In Search of the Lost*, Vavassore's map is a well-known edition of the world map: *Opera di Giovanni Andrea Vavassore detto Guadagnino* (1520-1530). His map was, in turn, based on Bernard Sylvanus' map, included in the Venice edition of the Ptolemy in 1511.

Speaking of his decision to join the initiative on the map's restoration, Mr. Lihodedov explains, "No more than five or six copies of this map have been preserved worldwide. With this in mind, it's unlikely that many Belarusian history lovers will have the chance to hold the original in their hands or examine it thoroughly (though many interesting facts can be discovered there)."

The lands between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea are marked as SARMATIA DEVROPA, and the rivers of Dnieper (boristene f.), Zapadnaya Dvina and Don (Tanai fiu) are delineated: upon the cartographic picture, the latter flow from the mystical Ripher Monte mountains.

Interestingly, the Dnieper is present on one of the map's marked climatic zones — per boristene; this indicates the involvement of these territories in world affairs of that period.

Matrix of the past

How did the process of the ancient map's restoration begin? As is often the case for innovative, unique projects, it



Project participants (from left to right) with Vavassore's map: Dmitry Lihodedov, Dmitry Shapovalov, Vladimir Lihodedov and Ilya Andreev

was guided by the thirst for knowledge and passion for the work. During last winter's Minsk International Book Fair, Vladimir Lihodedov presented a unique work — a recreation of Fransysk Skaryna's printing press. What's fascinating to note is that Mr. Lihodedov recreated it using early 15th century technologies and materials. The exhibition also featured a reproduction of Skaryna's Bible: Genesis. Remarkably, the Bible was printed on the recreated printing press. The exhibit, and the idea of recreating the incunabula, generated enormous interest. Reconstruction of rare graphic works has become a reality. Ilya Andreev invited Mr. Lihodedov to recreate an ancient geographical map — a gem of cartography.

It took little time to persuade Mr. Lihodedov, who says, "We managed to restore the old matrix, which took about a year. This was painstaking work but, in my view, it's been a success. Only a specialist can see differences from the original; importantly, we've used no 'ageing' effects. Our work replicates the

five century-old original — including its paper, which I made personally, using flax as the basis and following an ancient technique (used in Europe in the 15th-16th century). Professionals participated in the preparation and printing: graphic artists Boris Tsitovich and Dmitry Shapovalov, in addition to my son Dmitry Lihodedov."

The joint decision was made to release twelve copies of the map, on three different types of paper.

Recreating the lost

Modern people tend to search for practical convenience in everything. Reproducers of old books are convinced, despite the care needed in their work, that a practical approach is necessary. With vivid national colours and craftsmanship of the highest level, these rare reproductions make wonderful gifts, as do recreated historical Slutsk sashes. As the reproductions are being featured in museum collections, they should raise awareness and appreciation among visitors, teaching

them about this intricate process of book-making and map-making from centuries past. Maps of this kind are an essential part of a comprehensive cartographic exhibition.

Most importantly, we're preserving Belarusian national historical and cultural heritage, and recognising its deep relationship with world culture. It's hardly possible to overestimate the practical significance of this aspect. What better use of our practical skills than to create works with spiritual and cultural significance?

Musing on his plans for future projects, Mr. Lihodedov says, "The Vavassore map is our first experimental step in the reconstruction of old maps, including Belarusian. We're now studying the possibility of recreating Skaryna's Small Travelling Book. Sadly, no completely preserved original has yet been discovered; we have only fragments. We'd like to collect them together, to release an album. Meanwhile, authenticity of production and printing is vital."

By Galina **Ulitenok**

Alexey Dudarev: 'Join the Union! Creative ideas welcome here!'

We can now congratulate Alexey Dudarev — playwright, screenwriter and actor whose plays are staged globally and whose works have been translated into many languages — not on his new play, acting role or screenplay but on his re-election to the prestigious position of Chairman of the Belarusian Union of Theatre Workers. This unique theatrical association is among the oldest and most well-respected public associations (there are currently over 2,600 in the country), with a large membership.

On hearing Mr. Dudarev's recent speech at the 9th Congress of the Union of Theatre Workers — which he has headed since 1992 — the lines of Maxim Gorky come to mind: 'a single thing — when it is great — is truly too small'. Furthermore, the words of Mr. Dudarev are also recalled: he was once asked by an artist 'why do we need this Union', he answered with lines from the Persian poet Saadi — 'if ants suddenly join their efforts to attack, they will overpower the lion, no matter how strong the latter is'. This conversation took place back in 1987 when the young playwright was elected Secretary of the Union's Board. Mr. Dudarev's reply showed how well he understood the idea of an artistic community for its members to jointly progress in society. This was the Theatre Union which, in 1985, supported the

Kupala Theatre's proposal to award the 'Common Soldiers' with the USSR State Award. The play by Mr. Dudarev was staged by Valery Raevsky.

