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Always going into New Year in good and optimistic mood

Brest hosts New Year concert of creative groups

BELTA

EDITOR'S WORD

2017

Remarkable aspects are in focus

By Victor Kharkov

Often, the most significant aspects of the year lie not in particular achievements themselves but in what they represent, and what they mean for the future of our country

The opening of the Stadler Minsk Plant in Fanipol, to produce ultra-modern electric trains, seems of significance to me. That Swiss businessman Peter Shpuler has chosen Belarus for the location of this new facility indicates Belarus' progress. Stadler's investments into the Belarusian economy stand as an example to others and are a welcome answer to our modern challenges. In times of global economic turmoil, we mustn't forget to stand in solidarity: only by joining efforts can we overcome global problems.

The new facility should go from strength to strength, breathing new life into Fanipol. As is obvious already, it's likely to become a satellite city for Minsk. Successful operation of the joint venture sets an example to foreign investors. As mentioned at a recent Belarusian-French business forum, we're ready to discuss initiatives and proposals aiming to strengthen the economy, and to create high-tech facilities, modern infrastructure and new jobs. Guarantees of state support for such projects have been provided at the highest level.

Definitely, these are far-sighted decisions. The state is creating preferences for globally known investors, to encourage their interest in Belarus. Not only do such investors bring money and new technologies, they bring their own market connections, opening doors to new buyers.

At the end of the year, we tend to reflect, and make plans for the future, tailored to what we know lies ahead. We all make daily and weekly plans. Those covering five or ten years, or more, require greater analysis. Of course, we can't predict everything; the Fates have their own agenda. However, we need goals, to steer our ship through seas rough as well as smooth.

Globally, it's become fashionable to prepare long-term strategies. Russia's plans extend until 2025 while those of Kazakhstan reach through until 2050. Belarus has a similar document: the National Strategy for Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of the Country until 2030. Based on three pillars — people, the economy and ecology — it's an extensive document, covering over 130 pages, detailing the country's path towards sustainable development and looking at long-term risks.

According to purchasing power parity, Belarus is one of the leading states among its neighbours, and is relatively stable against the global background. A recent study by the International Labour Organisation shows that, in most countries, people spend the lion's share of their earnings — up to 70 percent — on food. Belarusians spend just 40 percent of their income in this way, and the proportion seems likely to continue to fall, as it has over the past decade.

Such trends are always encouraging. With this in mind, the future is looking attractive.

Remain optimistic!

'Punishments should differ'

By Vladimir Khromov

President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, demands country's supervisory bodies act with care and impartiality, speaking at session dedicated to work of State Control Committee

"You're aware of my instructions regarding the efficient use of budget funds and state-owned assets. Rational use of each Rouble from the budget is a guarantee of our country's security," noted the President. "We must live within our means and ensure maximum efficiency."

Mr. Lukashenko added that it's necessary to control budget expenditure and the use of state-owned assets, saying that this is one of the most important functions of the state. "However, we



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need to act carefully and impartially," stressed the Head of State.

Mr. Lukashenko underlined that the Committee is under direct subordination to the President, having special status. He stressed, "This is the central

At the President's session

body for the whole system of regulatory and supervisory authorities. Your work should be an example to all inspectors."

The efficiency of state control bodies is checked by an inter-departmental group, headed by the Prosecutor General, un-

der the President of Belarus. The President noted that the monitoring report is not the first such this year, saying, "The activity of the General Prosecutor's Office has been examined across corresponding areas, as has the activity of other government agencies. There are drawbacks everywhere that need to be eliminated, while simultaneously targeting further improvement of work," asserted Mr. Lukashenko.

"There are no closed topics in Belarus and nor should there be. Everyone is equal before the law. From time to time, we monitor the work of high-ranking officials and the areas of activity headed by them," emphasised the President. "Through these inspections, I want to understand how efficiently the current scheme is functioning."

Opportunities for bilateral interaction should be used to the full

Belarus and United Arab Emirates are keen on mutually beneficial co-operation across a wide range of issues



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During meeting at Foreign Ministry of Belarus

By Alexander Pimenov

Belarus' Foreign Minister, Vladimir Makei, speaking at the third session of the Belarus-UAE Joint Committee on Co-operation between the Governments of Belarus and the United Arab Emirates, has noted that collaboration between our two countries has significantly stepped up, across various spheres. Contacts are being developed between ministries and departments and tourist exchanges are on the rise, showing 'willingness for mutually beneficial interaction', as asserted by the Minister.

Belarus and the UAE hold regular meetings at vari-

ous levels, testifying to the friendly nature of our bilateral relations. "The United Arab Emirates are among Belarus' leading partners in the Middle East. I'd like to stress, however, that the potential of our co-operation is still hugely untapped," believes Mr. Makei. "We need to shift from ordinary trade to deeper production co-operation, envisaging joint companies and technology transfer."

Our two countries have good prospects to develop co-operation in investment, industry, agriculture and food, as well as sport, tourism, healthcare, and science.

The UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, An-

war Mohammed Gargash, noted that our two countries have great mutual relations, including in the political area. "Our major goal today is to find ways to use the current base of bilateral collaboration to further advance relations in the trade-economic and investment sectors," he stressed.

The third session of the Belarus-UAE Joint Committee on Intergovernmental Co-operation was hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with Belarus represented by Vladimir Makei. The UAE was represented by the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Mohammed Gargash.

Necessary path

By Mikhail Matievsky

Belarus would like to have good relations with the USA but won't be running before the hounds, notes Alexander Lukashenko, making new appointments at Foreign Ministry and diplomatic missions

"We've stated our position; this is an empire, the world's leading power, and we need to have good relations with them. However, we should by no means get ahead of ourselves and make false promises," stresses Mr. Lukashenko. "We've chosen a direction for the development of our relations, and we should follow this path."

Mr. Lukashenko's remarks on Donald Trump's election as US President, made in September, have not gone unnoticed by that country.

"No one supported Trump more openly and sincerely, whole-heartedly and without any obsequious moves, than us," Mr. Lukashenko asserts. "We took a certain position and kept to it. We held that position honestly and sincerely."

Priorities specified again

By Alexey Fedosov

Jean-Marc Ayrault, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development of France, expresses his gratitude to Belarus for the high level of organisation of the 'Normandy Four' ministerial meeting, held in Minsk on November 29th, as discussed with Head of the French Foreign Ministry and Belarusian Ambassador to France, Pavel Latushko



Jean-Marc Ayrault

Jean-Marc Ayrault also hailed the success of the 1st Belarusian-French Inter-regional Business Forum in Minsk, underlining the importance for our two countries of developing trade-economic co-operation.

The meeting took place as part of the annual Christmas meeting at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development. The event aims to support the activity of foreign diplomatic missions accredited in France. The event traditionally gathers heads of diplomatic representations, French government bodies, and the country's outstanding political and public figures.

Eleven ambassadors have commenced their work

Head of State accepts credentials from ambassadors of Burkina Faso, Indonesia, Canada, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mongolia, Finland, France, Eritrea, Estonia, and the Apostolic Nuncio to Belarus

By Vasily Kharitonov

The President has emphasised that, this year, Belarus marks the 25th anniversary of its sovereignty. “Within a relatively short period of time, we’ve overcome an economic recession caused by the collapse of the USSR and, in fact, have restored a socially-oriented state. We’ve carried out systematic modernisation in virtually all industries and sectors of the economy,” noted Mr. Lukashenko, addressing the heads of mission. “We’re rightly proud of our state-of-the-art spheres of work: nuclear energy, space exploration, biotechnology, and defence technologies.”

The Head of State believes that Belarus is seen as an oasis of stability in the region, promoting such values as peace and security. “We consistently advocate for the resolution of conflict situations using civilised methods, at the negotiating table. Such situations must be solved without the use of military force, without any political or economic pressure. Minsk has become an important platform for the regulation of regional crises today,” asserted Mr. Lukashenko.

The President asserted that the new composition of the National Assembly was formed in September 2016 and expressed hope for the expansion of inter-parliamentary co-operation.



Ambassadors of foreign states and Belarus' Foreign Minister, Vladimir Makei (in the centre)

He underlined that Belarus is always open to co-operation and to implementing mutually beneficial projects. “Belarus has one of the most open economies in the world. Besides taking measures to promote business, we’re doing our best to advance international trade-economic ties,” reminded the President.

