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Events determine sense

Belarus has long positioned itself as an active participant within the international community. The multi-vector character of its foreign policy confirms this. The UN Resident Co-ordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Belarus, Sanaka Samarasinha, comments that Belarus has always been a protagonist of the United Nations Organisation, since the day it promoted the establishment of this world organisation, becoming one of its fifty-one member states.

Our interview with Mr. Samarasinha is topical, since the United Nations Organisation opened its representation in Minsk twenty-five years ago, with Belarus becoming the first post-Soviet state to have a UN office. You can read about the UN's successful activity in Belarus in our **Quarter Century Working Together**.

Within about a month, Minsk will see the opening of a representational office of the International Committee of the Red Cross, allowing us to interact with the ICRC without the intermediary of the ICRC's regional office in Moscow, which opened back in 1992, covering Russia, Belarus and Moldova. **Accent on Good Endeavours** explores this topic further.

Belarus is building its partnerships with various countries and is mastering distant continents, as you can read about in **Ecuador Getting Closer**. Although 11,000 kilometres separate this South American country from Belarus, modern day communications render distance no obstacle, where countries are eager to engage in active partnership. Of course, it's necessary to reinforce intentions with concrete results. One of the coordinators of our joint work, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ecuador to Belarus, H.E. Mr. Carlos Larrea Davila, is convinced that we're on the right path. Chatting with us at his Minsk residence, Mr. Davila spoke keenly

on achievements so far and future prospects.

Looking at the world of modern technology, in early October, the world celebrated the 60th anniversary of the launch of the first artificial Earth satellite. Now, thousands are functioning, ensuring navigation and communication, ecological monitoring and cartography, as well as fulfilling

dozens of other needs. Belarusian satellites are among them, with space technologies helping drive forward sci-tech progress. Since Soviet times, dozens of scientific institutes and production structures have been working in Belarus on space problems, the discussion of which is commonplace at congresses. The recent 7th Belarusian Space Congress, hosted by Minsk, brought together more than 400 scientists from all over the world. They discussed prospects for space exploration, and the development of space apparatus, including commercial application. Next year, Minsk is hosting an even bigger event: the Global Space Congress, uniting astronauts from all corners of the Earth, as we detail in **Minsk Becoming Space Centre**.

2017 has been the Year of Science in Belarus, with all sci-tech spheres explored, including philosophical, as you can read about in **Philosophical Questions in Focus**.

We often think of nations in terms of stereotypes. Whom among us hasn't heard of German architecture, Korean hard work, English ceremoniousness and American entrepreneurship? However, can a whole nation boast one determining feature? Recently, the Sociology Institute at the National Academy of Sciences conducted major research into the 'civilisational-cultural code' of Belarusian society. To find out what conclusions they've drawn, read **We Can't Lose Our Code**, looking at how our national character is formed, and how it affects the fate of the country.

VIKTOR KHARKOV



► Relations of strategic partnership

China views Belarus as an important partner for cooperation in the joint Belt and Road initiative, notes the General Secretary of the Central Committee of China's Communist Party and President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, in his response message to the Belarusian Head of State, Alexander Lukashenko

Xi Jinping's message reads: 'I'd like to express my gratitude for your greetings on the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of China and my reelection to the post of General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. I attach great importance to the development of Chinese-Belarusian relations.'

The Chinese leader emphasises that, in September 2016, China and Belarus created trusting relations and an all-round strategic partnership of mutually beneficial cooperation, which has opened a new page



in bilateral relations. He stresses, "We support each other in matters relating to our vital interests. We can see positive trends of pragmatic collaboration across various spheres between China and Belarus. China views Belarus as an important partner in the joint Belt and Road initiative. I'm ready to join you in efforts to achieve the comprehensive development of our bilateral relations and to create a community with a shared fate."

On behalf of the Chinese people, he expressed gratitude to Alexander Lukashenko for inviting Chinese children to Belarus for recuperative holidays. Xi Jinping also expressed confidence that the friendship between our two peoples will continue to grow stronger.

► Opportunities for cultural influence

Paris hosts 39th Session of UNESCO General Conference, with Belarus elected onto Executive Board of this influential international organisation

Following a vote by 184 countries taking part in the conference, Belarus has been overwhelmingly chosen to join the Executive Board, receiving 171 votes. Between General Conference sessions (which take place every two years) the major governing body of the UNESCO is the Executive Board, which includes representatives of fifty-eight member states. The Executive Board meets twice annually, in spring and autumn, helping influence the adoption of decisions on which sites are to be included on the World Heritage List. The Deputy Head of the Department of



the Protection of Historical and Cultural Heritage of the Belarusian Culture Ministry, Natalia Khvir, hopes that our membership will give us the opportunity to influence particular processes. She explains, "It's a different situation to be observing from the outside rather than taking part in decision making."

Almost thirty years ago, Belarus joined the Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 1972. The beginning of this century was the most fruitful, with four sites located on the territory of our country joining the UNESCO World Heritage List. However, our ambitions are grander, with five more sites currently on the Tentative List.

► Unique edition to go on show to public

Facsimile edition of 'Book Heritage of Francysk Skaryna' donated to UN Library and University Library of Bern

The international project to recreate the legacy of the Belarusian book printing pioneer is the central fulcrum for many events dedicated to the 500th anniversary of Belarusian book printing. Implemented jointly by the National Library of Belarus and BelVEB Bank, the project presents a vivid example of successful cooperation between organisations united by the common idea

of recovering and perpetuating our historical legacy.

In future, the 21-volume collection will be showcased in the UN Library, so that members of the public may view it.

Representatives of the diplomatic corps, members of UN Office staff in Geneva, and Belarusians living in the French-speaking part of Switzerland have attended events held in Geneva to mark the 500th anniversary of Belarusian book printing.

Francysk Skaryna's legacy and the international project to recreate it in the form of a multivolume facsimile edition were discussed at a meeting in the library of the University of Bern. A copy of the facsimile edition was donated to the university library.



Meeting point — Abu Dhabi

President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, has been to the United Arab Emirates on a working visit

Negotiations with the UAE leadership included discussion of the current state of Belarusian-Emirate interaction, the implementation of previous agreements, and mutually promising projects. From January to August 2017, Belarusian exports to the UAE totalled \$44.8 million (up by 318 percent against the same period of last year). Over the first six months, direct foreign investments from the UAE exceeded \$11 million.

As part of the visit, a loan agreement was signed between the Development Bank of the Republic of Belarus and the Khalifa Fund for Enterprise Development. According to the document, the fund will allocate the bank around \$25 million, which will be spent on the development of private initiative, innovations, regional projects and the creation of new jobs in Belarus.

Demonstrating the friendly character of relations between the United Arab Emirates and Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko has been invited to spend several days in the UAE as a guest.

Mr. Lukashenko met the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, for negotiations, discussing prospects for Belarus-UAE relations. "Our bilateral relations are very important," noted the Belarusian Head of State. "Last time, we agreed a range of

areas for cooperation and we're trying to develop these directions together with the Emirates."

Mr. Lukashenko underlined that meetings with Mohammed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan are always held in a friendly atmosphere and thanked him for his warm welcome to the UAE. The President noted that the Belarusian delegation had become acquainted with the development of a whole range of branches in this country. "I should say sincerely that, this time, we've seen a great deal: from tourism to the best examples in healthcare. I'm grateful that you gave us access to any building we wished to visit, in a sincere manner: primarily the hospital. It astonished us greatly," said the President.

Regarding bilateral relations, it was agreed that the UAE should be more widely presented in Belarus, with several powerful projects being discussed, which should tie our two states closer economically. Our dynamics of developing our relationship are good, but need to be supported and expanded.

The major protocol event of the working visit of the Head of State to the United Arab Emirates was Mr. Lukashenko's laying of a wreath at the Fallen Warriors Memorial in Abu Dhabi. The guard of honour company took part and, following the laying of the wreath at the monument, all observed a minute's silence, in honour of those who have given their life in the service of their country.

The Head of State looked at the details of the memorial and wrote in the distinguished visitors' book.

The Fallen Warriors Memorial (Wahat Al Karama) is located opposite Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque and comprises thirty-one massive tablets, which lean on each other and bear the names of fallen warriors. The monument is a national and cultural landmark, praising the nation's values of unity and solidarity.

The President of Belarus met the President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, while in the UAE.

"We're cooperating via the trade-economic sphere and, despite difficulties, our trade turnover now exceeds \$3 billion, standing at about \$3.5 billion as of today. However, we can certainly expand collaboration by promoting interaction between regions," noted Mr. Lukashenko.

The Belarusian leader is convinced that the first forum of regions of Belarus and Ukraine, which is expected to take place in Gomel, will bring new impetus to the development of bilateral relations.

"As far as political interaction is concerned, we haven't any problems. We're committed to the course we've agreed to follow," underlined Mr. Lukashenko.

The Head of State noted that, even far from their countries, the presidents found an opportunity to meet and discuss topical issues regarding relations between their countries. "We have an opportunity to discuss issues that need additional impulse from us," he asserted.



BELTA

Accent on good endeavours

Representation of International Committee of Red Cross opens in Minsk

From the new year, the country will be interacting with the International Committee of the Red Cross without the intermediation of the ICRC regional office in Moscow, which opened back in 1992, covering Russia, Belarus and Moldova. During the visit to Minsk by the President of the ICRC, Peter Maurer, an agreement was signed on the opening of the representation in Minsk, which launches on January 1st. The decision can be reasonably viewed as a high assessment of Belarus

as a place of peace and humanism in the region, as well as far beyond its borders. The Belarusian state and of the International Committee of the Red Cross hold identical positions in these matters, as can be seen from the content of the meeting between Alexander Lukashenko and Peter Maurer.

The President is convinced, “This visit should be an important event, highlighting the fact that our relations should advance to a brand-new level. Our efforts to open an ICRC representational office mean a great deal, and we value

these very much. This will open a new page in our relations, and will generate new prospects and hopes.”

Belarusians are naturally tolerant, and merciful, having experienced their own trials and hardships through history, facing many destructive wars. Our hearts understand the pain of those in need. The President assured his guest that our country will make its contribution to international humanitarianism, helping those in need, through concrete actions. Around 150,000 refugees from Ukraine have found not only shelter in Belarus but their second homeland, having been settled here.

“Belarusian people view their Ukrainian brothers and sisters as equals,” noted the President. “We’ve spent a great deal but won’t dwell on those expenses, because people were in trouble. Cost doesn’t matter in such a situation. Syrian problems concern us too. In good years, our two states were connected by sincere friendship and fruitful cooperation. It’s now difficult to collaborate but no one can hamper us from being friends. Therefore, humanitarian cargoes are delivered to Syria from Belarus. Moreover, children also arrive in our country for recuperation.”

These aren’t merely one-off events but a solid policy. Mr. Maurer admits that the ICRC highly appreciates this. He said, “The activity of the International Committee of Red Cross, as never before, depends on the support of such countries as Belarus, who try to settle conflicts in the world and to unite conflicting parties at the negotiating table. Thank you for your assistance... Our thanks go to the Belarusian nation, to authorities and to you personally for your support of ICRC activity. We feel this in the way you support international humanitarian law. As soon as the representational office opens in Minsk, interaction will become even closer and more dynamic, helping to reduce suffering of people worldwide. Humanitarian activity has become an indispensable part of Belarusian state policy.”

By Dmitry Kryat

Ecuador getting closer



The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Ecuador to the Republic of Belarus, H.E. Mr. Carlos Larrea Davila

Thousands of kilometres separate Belarus from this South American country: 11,000 to be exact. Truly, we're far from being neighbours but, in these modern times, distance is no obstacle. Importantly, our two countries have, at the highest level, expressed willingness to establish an active partnership. Intentions must be strengthened with concrete results, believes the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Ecuador to the Republic of Belarus, H.E. Mr. Carlos Larrea Davila. He invited us to his Minsk residence to chat about plans for the future and forthcoming prospects.

Mr. Ambassador, how would you characterise the present state of Belarusian-Ecuadorian relations?

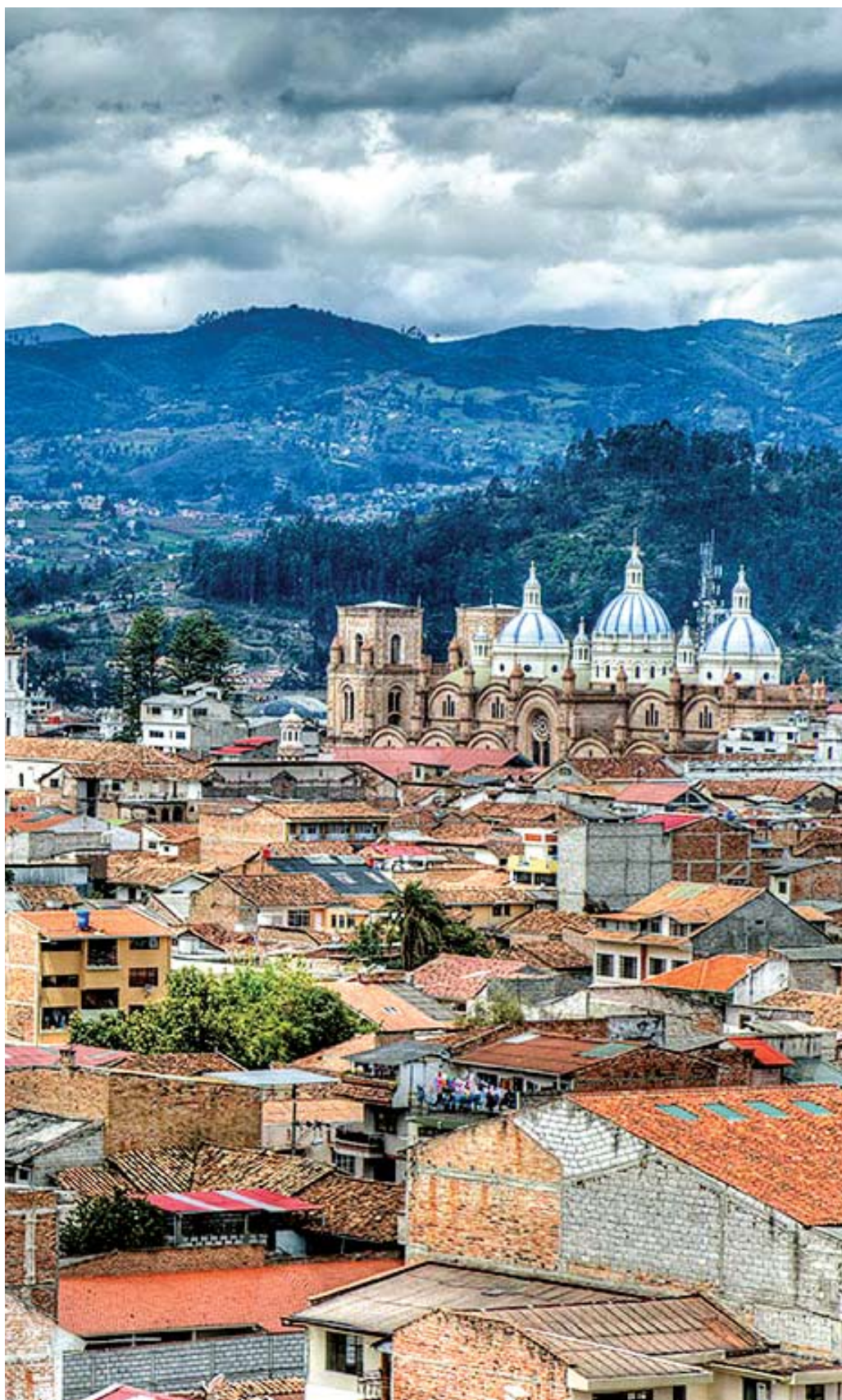
Ecuador's presence in Belarus is related to international priorities, and shifting emphasis towards the Eurasian region, with the aim of diversifying foreign relations and making the most of the complementarity of potential partner countries' economies. Ecuador boasts rich natural resources, an advantageous geographical position and exceptional climatic conditions. These factors are a foundation for the country's export potential and its ability to receive tourists and attract quality foreign investments. Ecuador has extensive experience in the development of laws and state policy in such diverse areas as public administration, tourism, migration, human rights, ecology and international tax law, and the creation of a barrier-free environment for people with disabilities. It's ready to share this experience with partners.

Meanwhile, Belarus is a regional leader in the field of technologies relating to trade, through state-owned companies. Its spheres of expertise cover not only oil fields, pharmaceuticals, nanotechnologies, electro-optics, heavy machinery and mechanisation of the agricultural sphere but seismic technologies, emergency management. These help us to plan a symmetric approach, which is respectful, complementary and mutually beneficial. Since May 24th, 2017 (when President Lenin Moreno was inaugurated), our bilateral cooperation has been strengthened by a pragmatic view on jointly realised ventures, at state level.

Our bilateral relations are experiencing their best period. However, the time has come to shift from identifying mutually beneficial projects to their implementation.

What are the most significant developments contributing to the dynamic development of Ecuadorian-Belarusian bilateral relations?

No doubt, presidential diplomacy has promoted our bilateral relations. In June 2012, President Alexander Lukashenko visited Ecuador for the first time,





Ecuador has successfully established itself in the global tourism industry: in 2017, the country won fourteen international awards

with a re-
turn visit by
President Rafael
Correa to Belarus
taking place in October
2013. During that meet-
ing, the heads of state made
the decision to open diplomatic
missions in Quito and Minsk. It was
a milestone which became a turning
point in relations between reliable part-
ners. It strengthened multilateral work
across fields in which we have a shared
approach. Lectures, workshops, and
publications in scientific journals and
specialised media have been organised
by the Belarusian academic community,
focusing on topics of strategic interest to
Ecuador.

A collegial body has been created as
part of public diplomacy, to promote the
interests of Ecuador in Belarus. It unites
well-known Belarusian citizens and is
co-chaired by the Minister for Transport

Min-
Meanwhile, an inter-parliamentary
cooperation group has been estab-
lished and Belarus has joined the Latin
American Parliament as an observer.
Official visits of the Chairman of the
National Assembly, ministers and other
high-ranking officials have contributed
to co-ordination of bilateral actions
across a wide range of cooperation-re-
lated issues.

and
Com-
muni-
cations and the
Deputy Foreign
Minister of Belarus.

***Trade and economic activity oc-
cupy a special niche in international
affairs. What are their features?***

Since the Embassy of Quito
opened in Minsk, mutual trade has
increased significantly, largely owing
to entry onto previously undeveloped
markets. Trade volumes are modest but
I'm convinced that market research, ad-
vertising and promotion will improve
figures. According to the State Statisti-
cal Committee, from January 2007 to
December 2016, mutual trade between
Ecuador and Belarus fluctuated, with a
surplus for Ecuador, largely due to the
market conditions and specific needs of
each country.

In 2007, our trade balance stood at
\$24.1 million but had more than dou-
bled by 2016 (to reach \$58,663,000).
Bilateral trade rose 143 percent (against
2007) with the largest increase registered
in 2015: \$77,506,000 (a 217.47 percent
rise against 2014 and 222 percent against



2007). Due to different methods of registration of foreign trade, the figures of Belarus and the Central Bank of Ecuador differ.

At present, Ecuador's exports include fresh cut roses, baby's breath, carnations, bananas, fresh fruit and canned goods, coffee, cocoa and other products sold in smaller volumes. There is potential for larger supplies of these products and new export articles, such as extracts, essences and concentrates based on coffee, cocoa butter, frozen shrimp and prawns, fruit paste, frozen fish and sycamore.