It's interesting to listen to Mr. Dudarev. His recent speech was en-

from Dubrovno in the Vitebsk Region. Since childhood, Alexey has absorbed the energy of this land. Moreover, he is an actor by profession, studying Belarusian theatrical language at the Academy of Arts. He was taught by an

The Union is a family that unites those who have given and are now giving their lives to the theatre — irrespective of what form the latter takes: avant-garde or academic, drama or music, professional or amateur. We — theatre workers — share the same blood; this refers equally to beginners and veterans, young people and the elderly

gaging — being full of literary associations, quotations and subtle humour. The explanation is simple: Mr. Dudarev is the 'heart' of Belarus. He was born in the remote village of Kleny, not far

outstanding teacher, Alexander Butakov. The re-election of Mr. Dudarev as the Union's Chairman is based on his personality, however: the man knows the theatre from the inside. He under-

stands the passions of the acting and directing spheres and is aware of the mental and physical stress needed to stage a performance. He headed the Belarusian Army Drama Theatre for over a decade, from 2002. Whilst chairing the Union, Mr. Dudarev will continue supporting artists and those in need of urgent help. Significantly, he's been re-elected for a new term as he managed to successfully steer the Union through a difficult reforming period.

It seems there is no-one better to take on this role. The members of the congress describe Mr. Dudarev as 'our brand'. It's remarkable that Belarusian theatre boasts a person who is viewed as a theatrical brand during his lifetime rather than after his death. No doubt, the Belarusian Union of Theatre Workers is alive and is shifting from a strategy of survival to a new development phase. There is every reason to believe that new ideas will soon be realised. Mr. Dudarev shares his views below on these and other issues.

Mr. Dudarev, do you appreciate this trust and the compliments of the theatrical community? Are you happy about them?

I am very grateful to all those who've voted for me. I even like the fact that someone was against me. This inspires me not to rest on my laurels but think of what I'm doing wrong. As for compliments, I've learnt to accept them over time — thanks to God. I'm thankful for my life. I'm happy I can live and create. I have a wonderful divine capability: to improve myself and my work. I accept sincere compliments with gratitude; owing to my inborn feeling of hypocrisy, I pay no attention to those that lack sincerity.

How is the Union of Theatre Workers doing now? Aren't you tired after leading it for 25 years?

Those are tired who do nothing. This does not refer to me. Apart from writing plays, I'm a good organiser. At the risk of being boastful, as a creator and organiser, I have something to

be proud of. I must emphasise however, there are things to be improved. This is natural: our life is a never-ending journey, including for a public organisation.

This journey is probably not easy...

It is complex but this difficulty is positive: we've learnt self-reliance. Pragmatic times have put an end to romantic expectations of creators who thought that someone should help us; we now understand that we must rely only on ourselves. Our artistic unions are public associations which number several hundred in Belarus. For a long time, we've been expecting that the state would help us — as it was in Soviet times. Creators — such as writers, painters, artists, art historians, critics, filmmakers, architects, directors, musicians, composers,

designers — questioned after the reforms what should be done and how our life would continue. These pragmatic times have influenced and are still influencing the Union. We must rely exclusively on ourselves!

We must gather, share our thoughts, ideas and plans — whilst searching for sponsors.

How many artists does the Union consist of?

At the moment, our union comprises 24 primary organisations, including 7 in the regions. Recently, 123 new members have joined but some have also left: some have gone abroad, some view the Union as useless, some don't pay the fees — although the sums are small.

I've often heard behind the scenes that the Union gives nothing and the role of artistic associations are over.

On the contrary, there is a global tendency now for all sorts of unions and integration and this is not simply a sign of the times.

People have always turned to unions, just read works by ancient thinkers. Moreover, Belarusian folk culture has much to say on cooperation and unions. Everyone should decide for themselves: if they need our union, please join it, help it, propose something to revive its activity. Any bright and promising ideas are welcome!



American science fiction writer Isaac Asimov has an interesting idea. We cannot tell a man, "You can create. Then come on! Create." It's much important to wait until they say, "I can create — irrespective of whether you wish it or not."

This is right and the same idea is applied to our Union. If the Union is not needed for anyone, then we are not forcing them to join. Our Union participation is voluntary. There are things that should not be done. As far as I remember, the British say: you can take a horse to water but you cannot make it drink...

Union members pay an annual fee which is very small. Have you ever thought of increasing it?

The increase in membership fees will not work — even if the sum rises 10 times! Moreover, it can be counter-productive. Our colleagues will then automatically leave the Union.

Let's recall the legacy left to the Union by your predecessors — Larisa Alexandrovskaya and Nikolay Yermenko?

First of all, we always cherish the memory of these remarkable artists and public figures. They worked not only at the theatre but also for the Union — which initially existed as the Belarusian Theatrical Society and then as the Belarusian Union of Theatre Audience. The Union's long life is linked to these personalities. You can't imagine the number of employees of the Union at that time who received salaries. I know you also worked as a consultant.

The Art Factory operated at that time — now known as the Eladeya Unitary Enterprise, in addition to Teatralny (Theatrical) sanatorium in Ostroshitsky Gorodok, near Minsk. We went to recuperate there. The House of Arts was also ours: we have many memories connected to this wonderful two-story building in 26 Nezavisimosti Avenue. It was situated in the city centre, close to the metro and Minsk's leading theatres. Many experience nostalgia for this 'house'. Many actors had dinner there after rehearsals — gathering and cele-



'Don't Leave Me' by Alexey Dudarev is the calling card of the Belarusian Army Drama Theatre

brating parties and holidays. The building housed so many events — including truly amazing meetings with outstanding actors, writers and theatrical critics. Moreover, the House of Arts organised theatrical congresses and conferences. We now live in a different Universe which boasts different values, goals, dimensions and possibilities.

As I know, the House of Arts passed to the Belarusian Eparchy in 1999...