Belarus is one of the founders of the Eurasian Economic Union. The Head of State is convinced that, by developing economic relations with Belarus, foreign states will appreciate the truly unlimited prospects granted by access to the common market of the EAEU.

According to Mr. Lukashenko, Belarus pays special attention to co-operation with EU countries, promoting

the ‘integration of integrations’, and placing its hopes with neighbours in this respect.

The President stressed that Lithuania is an important foreign economic partner in Europe for Belarus, primarily in the foreign economic sphere. “We’re working rather efficiently in transport-transit and investment areas. We need to make more progress in this field and use our existing potential to the full,” said the Head of State.

Belarus is also open to fruitful dialogue with Finland. “The attraction of investments and the use of modern Finnish technologies in the modernisation of Belarusian enterprises are of special importance for our country,” noted the President.

“It’s hard to overestimate the role of France as a political and economic ‘heavy hitter’ in the European Union and worldwide. We hope that the French Republic will support our commitment to a multi-vector foreign policy and our major involvement in international economic relations,” stated the Belarusian leader.

Belarus is ready to expand all-round contacts, including political and trade-economic co-operation with Estonia.

“Our country is interested in pragmatic interaction with Luxembourg in all aspects of bilateral, regional, and global collaboration. Taking into account the status of Luxembourg as one of the financial centres of Europe, we’re interested in bolstering economic

contacts, primarily in the credit and investment sphere,” added Mr. Lukashenko.

The Belarusian President also hopes to strengthen co-operation with the Vatican. “For our country, the Vatican is a special partner in international dialogue. We enjoy complete understanding and trust with the heads of the Roman Catholic Church and His Holiness Pope Francis,” stressed the Head of State. Mr. Lukashenko is confident that the new Apostolic Nuncio will contribute to the further strengthening of traditionally friendly and fruitful bilateral co-operation.

The Head of State sees good prospects for expanding co-operation with Canada. “The Canadian market looks

very promising for our country. We hope that the decision of the Canadian government to lift restrictions on trade with Belarus will contribute to the establishment of corresponding bilateral economic co-operation and strengthening of political dialogue,” the President said.

The development of relations with Indonesia is also of great interest to Belarus, especially taking into account that the country is the biggest economy in the ASEAN.

According to the President, Belarus has recently intensified dialogue with Mongolia. Our countries have resumed contacts at top levels and expanded the legal framework while enhancing trade-economic relations.

Mr. Lukashenko said that Belarus continues seeking common ground, with a view to expanding co-operation with African countries. In his words, Belarus boasts potential for positive experience in collaboration with Burkina Faso with regard to the supply of technical products. Mr. Lukashenko noted that Eritrea holds great promise.

At the meeting with the ambassadors, after the credentials ceremony, the President emphasised that Belarus is interested in building mutually beneficial co-operation with all states and integration associations.

Higher goals have been determined

By Alexey Fedosov

On meeting the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Belarus, H.E. Mr. Mohammad Reza Saburi, on the completion of his diplomatic mission in the country, President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, said that the forthcoming 2017 year will determine relations between our two countries

The Head of State remarked that much has already been accomplished, including a roadmap for bilateral co-operation for 2016-2017. He stated, “We now need to implement this plan. Why am I so

concerned about our collaboration? If Belarus and Iran use at least half of the available opportunities, it will be the most efficient co-operation project. You need everything manufactured in Belarus. We need your products. Let’s work together, setting up joint ventures in Belarus and Iran. Let’s finally show that we can liaise.”

Mr. Lukashenko underlined that, before the meeting of the presidents of our two countries, previous decisions need to be revisited. “We need to focus on promising projects and areas of interest in our co-operation roadmap. There is no other way,” the Belarusian leader is convinced. “I’d like you to inform the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of



Mohammad Reza Saburi

Iran and the President of Iran of my concerns. We’re ready to welcome the President of Iran at any time. I think that it will be a landmark meeting, launching a new stage in our co-operation.”

Mohammad Reza Saburi thanked the Head of State for the meeting and noted that he shares the President’s position. “My colleagues and I agree with you that we need to step up efforts to fully use our potential,” he said. “Iran is committed to raising the level of bilateral relations with Belarus.”

Obviously vital to determine priorities

By Yekaterina Knyazeva

Culture, tourism and economy are most promising areas of co-operative development between Israel and Vitebsk Region, notes Charge d’affaires of Israel to Belarus, Olga Slov

“It’s important for us to determine contact points and spheres of co-operation with the Vitebsk Region, particularly now — in anticipation of the arrival of the permanent Ambassador of Israel to Belarus. He’s been appointed and will soon begin work. There are many areas to be explored: joint ventures, cultural projects, and tourism between our countries. We’ve discussed this with the Governor of the Vitebsk Regional Executive Com-

mittee. I also visited the Vitebsk FEZ, where I heard co-operation proposals, and met with organisers of the *Slavianski Bazaar* International Festival of Arts. I’ve seen a number of exhibitions at Vitebsk museums too.”

The diplomat stresses that co-operation is long-established between the Vitebsk Region and Israel, with Israeli artists traditionally taking part in the *Slavianski Bazaar* Festival. Artists and photographers from Israel exhibit their works at Vitebsk galleries, and there are examples in trade and investment. Ms. Slov tells us, “I’ve toured the reproductive healthcare clinic, established jointly by Belarus and Israel. It intends to expand its scope of operation. I’m pleased to see co-operation develop in this manner.”

Benefit of investment is based on evidence

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development may help in preparations for pre-privatisation of Mostovdrev, Baranovichi Cotton Production Association, and Krinitisa JSC — as discussed by Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Semashko and new EBRD Office Head in Belarus, Alexander Pivovarsky

By Veronika Nikitina

“One of the areas of co-operation between Belarus and the EBRD is the bank’s assistance in conducting reform. We welcome your active participation in this area. Concrete



Modern high-tech fibreboard production at Mostovdrev JSC

projects are already under way, such as with Belinvestbank; its pre-privatisation preparation is in full swing,” Mr. Semashko commented.

The Moscow-Minsk Bank is also in the process of pre-privatisation preparation involving the EBRD. “In addition, last year, we identified three more companies as pilot projects: Mostovdrev, Baranovichi

Cotton Production Association, and Krinitisa. You are now studying the situation,” he added.

In turn, Mr. Pivovarsky confirmed that the bank is now working in a new direction: pre-privatisation investment in state-owned enterprises. “We’re analysing the situation at Mostovdrev and hope to attract a good investor, uniting efforts with

you,” he said. “We’ve also launched work at two other enterprises. We hope to be able to attract consultants by the end of the year, to conduct preliminary analysis of the situation, to help us to decide how we can work with businesses and whether we’ll be able to.”

Mr. Pivovarsky stressed that the EBRD attaches great impor-

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Since launching activity in Belarus in 1992, the EBRD has invested nearly 1.8 billion Euros, across approximately seventy projects, in various sectors of the economy.

tance to the project with Belinvestbank, which he views as an example of what the European bank can achieve in Belarus. “We’re satisfied with how the process of change is proceeding. It’s developing even faster than we expected. We’re now considering a new line, which will further strengthen the capital of the bank and create conditions for its further development,” he noted.

Mr. Semashko stressed that adoption of the EBRD’s new country strategy will enhance co-operation with the bank, especially within the public sector of Belarus, also extending the range of operations. All conditions for the move are available. “From 2003-2010, our average annual financial turnover was \$50-60 million. We’ve now achieved \$200-250 million but we can double this performance. We pin hopes on the EBRD’s contribution. Moreover, the new strategy makes it possible to negotiate with Belarus’ state bodies in a different way,” Mr. Semashko said.

According to Mr. Pivovarsky, joint projects can be realised in such areas as infrastructure, energy, communal services, the private sector and capital markets.

Impressive plan for three years

By Victor Khromov

From 2017-2019, the Belarusian Potash Company plans to ship 1.5 million tonnes of fertilisers to China — as envisaged by a memorandum of co-operation between the Belarusian company and China National Chemical Construction Corporation (CNCCC)

The Director General of the Belarusian Potash Company, Yelena Kudryavets, has signed the document with CNCCC President Xia Qinglong, during a visit by the Chinese company to Belarus. The first memorandum on co-operation between the two companies was signed in December 2013 and has been fulfilled.