In turn, Belarus sells potash, potassium chloride, iron and steel wire with brass coating, ammonium sulphate, plastic, valves for tyres, spare parts and equipment for cars to Ecuador. Due to its specialisation in the industrial sector, Belarus has great potential for expanding its presence in Latin America, especially through sales of tractors and heavy machinery.

In recent times, Belarus has increasingly focused on industrial cooperation with foreign partners. Is Ecuador ready for such offers?

Ecuador needs external cooperation aimed at modernising its production model. The country's conditions are contributing to the promotion of industrialisation but it needs international support. Moreover, Ecuador aims to become a regional provider of clean energy, enjoying a popular policy of promoting ecological production. With this in mind, technological cooperation with such partners as Belarus could play a significant role.

I must stress that Belarusian landscapes are amazing. Travelling from Ecuador to Belarus envisages coming from the middle of the world to the centre of Europe. I'm convinced many of our citizens should take advantage of this

Which Belarusian-Ecuadorian joint ventures are likely to launch? And why?

Ecuador is primarily interested in high-performance projects with the possibility of technology transfer, for all sectors of the economy — including private. The agricultural sphere's mechanisation is a particular focus, with Belarus demonstrating willingness to supply engineering products, or set up joint manufacturing profitable for Ecuador. Deep knowledge of the market and Belarusian equipment, and national systems of contract conclusion, as well as the presence of technical representations, is vital in the realisation of joint projects, building trust in post-sale maintenance. Our two countries are working hard to achieve these goals and the President of Ecuador, Lenin Moreno, has taken measures to build confidence in the tax sphere and the fight against corruption.

What's been done at legislative level and what's yet to be achieved to ensure that potential partners are more active?

Establishing a legal base is the first step in enabling our countries to smooth-

ly and safely develop business activity. On August 16th, 2017, the agreement between Ecuador and Belarus on avoidance of double taxation and prevention of evasion of income and property tax came into force. This two-sided document should help attract high-quality investments and trade transactions from both sides.

On September 12th, 2017, the protocol on completion of bilateral negotiations on market access for goods (as part of Belarus' accession process to the World Trade Organisation) was signed in Geneva — becoming another important aspect. There are no risks in Ecuador, since its economy is dedollarised. The country's legislation provides for non-discriminatory treatment for foreign investors, freedom of production, sales of goods and services, freedom of movement of capital, free competition, private property guarantees, freedom of access to the stock market, freedom of access to internal and external credits and investment contracts through which tax stability and promotion are ensured.

Quito, the capital of Ecuador



Belarus and Ecuador intend to expand their bilateral cooperation. Despite thousands of kilometres separating them, they have much in common: interests and positions in the international arena, attention to social issues and developments in the trade and economic sphere.

Ecador is the world's leading country for sales of bananas, and Ecuadorians eat nearly 74kg of bananas annually. Belarusians consume half this figure. Belarus and Ecuador are establishing cooperation in oil production, exploration and construction, with these projects setting the tone for bilateral cooperation.

The first oil field in the Amazon valley was discovered over fifty years ago and sales of black gold now account for the lion's share of Ecuador's exports. Foreign companies compete for the right to work on those oil fields but, thanks to its global reputation as a reliable partner, Belarus has received several proposals for collaboration in this sphere.

Truly, Ecuador is rich in minerals but the country lacks technologies, while Belarus can help establish production with high added value, aiding Ecuador in its desire to develop applied technologies. Our country can train necessary specialists, with about fifty students from Ecuador already studying at Belarus' higher educational establishments.



A simplified procedure of investment approval is applied by the Committee of the Ecuadoran Presidential Administration. Transparency in contracting and tendering, as well as safety and freedom of movement are natural for this country. Finally, the possibility of allocating credit lines for joint bilateral projects acts as another factor contributing to possible understanding between entrepreneurs. In this regard, I wish to emphasise the support which Belarus' Development Bank is ready to render.

Politics are of major importance in bilateral relations. Along which avenues of international policy do Ecuador and Belarus demonstrate convergence of views and approaches?

In the multilateral sphere, Ecuador and Belarus have similar positions in their vision of the multipolar world: respect for sovereignty and people's self-determination; mutually beneficial cooperation; establishment of relations with all countries of the world; and respect for international law and principles of global democracy.

During the recent official events honouring the UN's 72th anniversary, I talked about Belarus' vital experience in the international fight against human trafficking. Our two states are focusing on this issue. I also presented the Ecuadorian initiative on human rights and transnational corporations. Introducing a global mechanism to eliminate gaps in international law is a hot topic, including regarding national and international mechanisms to offer reparation to victims of human rights violations. We're yet in the early stages of our bilateral relations so the first phase of our diplomatic activity has focused on forming legislation to govern specific areas of cooperation.

How might our liaisons develop further in the fields of education and tourism, and what has already been achieved?

Several weeks ago, Belarus' Education Minister provided a comprehensive proposal on cooperation, including a protocol to establish new educational institutions in Ecuador and programmes

of cooperation in the field of education for 2018-2020 (involving scholarship exchange). Ecuadorian heads are now analysing the proposal.

The bilateral agreement on the recognition of higher education diplomas (22nd May, 2017) would probably become one of the most important signed documents. After coming into force, it should contribute to academic mobility and specialists' training. It will also be useful for young people from Ecuador wishing to study in Belarus. I'm convinced that the number of Ecuadorian students in Belarus will significantly increase in the future.

Ecuador has successfully established itself in the global tourism industry: in 2017, the country again won fourteen international awards (@WTravelAwards), largely owing to its active positioning in the international arena. We're sharing our positive experience with Belarus, since your country has launched a wide campaign to become an international tourist destination. Our experience includes a modern system of tourism industry management, which ensures security, legal support, an effective information system and institutional structures aiming to simplify tourist plans on a national scale. We've focused on twelve European and Asian countries but we may extend this, to Australia and to countries in the Eurasian region.

I must stress that Belarusian landscapes are amazing. Travelling from Ecuador to Belarus envisages coming from the middle of the world to the centre of Europe. I'm convinced many of our citizens should take advantage of this.

Cultural events bring people together naturally, even when thousands of kilometres separate nations. What Belarusian and Ecuadorian cultural events have there been?

The importance of fruitful cultural promotion is undeniable. Our Embassy has paid special attention to fine arts, organising over a dozen of exhibitions by Ecuadorian and Belarusian artists. Among them is the Belarus-known dynasty of the Maslennikovs. To achieve our goal, we've transformed our Em-



***We are separated
by over 11,000
kilometres,
with different
languages
and customs,
but these
differences
enrich us***

bassy into a permanent gallery, which has already gained recognition in cultural Minsk. Jointly with the Belarusian State Academy of Arts, we've held an original contest among students, focusing on Ecuador. The award-winning pictures will be sent to Ecuador as part of a joint project, to be exhibited at the Foreign Ministry. We've also agreed to jointly release a CD of Ecuadorian academic music: virtuosos from our two countries are participating in this non-commercial project, realised with the

support of the Belarusian State TV and Radio Company.

Mr. Ambassador, it's not your first year of working in Belarus. Certainly, you've managed to gain some understanding of its people. What has impressed you most? Is Belarus in any way similar to Ecuador, and what brings us closer to each other? Of course, Ecuador and Belarus represent different cultures and ethnic groups... what do Ecuadorians know of Belarus?

On November 1st, I celebrated my third year of work in Belarus. Several days after my arrival, Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei welcomed me and, during our meeting, I handed him copies of my credentials. On December 12th, 2014, I presented my formal credentials to President Alexander Lukashenko.

Your country is wonderful but its people impress me most. There isn't a single day when I fail to be surprised by their courtesy, discipline and dedication. This is a nation which I admire and deeply love. We're separated by over 11,000km, with different languages and customs, but these differences enrich us. Ecuadorians already know of Belarus' existence and are gradually learning more of its cultural values. An increasing number of Belarusians are also coming to Ecuador, engaged in energy projects, seismic exploration and development of oil fields, using ecologically safe technologies.

Diplomatic work in both directions continues. I was honoured to become the first Ecuadorian Ambassador to Belarus. This places great responsibility on me, as a pioneer whose legacy will set the tone for further friendship and cooperation.

Truly, much work lies ahead but much has also been achieved, greatly owing to the contribution of the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ecuador to Belarus. Diplomat Carlos Larrea Davila is a true professional who cares deeply about his work, aiming to benefit his country. He has learned to love Belarus, to his credit, and to ours.

By Vladimir **Mikhailov**



Quarter century



Twenty-five years ago, the United Nations Organisation opened its representational office in Minsk. We chat with current UN Resident Co-ordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Belarus, Sanaka Samarasinha.

If we look back at the chronology of what's been achieved by the UN Office in Belarus, what would you highlight?

Belarus has always been a leading proponent of the UN ever since it helped form the world body as one of its 51 founding members. While continuing to lead global efforts on important issues such as disaster response, the fight against human trafficking and a vocal advocate

of middle-income countries within the UN, it is rightly becoming known as a regional champion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Of course, it's important that the Republic of Belarus became the first post-Soviet state to open a UN office on its territory twenty-five years ago.

Together we have focused on a whole range of issues for 25 years in

Belarus: from addressing environmental challenges and the fall-out from Chernobyl to fighting HIV and TB; from dealing with migration and refugees to combating human trafficking and domestic violence; from supporting economic growth and working with entrepreneurs to empowering marginalized groups such as women, children, and the elderly. This partner-

working together



ship for development has yielded significant results. Belarus has practically achieved almost all the Millennium Development Goals, especially reducing poverty from almost 42 percent in 2000 to 5.7 percent by 2016. Belarus is currently ranked 52nd out of 186 countries by UNDP's Human Development Index.

Which areas of UN work have been especially intensified recently?

As in other middle-income countries around the world, Belarus too faces challenges in ensuring that the most vulnerable have access to services and opportunities just as much as everyone else. We have to do more to ensure the rights of people living with disabilities in the country are protected, respected

and fulfilled. We can do more to prevent new cases of HIV infection among teens and we can do more to increase the life expectancy of men — currently 66.5 (11.5 years less than women). We can do more to ensure protection of the thousands of refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons who have fled conflict from Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere. We can do more to support the 21 districts in Belarus that are still considered the worst-affected by the Chernobyl disaster. We can do more to support small businesses. We can do more to protect bio-diversity, promote responsible consumption and waste management. We can do more to ensure energy efficient housing and transport and switch to clean energy.

What are the components of UN work in Belarus and what does this work depend on?

To do important tasks efficiently means understanding that different people require different development solutions. Treating people the same way through our assistance when they are unequally positioned inherently reinforces inequality. We need to make more effort to collect and analyse disaggregated data so that we understand these differences. This is what the world meant when we committed together to 'leave no one behind' in achieving the 17 SDGs.

Moreover, instead of limiting ourselves to fulfilling human need we must look at realising human potential. This means spending more effort to under-



Belarus has always been a leading proponent of the UN ever since it helped form the world body as one of its 51 founding members. While continuing to lead global efforts on important issues such as disaster response, the fight against human trafficking and a vocal advocate of middle-income countries within the UN, it is rightly becoming known as a regional champion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

stand what capacities different people have and what capacities we can help them to build. We need to understand where they can get to someday, no matter who or where they might be right now.

We will then not only make a change in the lives of individual people and their families, but we will together build the nation and the world that we want — for ourselves, our children and the children of our children. All of this must be done taking into account the unique development context of Belarus, the promise and opportunities of the SDGs and

underpinned by the universal values, principles, norms and standards of the United Nations.

What are the priorities of the UN Office today? What are our joint plans and nearest endeavours?

The Belarus National SDG Council is now leading an initiative to align the SDGs and national priorities and strategies. As we support these efforts, we need to seize the opportunities that new technologies offer and innovate development solutions that anticipate future scenarios. We need to think more creatively about how to promote

meaningful public-private partnerships that increase financing for development impact, boost the economy, improve infrastructure and enhance essential services; we need to deal with the risks and exploit the opportunities of disappearing borders and demographical changes due to migration and ageing; we need to ensure young people's education match the emerging job market here and elsewhere; we need to make sure health and other social services are getting to everyone in need effectively and efficiently; we need to do even more to protect biodiversity, mitigate the impact of climate



change, reduce the risks of disaster, improve energy efficiency and create a green economy so that future generations may have what we have enjoyed.

What are principles of the UN's successful work in Belarus?

Since the beginning of my time here, I have travelled many times to every region of the country trying to understand the distinct challenges in each, but also discovering the common opportunities across regions.

The impact of the work we all do together is well documented. The statistics and numbers are abundantly clear. But it is the anecdotal evidence that showed me how you are making a real difference in the lives of those who most needed a difference. The difference was what I saw written on the faces and heard in the simple words of men, women and children I have met around the country.

Looking to the future, the importance of our global work through the United Nations is more important and



more urgent than ever. As conflicts, terrorism, nuclear weapons, inequality, natural disasters and climate change threaten our very existence. As we ramp up our efforts around the world, let us also recommit to continue our collective work making a tangible difference in Belarus — all of us together. It is your ownership, your leadership, your gen-

erosity, perseverance and passion that made the difference.

In particular, let's exploit the global reach of the UN family to create a knowledge exchange that bring to Belarus the best and most innovative and cost-effective development solutions from around the world while exporting the same from Belarus to countries where it is needed.

Let us redouble our efforts through the UN to use international and national expertise and the convening and facilitating role of the organisation to ensure that nobody is really left behind and that everyone not only participates in achieving the SDGs, but also that these goals are achieved for everyone.

Everyone's voice is important. Through a mutually respectful dialogue that seeks to understand each other we will no doubt create a better world for our children than we found ourselves. The world we want through the United Nations we have.

By Vladimir **Mikhailov**



Profit is generated from waste

Complete recycling of milk whey in Khoiniki prevents water and soil pollution while aiding waste 'optimisation' at dairy farms

Waste from dairy farms in the Gomel Region previously polluted the environment but is now being recycled

in the Gomel Region, at modernised Milkavita enterprise in Polesie's Khoiniki, thanks to a pilot initiative.

The unit used in the production of dry curd whey at Milkavita has been equipped by the Association of European Businesses (AEB) as part of the 'Supporting the Transition to a Green Economy' in the Republic of Belarus project, financed by the EU and realised by the UNDP in partnership with the





'Supporting the Transition to a Green Economy in the Republic of Belarus' involves 23 pilot initiatives, with five million Euros of funding, and 110,000 Euros applied to curd whey utilisation

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus.

Milkavita enterprise is the partner of AEB in the Gomel Region, with a re-equipped line able to process 110 tonnes daily (about 2,300 tonnes per month). The pilot initiative creates conditions for further waste treatment at dairy enterprises in the Gomel Region, helping solve the issue. Milkavita is now producing a new product: a whey-fat mixture with 30-40 percent fat, used to manufacture whole milk replacers (as given to livestock in Spain and France). The newly produced component is to be used to replace whole milk in the production of livestock fodder, saving 300-390 thousand Roubles per month on imported components (which have risen in price from 2,000 Roubles to 2,600 Roubles per tonne). Curd whey is now generating profit rather than being a hazardous waste.

The pilot initiative has economic, environmental and social impact. By processing whey waste, money is being saved on disposal, and profit generated. Volumes of processed curd whey are to rise to 2,300 tonnes per month, while energy costs will almost half. The environmental impact is also obvious, with all curd whey being treated, preventing water and soil pollution, via a closed cycle of non-waste production for dairy products.

A great many new jobs are forthcoming, including those for engineers and technologists at dairy enterprises country-wide. A training seminar for representatives of Belarusian dairy processing enterprises was recently held to increase the competency of those involved in implementing environmental production law.

Information has been disseminated on the creation of green business models of non-waste technological processes, both at state and private enterprises, for replication countrywide.

By Alexander **Pimenov**

Reference

■ **A single tonne of curd whey incorrectly utilised creates the same amount of environmental damage as 100 cubic metres of domestic wastewater and sewage. Moreover, according to the Agriculture and Food Ministry of the Republic of Belarus, the Gomel Region processed the least amount of curd whey in 2016, surpassed by the Brest and Grodno regions (which process whey from other regions).**

Will banks work with crypto currencies?

Domestic financial flow is rapidly digitising. Not long ago, the launch of the first Belarusian crypto currency was announced, using mobile payment services based on modern cryptographic technologies. How will the digital transformation of the financial system of Belarus continue? What opportunities will this open to the public? Will banks work with crypto currencies? The Chairman of Belgazprombank's Board, Victor Babariko, answers these and many other questions.

The 'New Reality: Challenges for Belarus' conference — organised by your bank in October for the third time — looked to the future. Why is your bank encouraging this?

The theme of our conference was more the present rather than the future. One of the tasks we've set is to catch emerging trends in the financial market. As a bank, we're interested in the detailed examination of these processes. On the other hand, we see demand for creating alternative financial products.

Do you plan to create these for the local and foreign market?

We're searching for financial products of interest to the global market, especially as we've faced restrictions on the domestic market. At the moment, the Belarusian market is small for

twenty-four commercial banks. Around five years ago, we attempted to offer traditional financial products to African countries and we realised that they already enjoyed more advanced access to finance than we do.

At that time, plastic credit cards were becoming popular in our country. Meanwhile, African populations had access to financial services via their smartphones. It's vital to analyse global trends and offer financial products not only domestically but abroad.

We're seeing non-banking structures trying to offer global financial products, such as the first Belarusian crypto currency. Will crypto currencies enjoy demand do you think?

Any currency is a tool for calculating and accumulating cash. Why

has bitcoin succeeded? Once people learned how to earn money from it, this crypto currency became a means of accumulation and its rate quickly went up. WebMoney is another successful story, allowing users to quickly transfer funds around the world. If Belarusian crypto currency can perform both functions, it could become popular.

Will banks start working with crypto currencies and participate in their issue?

The financial system is regulated and this unites advantages and disadvantages. No matter how much they'd love to, banks cannot work with financial instruments outside the legislative field. Our country — like many others — lacks a regulatory system to determine the legal status of a crypto currency. If operations



with crypto currencies become permitted legally, then we'll definitely work in this direction as a bank.

Should the banking system use the popular technologies upon which crypto currencies have been developed?

I think so. In particular, Belarusian banks could use ICO mechanics (placement of cryptographic tokens among investors) to attract capital into the country. This modern technology will facilitate the arrival of non-residents' funds into the economy.

Why should the banking system be attracting non-residential funds?

Everything is simple. Our banks must create mandatory reserves at a rate of 15 percent (or 30 Kopecks from each Dollar) from foreign currency funds raised within the country. However, financial institutions are not obliged to form reserves from non-residents. It's cheaper for banks to manage foreign exchange resources than those attracted domestically.

Banks are likely to continue working with money, while applying advanced cryptographic technologies. Do

Belarusian crypto currencies have a future?

If a crypto currency remains local, then it has few prospects. On the other hand, understanding and ability to work in this direction are investments into the future. Over time, in our opinion, all local crypto currencies will be replaced by global crypto currencies.

What basic requirements do users place on payment instruments?

It's important for users to have a settlement instrument which is as independent as possible from the issuer. The best choice in this respect is a financial instrument based on decentralised data storage. Users don't want to risk, including non-economic, as it influences the exchange rate of known currencies. It's important for users to be confident that the instrument makes it possible to pay and be global — to be used all around the world. This is an obvious desire.