True. The state restored historical justice — which is welcomed and supported. Let be honest and sincere: we did not build that 'house'. It was a bishop's courtyard of St. Alexander's Cathedral — built in the early 20th century using believers' money. It must belong to the Orthodox Church (which runs it at present). This might be not convenient for us but we should be thankful to the state. We must realise that nobody took anything from anyone. The church must house a church. At present, liturgy is held at our former 'house' and a golden cross tops its roof. We have lost nothing: we've acquired!

What can you say about the Teatralny sanatorium where artists could spend time in the countryside?

It has had a new owner for over a year: the Minsk Regional Executive

Committee's Committee for Labour and Social Protection. It's been assessed and bought by a state structure. The state was involved, after receiving the approval of our Board — in line with the charter. If this did not happen, no activity of the Union — even the most primitive — would have been possible. How could we afford to keep this sanatorium? The changes — which took place in 2016 — were a great blessing for the Union and all of us. The Union received money; its interest enables us to conduct authorised activities.

It was a lucky chance for the building to be useful for the state. As we've heard, it will become a home for the Elderly. This is a marvellous idea: who knows, probably some of us will need it one day.

Where do you get the money to organise such events as the World Theatre Day?

This year, the Theatre Day has been organised exclusively with sponsor money. We partially use these funds to hold the Congress. However, you can understand that sponsors do not queue to give their money. We must ask them directly and no other method works. We need money even to congratulate each member of the Union on their



Alexey Dudarev awards the 'Crystal Flower' to Olga Zhelezko, actress at the Belarusian State Academic Musical Theatre

birthday or Christmas. The same refers to postcards: these need to be bought prior to be sent.

I've heard from theatre lovers, you boast your own philosophy of the Union of Theatre Workers. I think it might be interesting to foreign readers...

As far as I know, a great Russian actress — Iya Savina — was once asked: 'Why is the All-Russian Theatrical Society being established?' That was an ancestor of our Union and the lady replied, "For 'vsemoshchestvovaniya' (welfare)." This word is capacious and difficult to translate well. The Union is not just about theatre — as I see it. It's a family that unites those who have given and are now giving their lives to the theatre — irrespective of what form the latter takes: avant-garde or academic, drama or music, professional or amateur. We — theatre workers — share the same blood; this refers equally to beginners and veterans, young people and the elderly. The Union remembers and loves each of them. A theatre can be replaced but the love for it is unchanged. Welfare is our faith! This means — as stated in our charter: the creation of favourable conditions for the artistry of figures of theatrical art (the Union members) and

their financial support. It seems to me that the Union should focus on this. The Union has always kept the close relationship with our Great Patriotic War veterans; not many of them are alive.

In my view, the Union should shift its activity focus. In Soviet times (when unions were created), it was set out in the aims and charters of artistic organisations. We could do anything! We could hold festivals and scientific conferences, stage performances, organise exhibitions and publish books. Briefly, each artistic union was virtually a ministry: a ministry of literature, a ministry of cinematography, theatre... This probably contributed to the Union's significance in the past but honestly, this is now the stuff of fantasy. Our Union — as well as any other — would be unable to hold the Slavianski Bazaar, for example. A special committee has been established for this purpose and specialists work on it.

The Union is not a theatre. It cannot teach a theatrical profession, cannot give a role, stage a performance, write a play or appoint to a post. It can give advice but only if asked. The Union has never been and will never remain on the sidelines when any of our colleagues

and friends face trouble. This is natural even in the most difficult times and even under modest capabilities. Importantly, there is a structure when you are in need, where you are important and where you are special — irrespective of what you've achieved in the profession and what awards you have. There are secondary roles in the theatre but there are no secondary figures. We all are fragments of the common harmonious structure: the theatre. We give our lives to it.

Until recently, the Union has run its own website. It's great! What information do you plan to put on it?

We'll include information not only about our Union and its activity but also the activity of all our theatres — in addition to analytical articles. Our www.bstd.by site will feature information about those who serve the theatre: actors, directors, composers, artists, set designers and others. There are people who write about them sincerely and productively: journalists, theatre critics... We can ask someone for an interview with actors of the Maxim Gorky National Academic Drama Theatre — i.e. Valery Shushkevich or Victor Gudimovich. This year, Valery has been awarded the Union's prize: Crystal Star — winning out of the final 17 applicants. As regards Victor, we studied together in the Acting Department. I'm personally very interested to know what the practical workers at the theatre think of it, their profession and their lives.

Why are the Union's prizes — Crystal Paulinka, Crystal Angel, and Crystal Star — so valuable for theatre lovers, in your opinion?

I'd answer this with a question: is the Golden Pen Award of the Union of Journalists valuable to you? I know you've received it for your best essays. Meanwhile, the medal is simple — made of metal rather than gold. Our prizes are also simple — being cast from ordinary glass [laughing].

I wish that many other awards would be as important and valuable as our 'Crystal'. Prizes are awarded for

the bright and talented in theatrical life and their value does not depend on the value of the prize itself but on the dignity of those who receive these prizes. I'm happy to state there are many artistic personalities who've failed to receive this award so far. However, they'll definitely receive it in the future.

of Gennady Ovsyannikov (People's Artist of the USSR) or Olga Klebanovich and Alexander Tkachenko (People's Artists of Belarus) own villas in Miami or the Canary Islands. In turn, we have different possibilities, a different mentality and different traditions. We should not turn away from ours and take on

What about establishing a new prize — for example, Crystal Pen? The Union could award it for the best media articles, reports and TV films on the theatre and its workers. Many of my colleagues work creatively in the field of theatre journalism; we have many professionals of the kind — as well as theatre critics. Among them is, for example, Tatiana Orlova. She is the oldest theatre critic and her excellent journalistic approaches are known to everyone. We also have young journalists who write brilliantly. Personally speaking, I would have been extremely pleased to be awarded a Crystal Pen...