The new document provides for selling 1.5 million tonnes of potash fertilisers to China between 2017 and 2019. The volume of shipments is important for both sides and testifies to the long-term nature of co-operation between the two companies.

Ms. Kudryavets believes that



Fertilisers are dispatched

the memorandum will contribute to stronger, long-term, mutually beneficial co-operation between the Belarusian Potash Company and CNCCC. Xia Qinglong mentioned the considerable accomplishments secured by the Belarusian company on the Chinese market, saying, “I’m impressed with the high level of manufacturing processes and the state-of-the-art technologies at Belaruskali. We appreciate the responsible approach, reliability, and quality of our Belarusian partner, which inspires our confidence in mutually beneficial co-operation.” The Belarusian Potash Company intends to work with CNCCC to optimise potash sales in China and improve logistical solutions.

Viewing reserves as a safety net for the state

In November 2016, Belarus’ money-box rose by \$21.2m, with National Bank gold and foreign currency reserves exceeding \$4.8bn, as of December 1th, 2016

By Yevgeny Kononov

There has been a steady increase in gold and foreign currency reserves since March 2016: a rise of about \$700 million for the year. This reserve looks impressive, as financial analyst Alexander Mukha notes. He believes it inspires confidence in the monetary policy of the state: among the public, business circles, investors, and international financial organisations.

Data confirms a stable trend on the home foreign exchange market. Currency supply is exceeding demand, allowing the National Bank to replenish reserves by buying foreign currency on the home market without external borrowing. It’s a healthier and more care-

ful option to bolster international reserves, than taking out a loan.

To ensure macroeconomic stability next year, the Government and the National Bank will take measures to increase gold and foreign currency reserves, using our surplus balance of payments. Earlier, the Deputy Chairman of the Board of the National Bank, Sergei Kalechits, told us, “We’ll increase gold and foreign currency reserves to an equivalent

of \$5.4 billion. According to our calculations, this figure will be worth the import value of 2.2 months of goods and services. In world practice, an indicator worth three months of imports is considered optimum. However, experts have other methods as well.”



International reserve assets of Belarus (according to IMF methodology, \$mln.)

Sedately pedaling

By Elvira Goroshko

Oncoming traffic

Today's fast, convenient buses, trolleybuses and trams run on time and provide a viable alternative to taking the car. Virtual displays show arrival times to the minute.

The Minsktrans website shows not only schedules but route maps for public transport, from point A to point B. There are even mobile applications for tracking desired routes.

Minsk metro simplifies the lives of passengers, allowing them to travel even without money. You can pay via SMS, sending a message to 2255 and scanning your e-ticket directly from the screen of your handset onto a special ticket barrier.

Following in European footsteps, Minsk is taking measures to encourage the use of public transport, and deter private car use in the centre. In Sweden, car parking in the city centre can cost up to \$15,000 annually. Drivers have to pay to gain entry not only in Stockholm but in London.

Trustworthy bicycle

Each year about 50km of dedicated cycle tracks appear in the city, with special markings and traffic lights. New paths are being laid and new rental stores are appearing. This past summer, 37,700 people made use of their services.

"Fewer than one percent of Minsk residents use a bicycle to get around the city, and very few people travel to work by bike. In the

Netherlands and Sweden, every third person does so," says Yuri Vazhnik, Chairman of the Belarusian Association of Experts and Transport Surveyors. "However, statistics looks encouraging. Over the past five years, the number of bikers has tripled. Today, we have 250km of bicycle track in Minsk. For full coverage, we'd need 600 tracks."

Minsk's State Tourism and Environmental Centre for Children and Youth has launched the *Ecovelik* project: a network of cycling paths through the capital and suburbs. The number of accidents has been reduced to about thirty, thanks to cycle paths, and only one person has lost their life on a cycle track so far each year.

In the capital, you can rent a bike for free, through the *Good Rover* project. You register online, gaining a special code, and collect your bike from a specific location, for return within twelve hours to any parking location.

"To make cycling popular, a bicycle parade was organised in the city, and nine thousand people took part," says Pavel Gorbunov, head of the Minsk cycling community. "We also held *Shabli Farmstead* international festival and the *Velomiss-2016* contest. We attract primarily pupils and students. It's vital that we encourage a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age."



Bicycles gaining increasing popularity

Ride to your heart's content!

For the past five years, an oncological surgeon from Minsk's Oncology Centre has cycled to work

"From end to end, Minsk stretches only 20km, so you can use a bike as your main means of transport for most of the year; public transport should be for occasional use only," says Mr. Kiselev, who is a surgeon and well-known activist for Minsk cycling and the environmental movement.

Mr. Kiselev, aged 50, is well-respected. His off-road cycle stands near his house, covered

with dust.

"I have three bicycles," he says. "I'm currently mostly using a Dahon folding bike, which I keep under the desk. It wasn't cheap, but it paid for itself long ago."

Every day he covers 10km and tries to extend his journey home through Minsk's beautiful parks.

"My health has definitely improved, which is something money can't buy!" he asserts. "Thanks to this hobby, I've met some great people. We've travelled the length and breadth of Russia, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Poland and the Baltic States. In the near future, we plan to visit Smolensk."

Homeland will generously provide birch juice...

By Boris Orekhov

Family of command pilot of current space crew, Oleg Novitsky, prepares unusual gift from Belarus

Five weeks have passed since the 'Soyuz-MS-03' spacecraft was launched. It has successfully aligned with the Russian Rassvet module of the Russian segment of the International Space Station (ISS). The international crew, headed by Oleg Novitsky of Belarus, has moved to the orbital house, where he, together with American Peggy Whitson and French Thomas Pesquet, will spend 180 days.

There's no time for relaxation in orbit, since there's much to achieve, under extreme non-gravity conditions. Command pilot Novitsky is conducting an experiment, entitled *Pilot-T*.

State Corporation Roscosmos explains, "The data received as a result of on-board research will help answer complex questions connected with cosmonauts' ability to fulfil duties under the long-term influence of micro-gravitation. We'll use this data to help develop reliable life support during lengthy space missions, or after landing on other planets, such as Mars."

The cosmonauts maintain the technical condition of the ISS and undertake two-hours on exercise machines daily. The station should have 'received' a transportation spacecraft, called 'Progress' but it, sadly, burnt while travelling through the dense atmosphere. Roscosmos assures us that this loss won't affect the life support of the crew — which has sufficient food and water on board.

Mr. Novitsky was very upset by the 'Progress' craft burning up, as it contained a small parcel from home, including a drawing of his younger daughter Margarita's palm, drawn out on paper. She is just six months old. Now, he'll have to wait for February's transportation spacecraft to arrive.

Yulia Novitskaya, his wife, has promised to send her husband's favourite birch juice, together with another drawing.

New generation dosimeter

By Alexey Fedosov

Belarusian innovators again surprise us, with smart dosimeter joining ranks of smart watches, TV sets and refrigerators

The innovation has been shortlisted for the prestigious European *Elektra Award 2016*, explains Vadim Radzivil, a co-designer for the device, and the founder and head of his start-up company. He tells us, "The smart-

dosimeter completely synchronises with your smartphone or tablet, enabling you to see a world map of radioactive zones. Users can then monitor the environment, as well as the surface of construction materials and food products. For those who travel by air, the device has a 'flight' mode and, on landing, offers a report on the radiation exposure of the flight and how many flights are still available before



A smart dosimeter

the person reaches their annual dose limit."

Initially, the dosimeter was created for household purposes. However, it's also suitable for use at nuclear power plants, and various forestries are keen to utilise the device, including beyond Belarus.

Country should be recognisable

By Olga Korneeva

Plans to launch single national tourist brand for Belarus in 2017

According to Vitaly Gritsevich, the Deputy Director of the Tourism Department at the Sports and Tourism Ministry, a single national tourist brand is to be launched for Belarus in 2017. "Next year, we'll conduct lots of events, including those relating to the creation and promotion of a single national

brand, enabling us to position our country abroad, as Georgia is doing," notes Mr. Gritsevich. He believes that the creation of the brand won't involve major expenditure, since the main focus is upon promotion.

"We plan to work with tourist operators in this direction," adds Mr. Gritsevich.

His department aims to develop internal tourism, raising export revenue to that seen in 2013-2014, when the situation was favourable.

