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LIVING STREAM OF SPIRITUALITY

INTERNATIONAL

The Minsk Times

Socio-political Weekly

Events in Belarus and abroad

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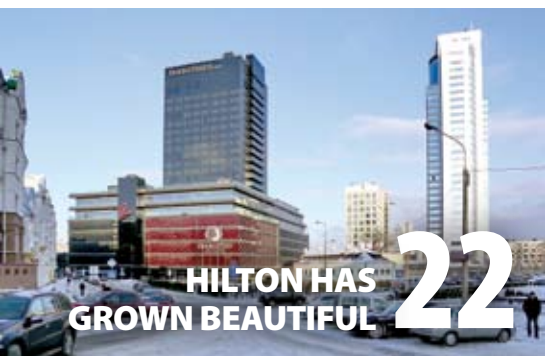
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CONTENTS



4 WORDS ON PEACE, KINDNESS AND HOPE

10 Builders confirm their reputation Incredibly, our road builders have laid more than 40 km of four-lane motorway within the last year, connecting the M6 Minsk-Grodno highway with the 'Olympic' road (M-1 Brest-Minsk-Russian border), closing the second ring road around Minsk and allowing traffic to fully navigate the MKAD-2 (Minsk second ring road)



HILTON HAS GROWN BEAUTIFUL

12 New pension rules Staged introduction of increased pension age launches on January 1st, raising retirement age for women to 58 years by 2022, with men working until the age of 63

14 Big potential of small businesses

16 Capital to acquire satellites Belarusian architects know exactly how Minsk will look in about fifteen years' time. It's not prophecy but town planning, the horizons of tomorrow's capital set out until 2030

20 Housewarming for newly-weds Belarus provides housing loans at low interest rates, but not at the expense of the treasury

28 Understanding others' pain 'Palliative care' firmly established in medical practice but only recently covered by legislation

30 Friends get together

36 Two coins, or Test of humanity

42 The Silk Road A novel on ancient Turkmenistan and China written by Belarusian and Tadjik

44 Not all secrets revealed, or Five reasons to visit Slonim

50 In order to dance, we must read more Grand Prix of the 29th International Modern Choreography Festival, IFMC-2016, in Vitebsk awarded to soloist of the Central Song and Dance Ensemble of the Army of China Yucheng Yao



ART TOUR FROM LISBON TO VLADIVOSTOK BEGINS IN... THE CAPITAL OF BELARUS

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Awareness of future



VADIM KONDRASHOV

What is more important: culture or spirituality? Perhaps, we might say spirituality, as culture is closely connected with education while spirituality deals with the state of the human soul and sincere feelings of love, respect, and altruism. It encompasses more than can be expressed in words. More often, we can only feel its significance.

The modern Belarusian state hasn't forgotten its high spiritual values. Moreover, we appreciate those who work to promote spirituality. At the beginning of each new year, we honour laureates of 'For Spiritual Revival' Award at a ceremony attended by the Head of State. Mr. Lukashenko attaches special significance to the event which symbolises our pride in our national identity, as well as the achievements which glorify Belarus, making it known worldwide and preserving our roots. Read more in **Living Stream of Spirituality**.

Life moves at a rapid pace, with urban and rural landscapes changing quickly. What will Minsk look like in some fifteen years? The answer to this question is well known to Belarusian architects. It's not prophecy but town planning, the horizons of tomorrow's capital being set out until 2030. The task set before architects is to worthily shape the city, putting town-planning in order. It's already evident that Minsk won't expand; rather its satellite towns will be further developed. All details are presented in **Capital to Acquire Satellites**.

What else awaits us? Major hopes are pinned on small businesses. In 2017, our economy should increase by at least 0.8 percent, due to the appearance and development of private enterprises and their creation of new jobs, accounting for almost half of forecast GDP growth. Meanwhile, by 2020, GDP generated by private businesses should have increased by 2.5 percent. Are small businesses able to fulfil these tasks? The Government is optimistic, since every third resident is employed in this sphere. We may assume that we'll see more self-employment in the future. Of course, it wouldn't be wise to plan on growth of small and medium-sized businesses without offering state support, just as we wouldn't expect a plant to thrive on dry, unfertilised soil. What will the Government's focus be? Find out in **Big Potential of Small Businesses**.

Our country has entered a technological age, with Belarus as an absolute leader within the CIS regarding information and communication technologies (ICT), according to the annual report on Measuring the Information Society issued by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The Union assesses the ICT Development Index of 175 countries, across eleven criteria: from specific technological criteria to the number of mobile subscribers and active Internet users. Belarus is ranked 31st, up from the 84th position in 2008. Our closest CIS rival, Russia, is ranked 43rd.

Yes, everything is relative. We don't lag behind, though we aren't yet in the lead, and we can be proud of this. The future looks promising.

VIKTOR KHARKOV



New regime to arouse much interest

Belarus introduces five-day visa-free regime for residents of 80 countries

The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, signed Decree No. 8 'On the Introduction of the Visa-Free Entry and Departure for Foreign Citizens' on January 9th. The document introduces visa-free entry through the border checkpoint at Minsk National Airport and visa-free stay in Belarus for up to 5 days for citizens of 80 states.