News of recent months shows that regulators have differing attitudes towards trends on the financial market. The National Bank has approved block chain technology and isn't hindering the

development of new financial instruments domestically. Meanwhile, China has decided to prohibit crypto currency platforms. Which path of state regulation is best, do you think?

Prevention of banknotes being used for criminal purposes is an important function of the state. We don't want our personal data to be publicly available, nor do we want data on drug trafficking and terrorists to be out of the state's reach. A golden mean must be found in state control over financial flow.

Moreover, it's important for modern states to agree a single global currency in the digital space. The wider this tool is distributed and placed under control, the less risk and transaction cost. It's senseless to ban anything in a local market. Technologies have made financial instruments globally available, from virtually anywhere in the world.

In our opinion, demand for financial products based on decentralised data storage will continue growing globally. Accordingly, the centralised system (or the state) will need to satisfy this demand.

By Dmitry Zayats



PAUL CHUYKO

Hospitable welcome

In 2019, Belarus will host the 2nd European Games, with thousands of volunteers giving their assistance, as they did for the 2014 IIHF World Championships, their help making each event successful

About 2,000 volunteers are expected to give their time to the 2nd European Games, with applications already being received.

We asked Nadezhda Yelsukova, the manager responsible for the work with volunteers on cultural and educational programmes, to tell us more about her work for the Directorate of the 2nd European



Games 2019. How does one become a volunteer, and what training is given? She ex-

plains, "Registration will be launched on the www.minsk2019.by site by the end of the year but, already, anyone can

apply. Of course, we have to be scrupulous in training so many volunteers. The European Games are comparable with the Olympics in terms of complexity of organisation.

With this in mind, we must prepare people at the proper level.

For example, there were at least 11,000 volunteers at the 1st European Games in Baku, but we plan to involve around

6,000. Our programme has been agreed with the European Olympic committees and we're cooperating with the Ministry of Education, which is already receiving applications from students. About 1,500 interested people have informed us of their desire to act as volunteers. Training will be offered directly at seminars and online."

"Volunteers will oversee twenty different directions — including logistics, working with the media, doping control, medical care, and assistance in accommodating guests and athletes. All our volunteer jobs are explained on the official website. Each requires different skills, but we will provide training. The most important thing is the desire to work," Ms. Yelsukova adds.

She notes, "Of course, knowledge of English is welcome. However, if a person suits us in other criteria, we'll offer help in studying a foreign language. Volunteers work for free, as they're keen to develop their talents and gain experience at a major event. We begin by giving general information and then, depending on their sphere of wishing to offer help, we offer further training. Our main task is to create a true sports festival, in which volunteers also enjoy their work."

A former student of the BSU's Institute of Journalism, Valeria Snezhko, worked as a volunteer while studying. She donated her time during the IIHF World Championships. "I wanted to be part of something large and grand, so I offered myself as a volunteer," Valeria tells us. "I remember applying online and, after some time, was invited for interview, with about fifty other people. I later passed the training courses, where we were taught what we should do. There was nothing difficult and my English language knowledge was very helpful since I had to deal with foreigners a great deal. I'll never forget that championship. If I participate in volunteer activities now, I'll experience different emotions. At that time, there was a feeling of some kind of closeness: many people applied but we were the lucky few chosen."

By Konstantin **Bakun**



Good result

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection notes that there are more than enough jobs for young people

Specialists monitor vacancies twice a year and give a detailed report on the structure of those seeking jobs, against available vacancies. This allows us to forecast the evolution of the labour market.

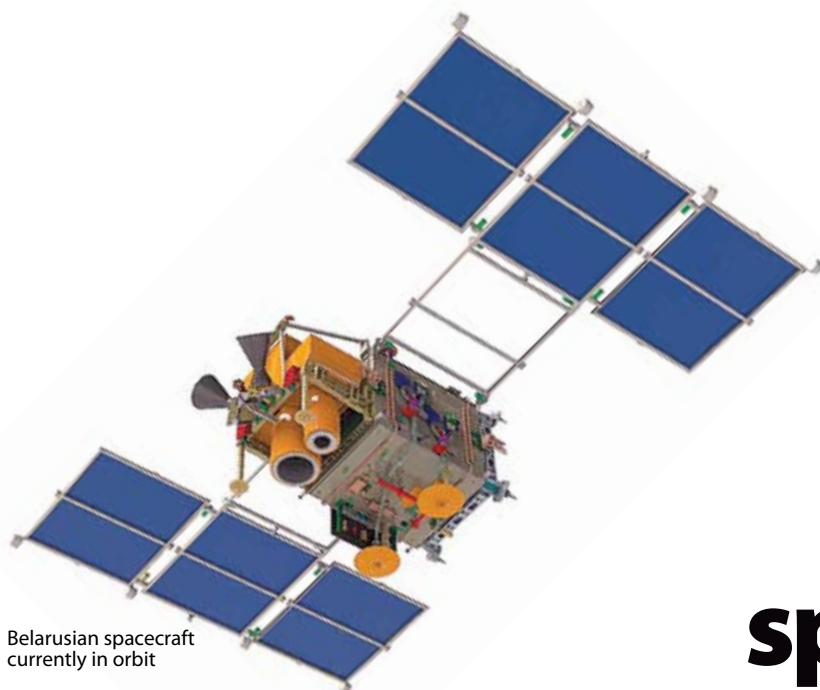
In line with research, we know that the Belarusian market is in need of doctors and teachers, in cities and villages. In early June, health institutions needed 2,400 doctors, while primary health workers were offered over 300 vacancies. More than a hundred pharmacists are currently needed. For every nurse seeking employment in urban areas, eighty are sought. Teachers are also highly in demand, with urban kindergartens offering 164 jobs, against 44 people registered as seeking such employment.

In cities, engineers, veterinarians, librarians, concrete workers, excavator drivers, cooks, hairdressers and seamstresses are all in demand, among other

professions. Meanwhile, rural areas need veterinarians, foremen, livestock farmers, tractor drivers, accountants and physical education teachers. The country badly needs builders, as it has for several years. Vacancies for bricklayers, painters and some other construction-related professions outnumber those seeking such employment many fold.

At the same time, economists, lawyers, secretaries, technical programmers and commodity experts may experience difficulty in finding a job. There are too many postmen, sales assistants, storekeepers and electricians. Surprisingly, in rural areas, road workers, boiler operators, carpenters, postmen, locksmiths, vehicle repairmen, seamstresses, security guards, assistant kindergarten teachers and social workers aren't much in demand.

For every ten vacancies in Belarus, there are only seven people seeking employment.



Belarusian spacecraft
currently in orbit

Minsk becoming space centre

In early October, the world celebrated the 60th anniversary of the launch of the first artificial Earth satellite. Thousands now orbit, ensuring navigation and communication, ecological monitoring and mapping, as well as serving dozens of other applications. Belarusian satellites are among them, with space technologies driving forward scientific and technological progress. Since Soviet times, various scientific institutes and production structures in Belarus have been working on space projects, and certain congresses meet regularly to discuss related problems and achievements.

Not long ago, Minsk hosted the 7th Belarusian Space Congress, gathering over 400 scientists from all over the world. For three days, they discussed prospects for space exploration, the development of spacecraft and use of achievements to serve economic interests. During the plenary session, participants commented that our country occupies a firm position in the space industry. The Belarusian training school aims to render much assistance in coming years.

Academician Piotr Vityaz, who heads the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences' Administration, asserts that our domestic scientists already boast global level achievements. "Scien-

tists and developers need to know what our colleagues are doing. Therefore, any congress is an exchange of information. Belarus is a space state and, definitely, we aim to realise many practical tasks in the space industry. Of course, much has already been done but we're facing new challenges, responding to them jointly," he said.

Five joint Russian-Belarusian programmes have already been successfully completed, notes the Director of the Department for Strategic Planning and Organisation of Space Activities, at Roskosmos Federal Space Agency, Yuri Makarov. Two more are now being realised: Monitoring-SG and Technology-SG. "These unite over sixty enterprises in Russia and Belarus, with almost half

coming from Belarus. Operating across diverse spheres in the space industry, the cost of satellite launch has been reduced, applying new technical principles and reducing the weight of spacecraft," he explains.

An exhibition was held as part of the forum, featuring Belarusian space-related developments. Among them were facilities for remote Earth sensing systems, presented by the National Academy of Sciences, Peleng JSC and Integral JSC. Interestingly, the recent meeting was a 'rehearsal' for an even more ambitious event: next year, Minsk will host the International Space Congress, attracting cosmonauts from all around the world.

By Konstantin **Bakun**



Riga, the capital of Latvia, today

Neighbours open arms anew

Belarus hopes to receive support from Latvia in attracting capital from Scandinavian countries, notes the Chairman of the Council of the Republic, Mikhail Myasnikovich, meeting a delegation from the Latvian Saeima (Parliament), headed by Deputy Speaker Gundars Daudze

Belarus has appropriate legislation and favourable conditions for investors wishing to implement projects. Mr. Myasnikovich notes projects in pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, and other cutting-edge spheres. Speaking about ways to attract Scandinavian capital, Gundars

Daudze mentioned that cooperation in transit and logistics looks promising, due to traffic flow between Scandinavia and Eastern Europe via Riga.

New opportunities are opening up, due to Belarus' participation in China's Belt and Road initiative. There are good prospects for investment collaboration and interaction, with nearly 2,500 com-

panies in Latvia using Belarusian capital. Meanwhile, Latvian businessmen have established over a thousand companies in Belarus.

The distance between Minsk and Riga is just over 450km, less than that to Moscow or Kiev. However, from a political point of view, until recent times, Latvia has been 'distant', despite our common border. However, this is a thing of the past. The Latvian parliamentary visit to Minsk has opened up a new page in our relations.

The Deputy Chair of the Council of the Republic, Marianna Shchetkina, called the arrival of Latvian colleagues an historic event, saying, "Relations between Belarus and Latvia, including inter-parliamentary, are entering a new stage. Our countries are implementing more than fifty agreements and treaties, with trade turnover exceeding \$260 million last year. Scientific cooperation remains promising. However, it's vital that trust and mutual understanding also develops."

Gundars Daudze, Deputy Speaker of the Latvian Saeima, who headed the Latvian delegation, completely supported his Belarusian colleague, noting, "This meeting is historic. It was nineteen years ago that a representative of the Latvian Saeima's Presidium last visited Minsk. A year ago, during a meeting in Geneva, we agreed with Ms. Shchetkina that I'd come to Minsk via Belavia and I've kept my word."

The Latvian Deputy Speaker is no stranger to Minsk, having received his higher education here in the 1980s. Mr. Daudze noted that he has noticed drastic change since then, even on his ride from the airport. Impressive modernisation of Belarusian-Latvian relationships is now expected, since all foundations have been laid.

"Latvia and Belarus need to more actively use the political basis (established over the years) in their economic collaboration, to ensure mutually beneficial relations. Both states will benefit," added Mr. Daudze.

By Alexey Fedosov



Luca Maria Scarantino, General Secretary of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies

Prof. Weihan Cui, Deputy Director of the Institute of Philosophy of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, PhD:



Philosophy helps form our structure of consciousness and thinking methods but much depends on the particular school of philosophy and its national peculiarities. I believe the Belarusian Congress offers a good opportunity for scientists from around the world to cooperate. Of course, it will facilitate the convergence of eastern and western schools of thought. Much has been spoken of globalisation today and, in my opinion, it's an objective trend worldwide; it's impossible to avoid it. Many questions arise regarding world development; philosophers and scientists should unite in finding a way to cope with today's global challenges. With this in mind, the Belarusian Congress is a good example of interaction between philosophers, to address serious problems facing the state and society.

Philosophical questions in focus

1st Belarusian Congress of Philosophy — National Philosophy in Global World — took place in Minsk

Minsk transformed into a major intellectual platform for several days, gathering five hundred scientist-philosophers from twenty countries, to discuss acute problems. Today's global challenges and contradictions are driving wedges between nations. However, philosophical knowledge could help international cooperation and integration, as the Chairman of the Presidium of Belarus' National Academy of Sciences, Vladimir Gusakov, believes. He comments that innovations in politics, economics and culture have a role to play, with philosophy as the most all-embracing science.

The General Secretary of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies, Luca Maria Scarantino, notes that Congress is positioning our country as a platform for the communication of the international scientific community.

We've asked thinkers of our time about the role of philosophy in the world, its national and global aspects and the global problems it's focusing on. We've also learnt views on Belarus' role within modern political processes.

Grigory Ioffe, Professor of Geospatial Sciences at Radford University (USA):



The idea Belarus has voiced regarding re-launching the Helsinki Process is bold and looks almost impossible. However, in recent years, much of what was previously viewed as impossible has been realised. I'm not talking only of positive events — but of negative, like the Ukrainian crisis. I'd advise Belarus to promote this idea of a new negotiating process globally. A couple of years ago, few could imagine that Belarus would become an arena for negotiations and that leaders of the two largest countries — Germany and France — would come here. I now express my compliments to the Belarusian Foreign Ministry for its ideas voiced to Western colleagues. This message underlines that Belarus is a young country lacking experience of democracy and, accordingly, it's illogical to demand anything from it yet. On the other hand, your country demonstrates willingness to learn from others. Politicians need to ensure they avoid antagonism and promote mutual understanding.

By Olga Zdanovich

Undisputable victory

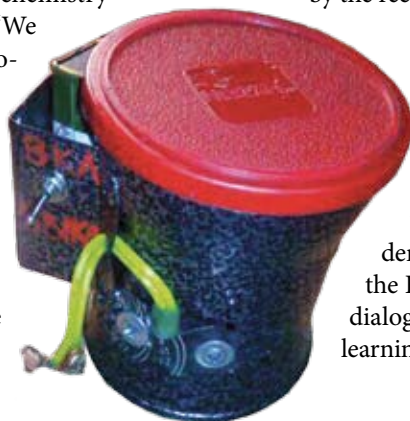
Unique device — invented by Mogilev's schoolboy — recognised at international competition in Stockholm

How to quickly and accurately determine the quality of water? It is a matter of concern to many people. Daniil Sharoikin, from Mogilev's secondary school #18, pondered over the issue as well and has made a major step towards determining the concentration of nitrates and ions in surface and ground water: the boy has developed a unique device for this purpose. His work has been highly appreciated in Belarus and, he was recently awarded recognition at the international competition — Stockholm Junior Water Prize 2017 (held in the Swedish capital).

To present his development and answer all questions of the strict jury, the teenager studied English thoroughly. As Daniil admits, his rivals were serious. "Overall, 68 students and schoolchildren from 34 countries — aged 15-20 — took part," he explains.

Famous scientists recognised the topicality of the young Belarusian's invention. They also admit its practical usefulness as the device can be used in industry. It took over a year for the talented Daniil to enjoy this landmark event. He was assisted by Yekaterina Kapralova (his chemistry teacher) and biologist Natalia Yeliseeva. "We conducted tests not only in our school laboratory. When needed, we asked Mogilev's Kuleshov University and Food University for help," he noted.

As the teachers assert, the teenager is not only talented but positively stubborn. If necessary, he can work day and night. Unsurprisingly, his results are amazing. Interestingly, the device has required little money: outwardly, it looks like two cups put one into the other. However, their contents



Daniil Sharoikin wins international competition Stockholm Junior Water Prize 2017

have a scientific basis. The system makes it possible not only to analyse the composition of water but also to transmit data to a computer. Daniil has already filed an application to the National Intellectual Property Centre to obtain a patent. He plans to continue work in this direction in the future. During his trip to Stockholm, the teenager was much impressed — primarily, by the reception of the King of Sweden.

The international recognition of Daniil's practical scientific work is not his only achievement. The tenth grade pupil is a lead singer of Mogilev's famous Raduga (Rainbow) Studio. As an activist and excellent pupil, he's represented Mogilev this year during the meeting of Belarusian students with the President — 'Youth: Looking to the Future'. He admits that the sincere and open dialogue has become another impetus for him to learning, creativity and scientific research.

By Svetlana Markova

We can't lose our code

Speaking about the peculiarities of a certain nationality, we often draw on stereotypes: German neatness, Korean diligence, English stoicism and American entrepreneurial spirit. However, can an entire nation have a single uniting feature? Recently, the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences conducted large-scale research, to identify and study the civilisational and cultural code of Belarusian society. The Head of the Centre for Political and Economic Sociology at the Institute of Sociology, Candidate of Philosophy Nikolay Shchekin, explains what influences national character and how it affects a country's fate.

Mr. Shchekin, what's the most important characteristic for a nation?

The question is a delicate one, and can't be approached in a trivial fashion. Traditional national values are the foundation of society. If the cultural code is 'lost', then the state is destroyed. In preserving and studying philosophical, historical and spiritual ties, we can move forward, improving ourselves and adequately responding to the challenges of our time.

We might say that the Japanese and Koreans have succeeded through incredible diligence, while Germans have done so through discipline, and the Americans through enterprise. Each country has its own history and philosophy, developing under certain conditions. Those with an adventurous spirit tend to travel more, exploring new lands.

Psychologists have proven that climatic conditions can influence our personality, with lack of sunlight contributing to the development of emotional instability. Islanders, as a rule, are inclined to introversion and con-

servatism, living in isolation from others. Even high population density plays a certain role, as it stimulates a greater sense of competition.

What distinguishes Belarusians? People tend to say that we're peace-loving, tolerant and judicious, patient, and disinclined to argue. Our people are friendly and open towards other cultures, without any sense of superiority. We are genuine, and wise, as is evident from our upbringing, education, morality, and an ethical attitude towards the environment.

No other country has introduced a five-day visa-free regime. We're trying to break away from the stereotypes of Soviet times, when we were perceived as a single nation. We're trying to show the world that Belarus is an individual country, with an open attitude, and an unthreatening attitude. We impose nothing and never criticise others. Our hospitality is borne from our wisdom, and diligence. This cultural, civilisational and historical code can be defined as the nation's commitment to its altars and hearths, peace and justice.

Which has had more influence on Belarusian mentality: the West or the East?

By the will of fate, our country is situated at the crossroads of all possible cultures and civilisations. We've absorbed everything like a sponge. Culturally, religiously and geographically, Belarus was part of Eastern Slavic, Orthodox civilisation. Our lands' entry into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Rzecz Pospolita also influenced the development of our spiritual culture.

Belarus has many faiths but no religious wars or tensions. On the contrary, each religion — Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Judaism, and Islam — has contributed to the common good. Inter-civilisational dialogue and historical memory have always been at the heart of this attitude. Despite historical vicissitudes, we don't blame anyone for the events of the past; we neither throw stones nor demolish monuments. The majority of our population perceive themselves as belonging to a single nation. Much blood has been spilt on our territory but we have remained resilient. After



the Great Patriotic War, people from all over the Union came to restore our ruined country. However, we remained Belarusians — without making a choice between the East and the West. This is a manifestation of the civilisational and cultural code of our society.

It's difficult to imagine any version of the Western value system in Belarus. It simply fails to fit into the value paradigm of our development. Western society — while building its prosperity at the expense of colonies and other nations — viewed us as material to satisfy its needs. These are the roots of the Western civilisation, with its principles of individualism and universality. Our civilisational code is absolutely different, based on the belief that all should work and live in accordance with their conscience and God's rules. We see no hierarchical division.

Via this approach, we've formed our state over the past 25 years; it may take others a century to do the same. We've built a political system and an economic model which have proven their worth.

There's another specific feature of our character: on facing an uncomfortable situation, or a conflict, some Belarusians take an attitude of 'let's hope nothing evil will come of it'. Is this bad?