Visiting a place of true beauty

Bykhov's coat of arms, with crossed guns, eloquently speaks of the heroic past of the 14th century Belarusian city



Emblem at entrance to the city

By Svetlana Markova

Tower of the Chodkiewicz and Sapieha families

The fortress palace on the bank of the River Dnieper is one of the city's most mysterious constructions. A royal gift to hetman Jan Karol Chodkiewicz, from Zygmunt August, it was made from wood in the 16th century. It later passed into the hands of magnate Sapieha, who expanded the castle, consolidated it, and erected new residential quarters. During recent excavations, archaeologists found samples of ceramics from that time: heraldic tiles of the Chodkiewicz and Sapieha families, and a building tool dated to about five hundred years ago.

Sadly, the fortress was attacked often, and is now in some ruin. In expectation of restoration, it has been conserved. Its watchtowers have already acquired their former, 17th century shape, and can be climbed for a panoramic view of Bykhov.

Tolstoy family estate

Near Bykhov, in the quiet village of Grudinovka, you'll find the noble estate of the Tolstoys, presented to Count Dmitry Tolstoy by Catherine the Second, after the partition of the Rzecz Pospolita. From 1812-1820, the Count was Governor of Mogilev.

The two-storeyed home, with columns, is sometimes called 'Onegin's house'. Crowned with a flat dome and spire, it's a typical early 19th century Russian estate house, as the Onegin or Larin family might have lived in.

Its park once occupied ten hectares, and contained more than forty tree species, including some very rare. Even today, you can walk its noble avenues, or sit on the spacious balcony, enjoying magnificent views of the ancient fountain, which remains today.



Bird's eye view of the city and Bykhov Castle



At Big Bard-Fishing Festival

Miraculous icon of Barkolabovo

Legend says that, more than 350 years ago, the icon chose its resting place. Prince Pozharsky, returning from Lithuania to Russia, had the icon of Barkolabovo Mother of God in his baggage. Just eight kilometres from Bykhov, near Holy Ascension Monastery, his horse stopped, rooted to the spot, and would only move

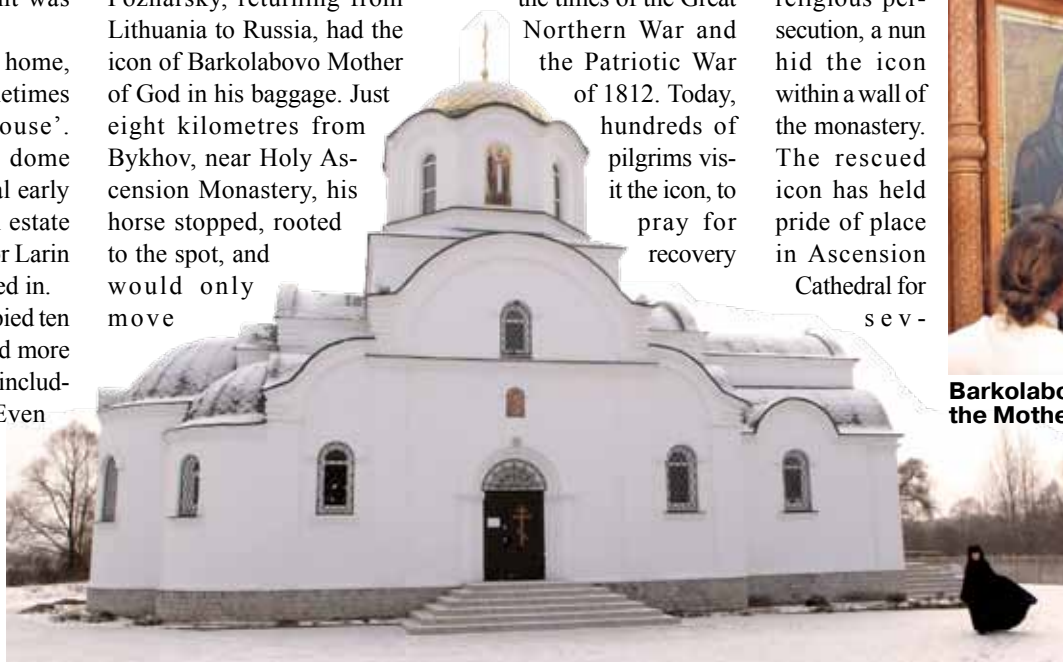
again once he'd given the icon to the monastery.

The first miraculous cases of healing occurred during the times of the Great Northern War and the Patriotic War of 1812. Today, hundreds of pilgrims visit the icon, to pray for recovery

from illness.

It's a real miracle that the icon has survived. During the days of Soviet religious persecution, a nun hid the icon within a wall of the monastery. The rescued icon has held pride of place in Ascension Cathedral for

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St. John the Forerunner Church in Barkolabovo settlement



A synagogue in Bykhov

eral decades.

Not far from Bykhov is the Church of the Lady of Kazan, in Barkolabovo, with its golden dome. Constructed in 1904, in pseudo-Russian style, its windows come in all shapes, with corbel arches and double columns. In Soviet days, a school used the building.



Barkolabovo icon of the Mother of God

The Barkolabovo Chronicles, by priest Fiodor Filipovich, were written nearby, describing life in Belarusian settlements, from 1563-1608. Bykhov has a monument devoted to the unique historical document.

MT REFERENCE:

Later Bykhov and the fortress passed into the hands of magnate Sapieha, who expanded the castle, consolidated it, and erected new residential quarters. During recent excavations, archaeologists found samples of ceramics from that time: heraldic tiles of the Chodkiewicz and Sapieha families, and a building tool dated to about five hundred years ago.

Synagogue with defensive slits

A Renaissance-style synagogue is located near the castle, built in the early 17th century as a defensive construction, with walls about two metres thick. A turret on one corner has slits instead of windows, to allow defensive action to be taken from inside, firing weapons. Other churches surround the central square, creating a multistage system of protection against enemies.

The former women's gymnasium was used to imprison officers of the Russian army in 1917, including the Supreme Commander in Chief of the Russian Army, Lavr Kornilov, a hero of the Russo-Japanese War and the First World War. A local forestry enterprise is now located there.

Bard-fishing

The Bykhov District boasts giant pines nearly two hundred years old, and Staritsa Nature Reserve, in the Dnieper River valley, features 'Zakharenka' waterfall. Meanwhile, Chigirinskoye water basin is one of the most popular recreation zones for Belarusians and for visitors, with its sandy beach. Agro-estates offer tranquil retreat, water sports, and excellent fishing. The international musical-sports festival *Big Bard-Fishing* is held there, attracting thousands of fans of singing and fish soup.

There's definitely no need to be rich to become a collector

There was a famous collector, George Costakis, known for the symbolic phrase that Chagall's paintings should have been bought when his works cost less than a sack of potatoes. Mr. Costakis has never been a very rich man himself but has managed to collect a major share of Russian avant-garde pictures and icons.

By Vladimir Stepan

I talked to Belarusian collector, Alexander Radaev. All art collectors are much alike: their eyes sparkle when the conversation deals with pictorial art or graphics. We met near the Yanka Kupala Museum which often hosts exhibitions where our collectors show masterpieces from their collections. I've collected quotes and sayings by George Costakis and Alexander Radaev. Who knows: maybe, in forty years, his collection will become similarly famous, work by our artists will be saved as a result and art lovers will be able to appreciate them.

"Collecting is a common hobby for me and my wife. We bought our first works — canvases by Alexander Ksendzov — at the artist's studio. Later, we got rid of many pictures for various reasons. Some of them were acquired by mistake but we still keep paintings by Mr. Ksendzov. All collectors face such choices. In the course of time, the process captured me so much that it became key focus of my life. It is my inner life, my relief, my hobby. As a child, I collected stamps, airplanes and cars. In turn, I collect pictures for my soul: they are a kind of deep and inner searching," Alexander says.

"Rationality is the main enemy of a collector. The more time spent on thinking, the worse the result. The key is to rely only on yourself as the decision is made exclusively by you! A true collector is ready to give everything for a work they want to obtain. It is easier to suffer need than to lose the desired item. They can sometimes spend a

monthly salary or money saved for a vacation, new house or a car," said Mr. Costakis.

Mr. Radaev continued, "If a picture fits into the theme of my collection, then I would have to buy it. Around a decade ago, I travelled



Alexander Radaev



Mstislav Dobuzhinsky. A sketch. 1932.