We'll think about your proposal during our Board meeting.

Does the Theatrical Dynasty fellowship of the Union still exist? When is it paid?

It exists and we pay it to our members monthly. The fellowship is aimed at a theatrical family consisting of at least 3 people who have worked or still work at the theatre. We also have contenders for the future. We cannot pay money to them now as they've not reached the necessary age: according to the rules, a family member must be over 60. The fellowship is not large but it is a sort of the above-mentioned 'welfare'.

Interviewed by Valentina **Zhdanovich**

I wish that many other awards would be as important and valuable as our 'Crystal'. Prizes are awarded for the bright and talented in theatrical life and their value doesn't depend on the value of the prize itself but on the dignity of those who receive these prizes

Jointly with the Culture Ministry, the Union has been awarding our talented theatrical figures with theatre awards for many years — or even decades, but this has now ended. I understand the modern trend of avoiding awards: in the West, no awards or 'Crystal' prizes of the kind are usual...

Every dog has his day. The West applies western trends. Actors of the level

others'. As regards personal awards, I believe this was a real, efficient cooperation of the state body and the public association. Personally, I am sorry that it is in the past. All personal awards are now represented by the National Theatre Award (given every two years), with only the 'Inspiration' prize left. The latter is awarded to talented theatrical organisers, of which we have many.



Awards of Union of Theatre Workers 2017



Roman + Julia



Yulia Kadushkevich and Roman Podolyako, a couple of talented actors from Minsk, are spending their summer vacation with their young daughter Anelia in a village near Lepel. I asked them why not the sea, or a warm foreign country, especially as the summer has not yet blessed us with any warmth.

soon understand why they decided to go to this village: a public profession can be tiring and people often want some peace and privacy. They joke that they don't own a house on the Canary Islands, but they have one in the depths of Belarus where no one will disturb them, so they can enjoy being together. There is a field and a forest nearby, the birds are singing and the lakes look very inviting when it's hot...

It's often the case that busy actors have no time for small talk: if there is no shooting for a film, then there

are rehearsals in the theatre. Now it's a bit easier: Yulia goes to the M. Gorky National Academic Drama Theatre just for the performances that she appears in, and she can spend more time at home with her little daughter: Anelia will soon be one and a half years old. Her name, says Yulia, means happiness itself. They meet Roman together from work when they can, but sometimes he comes home from the Yanka Kupala National Academic Theatre after rehearsals or performances when Anelia is already asleep. Both parents say that in the mornings she always wakes up with a smile.



Yulia Kadushkevich plays Nadya in the film 'Marrying the General'

Theatre is one way of seeing the world. The value of this profession is that the world is reflected through it. There are few such professions that embrace life in this way. Different roles represent different people, characters and destinies...

Where did her parents meet?

They saw each other for the first time at the Academy of Arts, when Yulia was in her third year of theatre study and Roman was conducting training on Acting Techniques. The students were rehearsing a scene from 'Hamlet' and for some reason, Yulia was struggling to get it right, despite repeated attempts. Roman approached the young student, who was sitting on a large box, reached out his hand and said, "Let's go". It was meant to move on to the mise-en-scene, from where Hamlet was supposed to lead. Yulia explains: "Roman gave me his hand, and I immediately forgot I was in the present, with a job to do, but felt as if I was in another dimension and this hand led to our life together..."

So Yulia gave her hand to Roman. They have already spent more than ten years together. Does their relationship remain romantic?

Yes, they say, in each new period of life, romance seems to blossom. Now it is filled with Anelia. Yulia even said in one of her interviews that she dreamed that it would be nice if she was stuck in a lift with her husband so they would have the chance to talk! They do not believe the saying that love passes, respect remains — because they are certain that love becomes deeper, stronger and can continue for eternity.

We can't avoid the traditional question, usually asked of actors: why the theatre?

Yulia: Once I went to the Yanka Kupala National Academic Theatre with my mother. I don't remember the name of the play or the actress. Only the face. I loved how passionate she was on stage. I fell in love with the theatre and immediately decided to become an actress, rather than go to the Institute of Foreign Languages. When I was a child, my grandmother, a theatre lover, also took me with her to watch plays. This probably also contributed to my choice.

Roman: When I was three years old, my parents sent me to a theatre studio, although they were athletes themselves. Their love of the theatre, apparently, did its job. I guess, that's how the idea of art was instilled in me and it was impossible to get rid of it. When it was time to enter the institute, I tried to be an athlete but it didn't work out so I went to the Academy of Arts to the Theatre Faculty. Theatre is one way of seeing the world. The value of this profession is that the world is reflected through it. There are few such professions that embrace life in this way. Different roles represent different people, characters, and destinies — and different professions, too.

Does the theatre help people understand life? Sometimes, especially when young, we perceive others through the prism of our ego, without thinking that another person is completely different?