It's neither good, nor bad. Our ancestors lived prosperously, being masters on their land, but endless wars and revolutions — sweeping through our territory — affected people's consciousness. They were obliged to stand against external pressure, rebuilding and recreating anew after each war. This has made us, on the one hand, more persistent and patient but, at the same time, stoically introverted. We rarely complain, since we're accustomed to independently overcoming difficulties.

Last year, researchers from the University of Washington compared the predominant features of average representatives of various nations with the political systems in their countries. It turned out that those with an open nature tend to live in democratic societies. How true are these parallels?

You shouldn't extrapolate Western models to fit ours. Democracy is not a commodity to be imported. When ideologue Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the national liberation movement of India, was asked why Hindus wouldn't adopt the UK economic model, he replied: 'Britain needed half the world to build this model. How many planets will India need?'

I fully disagree with the idea that we lack democracy and that we, Slavs, are not historically adapted to it. Let's recall the Polotsk and Turov princedoms. Was there democracy there? The same could be said of the Novgorod Veche in Russia. Western democracy is not a panacea for modern ills. We have only to look at the United States, France, Germany, the UK and Spain. People are shot in streets and offices, and explosions and acts of terrorism take place. This confirms state bodies' inability to ensure the safety of their citizens. At the moment, there are about sixty armed conflicts worldwide, thanks to Western democracies. We can shout about desiring 'freedom' but what freedom is there when people are crushed by cars on the street. Perhaps true democracy relies on providing people with the right to work, security, access to medicine, and education.

In many Belarusian villages, residents still see no need to lock their doors, showing their trusting, open nature. However, when a stranger comes, telling us what kind of political system to build, we resist. This is not the absence of democracy but defence of the right to govern our own development and protect our own interests.

When the West tells us that it's only concerned to make post-Soviet republics democratic and prosperous and that adopting Western recommendations is the fastest way to achieve this, we should beware. A straightforward transfer of Western institutions to our land won't bring democracy and prosperity but oligarchy, degradation and, most dangerous of all, the erasure of our historical memory.

By Yevgeny **Kononovich**

Golden formula of gratitude

Famous Russian scientist Valentin Koptug — whose name is much honoured in Belarusian science — was born in the small Belarusian village of Koziki, in the Vitebsk Region

Looking back at the passing years, even venerable academicians agree that our world is fragile. As the song goes, ‘everything is illusory in this stormy world...’ If a drop of malice, envy or fear is added to the flask of life, life becomes crooked and history can change. My own life, I’m sure, would have unravelled differently had I not met so many good and decent people. Truly, I’m convinced that we should behave with decency and gratitude at all times, just like Valentin Koptug.

His biography, which appears in the preface to ‘Science to Save Humanity’ (1997), offers his thanks to his senior colleague, Professor Boris Stepanov, a veteran of Moscow’s D.I. Mendeleev Physics and Technology Institute, and gives his congratulations on his 80th birthday. Forty years later, when Mr. Koptug was aged over 60 himself, he remembered with gratitude the mentorship of Mr. Stepanov, at the department of semi-finished products and dyes. Mr. Koptug recognised the debt his owned his senior companion, who was a worthy citizen of our great country.

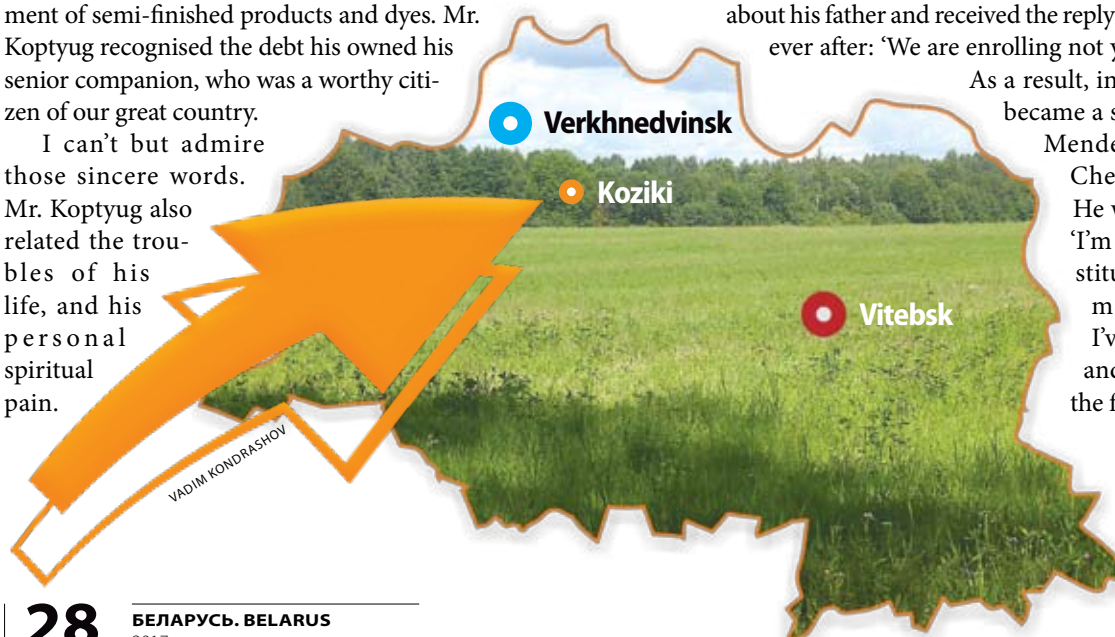
I can’t but admire those sincere words. Mr. Koptug also related the troubles of his life, and his personal spiritual pain.

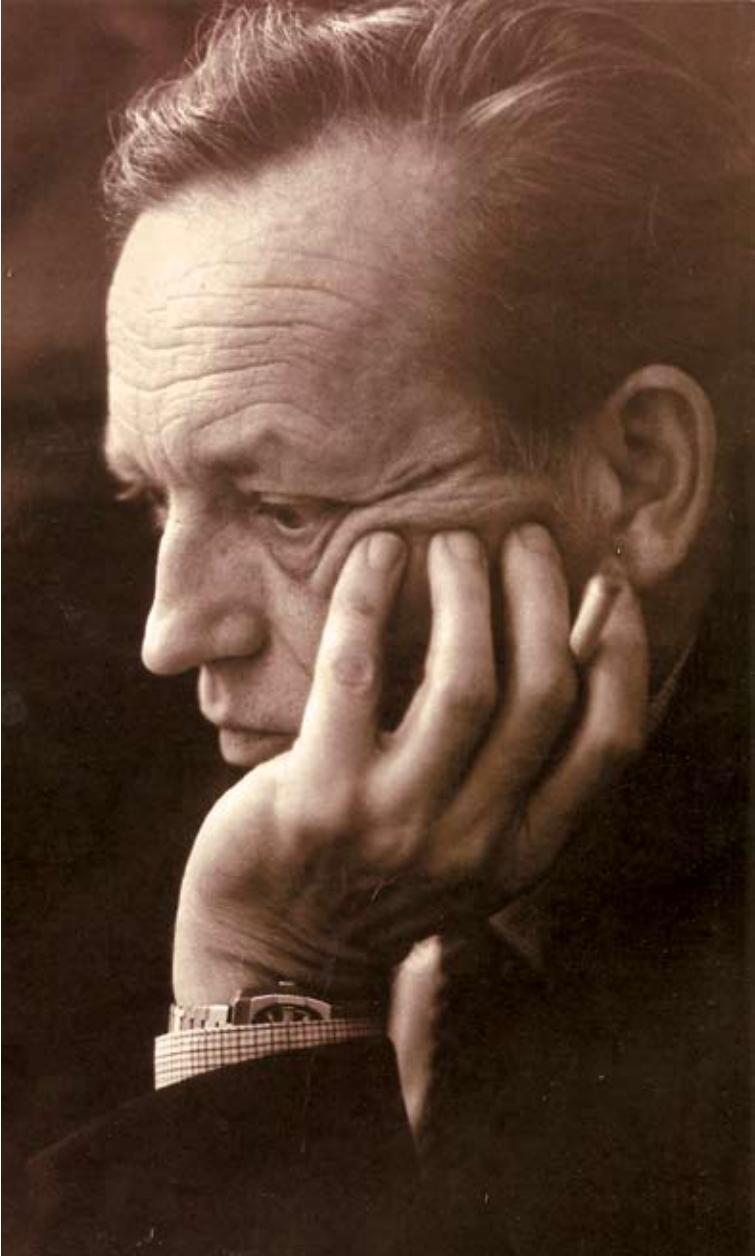
During the war, in 1941, jointly with his mother and brother, he was evacuated to the ancient Uzbek city of Samarkand, on the border with Tajikistan. Although he doesn’t mention the hardships of those times, he does relate events from late 1944, when his beloved older brother Vladimir was killed, fighting for Poland’s liberation. After graduating from secondary school with honours, Valentin left Samarkand for Moscow, entering Moscow State University in 1949.

He wrote later: ‘I submitted my documents but failed to mention that, in 1938, my father had been arrested and then shot’. That omission troubled his conscience and caused him to go to the secretary of the University’s admission board the next day, to tell the truth. The secretary responded, “It would be better for you, and us, if you tried entering another university.” Mr. Koptug followed that advice and went to Moscow’s Mendeleev University of Chemical Technology. On submitting his documents, he drew clear attention to the ‘unfortunate’ fact about his father and received the reply that he remembered ever after: ‘We are enrolling not your father but you!’

As a result, in 1949, Mr. Koptug became a student of Moscow’s Mendeleev University of Chemical Technology. He wrote in his preface: ‘I’m thankful to the Institute and the Department for everything I’ve achieved in my life and hope to achieve in the future.’

Expressing deep gratitude to Mr. Stepanov and to Mendeleev Uni-





versity, Mr. Koptug combined the past and the present in an original way. As an outstanding chemist and a wise man, who'd experienced a great deal, he noted that good deeds reap their own rewards. Looking at his own life, he stated the golden formula of human decency and gratitude at the heart of his warm message.

'I don't like to talk about what I've achieved in life, since I owe my success, to a great extent, to others. I'll detail here my own path through life, stating the facts with deep appreciation...' reads the text, followed by Mr. Koptug's signature. Through his life he held the post of Vice President of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and became the Chairman of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He was named a Hero of Socialist Labour, and awarded the Lenin Prize. He was a member of several foreign academies, and became the Vice President and then President of the International Union of Chemists. He worked as the Vice President of the Scientific Committee on Environmental Problems of the International Council of Scientific Unions (from 1992 on-

wards), and was a member of the Supreme Advisory Council for Sustainable Development at the UN General Secretary. He stated that he was, in all these roles, 'no more than any citizen of our great country'.

After graduating from university and completing his post-graduate education, Mr. Koptug — as his colleagues state — 'was engaged in fundamental research of the structure and reactivity of carbocations'. In 1990, he was awarded the Lenin Prize for his research and, from 1959, worked at Novosibirsk's Institute of Organic Chemistry, helping set up the Siberian Branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences. From working as a humble laboratory chemist, he became a major scientist, recognised globally. He became a well-known public figure. From 1980, he chaired the Siberian Branch, for seventeen years, also working as the Vice President of the USSR Academy of Sciences (Russian Academy of Sciences).

Mr. Koptug died at the age of 65, on January 10th, 1997. Those were hard times, during Russia's post-Soviet transformation. Academician Nikolay Dobretsov replaced his departed friend in office (chairing the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences from 1997 to 2008). In an article devoted to the 80th anniversary of Valentin's birth, he wrote: 'In caring for others, Mr. Koptug didn't spare himself. He worked daily, from sunrise to sunset, and lived in a 'state of monotonous rising tension'. Over seventeen years of heading the Siberian Branch, he had 650 unused vacation days — or about two years...' An issue of the 'First Hand Science' popular science magazine was devoted to Mr. Koptug's memory (#2, 2011), under Editor-in-Chief Nikolay Dobretsov.

Forty days after Mr. Koptug died, a deputy of the Russian State Duma, Lyubov Shvets (for whom Novosibirsk was also his home town) tried to understand his early death. Her article, 'He Believed: Russia Will Revive. Memorial for the Red Academician' (published on February 18th, 1997, in 'Sovetskaya Rossiya' newspaper) reads: 'Forty days ago, this intelligent but unathletic person died like a mighty man who continuously overcame an unbearable weight. He never rested, not even taking the time to fall ill...'

People who knew well Valentin Koptug wrote much of him, naming him 'an outstanding scientist and organiser of science', 'an outstanding son of Russia', 'a Prometheus of the late 20th century', 'a great humanist of the 20th century', and 'a romantic scientist'. 'Science Will Save Humanity' has become a tribute to his memory, bearing the name of V. Koptug on its cover. Published by the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, in 1997, its preface states that Mr. Koptug came to science primarily as a brilliant chemist. It includes articles and reports of journalistic and civil focus. Moreover, in 2001, another serious book — 'The Age of Koptug' — was released, uniting memories of the scientist, his articles, speeches and other materials. In June 2011, the 'Press Digest' marked the 80th anniversary of his birth at the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Every edition I've mentioned, and which I used to prepare these materials, derives from Lyudmila Schastlivenko and Alexander Logutenko (Belarusians from Novosibirsk). These active members of the Belarusian St. Yevfrosiniya Cultural and Educational Centre sent me these valuable editions, accompanied by a note, reading: 'These materials are devoted to Mr. Koptuyug for you. He was a person of unique spiritual beauty and a scientific genius. In Siberia, we cherish his memory. Belarusians must know about your great countryman.'

I'm thankful to Lyudmila and Alexander, and to Lyudmila Belyavskaya, a colleague from Novosibirsk, who edited and compiled 'Siberia Tied Fates: Famous Belarusians in Siberia' (Novosibirsk, 2008) which also includes materials about Mr. Koptuyug. In particular, I discovered recollections by his friend and colleague Nikolay Borisevich (who died in 2015). He was a famous personality within the Belarusian and Soviet scientific field, 'an academician of the Russian and Belarusian national academies of sciences, an Honorary President of the National Academy of Sciences, a Hero of Socialist Labour, and a Laureate of the Lenin Prize, the USSR and Belarus state awards and the V. Koptuyug Award'.

The first V. Koptuyug Award (1999) went to academicians Alexander Voitovich (from the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences) and Sergey Bagaev (from the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences) for their work on 'High Resolution Laser Spectroscopy and its Basic Applications'. In turn, Mr. Borisevich was awarded in 2000.

As Mr. Borisevich wrote in his memoirs, Mr. Koptuyug visited Minsk in 1970, at his Belarusian colleagues' invitation. At the time, he headed a laboratory at the Novosibirsk Institute of Organic Chemistry and was already a corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences. The text reads: 'As we know, Valentin Koptuyug is a Belarusian and, probably, this will become another argument for him to make a decision to be elected as an academician of the BSSR Academy of Sciences and head our Chemical Institute. Mr. Koptuyug willingly agreed to meet us in Minsk. He visited the Physico-Organic Chemistry Institute, made an interesting report and toured the city. Without extra conventions, we quickly switched to informal communication and openly discussed the proposal. [Mr. Koptuyug was born in 1931 and Mr. Borisevich in 1923, making them near contemporaries]. I realised that this great scientist could have gone beyond the post of Director of our Academy's Institute, and the opportunities of the Siberian Branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences could have been much wider.'

The scientists became true friends for many years, with Mr. Borisevich twice visiting his colleagues in Novosibirsk. In 1977, a group of scientists from Belarus went there as part of an exchange project, co-ordinating research activities. Since Mr. Borisevich

and Mr. Koptuyug worked in similar scientific areas, the guest visited his laboratory. Mr. Borisevich wrote: 'At that time, problems of isomerisation of the aromatic compound and the chemistry of carbonium ions occupied an important place in his studies. My laboratory in Minsk focused on spectroscopy and luminescence of aromatic molecules, and Mr. Koptuyug also used spectroscopic methods. Moreover, he was among the first in the Soviet Union to create a complex computer-based system for looking at the spectroscopic characteristics of molecular connections. He passed that database to the Institute of Physics of the BSSR Academy of Sciences and later organised a constant

exchange of updates.

Mr. Borisevich and Mr. Koptuyug often met in Moscow, at sessions of the Presidium and the Academy of Sciences' general meetings. From 1984-1989, they were both elected as deputies of the USSR Supreme Council. As Mr. Borisevich recollected, in 1995, the Academy of Sciences of Belarus first hosted elections of foreign members, and Mr. Koptuyug became the first chemist to be awarded that title. Mr. Borisevich wrote: 'The Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of Belarus invited him to make a presentation during the Day of Belarusian Science, on January 26th, 1996. The scientist's report — 'Sustainable Development of Civilisation and Russia's Place: Problems of National Strategy Formation' — conquered listeners' hearts with its versatility and richness, showing anxiety for the future of our civilisation and Russia's role.'

Another publication describes Mr. Koptuyug as a great friend of Belarus — his historical homeland. 'Science Will Save Humanity' includes an article from 'Sovetskaya Belorussia' newspaper (1992, December 16th), entitled 'Measuring Seven Times'. It was an open letter to the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus, compiled by Mr. Koptuyug, jointly with his colleague-compatriots in Novosibirsk. His view was supported by academician Andrey Trofimuk and a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Valentin Parmon. Interestingly, Mr. Trofimuk — whose family came from the Belarusian Brest Region's Zhabinka District — was named a patriarch of Soviet geology of oil and gas, and headed the



Elder brother
Vladimir

Valentin Koptuyug with his mother Nadezhda

Novosibirsk Institute of Geology and Geophysics for over three decades. He died in 1999.

Meanwhile, Belarusian Valentin Parmon, who headed the Institute of Catalysis from 1995 and was an academician at the same time, was elected to the post of Chairman of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, on September 28th, 2017. He now continues Mr. Koptyug's work. At the end of 1992, when Belarusian language was proclaimed the nation's single official language, these three Belarusians respectfully addressed our countrymen with a reasonable proposal: not to eliminate 'the Russian language which is natural for Belarusian science and technology'. After the 1995 referendum, Russian language received the status of another official language in Belarus.

In 1998, 'Belarus' magazine (#12) published an article about Valentin Koptyug: 'Not to Survive but to Live' (authored by Alexander Danilov, a corresponding member of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus). He was a member of the delegation of Belarusian scientists who attended the unveiling of a monument, placed on Mr. Koptyug's grave on June 25th, 1998, in Novosibirsk. In preparing the text, I failed to discover Mr. Koptyug's family roots. Sometime later, I discovered the online publication of a Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, an Associate Professor from Smolensk, Galina Gruchenko: 'Valentin Koptyug' (1931-1997) ('Smolensky Krai', 2008, #7). The article was included into the above-mentioned 'Press Digest' and contained valuable information about relatives and friends of the scientist; in particular, it spoke of his father, Afanasy Koptyug, who was born in 1899 in the village of Koziki, in the former BSSR's Drissa District.

Interestingly, that publication indicated the close spiritual ties of the academician with his native land. Ms. Gruchenko wrote that, in May 1993 (while attending the Mendeleev Congress in Minsk), Mr. Koptyug collected some Belarusian soil in a bag, to later scatter on his mother's grave in Novosibirsk. She, Nadezhda, was also Belarusian.