Yevgeny Krasovsky. Florence. 1961

to Lithuania and visited its antique shops asking for works by Mstislav Dobuzhinsky and Ferdynand Ruszczyk. The shop assistants looked at me with a strange smile. I now understand why. An old bookseller at one of the bookstores brought out a book, and between its pages, he kept a little sketch by Mr. Dobuzhinsky (of the right side of the curtain for

the *Hamlet* play for a Kaunas theatre). I asked the price and he named a sum. I did not have the amount at that time but I returned to that second-hand bookshop later and bought the card by Mstislav Dobuzhinsky. The status of a collection is defined by such works."

"The collector must not trade. It is always better to overpay than

to bargain a discount or reduce the price. This is the golden rule — tested by time and my experience. If you bargain too hard, you'll definitely get a discount. However, you'll then get a reputation of being a greedy and shrewd dealer. As a result, the money will work against you."

Mr. Radaev notes, "If someone had told me that a work by Mr. Byalynitsky-Birulya or Mr. Zhukovsky is being sold somewhere at an affordable price, I would have raced there that night. I have no works by these masters in my collection so far. It's impossible to buy a work by Mr. Zhukovsky and Mr. Ruszczyk here while they can be found at Polish auctions. I sometimes ask myself: why are we collecting? The reply might be that the process is sometimes more interesting than the result. An ideal collection for me is when a certain topic is revealed. It's not the number of works that matters. We collect works by Belarusian artists of the second half of the twentieth century. When we succeed in buying anything, we are pleased — hanging pictures on the walls and admiring them. At a certain point we began collecting 'old' works rather than acquiring simply everything we liked. As a result, the topic of our collection — *Great Old Belarusians* — was started."

"One of the most important rules for a collector is that they should have a limit: to draw a line near which they should stop in their

collecting passion. Any collection must have limits. It's necessary to get rid of some pieces."

Mr. Radaev continues, "My wife is a more emotional collector. If she loves something, then she 'sparkles'. In turn, I study who is the author of a picture, and when it was painted. If I know that works of an artist are quite difficult to find today, I will buy even a small sketch. It's impossible to make money on collecting. Moreover, the market has dipped: it's sometimes impossible to sell a piece at the price paid for it several years ago. However, on the other hand, this is a great time for those who want to supplement their collection or to start collecting. Even now, canvases — trapped in rural clubs and libraries in Soviet times — come to the surface. They were distributed there by the Union of Artists. They may have been severely damaged and required restoration. I was lucky enough to find a wonderful graphical work by the artist Romanov in a provincial hotel room; the picture was bought many years ago and has miraculously been preserved. It's unreal to find a Chagall in Belarus now. Everything has been cleaned up. Meanwhile, I knew a man who told me that, back in the 1990s, a picture by Pen could have been exchanged for two pairs of jeans in Vitebsk. However, there are still no works by Chagall! Not long ago, an autograph by Marc Chagall was sold in Moscow: the painter signed his catalogue for Yekaterina Furtseva. There is an autograph of Chagall signed for Maxim Tank (with a drawing). We have a few people who knowingly collect art. Even if a person has money, they simply buy and fill the space — not thinking much of the artist. In the best case, they purchase what they like."

What do Belarusians usually prefer to have for dinner

By Olga Korneeva

Different nations — different eating habits

International market research company IPSOS studies our eating habits, comparing how various nations eat, and at what times. Dinner is the most popular meal of the day, with 80 percent of respondents never missing it.

Despite the 'not eating

after 6pm' rule, most Belarusians dine around 7-8pm, as do Russians, Ukrainians and Kazakhs. Georgians eat as late as 11pm; perhaps it's no coincidence that the country is the birthplace of Borjomi mineral water.

Belarusian dinner dishes tend to be quite heavy, comprising potato, meat and vegetables. In contrast, those in the Baltic States often

choose salads or sandwiches. The Ukrainians prefer warm meals, and the country leads in the volume of alcohol consumed during dinner.

Belarusians lead in terms of eating outside of meals, with 72 percent admitting to snacking.

What do Belarusians eat
Predictably, the most popular food among Belarusians is potatoes. According to the

National Statistical Committee, each Belarusian eats 170kg of potatoes annually: more than in any other CIS country (550g daily, against an ideal of 350g). Daily rations of fruit and vegetables should reach 500-550g, but most of us eat half this amount: just 145kg per year.

According to statistics, Belarusians eat around 89kg of meat annually, or about



250g daily: up from 88kg in 2002 and 62kg in 2005.

Heavy dinner vs light hunger. Dining habits around the world.

26 percent of people have a late, heavy dinner and often choose food rich in calories,

making up for it being so long since lunch. 58 percent of respondents try not to overeat, aiming only to moderately satisfy hunger. Meanwhile, 16 percent prefer to leave the table with a light feeling of hunger.



A representative poses for photographs beside the Five Golden Rings part of the Fire Garden at the launch of Christmas at Kew

Kew Gardens in London lights up for Christmas

Across a frozen lake, more than 60,000 lights dance to the sound of popular Christmas carols in London

This is the scene that welcomes visitors to The Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew in London. The world famous gardens have been transformed into an enchanted forest of more than 60,000 lights. This winter trail for Christmas is inspired by the Gardens themselves, as the trees, temples and glasshouses of Kew are playfully lit and all aglow.

The trail — just over 1.5 kilome-

tres — leads visitors past two huge Christmas trees, a scented garden and all kinds of nature-inspired lights.

“The original idea was to do something festive at Christmas that really brought the gardens to life at a time when people wouldn’t normally visit. We’re usually closed in the evenings particularly in winter and so that was the idea behind it and just to allow people to come and enjoy the gardens

in the run up to Christmas with some festive spirit, but really to showcase how beautiful the gardens are in the dark,” explained Sandra Botterell, Marketing Director, Kew Gardens.

One installation is called ‘Bloom’ by the international artists collective Squidsoup. It consists of 1,000 individual spheres of light, each also emanating sound.

“The trees are illuminated, you go

past some really special and ancient trees. We have trees here that are four or five hundred years old so there’re the stories of the trees as well,” added Sandra Botterell.

One of the most popular attractions is the LED light tunnel which ripples with different colours. It has proved a hit with all ages and the perfect place to pose for those Christmas selfies.

More anti-government protests in Poland over press freedom

Anti-government protests have continued for a third day in Warsaw over plans to restrict journalists’ access to lawmakers in parliament

Carrying banners which said ‘we will not give up on freedom’, several thousand marched outside the constitutional court to thank its outgoing head, Andrzej Rzeplinski, for having opposed changes which they claim are against the law.

Opposition MPs say the ruling Law and Justice party (PiS) is trying to stifle press freedom with its plans to limit the number of reporters allowed to cover parliament.

As well as the number of journalists permitted to enter the parliament building being restricted, only five selected Polish TV stations will be allowed to record or broadcast parliamentary sessions.

The government denies the measures are restrictive.

Political tension is rising in Poland between its conservative government and the pro-European Union opposition.

For the first time PiS supporters also came out onto the streets.

The new rules for journalists have led to the biggest political stand-off in the country for years.

A wider conflict started building last year after the PiS took power and began introducing sweeping changes in the legislative sector, the media and education.



Amazon makes drone delivery history

Internet retailer Amazon has revealed it has made its first drone delivery in Europe and the first ever directly to a customer

It happened on December 7th in Britain, where earlier this year the authorities gave permission for drone test flights with restrictions on where they can take place.

The autonomous drone carried one of the company’s TV streaming devices and a bag of popcorn and dropped them off on the lawn of a house near Cambridge, not far from the distribution centre where the drones are based.

Amazon said the delivery oc-

curred 13 minutes after the order was received online.

It released a video documenting the delivery in which the narrator said, “We’re starting with two customers now and in the coming months we’ll offer participation to dozens of customers living within several miles of our UK facility, and then growing to hundreds more.”

Amazon is also running a trial programme in the United States and in July made the first drone delivery there to a ‘7-Eleven’ convenience store in Reno, Nevada. It transported a chicken sandwich, coffee and a donut.

Finding the best suit for a visit to the red planet

Which kind of space suit will an astronaut wear on Mars? In order to prepare for a future human mission on the red planet scientists are holding tests in order to figure out how to live in near-isolation.