Roman: Yes. One learns different characters through the preparation for roles. And in life, one watches people, whether it's needed for a role or not. A reflex develops so that one hears how they speak and pay attention to the accent. The acting profession forces one to be a good psychologist. Actors have fewer barriers...

Yulia: Our teacher, Foma Silvestrovich Voronetsky, said the most important thing in the acting profession is the ability to sympathise, to understand another person. Then it is easier to feel their soul as your own. But it's also important to remain yourself, not to lose yourself.

Did you have any regrets about your choice of profession? And were there any moments in your life when you wanted to abandon everything?

Yulia: My love for the job never disappeared. But the desire to abandon everything, I confess that when I entered the profession after the Academy I was afraid that nothing would work out for me. I understood that I was not yet ready for this profession. Study is one thing, and work in the theatre is quite another.

Roman: It's not about losing interest. My profession is a kind of a drug, and I cannot give it up. But sometimes I feel sad when I see creative imperfection. There are various factors here. I may not like the play and the solution offered but this is the reality. I like our Belarusian audiences however, they are extremely tolerant. Even if the play is boring and does not delight the audience, they will still applaud and give due praise to the work.

I read somewhere about the law of the jungle that prevails in the theatre. How soon after the institute, and maybe even during study, did you realise that the acting profession is extremely competitive?

Yulia: I'm in a good place. I feel comfortable so I don't have to compete with anyone. In general, this has never bothered me. When I'm given a role, I feel pleased, and if they give it to another actress, I'm glad for her.

Roman: Shakespearian passions do occur in the theatre, but it's mainly the girls! Among the actresses, the competition is fiercer. In the theatre, there is even a joke: when women greet each other by kissing, this is a rehearsal for a bite. Women do encounter more difficulties in the theatre because their roles are limited by age.

Men, in my opinion, have no need to fight for anything. Especially if there is a normal relationship or friendship between them. For some roles two casts are appointed and we then decide which of us will think up something different so that the pictures of our roles differ. Let's take, for instance, the play 'Translation' by Nikolay Pinigin, where I play the same role with Sasha Molchanov. As old friends, we have nothing to compete over in terms of attention or position in the theatre. And we tell each other what is important to us in this role. This enriches us both in terms of creativity and personal communication. There are two pictures

of the role, and they are completely different. Healthy competition shouldn't humiliate a partner, but instead makes one invent something original by looking at the other.

"I cut tobacco for a living in Kentucky. That was hard work. I sold insurance door-to-door. That's hard work. Acting is not hard work. If you're lucky enough to be sitting at a table like this, you've been very lucky in your life." I quote George Clooney. Just like him, many western actors say that there is nothing complicated about their profession. What do you say to that?

Yulia: Perhaps they are joking. Naturally, in comparison with physical labour, sitting at the table on stage will seem easy. Although I believe that such a statement is debatable. One needs to sit, stand, walk, run and think differently depending on the role... it requires the effort of all your faculties.

Roman: In the old building of our theatre, as you know, there were janitors at the service entrance, and they sometimes said: you call this a profession? The guys just come to the theatre, drink coffee at the buffet, then shout something on stage... And they cannot even imagine that when an actor goes on stage and says even a few words into the microphone, his hands and legs



Roman Podolyako plays Duke in a performance 'Pan Tadeusz'

are shaking, he's sweating... And it's not just psycho-physical effort. Many other things seem easy from the outside and provoke comments from those who had never walked in their shoes.

Does your understanding of the profession differ in your student days and, say, after five years of work in the theatre? Or did you appreciate the difference before?

Yulia: When you begin your studies, everything seems easy, but during the fourth year, you discover that you don't understand anything and you don't know what to do next. When I came to the theatre, it was very scary, although I thought I could handle it. After the tenth rehearsal in my first role in the play 'The Taming of the Shrew', I realised that everything was not as it seemed, but was much more difficult. From role to role, I felt the profession more and more. It became less scary and I wanted to get complicated roles through which I would understand the true meaning of the profession



Roman: I've nothing really to add to that. In the student years, plays are a holiday, they are experimental and exciting... To some extent, a theatre is a factory that must manufacture the product. Each actor has a niche, a certain role and they use us accordingly. Sometimes after study, some actors get nothing more than roles in mass scenes for years. It's very difficult for them to feel inspired so some of them leave the theatre. To discover something new in young actors, a director should also be a good teacher.

Does ambition form an integral part of your profession?

Yulia: I used to think people shouldn't have ambitions. Now I think they give impetus for movement, for understanding yourself in the profession.

Roman: In the acting profession, like in any other, there is nothing to do if you do not have ambitions. And this primarily concerns the desire to achieve professionalism.

What roles are close to you and which are like you in character?

Yulia: All my roles are like me. These are modest people, well mannered, born into a good family... However, there are also character roles. In addition, I have had a dream since studying at the Academy. I would like to play a role in the 'Idiot' by Fiodor Dostoevsky.

Roman: We cannot escape from ourselves, in each role there is a part of ourselves. Whatever character you have to create, it still passes through you. I am also given roles of reflective heroes, they are self-absorbed and intelligent. But I'm more interested in sharper roles. There is a chance to act boldly, to show creativity. Heroes are harder to play. They are quite similar. In the play 'The Two Souls' by Maxim Goretzky, where I play the intellectual Abdiralovich who tells the story, there are no turning points. The development of the role is like that: no despair, no joy, no other emotions... It is very difficult to play an observation, you look for at least some kind of reflection. When the audience have no one to worry about on the stage, no one to care about, then they have a tedious time. It depends also on your own experiences and what task the director has set for you. In general, we have very good actors in Belarus.