Working on the article, I tried to find the village of Koziki among modern settlements, but failed. The Drissa District was formed on July 17th, 1924, as part of Polotsk Province, and the city of Drissa at its centre; in 1962, it was renamed Verkhnevinsk, and is now known as a regional centre in the northern part of Belarus (Vitebsk Region). I was assisted by an Associate Professor of Vitebsk State

Technological University, PhD Alexander Myadel, with whom I exchanged e-mails. Also born in Koziki, in 1961, he sent me a Soviet military map from 1938, featuring the village. He wrote: 'First, find the village of Borkovichi at the top of the map; Koziki is situated to the south-west, covering the 68-82 square. Actually, the village 'died' in the early 1960s, with no more than ten houses inhabited'.

Mr. Myadel also managed to find traces of a member of the Koptyug family. Most probably, this was the academician's uncle, who lived in Koziki. According to Mr. Myadel, Koziki cemetery still remains, while the site of the former village is now a flat field. In summer 2016, he visited the area at my request, taking four photos for me, which feature the site where Koziki was once situated and some gravestones bearing the name of Koptyug. "I took these photos on July 23rd, 2016," he explained. "The cemetery is located to the south of the village, with no more than 500m separating it from former homes. All are rather conventional, since no signs of the former village remain."

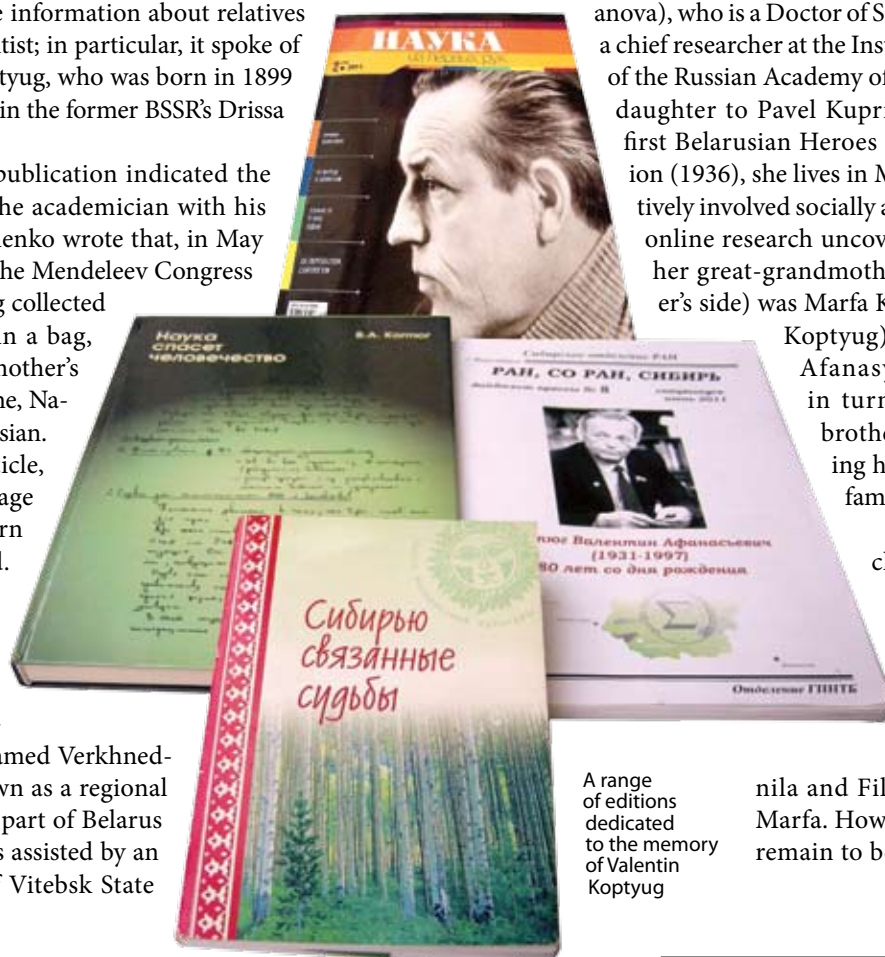
Interestingly, Ivan Chersky — a famous explorer of Siberia, a geologist, a palaeontologist and a native Litvin — was born in the same place, on the bank of the Zapadnaya Dvina River, to a wealthy family from the Vilno Province, on May 3rd, 1845.

Researching Mr. Koptyug's family, I found one of his relatives: Larisa Nikovskaya (maiden name Kuprianova), who is a Doctor of Social Sciences and a chief researcher at the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Granddaughter to Pavel Kuprianov, one of the first Belarusian Heroes of the Soviet Union (1936), she lives in Moscow, and is actively involved socially and politically. My online research uncovered the fact that her great-grandmother (on her mother's side) was Marfa Kukharenok (born

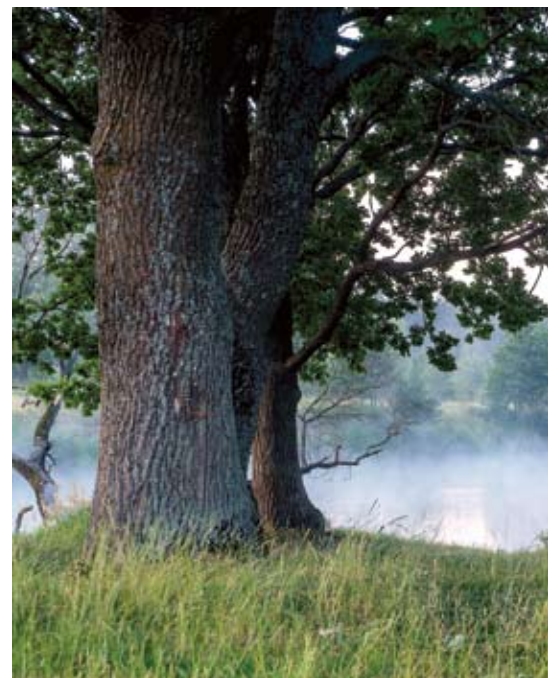
Koptyug): the daughter of Afanasy Koptyug who, in turn, was Valentin's brother. Such fascinating historical facts and family ties!

Belarusian archives may contain more detailed information on the academician's father, Afanasy, his brothers Danyla and Filip, and his sister Marfa. However, their stories remain to be told.

By Ivan Zhdanovich



A range of editions dedicated to the memory of Valentin Koptyug



Catching fish

Hook, line and sinker

Belarus has three types of fishing enthusiast, with those wishing to cast their rod for free able to drive to the nearest lake. There are also certain ponds and river sections, where success is almost guaranteed, for a fee, as the fish are regularly fed. Finally, there are specialised farmsteads, where fish are bred especially for sporting fishing. Of course, this pleasure is rather expensive.

Among the most populated rivers are the Sozh, Pripyat and Dnieper, where keen fishermen come from near and far to land their catch. Russian guests are especially frequent, and such events as the annual Fishing Cup and popular Bard Music and Fishing Festival attract large crowds.

Whatever the season, there are fish to be caught: catfish, bream, pike, tench and perch, with the diversity of species increasing. In 1965, forty-nine species of fish were registered in Belarusian riv-

ers and lakes and, in the late 20th century, there were fifty-eight. According to recent studies, there may be sixty-five species of freshwater fish in Belarus.

Sturgeon offered

Belarus is famous for its trout and sturgeon, with our parents taught from childhood where to find fish in local rivers. There is a worry that environmental change and pollution could impact the fish population, so people are taking action to remedy the situation, with the focus on artificial reservoirs.

Selets fish farm, in the Brest Region, has been involved in sturgeon breeding for the past decade. Chief fish-breeder Sergey Mikhovich tells us, "This species is considered to be elite. Until the end of last year, almost all our fish were exported, as local people didn't buy it, preferring cheap carp and silver carp. Now, the situation has changed, and people have discovered how tasty 'king-fish' are."

The farm plans to establish production of sturgeon caviar on an industrial scale, having plenty of capacity. You might wonder how this relates to fishing. Several years ago, the farm began to release baby fish, mostly into the Pripyat and Berezina rivers. Mr. Mikhovich admits, "Around two decades ago, it would have been a miracle to catch sturgeon in the river. Now, it's easy; our efforts have yielded results."

Bet on the delicacy

Anyone buying precious rainbow trout will see the inscription: 'Made in Belarus'. Few realise that this red fish is bred in the country. The first trout farm in Belarus, Lokhva, was established in the Mogilev Region four years ago and immediately became a leader in production of rainbow trout for sale and for commercial fishing.

"A kilo of Belarusian trout costs around 11.3 Roubles — half the price of the same fish imported from Norway,"



explains a leading specialist in foreign economic activity, Vitaly Bomikhov. “At our trout farm, we annually produce seven hundred tonnes of fish, with 80 percent going to Russia.”

Traditionally, in September, the seasonal sale of farmed fish begins in Belarus. In 2017, a ‘harvest’ of 9,800 tonnes is expected — including carp, silver carp, grass carp and crucian carp, as well as more valuable fish from the family of catfish, salmon and sturgeon.

Miraculous 60kg catfish

Telling tales of their trophies, fishermen are known to exaggerate. However, two years ago, Minskers caught a wonder in the Pripyat River: a catfish 2.05 metres long, weighing 60kg, thought to be about twenty years old.

“Such a catch is the dream of any fisherman,” says Anatoly Shumchenko, who posted a photo report on social networks about his fishing with friend Vitaly.

Alexander Lukashenko fished in the same location and caught a true giant. “I personally caught three catfish, weighing 57kg, 24kg and 7kg. Until re-

*One in ten
Belarusians spend
free time with
fishing tackle,
casting from
the shore*



cently, there were no fish in the Pripyat River but the fish practically bite your fingers now, if you place them in the water,” said the President several years ago. The largest catfish caught in Belarus was registered in 2011: caught in the Pripyat, weighing 68kg.

Bream in the net and catcher to the cage

Sadly, poachers do present a problem, despite serious fines for violating the law. Poachers may be held criminally liable. Most use nets, which is strictly against the law. Even having possession of a net within one kilometre of a river or lake is grounds for action.

“Over the last six months, our employees have confiscated more than 2,800 nets, with a total length of 125km, and 4.5 tonnes of illegally caught fish,” note employees of the State Inspection of Belarus.

Moreover, one should be aware of rules, with no more than 5kg of fish permitted per person from Belarusian lakes and rivers, and only five fish-hooks allowed.

By Anna **Kurak**

From Beijing with love

'West is West and East is East; and never the two shall meet' reads Kipling's poem, indicating the division between two civilisations. However, he may have been mistaken, as the East and West sometimes converge, thanks to cultural exchange. Let's turn to China, which is generously investing into our economy and helps us in building the Great Stone Industrial Park. Our two countries are liaising in education, with Minsk hosting the Belarusian State University's Confucius Institute, where Chinese students come to study. Meanwhile, Belarusians have been going to China to study. Victoria Prigodskaya was recently among a team of BSU students, spending a year in China as part of an exchange programme. She tells us about local eating habits, fashion, lifestyle and the intricacies of the mysterious Chinese soul.

Living in former capital

We met Victoria in a city park, chatting on a bench. Interesting, she notes that China lacks such benches as people happily sit on pavements, ramps and, even, fences. "For us Belarusian students, they built a kind of a bench, near the campus," she smiles. After a one-year preparatory course, she set off to join the cultural exchange programme, travelling to remote China with her fellow students, heading to the provincial town of Kaifeng, situated in the Henan Province: 17-hours' drive north of Beijing.

In fact, its population is just over five million, with infrastructure rivalling that of China's capital. The city had the honour of being the capital in the time of the Song Empire (960-1127).

Arriving in Beijing, the students had to reach their destination by train, independently, which resulted in them paying triple the official price to unofficial

Most Chinese people live in small yet tidy apartments, and many young families live with their parents, until they can build their own accommodation. They love children, even obsessively

bus drivers. Of course, such things can happen anywhere, including in Belarus.

The Chinese seldom use taxis, as most prefer affordable public transport, as in Belarus. They also love cheap mopeds and bicycles, which are extremely popular in China. Violation of traffic rules is common, largely because about eighty percent of those using two-wheeled transport have no road training. The level of driving culture is very low, with drivers violating rules even in front of the police, and passengers having no right of way.

The cult of food

Chinese habits differ from those in Belarus, with there being no set time for breakfast, although lunch is taken strictly from 12.00 to 14.00. If you go to a café at 4pm, you might find all the staff sleeping. To have something to eat, you may need to wake up the chef! Dinner is usually eaten from 6-7pm, so it can be preferable to arrive later, when more tables will be free.

On meeting someone, the Chinese always ask whether you've eaten, believing that it's impossible to be at ease, or



Our students are proud to be from Belarus

discuss business, if you're hungry, since you're likely to feel irritable.

Before going to bed, Belarusians love to eat potatoes and meat, while the Chinese prefer rice and noodles. In fact, they'll eat this dish day or night, only changing seasoning ingredients. The Chinese love peas, even making ice cream from them, and eating peas with chocolate and honey. Victoria, with her Belarusian palate, found local food rather fatty, and sometimes too spicy or sweet. However, she easily adapted (despite dreaming of Belarusian soup, potatoes with cutlets and pickled cabbage on her fifth day). "Many of my teammates ate only oatmeal at first. When we accidentally stumbled upon a restaurant serving European cuisine, our joy was tremendous," she says.

Sunset in Belarus and dawn in China

"Once, in the morning, I heard distinct cries of 'a', 'o', 'u'. On looking out the window, I saw a group of old people exercising with kung fu," Victoria recol-

lects. "Our elderly people prefer to sit on a bench, lamenting their age; in China, older age isn't one burdened with worries but a time when people are finally able to live for themselves."

After retirement, the Chinese tend to go power walking and take outdoor exercise. It's common to meet older dancing couples in parks and people doing kung fu, y-shu or other martial arts.

Those waking up early enjoy the Communist Party's favour

The Chinese tend to get up for work early, with traffic jams by six o'clock. In Belarus, only utility workers and taxi drivers are working at that time.

They also go to bed early, so the streets are near empty at night.

Most Chinese people live in small yet tidy apartments, and many young families live with their parents, until they can build their own accommodation. They love children, even obsessively; this immense adoration can transform into an unhealthy cult. There

are strict governmental limits on how many children a couple may have, although the long-existing policy of the Communist Party to permit no more than one child per family was abolished on January 1st, 2016. Now, two are permitted without 'punishment'.

Falling ill is a true luxury

"On arriving in China, we were allowed to take out medical insurance equating to \$200 of treatment per year: enough to pay for a single visit to a doctor and receive treatment for a common cold," Victoria recalls. "As a cheap alternative, we were offered alternative medicine: acupuncture and herbs. Not everyone in China can afford expensive medication. In actual fact, I just took aspirin and cough medicine."

It's quite easy to settle in China, with an increasing number of foreigners arriving to work or study. A realistic attitude is what's important. Then, you're more likely to be pleasantly surprised.

By Ilya Krasovsky



VITALIY PIVOVARCHIK

Great start for Chinese tourists

Not a single popular tourist destination could now be imagined without Chinese tourists. Last year, the number of tourists from China exceeded 135 million and the figure is growing annually. They generously spend money on excursions, souvenirs and other items (in 2016 alone, they spent \$261bn in foreign trips). With this in mind, the tourist industry in any corner of the world — from St. Petersburg to Rio de Janeiro — is happy to welcome them. Belarus is no exception.

2018 is to become the Year of Tourism in Belarusian-Chinese relations. It's relatively recently that the first commercial tour groups from China came to the Republic. The youngest of them was a woman aged 60 and the oldest was an

80-year-old man; they bought a six-day tour to get to know our country. During their stay, the Chinese visited Mir and Nesvizh castles, Dudutki, Brest and the Belovezhskaya Pushcha. Their experience of Minsk began with a tour around the city and our reporters were happy to join.

The first words which our foreign guests learnt were 'thank you', 'very good' and 'beautiful girl' and they tried to use them almost every time — accompanying them with a smile. The Belarusian capital appeared far different from what they had thought it would be: they were impressed with the archi-

itecture and the many parks. Moreover, they say Belarusians are friendly and have great cuisine.

A representative of the Chinese Tourism Group Corporation — Liu Yang — was among the visitors. He was delighted with the capital and took endless photos of Nezavisimosti Avenue (where the city excursion began). “At present, Chinese people in the middle and high age group are expressing a particular interest in Belarus and Russia. They have even introduced a ‘red tourism’ idea: travelling through the post-Soviet countries. Moscow and Russia are better known to our countrymen, he says, while your country seems more mystical — which makes it even more attractive. Interest in health tourism is now also growing — including in Belarus and neighbouring countries.”

Chinese tourists of any age are taking pictures of everything they see — such as the Red Roman Catholic Church, a monument to Lenin, university buildings, their own guide and even journalists... “Why do you need so many shots?” the reporters asked one of the tourists. Lina explained, “I have many friends. None of them has ever visited Belarus. They would like to receive a detailed photo report. They’ll see the pictures and all the local beauty and will surely come here themselves.” No doubt, if they do they won’t regret it.



VITALIY PIVOVARCHIK

► Programme under development

Tourism comprises up to ten percent of world GDP. The UN General Assembly names tourism a tool for sustainable development and 2017 has been acknowledged the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.

This year has become one of the most fruitful for Belarusian tourism. A visa-free regime has been introduced for citizens of 80 countries: on coming to Belarus via the National Airport, foreign guests can spend five days in the country. In six months of the year, over 52 thousand travellers have taken advantage of this opportunity.

The Deputy Minister of Sports and Tourism — Mikhail Portnoy — informed us of plans to increase this period of visa-free stay. “We are pleased with the limitation of five days, but this is not enough for foreigners — especially in cases of health and sports tourism. The introduction of the visa-free regime is a pilot project. We focused on issues of security which are very important in tourism, now, we’ve worked out the security and are now planning to increase the term to 10 days. We hope the decision will be made by the time the European Games begin,” he says.

Foreign tourists have been able to visit the area of the Avustovsky Canal and the city of Grodno without visas for a year and the list of places for such visa-free visits is expected to be increased in the future: part of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha and other border areas are likely to be added. Brest also wants to be included.

An information campaign plays a major role in the promotion of tourist services. Until the end of 2017, several variants of Belarus’ country brand will be open for public discussion; one of them will possibly become the Republic’s calling card.

► Reserve airfield as a tourist site

The country’s oldest aerodrome to become a tourist sight

Karolino aerodrome near Grodno is used as a base for a local aeroclub. However, the Head of the Sports and Tourism Department at the Grodno Regional Executive Committee, Oleg Andreichik believes that the site would be interesting to a much wider range of people. Moreover, the aerodrome, founded in the early 20th century, could become a tourist ‘Mecca’ for Belarusian and foreign tourists who are keen on the history of aviation as well as those enjoying active leisure pursuits.



The first aeroplanes on the Karolino aerodrome appeared back in 1912. It was used by four-engine wooden ‘Ilya Muromets’ aircraft and the first monoplanes. The aerodrome was actively used during both world wars and Mr. Andreichik is confident that its glorious past, closely connected with the development of aviation, can and should spark interest among visitors.

At present, visitors have an opportunity to go up in a balloon and to take a parachute jump. It’s already a venue for organised championships in parachute sports and aviation festivals, but we aren’t resting on our laurels. In the long-term, we plan to open a museum of aviation and an exhibition dedicated to the history of the country’s oldest aerodrome. Aircraft and helicopter flight simulators may also appear.



Opening the Dvina River area

Out of three thousand archaeological, architectural, art and cultural monuments of the Vitebsk Region, around 1,000 are registered on the List of Historical and Cultural Treasures of the country. The Braslav Lakes, St. Sophia Cathedral and Marc Chagall's House-Museum — the calling cards of the region — are familiar to everyone. We suggest you take a trip to some of the other unusual and mysterious places of the Vitebsk Region.