Staff members and students at the Rhode Island School of Design are working on a new adjustable suit, which is expected to be tested during the next Mars simulation mission inside a dome in Hawaii.

“We’re designing this suit for use at HI-SEAS, which is a Mars analog — it’s a practice of what we’d eventually like to do on Mars. What the suit would do is to help the simulated astronauts there more realistically do their Extra Vehicular Activities, or EVAs,” explained Andrzej Stewart, Simulated Mars Astronaut.

He was the chief engineering officer on the last Hawaii Space Exploration Analog and Simulation, a year-long simulation mission which ended in August.

Beyond the technical aspects of



the spacesuit, he has also found out new important elements.

“One thing I noticed while wearing the suit today it’s also very isolating. So there’s a certain psychological aspect that comes from being isolated from the environment, as well that’s important that we simulate,” he said.

Real space suits are designed to work in zero gravity, for this reason they are too heavy to use on an

Earth environment, as the NASA-funded Mars simulation dome in Hawaii. Another issue with the real space suit is the extremely high cost. “Even people inside of NASA can’t routinely get access to a real space suit sometimes. Real space suits are millions of Dollars apiece. So we really were trying to create something that was affordable,” pointed out Michael Lye, Simulated Mars Suit Designer.

Materials prepared with aid of information agencies

Tours helping familiarity with our bright history

National History Museum of Belarus celebrates 60th anniversary since foundation, and its position as one of the most popular museums countrywide to have unique exhibits

By Veniamin Mikheev

Preserving, studying, and presenting

The museum at 12 Karl Marx Street, in Minsk, is popularly known as the museum with a gun. It's been known as the State Museum of the BSSR, the National Museum of History and Culture of Belarus, and finally, as the National History Museum of the Republic of Belarus.

Its goal remains unchanged: to preserve and study its treasures, and present them to the public as gems of historical and cultural heritage. Its *National History Museum: from Past to Present* exhibition is devoted to its anniversary.

The museum owns the country's largest collection, of more than 450,000 items: coins, archaeological treasures, old print publications, national costumes, and documents. There are modern interactive projects and installations, to attract younger visitors.

Present-day features of exhibitions

The exhibition comprises two sections. The first introduces individual pages of the museum's history, through documents, photographs, and unique artefacts. Some are the museum's calling cards, while others are new to the collection.

The silver cup of the Ogiński family, a candlestick belonging to King Czap-ski, a gold watch once worn by the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the BSSR, Nikolay Goloded, and many others can be found in the first section of the exhibition.

The second section introduces visitors to exhibition projects across the decades. Some posters date back to 1966: a year before the first permanent exhibition of the State Museum of the BSSR



Vytaut



opened.

The National History Museum is inextricably connected with several Belarusian museums of the early 20th century: Minsk

Church History and Archaeology Museum; Minsk Regional Museum; the Belarusian State Museum; and the Belarusian Local History and Folk Museum of Ivan Lutskevich, in Vilnius.

The museum was established by the order of the Council of Ministers of the BSSR, on December 15th, 1956, in Minsk, named the Belarusian State Museum of History and Regional Studies.

In 1964, it was renamed as the State Museum of the BSSR. On November 2nd, 1967, it launched an exhibition. In 1992, the museum was once again renamed, as the National

Museum of History and Culture of Belarus. The present name appeared in 2009.

The museum holds paintings, sketches,

sculptures, decorative arts, manuscripts, books, printed publications, antique editions, archaeological artefacts, coins, precious metals and stones, botanical-related items, historical seals, weapons and ammunition, clothing, musical instruments, objects from the history of engineering, household and ethnographic items, photos, and film and audio records.



Jagaila

From the remote past

The remains of primitive dwellings made from mammoth bones (dating from the 18-16th millennium BC) are among the museum's treasures, alongside Neolithic tools from silicon mines, a wooden human figure (from the late 3rd-early 2nd millennium BC), and an ancient pagan idol (6th century). There are medieval crafts and ornaments made from bone, glass and amber, metal icons, the altar gates from the church in David-Gorodok (18th century), a wooden religious sculpture, a set of silver belt plates from the 15th and 16th centuries, Slutsk belts, multicoloured tiles, and items from the Naliboki glass-works.

The collection of early printed books and manuscripts includes



Exhibition from National History Museum's exposition

editions from Belarusian printing houses from the 16th and 18th centuries: *Menaia for March and April* (1521, Turov); *Ordinal and Typicon* (16th century); and *Heirmologion* (1651, Kuteino). There are royal and ducal letters with pendent seals from the 16th century, and the museum keeps more than eighty hoards of coins and other objects found within Belarus, including a hoard of Greek and Roman coins from the 1st and 2nd centuries, and a Minsk hoard, including coins, from the 17th century through to the 20th. There are coins from the ancient East, Greece, Rome and other countries.

The sphragistic collection includes confessional and personal seals, such as that of the Chief Tribunal of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania of Grodno cadence, dating from 1788. The museum also houses the most complete collections of Belarusian traditional costume, copper utensils, and pottery from all regions.

Among its documents are about 200 drawings detailing the Belarusian gentry's family trees. A number of museum items are included in the State Register of Historical and Cultural Treasures of the Republic of Belarus.

The museum houses the permanent exhibitions of *Ancient Belarus* and of *Belarus in 16th-18th Century Portraits and Heraldry*. The

first includes items dating from the Neolithic era, through to the 19th century, and shows visitors how early people lived on the territory of our country, forming tribal alliances, and establishing the first state entities, before creating the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It concludes with the years of Belarus as part of the Russian Empire.

Belarus in 16th-18th Century Portraits and Heraldry reflects one of the most complicated and controversial periods in the history of

Belarus: the time of the Rzecz Pospolita (mid 16th-late 18th century). It focuses upon the lives of the upper classes: magnates and gentry, and representatives of the aristocracy who played an important role in establishing and developing the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Rzecz Pospolita, as well as their decline.

It goes without saying that exhibitions are an important area of museum activity. Many are significant culturally, for Minsk, and for Belarus. Among recent visiting international exhibitions at the museum are *The Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania and its Reconstruction* (from the National Museum of Lithuania), *Precious Patterns* (from Moscow's State Historical Museum), *Treasures of Ukraine* (from Ukraine's National History Museum), and *Things Between Life and Death* (from Stockholm Army Museum). *The White Russia and its Neighbours* exhibition, arranged with the Russian Folk Museum, was a remarkable joint project. Meanwhile, several Belarusian museums and private collectors took part in a project initiated by the National History Museum: Belarus in World War I.

In total, cultural and educational activities are carried out in the form of guided tours, educational sessions, presentations, topical workshops, and various major museum events.

Wedding goblet of Bogdan Ogiński

Seagulls, always

Grodno's Regional Puppet Theatre has recently presented Chekhov's *Seagull*, modestly declaring itself Treplev's 'country theatre', despite the grandeur of its prominent director Oleg Zhyugzhda

By Tatiana Orlova

19th century country theatres provided entertainment for landowners, but director Oleg Zhyugzhda has conceived something very unusual.

Several years ago, I saw his *Cherry Orchard* at the puppet theatre in Mytishchi city, near Moscow. That performance was nominated for Russia's *Golden Mask Award*. It featured actors more than puppets.

In Grodno's *Seagull*, the puppets are slightly separated from their owners. In fact, Mr. Zhyugzhda adores puppets, especially marionettes, which few know how to work with. He is an expert himself. However, a puppet is completely dependent on the person working it, while an actor can express Chekhov's dramatic nuances more effectively. Oleg Zhyugzhda uses puppets in a subordinate position, with his actors avoiding hiding behind them; actors do not play the puppets' roles, rather moving into the foreground for important moments of dialogue.

Mr. Zhyugzhda has created his own beginning and end for the *Seagull*, inspired by unexpected dis-



Bravo to Grodno's puppeteers!

coveries. The performance begins with the fierce cry of seagulls, and men shooting them dead. The director, having read Chekhov many times, sees the birds as a metaphor for women, believing that Chekhov views them as the reason for men's broken destinies. They are weapons of seduction, dictatorship and whim, depriving men of their will and independence, forcing them to live by a woman's schedule.

While the birds look beautiful against blue skies, like a romantic ideal, near the ground, they appear noisy and impudent, with ugly beaks and disorderly gait. They

peck and swallow everything, indiscriminately.