Have you ever discovered something new while playing your role, something that would surprise both yourself and the director?

Yulia: This is the most important thing that urges me on before every entrance. It's interesting how the role will be played today, what I'll discover in it. But such discoveries more often happen when films are shot. In the film 'The Folk-healer', where I play the main role, I met with revelations I couldn't expect myself. The role was complicated. The director gave the freedom to interpret it myself, without suggesting how my heroine should treat people. I decided to trust myself, in the first shot the camera ran for ten minutes. Then it stopped and I saw the director in tears... I remember what great pleasure I felt...

Roman: I like the moments when total silence reigns in the hall when you're on stage. It's like a kind of general hypnosis. It seems that you can hear the breath of every person, you dominate the hall and the viewer is living in the same space with you. They forget what is happening on the street, at home, at work, how many lamps are on the ceiling in the theatre... It lasts maybe a minute, maybe two or less, and then you feel the pleasure of what you are doing. So it was at the performances of 'Dzyady', 'Maestro'.

How would you describe yourselves as actors?

Yulia: I'm very modest, shy and rehearse my roles for a long time. Although some of the roles were hard. For example, in the film 'Marrying the General', the actor Pavel Delong was acting, and he was very demanding about his partners. The director Sasha Kononovich was very fast, it was necessary to work quickly, it was not always easy. But it was a wonderful experience, and I'm grateful to both of them for it.

Roman: About myself, I would say this: promising. I understand my possibilities and sometimes I also understand that I can do more. Recently, I have wanted to work with Shakespeare, with

high art. It could be Hamlet. Better still, I will tell you about Yulia as an actress. She's talented, but sometimes she does not have enough ambition. Sometimes she worries about what they say about her, what they think. And you do not have to worry about the whole world, it's better to think about yourself. Besides, Yulia looks extremely organic on stage, it's in her nature.

Yulia: Roman taught me how to work on stage, without even realising it. He taught the students of our course for four years. And at the rehearsal of the play 'Dzyady' I got carried away with how Roman can open his soul in the technical parts. I have the opposite quality: until I open something in myself, I cannot learn the technique. And thanks to Roma I understood how to combine it. In one of the scenes he had to throw a cup into the wings, and I was surprised how he always hit the same point. If I did it, I would have thrown it in the wrong place.

Roman: I found out that I'm a good cup-thrower...

Yulia: Seriously, when I watch Roma on stage, I sometimes forget that he is my husband. I see a talented actor who puts a spell on the hall. And it fascinates me... And then I feel pleased that this is my husband who has captured the audience.

What are the roles you are most proud of?

Yulia: There are two roles, which I really love. Dunyasha from the play 'Bridegrooms'. There are many silent scenes there, when you are silent, but the audience hears you. This is extremely interesting — so that I wanted to play roles without words for a while. And I really like the role in the play 'The Wheel of Love'.

Roman: I like my role in the one-man performance after Chekhov's 'Sakhalin Island', where I work for an hour and a half. It was staged five years ago by Alexander Nordstrom, a Belarusian-Swedish project. In general, young actors don't play in one-man performances, it is the prerogative of the older generation. I succeeded, which was very nice because this is a kind of test for the actor. There were also plays of 'Maestro', 'Yvonne, Princess of Burgundy'. There I had some great roles.

Has the idea that it might be better if we were not in the same profession ever crossed your mind?

Yulia: No, never. It's great that we are together. I would like us to work in the same theatre, to rehearse side by side... And he doesn't want it to happen...

Roman: Oh, no, no! It's complicated. I see couples who work in my theatre. It is not easy not

to mix family issues with theatrical ones, to abstract the mind from certain moments that are inevitable in the profession. When a wife needs to kiss another man for the role, and the husband is standing behind the scenes watching, he may feel uncomfortable, although he understands... Of course, I'm joking giving such an example. In general, I'm not against joint projects with Yulia, but it's probably better that we work in different theatres.

How do you feel about the statement: the actors must sacrifice their personal happiness on the altar of art. Which sacrifices are required in your opinion? Or is this a myth?

Yulia: I wouldn't want to have circumstances in my life that would require me to sacrifice my family. It's impossible for me. I hope that my family and my favourite work will continue to coexist in an organic combination.

Roman: I'm for a balanced approach. If you fall ill or are exhausted, then it's not a must. Though previously I thought otherwise. In the end, these issues can be resolved in the theatre considering the reasonable management of the process. Sacrifices in the name of art do not end very well. Having sacrificed everything, a person remains alone with his or her loneliness. There are many such examples in the history of acting.

How do you help each other in the profession?

Yulia: Firstly, there is mutual understanding. When I'm at film shoots or at rehearsals, I feel calm. I know Roma understands me, and he will greet me at home happily. As for the roles, I also note his remarks and accept his advice.

Roman: Naturally, we discuss the performances and can give each other a piece of advice. Sometimes I also feel the desire to give some advice to the director who steers Yulia to some decisions about the role — but being an actor means being dependent...

How did the creation of your family begin and what does a happy family mean to you?

Yulia: It's when you overcome the difficulties of family life, even disputes, but you cannot imagine that this person will not be around, this is the love that animates a happy family.