The Dragon Gorynych's Brother

Everyone is aware of the Scottish Loch Ness, shrouded in mystery. Belarus too has its own riddle — Lepel Lake. According to residents, as well as the classical writer of Belarusian literature and history expert, Vladimir Korotkevich, Tsmok (the Dragon) lives here. It's held to be a fantastic creature like a hippo with a fallow deer's head, fins and a long neck. People say that sometimes Tsmok comes from the depth of the lake, turns into a beautiful young boy and follows young girls. However, if they behave badly he punishes them. Tsmok is a positive char-

acter however, and is patron of the family in Belarusian mythology. The 'Visiting Lepel Tsmok' Festival is held in the city to honour the mythical creature.

Stone 'mushrooms'

Many have heard of the Turov crosses in Gomel, which grow from under the ground. However, few are aware of live crosses in the Vitebsk Region. An enchanting place with some of these stone 'mushrooms' is found in Zamoshie in Ushachi — 25km from the district centre. Stones of various forms and sizes — ancient monuments of the 12th-15th century — appear from under the moss in a thick forest on the outskirts of the

village. Until the early 2000s, no-one would ever have imagined that these are graves. They were noticed by a Minsker who bought a plot of land for her summer cottage in Zamoshie. At the time, they were several centimetres high but now some of them are as big as a person. Scientists have tried to explain the anomaly as being caused by temperature fluctuations in the soil, but the locals have their own explanation: the crosses are sign from God.

Cherry paradise

One may think that 'cherry paradise' is another title for the town of Glubokoe. For many centuries, each summer the

shine of these 'red rubies' illuminates the houses of the Glubokoe residents. Even if other regions have a poor cherry harvest, the rich berries are always in abundance here. No one knows exactly how these wonderful cherries appeared in Glubokoe. They were possibly brought by monks who had large cherry orchards near their monasteries or were cultivated by a local botanist Boleslav Lapyr, even perhaps by Baron von Munchausen. Cherries mature here, as everywhere, in July-August while two types of berries 'shine' all year round. During the first Cherry Festival in Glubokoe in 2013 a sculpture was unveiled in the town's centre — a stylised trunk and branches of rich cherries. Now, the sculpture glows from the touch of the hands of numerous tourists.

Pancakes on 'the chopping block'

Belarus is a hospitable country and its residents are proud to offer their guests not only bread and salt. Each region can boast unique traditions and the Vitebsk Region also had its own culinary peculiarities. One of these is pancakes on 'the chopping block'. The unusual dish is offered by participants of the folk club of national cuisine, Grutsa, in the Sharkovshchina District's Radyuki. When there were neither electric nor gas stoves in houses and an unexpected guest arrived, our ancestors used to place kindling-wood on the hearth and make scrambled eggs or pancakes. Participants of the Grutsa club have improved the ancient technology. They take a dry chopping block, cut it into eight places, drop in some diesel fuel and light it. Then they put a frying pan with dough

on it. The chopping block burns slowly while the pancakes taste as if they've come straight from the oven, with a pleasant smoky aroma.

Excursions with Bolotnik

The Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve has much to engage tourists: 70,000 hectares of untouched forest, many rare and disappearing plants and animals, a dozen interesting walking routes, the Museum of Nature... Recently a Centre of Mythological Tourism has opened there — an open-air exhibition 'A Mythological Farmstead', an ecological path 'In the Land of Myths', and the Museum of Mythological Creatures — a whole host of monsters and spirits in which our ancestors used to believe. The ecological route offers the visitor 17 unusual installations: Polevik (the spirit of fields), Pushchevik (the spirit of pushcha), Bolotnik (an evil spirit of the bog), the Mermaid, the Adder King and other creatures. The most incredible is the chance to walk along this path at night! Just imagine all the emotions experienced by tourists while walking under a starry sky where owls hoot and myths become reality!

By Lyudmila Minakova



Interesting facts

Most famous tourist sights of the Vitebsk Region:

- 1** Art Centre and Museum of Marc Chagall in Vitebsk
- 2** Repin's Zdravnevo Museum-Estate in Vitebsk
- 3** Town Hall in Vitebsk, constructed in 1775
- 4** St. Sophia Cathedral in Polotsk of 11th-18th century is the first stone construction in Belarus
- 5** Saviour Monastery of Yevfrosiniya Polotskaya in Polotsk, founded by St. Yevfrosiniya Polotskaya in the early 12th century
- 6** Tyzengauz Palace in Postavy — an architectural monument of late 18th-early 19th century
- 7** St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church in the Postavy District's Kamai village — an example of early 17th century defensive architecture
- 8** St. Anna Roman Catholic Church and landscape-park estate in the Glubokoe District's Mosar village — 'Belarusian Versailles'
- 9** Holy Kuteinsky Monastery in Orsha — one of the largest book printing centres in the 17th century
- 10** Braslav Lakes National Park



Feeling like first book printer

It's now possible to study the history of book printing using a restored 16th century machine (similar to that worked upon by Francysk Skaryna and Ivan Fiodorov five hundred years ago). You can feel just like the first book printer!

The reproduction is now touring major book fairs abroad, and in Belarus, such as at celebrations for the annual Day of Belarusian Written Language and at the 30th International Book Fair in Moscow.

To master the ancient art of printing, our reporters travelled to Vileika, a district centre 100km from Minsk, where the machine is on show as part of the 'Looking for Lost Values' collection, gathered by historian Vladimir Lihodedov, at his studio.

Vladimir Lihodedov is a well-known personality in Belarus, being a filokartist and a collector, as well as a laureate of the President's 'For Spiritual Revival' Award. He has created hundreds of publications and dozens of books, including one about Alexander Nevsky and another on Prince Vladimir, Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles. Mr. Lihodedov initiated the installation of monuments to those killed in the 1812 War, not far from Vileika, and to Orthodox priest Fiodor Yuzefovich who died during the uprising of 1863.

"I've always been interested in history," he explains. "My collection of old photographs and postcards devoted to Belarus is the largest in the world. Skaryna is my countryman, born in Polotsk, as I was. It was there that I first tried to organise my exhibition, even finding a site, but it fell through. I succeeded in Vileika which is, some say, the birthplace of the first Russian book printer, Ivan Fiodorov."

YURIY MOZOLEVSKIY

Mr. Lihodedov's studio is now undergoing repair so it's too early to speak about receiving visitors. However, the future museum of all things relating to printing and writing, including a unique collection of writing instruments, is sure to be popular. It is called 'Looking for Lost Values'.

Its location is symbolic since, in Soviet times, the building housed a printing house; Vileika District newspaper journalists worked there. Mr. Lihodedov received some funding to purchase the building, to house his cumbersome stropping machine, his set of lead linotype lines, various typographic tools and colourful campaign posters.

The 16th century printing press is placed in the centre of the hall and can hardly be confused with anything else. It's large (taller than a person) and heavy, made from pure oak. Since the 500th anniversary of the birth of Belarusian and Eastern Slavic printing, it has received much attention. Not long ago, film makers visited Vileika to shoot it.

According to Mr. Lihodedov's plans, the machine will have its own room, styled to appear as it would have done in the 'Skaryna era', without electric lighting. There will be a mill to produce paper, in keeping with the age of the printing press, but funding is needed, either by the state or from a serious patron.

It took around six months to recreate the press, with a 'prototype' made initially; it now resides at Poland's Orthodox Suprasl Monastery.

"Handmade!" Mr. Lihodedov proclaims, adding, "No, I didn't make it myself. I don't know how to do that. Everyone must do their own job. I was assisted by my long-time friend Genady Katlinsky. The major difficulty was to make a wooden screw and a nut. It's almost impossible to find master carpenters although, in the past, each village would have had several. Look at old carved houses! Truly, people knew their craft."

He adds, "The only task I set for myself was to make the machine collapsible, so that I could transport it from one place to another. It's painstaking to disassemble and assemble the press, taking at least a day. We transport it by mini-bus. It used to be tricky to load it onto the vehicle but we've perfected our technique now, with over twenty parts slotting together."

Attempts to create something similar continue, with proclamations regarding exact copies being made, but the historian believes these only slightly resemble the original since no wooden press remains from that time. We are

Interesting fact

■ **Vladimir Lihodedov's exhibition in Vileika shows how presses from the 16th-19th century would have worked. His plan is to allow all visitors to try for themselves, making a sheet of paper and printing not only pages, but creating etchings and engravings, and printing a leaflet or a newspaper. He'd like people to try embossing on a gold-printing press like a real bookbinder. Every visitor can then feel the same thrill as the first book printer.**

obliged to rely on medieval engravings and descriptions from old books.

Mr. Lihodedov studied the craft of old printing at workshops in Leipzig, Mainz and Basel, as well as from Polish and Czech restorers. "Try it yourself," the historian suggests and we pull the lever. He does this several times, fixing the pre-cast and inked metal matrix to paper. The bottles of ink might be mistaken for bottles of beverages, while the paper is truly authentic, being handmade. His master class in making it created a stir at the Moscow Book Fair.

"You can now speak of medieval book printing not only as a theorist but

from first-hand experience. This allows us to prove, or deny, many historical facts in a practical way," Mr. Lihodedov smiles. "For example, I believe I can assert that Skaryna didn't personally print all his works, despite knowing how to perform each task. Let's imagine: one of his Bibles has 192 pages and 96 spreads (books were printed in this format). According to researchers, at least a thousand copies were circulated. Printing a single book requires almost 100,000 impressions and he created over twenty books. Skaryna would never have had enough time to do everything personally. Meanwhile, some impressions are uneven, made with greater or lesser force, indicating that various people were involved. No page is identical in these old books: some are bright and some are dull. A book was later laced by hand, and it's not uncommon to find errors, with pages placed upside down."

The historian knows his subject well, having personally reconstructed a Bible, following Skaryna's technology. Initially, he made 192 matrices, producing a separate board with letters for each page and making paper from linen. He was assisted by his son, Dmitry, who looks rather like Skaryna.

At first glance, a problem is evident: the restored Bible looks new, without the fading or yellowing of pages we're used to. "An authoritative Russian professor came to one of my presentations and asked me about this. Of course, when printed in the 16th century, the book looked new. Accordingly, there's no 'need' to make our book look old. We want to see it through the eyes of the first book printer. We made twelve copies and my friend, artist Boris Tsitovich, illustrated one, using Skaryna's motifs. We aren't sure whether the first book printer used pictures in his books, mind you. I've also experimented with bindings, travelling to Estonia to see the traditions of red leather and wood, which remain alive. One of the Bibles is now kept at the National Library of Belarus.

By Dmitry Umpirovich

Man from Polotsk

This year, Belarus is widely celebrating one of the most significant dates in its spiritual history: 500 years ago, on August 6th, 1517, in Prague, Francysk Skaryna — a native of ‘the glorious city of Polotsk’ as he put it — published the Psalter, the first Belarusian printed book. We follow in the footsteps of our first printer, visiting the cities which played a crucial role in his life: Krakow, Padua, Prague and Vilnius.



Hall in Collegium Maius where medieval students took exams and were awarded academic degrees. Francysk Skaryna received his Bachelor's Degree there

Krakow

From 1504 to 1506, Francysk — a son of Luka from Polotsk — studied at Krakow University's Department of Liberal Arts. The University was founded on May 12th, 1364, when King Casimir III the Great signed a charter on the foundation of Krakow Academy. Later, Queen Jadviga's bequeath of her jewels to the educational institution enabled the Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland, Władysław Jagiełło, to resume the University's activities. The establishment is now named after him: Jagiellonian. In the times of Francysk Skaryna, the University was the major higher school, not only for Poland but for the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. With this in mind, Skaryna studied there.

In the 16th century, the fee for the entire training course was eight Groshes: enough to buy two horses, as my guide, Desislawa Christozowa-Gurgul,

tells me. It was a huge sum for Skaryna's family and, truly the Polotsk merchant family could hardly afford it. Accordingly, beside the name of our future first book printer, for the year of 1504, the register reads '2 Groshes'.

Students lived in the bursa (like a hostel near the University). The Collegium Novum is now situated on the site of one such bursa, built especially for poor students from across the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Aul auditorium features portraits of the most famous graduates and lecturers, including a memorial plaque in honour of Francysk Skaryna, who received his Bachelor's Degree there, on December 14th, 1506.

Padua

In 1506, Bachelor of Liberal Sciences Francysk Skaryna graduated from Krakow University. We lack much information on where he moved afterwards but know for sure that, on November

4th, 1512, he applied to the University of Padua for the defence of a Doctor of Medical Sciences' Degree.

...I hold in my hands one of the accounting books of the University of Padua. Its cover reads: '1512-1523'. Three of its pages are devoted to Francysk Skaryna and I'm thumbing them with excitement.

Dr. Francesco Piovan, of Padua University, tells us, "He came to Padua as a Doctor of Philosophy, recorded here as a poor student: a pauper. This doesn't mean that he had absolutely no money. At that time, a person called themselves poor if they lacked enough money to study."

The University exempted Skaryna from paying for the exam. "This entry is dated November 6th," Mr. Piovan continues, turning the page. "A collegium to hold exams gathered in the sacristy of St. Urban Church. Its vice-prior, Doctor of Medicine Tadeo Musati, said, 'A quite educated, poor young man has come. This Doctor of Arts — born somewhere remote, probably four thousand miles or more away from this glorious city — has arrived to glorify Padua's brilliance and enhance the glory of the flourishing team of philosophers of the gymnasium and our holy collegium. He addressed the collegium with a request to enable him — as a gift and special favour — to be provided with the mercy to pass God's exams in the field of medicine, at this holy collegium. Your Excellencies, if you let me, I'll introduce this man. The young man and the aforementioned doctor bears the name of Francysk — a son of deceased Luka Skaryna from Polotsk...'"

"The commission — which then included many very famous people — admitted that Skaryna was ready for the major exam," Mr. Piovan continued. "As a result, on November 9th, the exam was held privately in the Bishop's Curia and Francysk Skaryna received the title of Doctor of Medical Sciences. Members of the board unanimously agreed to render Skaryna that title, as a result of tentative and private examination."



The hall in the Palace of the Archbishop of Padua — where Francysk Skaryna sat his exam — remains today, though it looks extremely modern, sadly. Nevertheless, if you gaze at the ceiling, you'll see that the original is still there. I tried to look at the ceiling with Francysk's eyes but then realised he probably had no time to admire the ceiling!

As in Krakow, Padua University has a memorial plaque devoted to our first book printer. Moreover, Padua has gone further, placing his portrait among the most famous foreign graduates in the Hall of Forty.

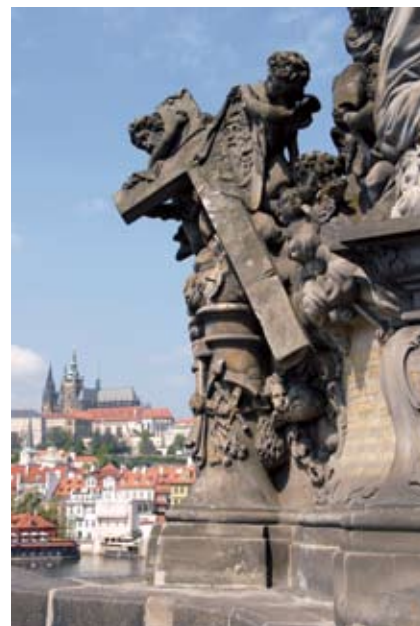
We know for sure that Skaryna was proud of his scientific degree and his homeland, placing the inscription of 'Doctor of Medical Sciences Frantsisk Skaryna from the glorious city of Polotsk' in all his books. His son, Simeon, later became a physician as well. Francysk Skaryna treated Bishop Jan of Vilna (an illegitimate son of King Sigismund the Old) and the Duke of Prussia, Albrecht, from Konigsberg. Of course, there were other, less eminent patients.

First Prague

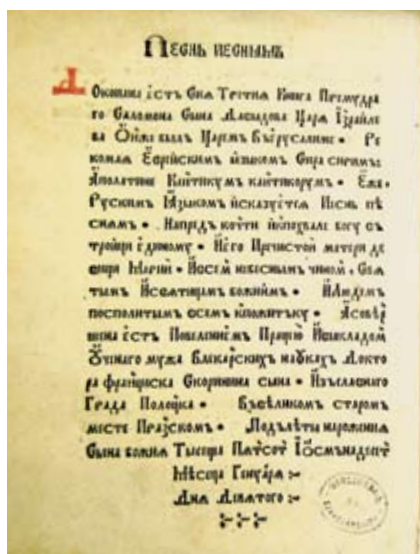
Five years after receiving his Doctor of Medicine's Degree from the University of Padua, Francysk Skaryna stayed in Prague: on August 6th, 1517, he published his first book — the Psalter. It's easy to imagine him looking at the sheets hanging to dry. The business — for which

The Hall of Forty: a stand is situated in front of the wall featuring portraits of graduates from Eastern Europe. Galileo Galilei lectured there.

The photo is published with the permission of the University of Padua



View from Charles Bridge to Prague Castle



The last page of 'The Song of Solomon', published by Francysk Skaryna in Prague in 1518. It shows the date and place of publication, as well as the name of the publisher

Monument to Adam Mickiewicz near the Church of St. Anna. Francysk Skaryna might not have seen the monument but definitely visited the church



he had been preparing for several years — had launched!

Did Skaryna only reach Prague in 1517? Dr. Ilya Lemeshkin — who lectures at Charles University's Department of Philosophy — believes not. He tells us, "The time of Skaryna's stay in Prague should be shifted to early 1517 or late 1516. His Psalter publishing is likely to have been preceded by a rather long period of making acquaintance with the situation and printers, and agreeing rent. From August 1517 onwards, for two years, Francysk Skaryna released a new Bible edition almost monthly. Anyone connected with book publishing would agree that his speed was amazing. By August 6th, almost everything was ready: translations and illustrations, and a printing house rented, Cyrillic letters cast and necessary materials (paper and ink) bought. It's virtually impossible to do that today; it would likely take longer than a month."

As to why Skaryna chose Prague to publish his books, some believe it was due to the tolerant atmosphere which reigned after the victory of the Hussite movement in the Czech Kingdom. We still do not know for sure what religion Skaryna supported: Orthodox, Catholic or Hussite. He called himself

a Christian. Two other European states famous for their religious tolerance — the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Venetian Republic (including Padua) — are close to Skaryna.

Religious tolerance meant tolerance for translations of Holy Scripture into 'folk' languages, which was not encouraged in strictly Catholic or strictly Orthodox countries. By the time of Francysk Skaryna's activity, three translations of the Bible had been published in the Czech Republic. Prague's tolerance extended to book printing as well, with books issued not only in Latin fonts but also Jewish. Accordingly, even if Cyrillic looked surprising, it was permissible.

This is how Prague became the birthplace of Belarusian book printing.

Vilna

Francysk Skaryna lived in Prague, we think, until 1520, later moving to Vilna (modern Vilnius) — the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In the early 16th century, the territory of modern Belarus — where Francysk, his father Luka and his brother Ivan were born — was part of that state. In Vilna, he published two books: 'The Small Travel Book', in 1552, and his Apostle, in 1525. There, the most important events in his personal life unfolded, as he married Margarita Odvernik, the widow of Yuri Odvernik (who sponsored Skaryna's publishing activity), and had two sons, František and Simeon.