Today, many people, having killed a seagull, wouldn't feel sorry for it. They certainly wouldn't keep it



Scene from *The Seagull*



Director Oleg Zhyugzhda

stuffed, as an artefact. Chekhov lived in Yalta for a long time, and had seen many of these birds. It's unlikely that he was sentimental about them. In his other plays, women, with their crying, define men's choices, preventing them from achieving something valuable in life.

There's no value in discussing Chekhov's misogyny (or the possibility of Mr. Zhyugzhda's). Women do define men's destinies in many ways. Cleverly, director Zhyugzhda removed character names

from a model bridge, until it becomes unstable. This metaphor, of humanity finding it difficult to live with truths, which deconstruct our 'safe space', acts as a direct communication with the audience.

Perhaps the greatest moment of truth in the Grodno performance is the scene in which Arkadina (played by Larisa Mikulich) pulls out a huge fish with a face similar to Trigorin's (the novelist, played by Vasily Leonov). She begins to attack him: moral violence has become physical violence.

The final scenes do not show Kostya Treplev shooting himself, as is 'traditional' but by the character (the son of the actress, played by Alexander Ratko) being shot by Nina. She then rushes into the lake.

The director has managed to transform the (sometimes dull) two-hour performance, without interval, into a mystery to be solved. Stones are scattered and nobody gathers them. The country commonwealth, including Arkadina's family, is collapsing, dying silently. Nobody will remember how they lived, suffered, or created.

Only the seagulls will remain, crying over the magical lake, calling the next master to solve the riddles of Chekhov's play.

from the performance programme, reducing Arkadina to 'actress' and Nina to 'the daughter of a rich landowner'. Masha is only 'the daughter of a manager' and Polina Andreevna is 'the wife of

a retired lieutenant'. The director steps back from existing interpretations of the play.

Each character, having told their personal story, pulls a stick

Present from overseas

By Vladimir Velikhov

An unusually generous gift was made to the Orsay Museum in Paris by millionaires from Texas, Marlene and Spencer Hays. According to their will, the museum will receive about 600 pictorial masterpieces — worth 350m Euros. The private collection includes the canvases by such outstanding painters as Edouard Vuillard, Pierre Bonnard, Edgar Degas and Amedeo Modigliani. This is the biggest foreign donation received by this museum over the last 70 years.

Spencer Hays, whose worth was estimated at \$400 million in the 1990s, earned his start capital by selling men's suits, books and other goods. The family began to collect works of art in the early 1970s. Initially, the Hays oriented towards American paintings but, after moving to Paris, focused on Post-Impressionist and avant-garde painters, as well as artists



Marlene and Spencer Hays

from the early 20th century.

The Hays collection boasts an unusual portrait of artist Chaïm Soutine, who was born in Smilovichi. Famous Italian artist Modigliani knew Soutine in Paris, helped support him financially, and tried to lodge him with his friend Léopold Zborowski. However, Zborowski's wife refused to accept the new lodger, inspiring an angry Modigliani to draw Soutine's portrait on the door of their house. The woman later sold the door to an Arab sheikh for a modest sum, and the work found its way to America.

Marlene and Spencer have already donated 187 works valued at 173m Euros to the museum. The remaining canvases will be transferred to France upon the couple's deaths under the condition that they all are exhibited in a dedicated space rather than are dispersed throughout the galleries. Curiously but the official ceremony of donating the collection took place in the Élysée Palace in the presence of the French President, François Hollande who awarded patrons of arts with National Order of the Legion of Honour.

Beauty with two diplomas

By Yuliana Leonovich

Belarusians continue to conquer modelling world

Belarusian Svetlana Kuznetsova recently won the *Mrs. Globe-2017* international beauty pageant, ahead of rivals from sixty-eight countries. Mrs. Kuznetsova is Belarus' first representative to win the major crown of this contest in the past twenty years. This year, Yulia Stupishina of Russia received the First Runner Up prize.

For those who follow the modelling history of our country, Mrs. Kuznetsova's success is no surprise. As Miss Kruk, the charming brunette won *Miss Belarus-1988* and was a finalist at *Miss Europe-1999*. She took part in *Miss World-2009*, and won prizes at *Miss Universe-2013* and *Missis Beauty Millennium International-2012*.



Svetlana has three children and works as a teacher of mathematics at a gymnasium school. She boasts two higher education degrees: the first from Grodno State University's Mathematics Department and the second from Russia's Higher School of Economics. In the all-Russian *Teacher of the Year-2010* contest, she was named among Moscow's top ten best teachers, receiving a governmental medal for her work in Russian education.

Youth returns to elite

In IIHF Ice Hockey U20 World Championship final match of Division I Group A, held in German Bremerhaven, the Belarusian team confidently defeats Austria 4:0, bringing place in world youth hockey elite for 2017

By Alexey Grishin

To gain a guaranteed place in the elite division, our Belarusian squad would have been satisfied with any winning result in the final match against Austria — even in overtime or through penalty shots. However, Yuri Faikov's players began decisively, though the final match score was not immediately reflected in the numbers on the board.

The opponent was broken by the middle of the second period, with two players sent off from the Austrian squad, and the score standing at 3:0 to Belarus. In the third period, our complete team showed its strength, with Yevgeny Astankov taking the last goal.

During the IIHF Ice Hockey U20 World Championship, Mr. Faikov's trainees also beat the French (6:3), the Norwegians (4:2) and the Kazakhs (3:1). However, they lost to Germany in the penalty series (3:4).



A moment from Belarus-Austria match

From the first, the Belarusian youth team had its sights set on returning to the elite division, which it left last season. Happily, the task has been met. This will be its eighth stint in the elite division, having played there three times under coach Vladimir Melenchuk and twice under Mikhail Zakharov. Under Mr. Zakharov's supervision, we were obliged to leave

the strongest division. Meanwhile, Eduard Zankovets and Alexander Belyavsky failed to take us back into the elite. The Belarusian youth team saw most success from 2000-2003, under Vladimir Melenchuk, staying in the elite for three seasons successively. No other coach has managed to preserve our place in the strongest division for more than one season.



Youth national team celebrates success

DIRECT SPEECH

Yuri FAIKOV, head coach of Belarus' youth national team:

In honesty, we're yet to fully comprehend our championship title win. We're exhausted emotionally from our time on the ice. After the match, we told our guys that they're the best, which is true. All played at a high professional level. We expected a good performance from Andrey Belevich, and he lived up to our expectations, even winning the title of 'best striker of the tournament'. The secret of our success is simple: hard work for the past seven months and unconditional trust between coaching staff and players.



Two medals across two ski aerials stages

By Igor Svitov

Belarusian aerial ski jumpers earn two awards at first two stages of Freestyle Ski Aerials World Cup, held in China

Sochi 2014 Olympic champion, Anton Kushnir, of Belarus, has won the new season's first stage of the Freestyle Ski Aerials World Cup, in Beida Lake. Earning 115.05 points, Kushnir was ahead of Chinese Guangpu Qi (114.48) and Hang Zhou (95.98). Maxim Gustik of Belarus was ranked sixth (84.07).

After his triumph at the Olympiad, Kushnir held back from performing at top tournaments, recovering from injuries.

In the women's competitions, Anna Guskova finished with the highest result for her team, in fifth place (73.66 points). Alexandra Romanovskaya came sixteenth (61.42) among twenty-three entrants.

The second stage of the Freestyle Ski Aerials World Cup was hosted by Beida Lake. Maxim Gustik, a 2015 World Championship bronze medallist, took 111.51 points, sharing third place with Chinese Xindi Wang.

Anna Guskova was ranked fifth (with 83.79 points) during the second stage, while Alexandra Romanovskaya was placed sixth among twenty-three participants.

In the World Cup second stage, the national team of Belarus came fourth, thanks to Anna Guskova, Maxim Gustik and Anton Kushnir.

In the overall standings across two World Cup stages, Guangpu Qi leads among the men, followed by Anton Kushnir, while Maxim Gustik is fourth. Danielle Scott of Australia leads the women, followed by Chinese Xu Mengtao. Anna Guskova is placed fourth, while Belarusian Alexandra Romanovskaya is ninth.