Roman: A happy family is when everyone is at home, when everyone is together. It seems to me that we accidentally meet some people in our lives, but as for Yulia — this was no accident, but happy destiny.

By Valentina Zhdanovich



Such they are today

IVAN ZHDANOVICH



ALEXANDER STADUB

“It’s important for a painter to experience life”

This year, just one or two months ago, laureates of the National Fine Arts Award were honoured for the first time. The solemn awards ceremony took place at Minsk’s Arts Palace. Moreover, it was announced at the ceremony that Leonid Shchemelev, People’s Artist of Belarus and laureate of the State Award, was given a diploma ‘For Contribution to the Development of Pictorial Art’. It’s well-deserved recognition. When a person boasts such impressive professional and life experience it’s important to make use of it, even in such a delicate sphere as art. Of course, many are aware of this famous Belarusian master thanks to his numerous reflective pictures.

Actually, Leonid Shchemelev's creativity enables us to see incredible beauty in our landscapes and diversity in our environment, as well as dignity and nobility in human nature. His art is fascinating in its natural simplicity, having charm and beauty; his works are natural in every sense. Today, he is widely known as a master of contemporary Belarusian art, having been awarded the title of People's Artist and laureate of the State Award of the Republic of Belarus. He has received the prestigious Francysk Skaryna Medal and has enjoyed dozens of personal exhibitions at home and abroad, while taking part in international artistic forums. His pieces have been acquired by museums and galleries across the globe, as well as by private collectors in Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, the USA, Canada, Italy, France, Germany, Spain, Australia, Iran and Israel.

Meanwhile, today our publication focuses on Leonid Shchemelev as an artist whose professional experience has enriched the development of Belarusian pictorial culture. He is a master who has influenced the creativity of modern Belarusian painters in so many ways. Our conversation at his studio, where the respectable master still comes at his 94 years, was dedicated to this topic.

To what degree does the professional and creative growth of a young painter depend on their teacher?

Teachers should treat young artists sincerely. I see teachers as having an understanding of high culture, although they don't need to be great painters themselves. They do need to understand the essence of art in order to help their pupils' progress. Art is produced only by the most able.

Do you speak from experience?

Of course. I'm not speculating; I know this for sure. I always yearned to teach but it's now too late, as it requires



'Dzintari'

much effort. I once taught at a school for talented children and then at an art school, which I loved, but I left to pursue my own creativity. I really wanted to work at the institute, but the feeling wasn't reciprocated.

Surely, not every painter can become a teacher. Much depends on their cultural and intellectual experience and ability to pass on knowledge, does it?

You're right. It's the only possible approach towards teaching art. A painter can't just take the place of a teacher; they need to have an endless desire to teach. Pedagogic activity ties together our country and its culture. A teacher is like a creator, always opening something to reveal what lies beneath.

When a pupil breaks away from their teacher, it's like breaking the past from the present. French pictorial art seems to have lost much because of this.

You're right that France has lost many of its traditions. French painters used to demonstrate love for their homeland through their art, encapsulating the spirit of all things. Their work now lacks this element.

Do you feel nostalgic about the times of forty or fifty years ago? At that time, the community was different, including in the creative sphere...



'Horsewoman'



'Autumn Motif'



'Bunch of flowers'

Perhaps... I was born and raised in Vitebsk, so was brought up with interesting painters from childhood. I gained a great deal from attending Vitebsk's school, where gifted people taught us. The Metallist Club held exhibitions and encouraged discussions, as I well remember. Of course, this influenced my choice of profession and my attitude. After the Great Patriotic War, I entered Vitebsk's Art School, taught by the wonderful Lev Leitman. It was an interesting period, when the horrors and fears of war could be shaken off and you could take delight in some other occupation. Mr. Leitman was very interesting as a teacher, bringing you into his inner circle of understanding.

Other teachers were good and bad and I finally left in 1952, entering university in 1953. There, I began to understand the nature of pictorial work within Belarus and the former Soviet Union. My teacher, Vitaly Tsvirko, became an integral part of his pupils' lives. I felt close to him, finding him very interesting; his teaching was enlightening. The most vital lesson I received from him was to respect my brush and paints. Moreover, I learnt to respect artists worldwide.

Tsvirko was not only an interesting teacher. In 1955, an exhibition at the Dresden Gallery in Moscow attracted thousands of people from all over the Soviet Union. You had to queue for several days to see it. Mr. Tsvirko organised our trip to this exhibition, allowing us to spend several days viewing free of charge. We had great respect for his efforts on our behalf. It's difficult to imagine this situation today. We need our conversation about art to be broader, as society can't grow without progressive understanding of this sphere.

You paint every day. To what extent do your current works reflect today's world and how much of the past do you bring to them? Do you connect the past and present?

Art holds a mirror to the world and all that is in it. I'm painting scenes from the war of 1812, when France attacked Russia, but can present the emotions

with a modern perspective, so that they strike a chord today. I'm a modern man, so I'm more concerned with the present than with history. You can gain a better understanding of today's issues by understanding the past.

I like modern art, although my studio gallery has a picture of Napoleon! I like to see a modern understanding of the past — a modern perspective. Art brings joy and delight, as it has done since ancient times. Ancient Greek art is worthy of admiration, as you can see the character and opinion of each artist. I think it's important to see the world's development though, since there's more benefit in this.

You're visited by foreign guests. How do they perceive your works?