I met Prof. Sergey Temchin, a specialist in Church Slavonic manuscript heritage, and Slavonic and Balto-Slavic historical linguistics, at 19A Didzioji Street, at a café, sitting beneath a memorial plaque in honour of Francysk Skaryna. As to how Skaryna met his wife, Prof. Temchin wishes that he knew more, lamenting that no love letters have come to light.

"You should talk to the book designers," he suggests. "Show them title pages and how the text begins afterwards. It's truly beautiful to see how he combined various fonts on a single page. The work was done at a very high level. His Prague

engravings are magnificent. The fact that there were no such engravings in Vilnius indicates that he didn't cut them himself and didn't draw them. Rather, he found people to do so, and evaluated their work. I have no doubt that he was well aware of the process of printing, and was able to fully work the press himself. Without that knowledge, he would have failed to produce a printing press in Vilna, as no one else boasted such knowledge in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. His Prague publications are the pinnacle not only of Cyrillic printing but Central European."

Sigismund I the Old, who was the Grand Duke of Lithuania and the King of Poland, favoured Skaryna. However, historians believe Francysk received even greater patronage from Jan, an illegitimate son of King Sigismund. In 1519, Jan, aged 20, was appointed as Bishop of Vilna. Many historians believe that Frantsisk was Jan's secretary and physician. On having such a patron, it became easier to establish a printing house.

In those days, Vilna was a very intelligent city, boasting five doctors of medicine. The reformer of European medicine, Paracelsus, came to discuss his ideas with them. He also admitted that he faced a crushing defeat as a result of those debates and was forced to leave the city in disgrace. Some

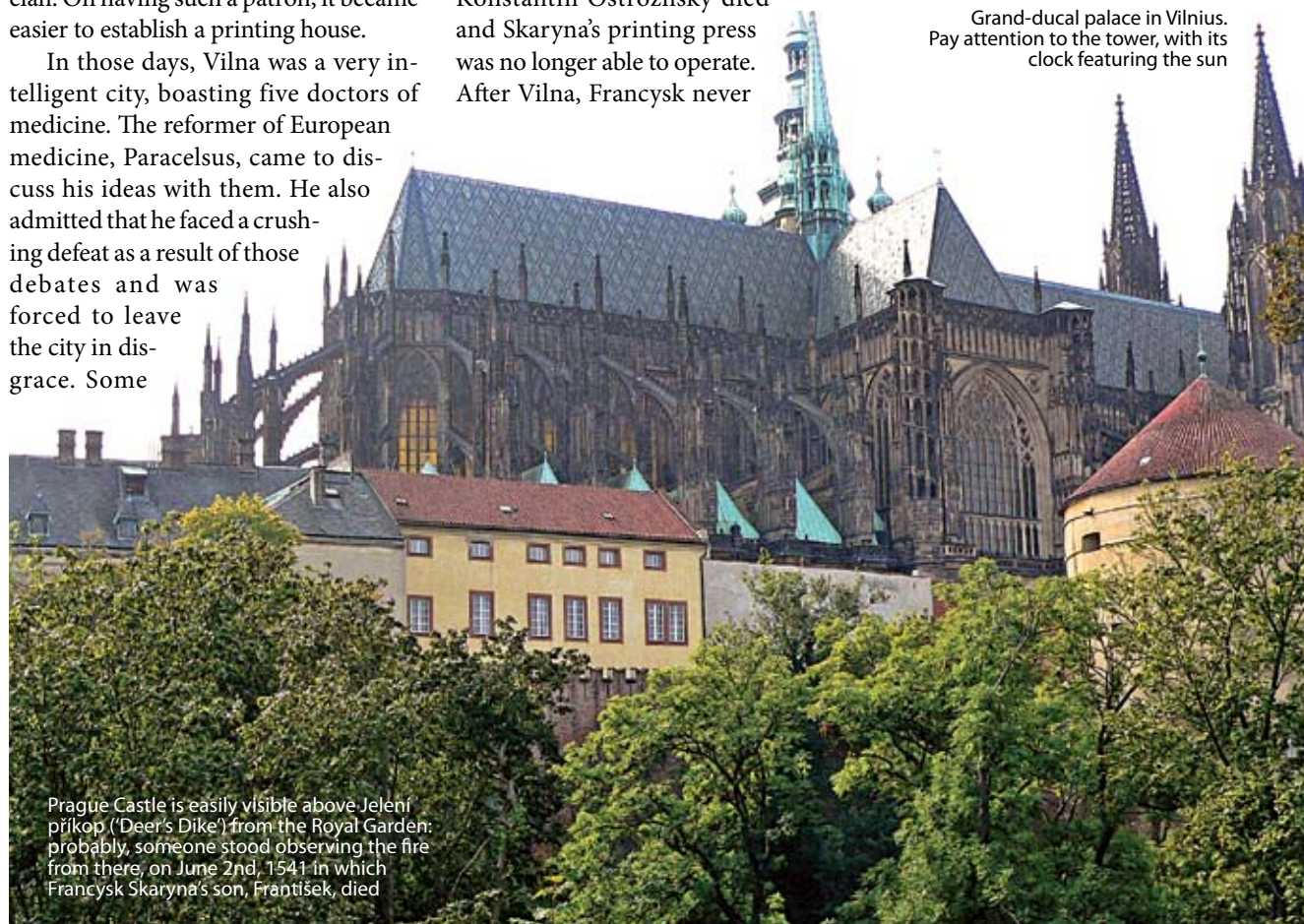
historians are convinced that Francysk Skaryna took part in those discussions, since he was a member of the Vilna Curia's humanistic club, headed by Bishop Jan. Our first book printer enjoyed an extremely active life in the capital.

Despite bringing personal happiness to Skaryna, Vilna quickly deprived him of it. In 1529, his wife, Margarita, died, leaving her husband with two small sons. Her relatives begin to sue Skaryna for the inheritance, and Skaryna's elder brother, Ivan, also died. In 1532, Frantsisk was imprisoned in Polish Poznan for several months because of his inheritance and debts. Happily, the perseverance of his nephew, Roman, Ivan's heir, aided his release. Roman promised to pay all his debts, while the patronage of Bishop Jan and the favour of King Sigismund I the Old helped.

Sadly, shortly afterwards, his patrons Yakub Babich, Bogdan Onkov, and Konstantin Ostrozhsy died and Skaryna's printing press was no longer able to operate. After Vilna, Francysk never



Grand-ducal palace in Vilnius. Pay attention to the tower, with its clock featuring the sun



Prague Castle is easily visible above Jelení příkop ('Deer's Dike') from the Royal Garden: probably, someone stood observing the fire from there, on June 2nd, 1541 in which Francysk Skaryna's son, František, died



Bas-relief in the Royal Garden Palace, depicting King Ferdinand and Queen Anna. There is some debate over who is presenting the flower and what sort it is, but it's likely that it was grown by Francysk Skaryna

published another book or, if he did, it remains unknown to us.

The lonely widower with two sons was forced to earn money: a problem that had never worried him before. As a result, he left Vilna, and never returned.

Second Prague

In 1535, Francysk Skaryna returned to Prague. He was 45 (or perhaps 49), with average life expectancy at 33-34 years. The situation in the Bohemian Kingdom had changed: Anna Jagiellonka had ascended to the throne or, to be more correct, her husband, Ferdinand I, had become the King of Hungary, Bohemia and Germany. The strong and influential monarch of the great empire employed Skaryna.

During his second stay in Prague, Skaryna seems to have worked at the royal court as a doctor and a gardener. It might seem that these professions have little in common but, in the 16th century, healing and botany went hand in hand. The monument to Skaryna — erected in Prague not far from the Royal Garden — is inscribed: 'The great Belarusian humanist and Eastern European first book printer Francysk Skaryna worked as a royal botanist in local places'. Interestingly, at the Francysk Skaryna and

Prague international conference, held at the National Library of the Czech Republic in June, a large dish of citrus fruits was placed in the centre of the table, honouring Skaryna's achievement of being the first in Central Europe to grow lemons and oranges. He was a man of versatile talent.

The next time that the name of our first printer is found in the Prague news is June 2nd, 1541, when his son, František, died in a great fire at Prague Castle. A publicist of that time, Václav Hájek, wrote, "In the house of priest Jan of Púchov, several persons were burnt: cook Magdalena, servant František — who was the son of Dr. Rus, and another young servant." How ironic it is that the son of the first printer of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania died in the house of an outstanding Czech writer and publisher, priest Jan of Púchov.

We do not know how Francysk Skaryna spent the next ten years. Probably, he left Prague or lived there until his death. Some believe that Czech aristocrats invited him to work as a gardener, since they could boast 'Gardener Francysk Skaryna (Dr. Rus) works for me. This Doctor of Medicine previously looked after the royal garden.'

Some historians believe that, broken but not crushed, Skaryna lived in the South Bohemian city of Český Krumlov until his death. It may be so. We know for sure that his son, Simeon Rus, worked as a doctor and a gardener in Indřichovo Hradec — one of the most important cities in Bohemia at that time. In January 1552, Simeon was issued a royal charter, giving him the right of inheritance. Accordingly, we know that, by that time, his father had died.

The first book printer of Belarus, Lithuania and Eastern Europe left his legacy to the world. We don't know where he died or where he lies buried. However, there's no question that he played an important role in the history of Belarusian, Czech, Ukrainian and Lithuanian culture. He'll forever remain a king among men.

By Inessa **Pleskachevskaya**
Photos of Mikhail **Penyevsky**

The gravestone of King Ferdinand and Queen Anna in the Cathedral of St. Vitus, in Prague Castle



Aesthetic pleasures for all tastes

Apart from famous performances for lovers of operatic and choreographic art, the Bolshoi Theatre of Belarus presents several innovative projects

Making magic

For the fourth time, the Bolshoi Theatre is inviting children and their parents to take part in a family festival, entitled New Year Theatrical Toy, embracing the joy and magic of the New Year. Encouraging families to gather, it inspires us to communicate and nurture our creativity in inventing our own toys. The contest organisers are seeking theatrical ideas which capture the essence of a particular performance or the life of an actor or a musician of the Bolshoi Theatre.

Yelena Balabanovich, a leading editor for the Marketing, Information and Advertising Department at the Bolshoi

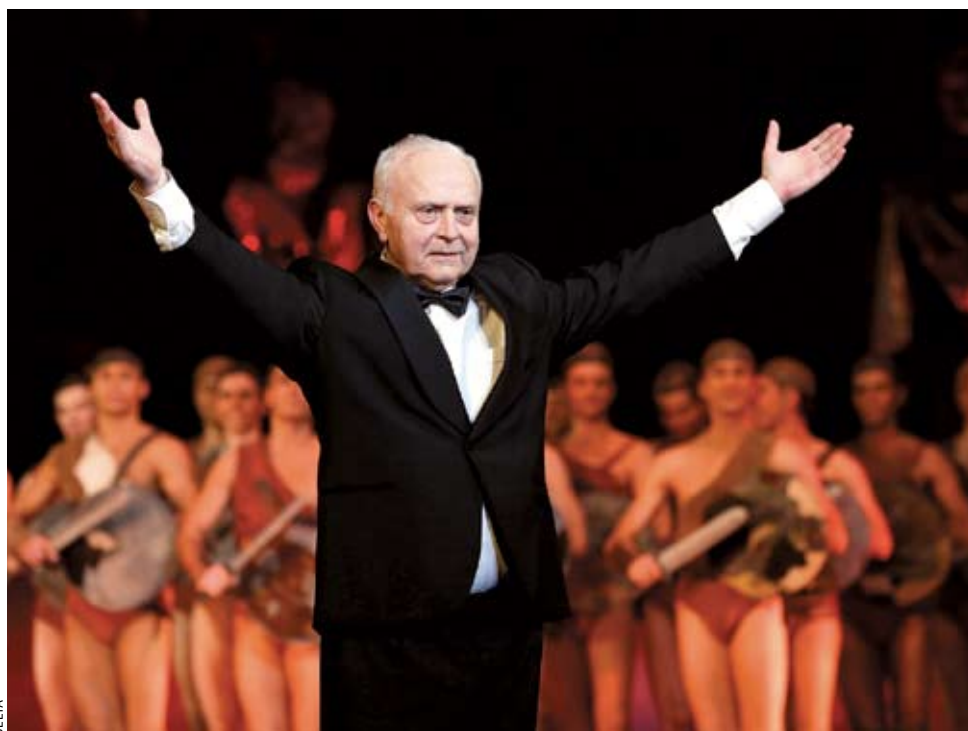
Theatre, explains that, last year, dozens of families from across Belarus showered the theatre with unique toys, including those inspired by 'The Nutcracker' and 'Cinderella', 'Carmen' and 'The Firebird', 'Aybolit' and 'The King of Mice', 'Signor Tomato' and 'The Three Little Piglets', 'Madam Butterfly', 'Scheherazade' and even 'Rigoletto'... It seemed that all heroes of the Bolshoi



Theatre of Belarus were represented. Many participants demonstrated their imagination and created unique silver snowflakes, sonorous bells, New Year balls and crackers. Each one was made with great love.

The 2017 New Year Theatrical Toy competition has been launched, giving children plenty of time to work with their parents, grandparents and teachers, for submission between December 1st and 22nd. Entries can be sent to 220029 Minsk, 1 Parizhskoy Kommuny Square, Belarus' Bolshoi Theatre. If sent by post, toys should be packed well, while those from Minsk are welcome to bring their toys personally, at any time, to the service entrance. Importantly, each toy must be accompanied by its name, alongside your own family name and contact phone number.

Toys won't be returned to their creators but will be sent to Minsk subsidiary boarding school #10, as in past years, over which the Bolshoi Theatre has taken patronage. However, first, they'll decorate the main fir tree of the Bolshoi Theatre. The winners of the best toys will be awarded and every child involved with receive a souvenir: prizes, diplomas and small gifts will be presented by Bolshoi Theatre sponsors.



Valentin Yelizariiev at his jubilee celebration

We'll sing again!

Over two hundred applications have been submitted to the Minsk International Christmas Singing Competition, being held at the Bolshoi Theatre for the fourth time: from December 14th to 20th. Young artistes from Bela-

rus, Russia, Georgia, Uzbekistan, USA, South Africa, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Israel, Kazakhstan, China, Mongolia, France, Germany, Latvia, Moldova, Poland and South Ossetia are taking part. Besides sopranos and baritone singers (which usually account for the majority of participants) there will be bass-baritones and tenors, as opera directors eagerly anticipate.

The contest has three rounds: the first two require a concert master and the final is accompanied by an orchestra, with participants performing one of the main parts from a classical or modern opera. Stars from the Belarusian Bolshoi Theatre will help entrants. Meanwhile, the audience will join the jury in assessing the third round. On December 20th, the People's Choice Award will be presented in the Large Hall, during the gala concert of finalists, alongside the usual diplomas and awards.

The Grand Prix winner will receive a cash prize of \$10,000, with the first prize holder awarded \$8,000, the second receiving \$6,000, and the third a prize of \$4,000. Many young artistes will also re-



Contests of vocalists-2016



'Spartacus' (1980): Tatiana Yershova as Phrygia and Vladimir Komkov as Spartacus

ceive invitations to leading opera houses around the world. The jury comprises directors of opera houses, impresarios and famous musical figures, headed by the General Director of the Bolshoi Theatre, Vladimir Gridyushko. Among them is Nicholas Payne — the Director of Opera Europe (Brussels, Belgium), and John Allison — the Editor of 'Opera' magazine (London, UK), as well as jury first-timers Robert Körner (the Director of Artistic Production of the Opéra National de Lyon, France), Erki Pehk (the Artistic Director of the Prom-Fest International Opera Music Festival in Estonian Pärnu) and Dmitry Vdovin (the Artistic Director of the Young Artists Opera Programme of the Bolshoi Theatre of Russia).

The Bolshoi Theatre of Belarus wishes good luck to all the young, talented singers taking part.

November birthdays

On November 2nd, People's Artist of the USSR and Belarus Valentin Yelizariyev, the ballet master, celebrated

his 70th birthday at the Bolshoi Theatre. For many years, he worked as the theatre's artistic director and head. Students from all over the world came to congratulate him, joining his colleagues and friends. Among the guests were Nikolay Tsiskaridze, Svetlana Zakharova, people's artistes of Russia and many other celebrities. The concert programme, entitled 'Stars of the World and Belarusian Ballet', featured artistes from the Bolshoi Theatre of Belarus and the Bolshoi Theatre of Russia, as well as those from St. Petersburg's Mikhailovsky Theatre and other eminent foreign guests, such as dancers from Boris Eifman's Ballet and the Prague Academy of Music and Dance.

The Belarusian TV and Radio Company recorded that grand event, which lasted for over three hours. The gala concert in honour of Valentin Yelizariyev was later broadcast by the Belarusian TV channel.

'Valentin Yelizariyev: Ballet is Art of Thought' features key moments from the maestro's life, including his outstanding productions with the Bolshoi Theatre. The documentary details Mr. Yelizariyev's reworking of the famous Spartacus ballet this October: a show staged for thirty-seven years by the theatre.

The documentary features interviews with People's Artist of the USSR Yuri Grigorovich, Svetlana Zakharova, Nikolay Tsiskaridze, the Artistic Director of Ochi International Ballet from Japan and prima ballerina Kumiko Ochi, Vadim Pisarev (a People's Artist of Ukraine), and Nina Ananiashvili (a People's Artist of Georgia), all sharing their thoughts on working with Mr. Yelizariyev. The film is the brainchild of Oleg Lukashevich and Alexander Alexeev, and was screened for the maestro's fans on the eve of his birthday.

Valentin Yelizariyev is a world-class choreographer associated with many successes of Belarusian ballet, including the launch of the famous 'Belarusian school of ballet'. He has gained global recognition for his European level pro-

ductions and has headed the Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre for thirty-five years, creating fifteen performances in Belarus. He staged his first ballet — 'Carmen Suite' — at the age of 26, creating a true sensation. His choreography of 'The Creation of the World', 'Till Eulenspiegel', 'Spartacus', 'The Nutcracker', 'Carmina Burana', 'Bolero', 'Sacred Spring', 'Romeo and Juliet', 'Passions' (Rogneda), and 'The Firebird' is an astonishing legacy.

The maestro holds many awards — including the most prestigious Benois de la Danse, established by the International Dance Association. He has also been awarded an Order of Francysk Skaryna, an Order of the Fatherland of the III and II degrees, the UNESCO's Five Continents Medal and many others. At present, Mr. Yelizariyev is a professor at the Belarusian State Academy of Music and his students are laureates of prestigious international competitions. He also continues his creative work in leading theatres in Europe, Japan, China and the Middle East.

In November, People's Artist of Belarus Tatiana Yershova, a tutor at the Bolshoi Theatre, celebrated her 65th birthday. "When I was first invited to the theatre and I saw 'The Nutcracker', I immediately fell in love with ballet. Interestingly, my debut took place on stage at the Latvian Opera and Ballet Theatre in Riga; it was 'The Nutcracker'. I even retired to the accompaniment of Tchaikovsky's magical 'Nutcracker': it was the last ballet in which I danced. Everything started with 'The Nutcracker,'" she recalls. "I've never understood why people call me a 'legend of Belarusian ballet'. A legend is a fantasy, while I'm real. I appreciate it, of course, although I've no wish to be glorified. It would have been great for me to be taller and to have more talents; perhaps my teachers never imagined I'd achieve so much. I never thought of becoming a People's Artist; I was simply doing my job..."