Without any doubt of her supremacy

By Semen Bondarev

Alena Leshkevich of Belarus claims world champion title in Muay Thai among professionals in under 45kg category, defeating Chinese Wu Candy

Alena Leshkevich of Belarus claims world champion title in Muay Thai among professionals in under 45kg category, defeating Chinese Wu Candy

In May, Alena received high commendation for her IFMA (International Federation of Muay Thai Amateur) Muay Thai World Championship victory in Sweden. The petite-sized beauty has now repeated her success, defeating China's Wu Candy in Hong Kong, to take the world championship title among professional Muay Thai fighters.

Head coach Alexander Grigorov, who has been training Alena, alongside Mikhail Stepanov, asserts, "Alena trains for 90 minutes to two hours daily and has moved from being a master of sports to a master of sports of international class. We're preparing for her to be awarded the title of an honoured master of sports. Alena is a world and European champion and has claimed silver many times. Now, she's won a professional world title. I'm delighted for her."



Alena Leshkevich

Did you expect her to beat Wu Candy?

We were anxious, as Alena was preparing to perform in the under 48kg category. Just a few days before her fight, she was moved to the under 45kg weight category, which presented a serious problem. Before the fight the organisers warned us that if there would be an equal fight the victory would be given to the current champion, Wu Candy. Wu was skilled in hand fighting and fought bitterly, but Alena was stronger. She made her supremacy obvious; no one doubted it. She achieved her victory by the unanimous decision of the judges.

Taking revenge for loss to Croats

By Kirill Karin

Belarus' men's national team achieves second victory in European Table Tennis Championship qualifying round

In the 3rd round match in Group D, our Belarusian sportsmen defeated Israel in an away match — 3:0. Though the leader of the Belarusian squad, Vladimir Samsonov, was absent, Pavel Samsonov, Gleb Shamruk and Alexander Khanin played well, scoring goals.

At the start of the first round of the continental tournament, Belarus beat Israel in Minsk with the same score (3:0) but was then whitewashed by the Croats in an away match.

The final match will be played by the national team of Belarus on January 24th, 2017, in Minsk, against Croatia. Belarus is currently in first place in its group, with five points (across three matches), while Croatia has four points (two matches) and Israel has three points (across three matches).

Belarus' women's national team has completed both its matches in Group C with a score of 3:0 — defeating Bulgaria, in Sofia, but then losing to the Russians in Minsk.

In the third round, on January 24th, they will play Russia away. Then, on March 7th, Belarus will welcome the Bulgarians to Minsk. To date, Russia boasts six points (across three matches), Belarus has three points (two matches) and Bulgaria has three points (three matches).

In the elite division, thirty men's and women's teams are divided into ten groups. The winners of the groups play each other, while squads in third places move into the second division. Those ranked second have play-off matches, with winners going through to the elite division and losers entering the second division of the continental championship.

Continuing work on senior positions

Pavel Yasenovsky of Belarus re-elected as Sports Director of European Judo Union

At the 68th EJU Ordinary Congress, in Greece, the Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Judo Federation, Pavel Yasenovsky, was re-elected as Sports Director. Meanwhile, presidium member Sergei Buyakevich will continue to work as a lawyer with the European Judo Union.

Sergey Soloveyichik of Russia was re-elected as President of the European Judo Union, and Ezio Gamba of Italy was named Secretary General. Alexander Jatskevitch of Latvia will serve as Refereeing Director.

The 68th EJU Ordinary Congress gathered representatives of forty-four European states. European judo wrestlers won twenty-five medals (eight gold, three silver and fourteen bronze) at the Rio Olympic Games in 2016. Belarus was represented by Darya Skrypnik and Dmitry Shershan, who were eliminated in the opening bouts.

Mood of the week



New Year illumination in Minsk's Oktyabrskaya Square

EXHIBITIONS

NATIONAL ART MUSEUM

20 Lenin Street
Until 30th January. *Celestial World on the Earth* Until 5th February. *Russian Pictorial Art of 19th-20th Century*

NATIONAL HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF BELARUS

12 Karl Marx Street
Until 15th January. *Time of Silent Stars: from Black-and-White to Red* Until 29th January. *Belarusian Trade in History* Until 29th January. *Day of the Past — Day of the Present* Until 28th February. *Time of Miracles: Winter Holidays and Entertainments* Until 1st June 2017. *From Romanian Dinary to Belarusian Rouble*

EXHIBITION HALL OF BELARUSIAN NATURE AND ECOLOGY MUSEUM

9A Bogdanovich Street
Until 13th March. *Noisy Feathered Rainbow*

HOUSE OF PICTURES

89/3 Pobediteley Avenue
Until 8th January. Konstantin Muzhev and Yevgenia Muzheva: *Movement*

OUTLET

44 Zhukov Avenue
Until 31st December. Exhibition of reptilians: *Tropics* Until 31st January. *Hidden Reality* Until 31st January. *Quintessence: To See the Unseen* show-exhibition

LEONID SHCHEMELEV CITY ART GALLERY

10 Revolyutsionnaya Street
Until 31st December. *Pictorial Art Opening* Until 29th January. *Robo Art*

ARENA CITY

84 Pobediteley Avenue
Until 1st February. *IllyuzIum* interactive entertaining exhibition of illusions and 3D pictures

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS

47 Nezavisimosti Avenue
Until 31st December. *Art Capital: from France to Belarus*

SPORTS PALACE SQUARE

4 Pobediteley Avenue
Until 15th January. *Minsk Christmas Festival*

CAT MUSEUM

11 Dzerzhinsky Avenue
Until 31st December. *New Year Season in Cat Museum*

HOUSE-MUSEUM OF FIRST RSDRP CONGRESS

31a Nezavisimosti Avenue
Until 31st January. *Museum of Fir Tree Toys*

BELEXPO

27 Yanka Kupala Street
Until 31st December. *New Year Fair*

THEATRES

BOLSHOI OPERA AND BALLET THEATRE

1 Parizhskoy Kommuny Square
22.12. *A Masked Ball*; *Portraits*. Izabella Yurieva 23 and 24.12. *The Fountain of Bakhchisaray* 24, 26 and 29.12. *Gala concert of Belarus' Bolshoi Theatre stars* 26.12. *Three Little Pigs* 27 and 28.12. *The Swan Lake* 27.12. *Blue Light*

YANKA KUPALA NATIONAL ACADEMIC THEATRE

7 Engels Street
22.12. *Two Souls* 23.12. *The Seagull* 24 and 26.12. *Kolyady Night* 27.12. *Local Cabaret* 28.12. *The Pinsk Gentry* 29.12. *ART*

MAXIM GORKY NATIONAL ACADEMIC DRAMA THEATRE

5 Volodarsky Street
22.12. *Lady for a Day* 23.12. *Circle of Love* 24.12. *As if by Magic*; *An Ideal Husband* 27.12. *Tricks of Khanuma*

CONCERTS

PALACE OF THE REPUBLIC

1 Oktyabrskaya Square
20.12-07.01. *Main New Year Little Fir Tree of the Country* 20.12-06.01. *Main New Year Fir Tree of the Country*

VANKOVICH HOUSE

33a Internatsionalnaya Street
23.12. *Night of Ancient Music: Miraculous Sounds of Christmas*

28.12. *Testosterone* 29.12. *Viva Commedia!*

BELARUSIAN STATE ACADEMIC MUSICAL THEATRE

44 Myasnikov Street
23.12. *Jane Eyre* 24.12. *My Fair Lady* 26.12. *Cinderella's Ball*; *Ball in Savoy* 27.12. *Cinderella's Ball*; *Wedding in Malinovka* 28.12. *Adventures of Kai and Gerda (Snow Queen)*; *Blue Cameo* 29.12. *Cinderella's Ball*; *Merry Poppins*

MODERN ARTS THEATRE

5 Oktyabrskaya Street
23 and 26.12. *Up-Side-Down House* 24.12. *New Year Dinner with Keira Knightley* 25.12. *Figaro.tut* 29 and 30.12. *Barmalay Against New Year*

REPUBLICAN THEATRE OF BELARUSIAN DRAMA

44 Kropotkin Street
23-30.12. *Golden Heart*

MINSK CONCERT HALL

5 Oktyabrskaya Street
27.12. *Belarusy art band*

SPORTS PALACE

4 Pobediteley Avenue
23.12. *Baby Cup BelSwissBank International Children's Callisthenics Competition* 24-26.12. *Kingdom of Broken Mirrors*