I've been visited by French, Turkish and American guests. I felt that they were aware of the national language and perceptions. Recently, three young girls arrived from France and, remarkably, their attitude towards art was identical to ours. They saw life through an understanding of themselves. Many people want to see what an artist produces but I'm eager to see joyful creativity and to see how they reveal the essence of life. If a person feels the pulse of life, it's always interesting.

From the autobiography of People's Artist of Belarus L. Shchemelev:

I was lucky, being born in Vitebsk — a city of artists. I spent my childhood surrounded by art lovers, albeit amateur. I learnt about colour, canvases and the smell of fresh painted pictures early on. The Dvina River was nearby, which is still sacred to me. My most treasured childhood memories are of delightful winter skiing and playing on the banks of the Dvina in summer. There were trips to my grandmother's village and, of course, films.

The war ended all that of course. In 1941, I left, like others, to fight. In 1943, during the liberation of Belarus under Mozyr, I was seriously wounded and sent to hospital. However, I recovered sufficiently to fight again. In short, I survived those terrible war years of the last century.

Destiny saved me and I went to Minsk's Art College. Later, I worked as a teacher and, finally, I entered the Art Institute in Minsk. I was lucky again, studying under Vitaly Tsvirko — a wonderful artist and teacher, who opened my eyes to a new understanding of the world. I gradually overcame my early artistic failures and soon began to exhibit throughout Minsk, Moscow and abroad.

My artist's life is the best gift I've received from God: my admiration of the world and ability to depict its surprising paradoxes. Creating art brings me great happiness.

Your teacher, Vitaly Tsvirko, disliked public speaking but his paintings were more eloquent than words. How do you categorise yourself?

I'm among those who love their profession. I can describe my thoughts in words and can critique the works of others, although I'm not a professional in this sphere. When it comes to my teacher, Vitaly Tsvirko, I have a great deal to say, as I gratefully admire him as an artist and as a person. When you've studied for a long time, you find that many teachers influence you. However, those who teach art can be the most influential, as they teach you so much about yourself. This allows you to grow as an artist, understanding your role and responsibilities. Mr. Tsvirko was such a teacher to me. Being a great artist, he passed on more than professional skills. He showed me humanity and love for the countryside — both of which he felt strongly himself.

Is this why pictures of nature dominate your canvases, in various states and moods?

I have few 'pure' landscapes as most use some pictorial construction or portray action. My characters not only complement and enliven the landscape, but are intrinsically connected to their environment. I don't create plots but I do work on a theme, striving to reveal it to my viewer. I paint life rather than fantasy.

How do you view the days when social realism ruled?



As comfortable in studio as at home

Talented masters always find ways to realise their creativity, making true masterpieces. One of the greatest drawbacks of social realism was the way that privileges, knowledge and posts were unfairly distributed. Of course, a painter's own personality had a role to play in whether they succumbed to temptation; not everyone became infected with the disease. I find it difficult to say how many pictures I dedicated to the historical-revolutionary theme, as such works aren't limited to showing the act of shooting people. Sometimes, a single face can show the fate of a whole generation.

You travelled a lot deal across the USSR, visiting Europe and Asia. How did they influence you as an artist and for what were you searching? What did you want to understand?

I travelled a great deal, especially in Soviet times, seeing all fifteen republics. I've been abroad many times and always returned with vast amounts of artistic material. More importantly, I was able to compare art in each place, striving to understand what feeds the creativity of each famous artist (in the



Annushka



Leonid Shchemelev's natural feature is an open character



'Winter day'

USSR and abroad). I realised the obvious: art is nurtured by folk art, culture and traditions. You can only reach the ultimate peak of success, at home or internationally, if you are true to this idea, processing that which is unique and special. In the end, you can present it to the world in a way which is universally recognisable.

So, you had the opportunity to compare sights with those of your homeland. How does Belarus differ and what do you think visitors notice most on arriving here for the first time?

Primarily, our countryside, as Belarus is covered in a whole system of pure spring lakes and a network of large and small rivers. These nourish nature, keeping colours fresh and juicy; it can't be ignored. Colours don't fade, they simply change with the seasons, remaining vivid. The rich green of spring and summer flowers is replaced by the amazing shades and tones of autumn. The transition is seamless and filled with majesty. Winter then takes over, with its purity and white snow. Our lace-frosted trees are like nothing else. Our countryside never looks weary. It is always alive and fresh. This may be why

Like all artists, I choose to paint what I love, for my own enjoyment. I love those close to me, so draw them with pleasure. I create portraits of those close to me in spirit and convictions with no less pleasure

Belarus has always had so many wonderful landscape-painters.

You also have many portraits of those dear to you among your works.

Like all artists, I choose to paint what I love, for my own enjoyment. I love those close to me, so draw them with pleasure. I create portraits of those close to me in spirit and convictions with no less pleasure. In my opinion, they are good as they are.

Over the years, I've attended your exhibitions, seeing your still life works, which I think are among your most bright, emotional and beautiful. Are you content for the word 'beautiful' to be applied to your art or do you find it too trivial?

I think that beauty is a necessary quality for art. Think of the famous line: 'beauty will save the world'. Why should I be displeased? All art should be beautiful, having been created by an artist. Paintings should be especially so, being so colourful. Landscapes are naturally beautiful, being filled with colour; without this, we'd see only a desert. As one artist said: 'Learn from nature and create real art'. Folk art draws on all which is beautiful; it's a formula which can never fail.

By Veniamin **Mikheev**