By Mikhailina Cherkashina



Game worthy of finals

Belarusian tennis players worthily rival US team in Federation Cup finals, playing as equals and coming close to victory in dramatic match at Minsk's Chizhovka-Arena, cheered on by ardent fans

President Lukashenko believes that Belarusian tennis will soon loudly declare itself. Speaking with leading international tennis organisations in Minsk, during the Federation Cup finals, hosted by Chizhovka-Arena, he praised the performance of the Belarusian team. The final match of the unofficial world championship saw the American favourites having to battle hard to defeat the host team, eventually winning 2:3. Despite being seeded several dozen times higher than the Belarusian team, the Americans



Arina Sobolenko
and Alexandra Sasnovich

BELTA



Awards ceremony: US team on the left while the national squad of Belarus is on the right

truly had to pull out the stops to claim victory. Fans are both elated and disappointed, realising how close the team came to making history.

US team coach Kathy Rinaldi has praised the Belarusians, who only recently squeezed into the top one hundred world ranking, yet gave the US team a run for its money. The experienced opponents were forced into a wild dance in the doubles match. Having gained victory, the Americans began celebrating on the court and were vivacious in the press centre. Meanwhile, Alexandra Sasnovich demonstrated her serious side, giving a thorough analysis of the match. She lost to the winner of the US Open, Sloane Stephens, 2:5, just half an hour before commencing the decisive doubles match, which no doubt left her feeling exhausted. She admitted to feeling tired, saying, "I'm barely standing, as the day has been hard. After playing my singles match, I immediately went into the doubles. Massage therapists worked on my legs, and my father tried to give me some rice to eat. Three minutes before we began, I hadn't even changed my clothes and was laying on the table."

The result of the final match again proves that Federation Cup matches involve psychology and tactics as much

as skill. The Belarusian team, making its debut in the World Group, lacks experience in such tactics, but clearly has great potential. In February, Belarus will play Germany in Minsk, with the winning team likely play the Czech squad, which has won the Federation Cup for



The Belarusians' achievements were praised by American captain Kathy Rinaldi who said, after the victorious match in Minsk, that her team had to make an enormous effort to snatch victory

the past three years running. It will be a challenge for our girls to repeat their great performance but coach Eduard Dubrov is optimistic. He comments, "I think we have a good future, since we've been playing against stronger rivals in every new match. We performed well in the finals, only losing 2:3. All fans at the final saw a decent game. We didn't disappoint them but rather inspired confidence that we'll win gold in the future. We have a single wish: to play on and gain experience. If our girls perform

this well against players from the top 10 and top 20, they should be ranked accordingly."

The Belarusians' progress has been praised by American coach Kathy Rinaldi, who notes how hard her team had to play to snatch victory. The leader

of the US team, world 10th seed Coco Vandeweghe, won her three matches, later saying that Minsk's Chizhovka-Arena enjoyed a fantastic atmosphere. Although fans were supporting the Belarusian team, it was a great pleasure for the guests to play.

Next season, Belarus and the United States may meet again in the Fed Cup final, if they pass through the quarterfinal and semi-final stages. Let's wish them good luck and sporting confidence!

By Kirill **Dmitriev**

Fashion — affordable to everyone



Fashionable designers and small business: Economy Ministry knows how to double exports of clothes

Haute couture for most buyers is like an expensive picture in a museum: it's possible to look at it but just a few can buy it. The goals which are to be brought to life soon by designers and state authorities include: to make fashion affordable, to dress the country's population in Belarusian brands and to increase the manufacture of fashionable clothes and make them cheaper. This year, specialists of the Economy Ministry have shown great interest in designer outfits and sewing businesses. Together with the Belarusian Fund for Financial Support to Entrepreneurs, the Ministry has decided to sup-



port the event which is the major point in the country's fashion life — Belarus Fashion Week (BFW). They have pledged a programme of long-term cooperation.

Why was fashion chosen? The sewing trade and economic calculations are from different spheres but they are closely linked. Director of the Economy Ministry's Entrepreneurship Department, Piotr Arushanyants, cites the following figures: today, more than 1,800 small and medium-sized organisations trade in the country, manufacturing clothing and items from leather and fur. Almost 67 percent of these are directly involved in sewing. "At present, small and medium enterprises in this segment offer the widest range of clothes to suit any taste and purse. These producers can provide the country's population with fashionable quality clothing, as well as exporting considerable amounts. Many companies export up to 80 percent of their produce. We expect that we'll be able to give new impetus to the development of this sector of the economy. Moreover, we also aim to 'give a push' to this business in the regions," noted Mr. Arushanyants.

The Entrepreneurship Department describes how clothing manufacturing is one of 23 types of activities for which optimum trading conditions will be created.

*Many Belarusian
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After accepting a package of documents on the simplification of bureaucracy, entrepreneurs will only need to inform the local executive authority at the start of their activity. Excessive requirements and inspections will be removed. Mr. Arushanyants has no doubt that the simplification of business conditions will enable a reduction in the cost of designer clothes and make them more affordable. The Economy Ministry has also calculated the return from the sector according to an optimistic scenario: the production and export of clothes with the 'Made in Belarus' label is to be doubled in future.

Alongside these theoretical plans, officials have also actioned concrete measures. For example, master classes will be conducted for BFW participants

by international experts in the sphere of clothes production and round table discussions will take place tackling the development of the industry. Thanks to these networking sessions, organisers of the BFW will be able to bring together manufacturers of materials accessories, as well as large importers.

The Minsk show will be also attended by buyers from Russia, Kazakhstan, France, Italy, Germany and Canada. This is a chance for new and experienced designers to make a name for themselves on external markets. BFW organisers hope for a fruitful result from interaction with state authorities. Cooperation with the Foreign Ministry has helped abolish visas for all foreigners who arrive for Belarus Fashion Week. This rule was in force long before the introduction of the five-day visa-free regime and was a perfect compliment for guests. Collaboration with the Economy Ministry and the Belarusian Fund for Financial Support to Entrepreneurs will also bring benefits: for example, designers will be able to receive business loans at affordable rates.

"We are making big, rather than small, steps on the way to make our fashion affordable to any customer," summarised Mr. Arushanyants.

By Polina Konoga



Alexandra Chichikova confirms that beauty has no boundaries

Real beauty!

Alexandra Chichikova from Belarus has won Miss Wheelchair World 2017

Her social network pages are full of congratulations. The Minsker has won the first ever international Miss Wheelchair World and will keep this unique title all her life.

Apart from Alexandra, the finals — hosted by Warsaw — featured another twenty-three ladies, including Belarusian Angelina Waleskaya (a model with cerebral palsy). Alexandra answers our questions...

Alexandra, what was the most stressful moment in preparing for the contest?

On the fifth and sixth days of our preparation for the gala-finale, we began choreographic training. Despite being truly exhausted, we had to train all day. A participant from Ukraine, Ulyana

Alexandra Chichikova:

'We're united by the desire to change attitudes towards people with disabilities'

Pcholkina, encouraged us to stand in a circle holding hands, saying, "We're strong when we're together." Those words inspired us all!

Any contest brings an element of competitiveness. Was everyone friendly?

The atmosphere was very calm; even full of love. It wasn't just a beauty pageant. It bore deeper meaning. We're united by the desire to change attitudes towards people with disabilities. With this in mind, we supported each other in all difficult situations.

There was a catwalk at the end, with everyone dancing and moving quickly



in their wheelchairs. It looked spectacular! Was it technically difficult?

Our choreographers worked hard to ensure each girl had no problem in performing her movements. Moreover, excellent dancers assisted us, taking into account our individual capabilities, and helping us to move effectively.

Did you make new friends?

Ukrainian Ulyana Pcholkina is my 'soul-mate'. No obstacles have hampered her becoming a TV host and having a family. She supported me strongly and kept telling me, "If you're here, then you'll cope." I also made friends with ladies from South Africa and Angola.

Do you have plans for the future?

I'll promote this event in my country as I'd love for us to host it.

A few months ago, the 23-year-old student from Minsk — Alexandra Chichikova — could hardly imagine that she'd take on such huge responsibility, representing Belarus at the Miss Wheelchair World 2017 international contest, in Warsaw. Now, she timidly touches her crown, smiling gently. Alexandra is very good-natured: a feature which conquered the hearts of the jury. In the finals, she was placed first among twenty-four contestants from around the globe. Her days are now tightly scheduled. After a grand gala party and the awards ceremony, she takes on a very public role,

become someone whose past, present and future are interesting to many.

Alexandra recalls events of six years ago with some sadness but with restraint: at the age of 17, she fell from the window of the third floor of her family house, while it was under construction. Since then, she has used a wheelchair. However, Sasha's life doesn't differ greatly from most other girls: she drives a car, studies to become a psychologist, acts in the theatre, works and makes plans for the future. She admits that she'd do anything to ensure that the 2018 Miss Wheelchair

World is hosted by Belarus. The Polish organisers are supporting the idea and have offered their help.

Returning home, she plans to battle stereotypes regarding people with disabilities. "This contest has enabled me to be heard by others. Now, I think I'll be able to speak my mind, and work to change the situation. I'd love to see families with children — where both parents are disabled — receive more support. This will be a focus of my future social activity," Alexandra explains.

By Taisa Azonovich

In addition

Angelina Waleskaya, a participant of Miss Wheelchair World 2017:

Although the competition gathered women using wheelchairs, their capabilities were different; some can't use their hands or talk. The American has no arms or legs but moved beautifully while dancing. We received dance training from 7am to 11pm. It was difficult, with some girls crying at being unable to move their hands as they wished to. Sadly, the organisers failed to somehow reward them.

Some participants came with their husbands and I witnessed true love — when women cannot move their hands and even have problems in the bathroom, they are cared for by their loved ones. The Finnish entry is unable to talk or move, communicating only with the help of her eyes. She came with her mother, her husband and her husband's sister. She met her husband online and he came to her, in Finland, from Holland.



Rarities with 500-year-old history

National Art Museum presents 'From Book Treasury' exhibition, featuring publications from Belarus' 16th-early 19th century publishing houses

The exhibition coincides with the 500th anniversary of Belarusian book printing, initiated by Francysk Skaryna's printing of Bible texts in Prague. It features around a dozen publications by Belarusian publishing houses from the museum's collection, which includes around 200 artefacts. Most books in the collection are of liturgical and religious-moral content: Orthodox and Uniate publications and books created by the Old Believers. The collection comprises many works collected through expedition activity, which the museum began after World War II. Nearly two dozen books have been purchased from individuals, or have been donated by state agencies.

The oldest exhibit presented at the exhibition is the 1600 Gospel, made by the major Belarusian book printing centre of the late 16th-early 17th century: the Mamonichi brothers' publishing house, in Vilno. Initially, the brothers attracted a master of book printing, the closest associate of Ivan Fiodorov — Piotr Mstislavets. Four Evangelist prints of this publication date back to the first publication of the publishing house: the 1575 Gospel.

The museum exhibit has been restored for the jubilee of Belarusian book printing and the whole process has been photographed to be further demonstrated at the show.

The Seven Day Acatistos edition is a true rarity, printed in 1698 by Maxim Voshchanka, at Mogilev's Brotherly Publishing House (in the late 17th-early 18th century, over forty different publications were released). Featuring over a dozen woodcuts,



it demonstrates the skill of the Mogilev school of engraving, and is sure to delight visitors to the exhibition.

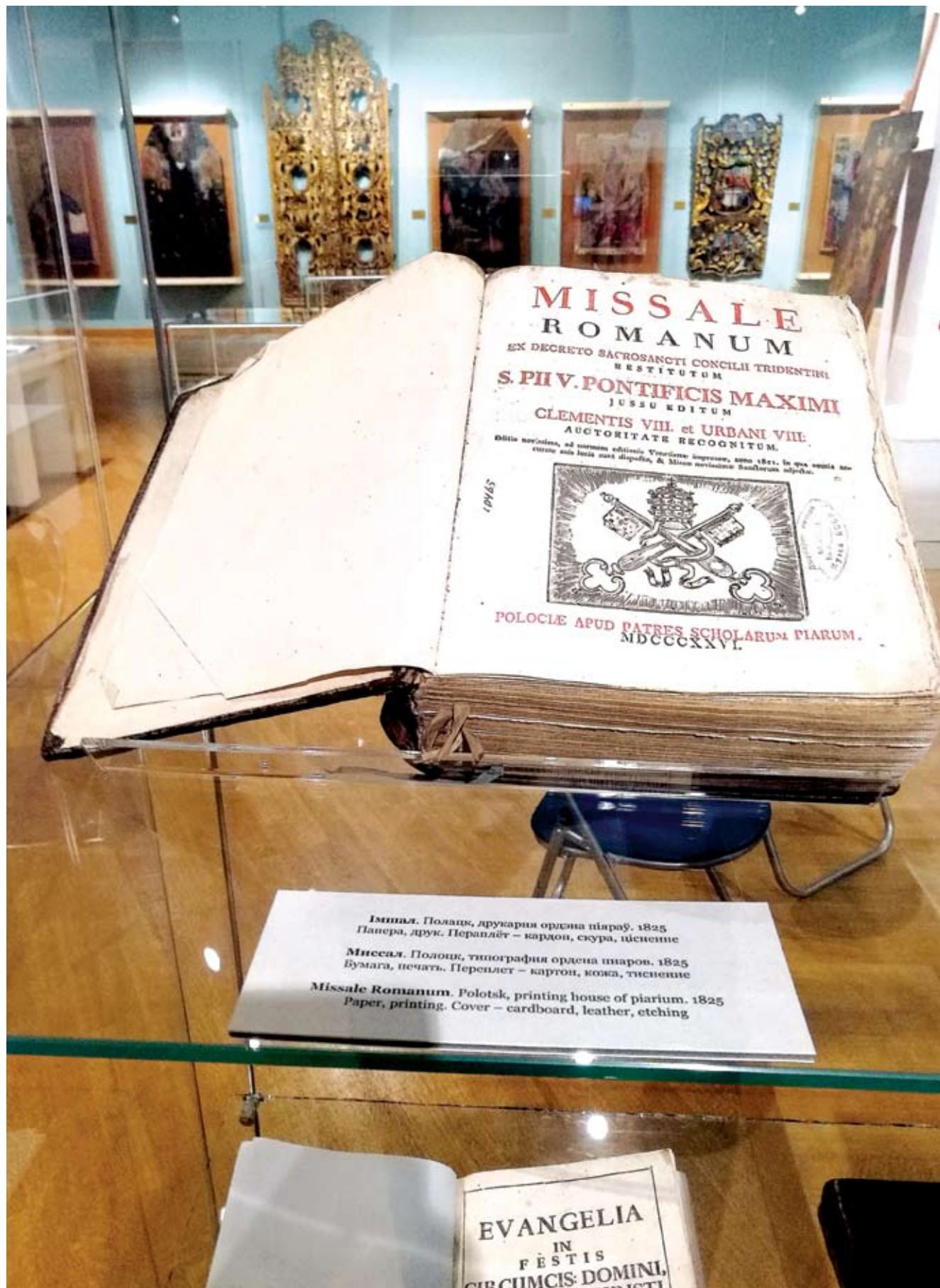
From the famous publishing house of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Vilno Trinity Monastery (in the second phase of its activity from 1760 to 1839), the 1794 Canon, aimed at Old Believers, is on show. The edition is decorated with traditional graphic elements, as seen in Moscow editions for Old Believers.

Evangelia in Festis (Gospel for Holidays), printed in Latin in 1765, is also on display, created by Suprasl Monastery's publishing house (1692-1803). Other exhibits include Missale Romanum (a Roman Catholic liturgical book of 1826), created by Polotsk's publishing house, and Sacred Hermeneutics (1830) in two volumes, produced at the Vilno publishing house, which operated from 1775 to 1842.

Some books boast artistic frames. The most impressive belongs to the 17th-18th century Gospel from St. Nicholas Church, in the Minsk Region's Urechie. Various techniques were used for its production, including molding, stamping, engraving, niello and partial gold coating.

The exhibition enables visitors to come closer to the five-hundred-year-old history of Belarusian book printing.

By Vladimir **Mikhailov**



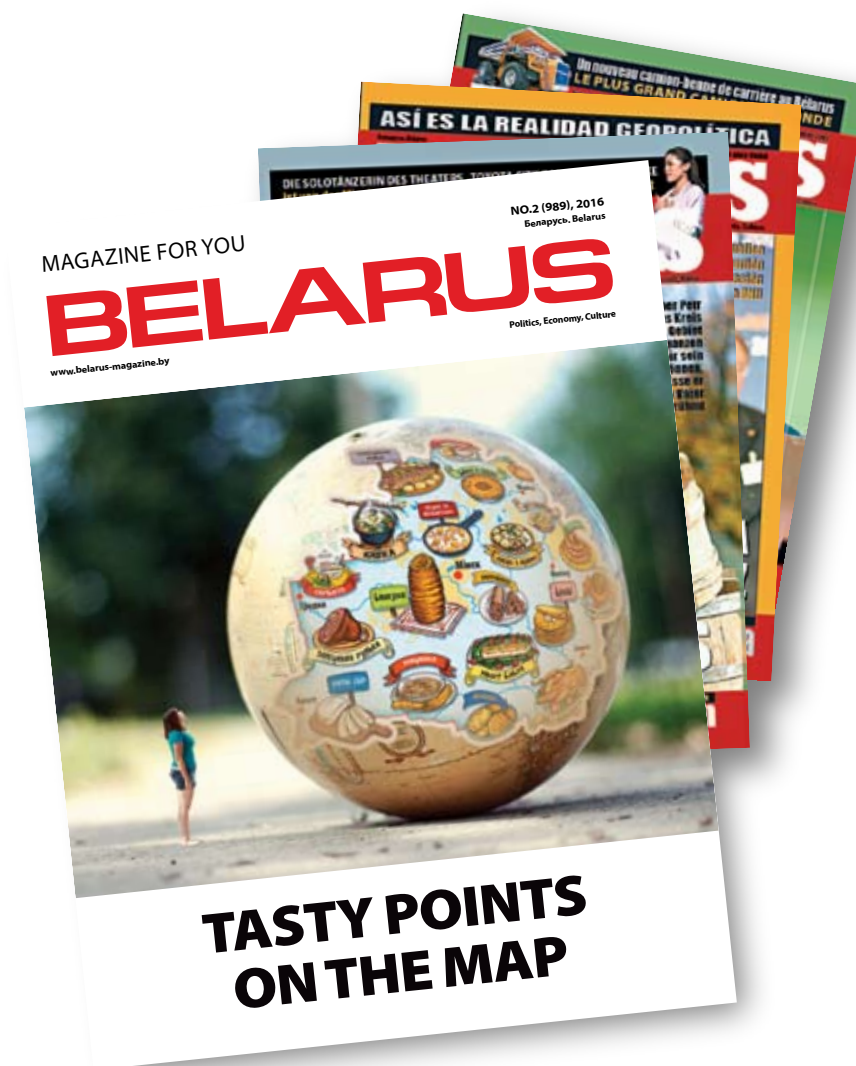
Імшаль. Полацк, друкарня ордена піяраў. 1825
Папера, друк. Переплёт – кардон, скура, тисненне

Міссаль. Полоцк, тыпографія ордена піяраў. 1825
Бумага, печат. Переплёт – картон, кожа, тисненне

Missale Romanum. Polotsk, printing house of piarium. 1825
Paper, printing. Cover – cardboard, leather, etching

EVANGELIA
IN
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