These are 39 countries of Europe, including the entire European Union, Brazil, Indonesia, the USA, Japan and other countries. These are favourable countries in terms of migration and Belarusian strategic partners which have introduced visa-free regimes for Belarusian citizens on a unilateral basis. New regulations also apply to non-citizens of Latvia and stateless persons of Estonia.

The document primarily aims to raise the number of business trips, tourism and private visits of people with regular passports and will not apply to foreigners

on official trips with diplomatic, service, special and similar passports.

A valid passport or other document permitting foreign travels, money (equivalent to at least two basic amounts for each day of stay in the foreign currency or Belarusian roubles), medical insurance to the value of at least 10,000 Euros operational in Belarus will be needed for visa-free entry.

Meanwhile, citizens of Vietnam, Haiti, Gambia, Honduras, India, China, Lebanon, Namibia and Samoa should also have a valid multi-visa to the EU states or the Schengen Area with a mark confirming entry to their region, plane tickets with a confirmation of departure from Minsk National Airport within 5 days after the date of the entry.

The visa-free regime does not apply to people arriving in Belarus by plane from Russia and planning to go to Russian airports (these are internal flights with no border control).

► For the benefit of mutual interests

The United States of America look forward to stronger relations with Belarus, according to a statement released by US Embassy to Belarus, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our diplomatic relations

The US Embassy notes that, since establishing diplomatic ties with Belarus in 1991, the United States have strongly supported Belarusian independence and sovereignty, on its path towards a more democratic and prosperous society.

The statement reads: 'Over the past twenty-five years, the United States and Belarus have liaised to strengthen European and global security. We welcomed the historic decision by Belarus to give up its nuclear weapons, in 1994. This made a significant contribution to nuclear disarmament'.

The Embassy adds that, over these years, thousands of Belarusians have visited the USA on academic and professional exchange programmes. In turn, American experts, teachers and professors have visited Belarus to share their knowledge with Belarusian partners.

► 3D illusion really appeals

Journalists of the popular US media outlet, USA Today, visited the CES 2017 expo in Las Vegas featuring more than 20,000 new gadgets from all over the world and picked their top ten. The Kino-Mo project by Artem Stavenko and Kirill Chikeyuk of Belarus is on their list.

The device designed by the two Belarusians produces incredibly colourful 3D visuals floating in mid-air. The project of Artem Stavenko and Kirill Chikeyuk won the contest by Virgin Media founded by billionaire Richard Branson. Later the company of Belarusian designers concluded one more investment contract with billionaire Mark Cuban.

Words on peace, kindness and hope

President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko calls for unity between nations and within the Church, on visiting the Holy Spirit Cathedral in Minsk, to celebrate Orthodox Christmas

We're happy that, today, we're together with our brotherly nations: Russians, Ukrainians, other nations and nationalities who live in our states," the President said. "I spoke at the Synod about issues we must address, in the Church and the state. These have nothing to do with proposals to cut ties and separate. We shouldn't do this. We need to stay calm and settle current matters while looking to the future, but not too far, of course. Otherwise, we may make mistakes which would be inadmissible."

Mr. Lukashenko noted that, on Christmas, people think a lot about eternal uniting values. "We always speak about moral virtues and sources of spiritual strength. In this church, I'd like to mention another important value. It's our Church, our main Christian Church. It has always been and, I hope, will remain

as the centre of unity. It is the main power uniting people, the nation, us," he added.

In his words, Belarusian authorities view the Orthodox Church as a very good partner, supporting the ideas of the state, such as restoration of holy places, support of the family, morality and cultural values. "The Church has always lent its shoulder to our people. It has always been in the epicentre of all important events," the Head of State said.

Mr. Lukashenko believes that the pastoral word is vital in our modern world, where individuals often find it difficult to take the right path and to understand processes taking place around them. "Our Church is the most responsible Church in the world, the fairest and the most sincere. Our Church has never told lies to our people. I should also note that we also have never given reason for

our Church to behave inappropriately," the President noted.

The Belarusian President lit a Christmas candle by the Minsk icon of the Mother of God in the Holy Spirit Cathedral. He was welcomed there by the Metropolitan of Minsk and Zaslavl, Pavel, the Patriarchal Exarch of All Belarus. The cathedral was also attended by representatives of the Orthodox brotherhood and sisterhood, as well as Sunday school students.

"I want this holiday to bring you peace, mutual understanding, prosperity and — importantly — realisation of all your wishes: if not all, then those related to your families, friends and, especially, children," the President declared, adding, "I'd like to address Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, our guests and all Christians with congratulations on this bright and solemn day. Merry



BELTA

Alexander Lukashenko and the Metropolitan of Minsk and Zaslavl, Pavel, the Patriarchal Exarch of All Belarus

Alexander Lukashenko:

I want this holiday to bring you peace, mutual understanding, prosperity and — importantly — realisation of all your wishes: if not all, then those related to your families, friends and, especially, children. I'd like to address Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, our guests and all Christians with congratulations on this bright and solemn day. Merry Christmas to all of you! Live in peace and kindness!

Christmas to all of you! Live in peace and kindness!"

The President presented an icon of the Mother of God — Tender Feeling — to the Belarusian Orthodox Church: a reproduction of Malorita's 15th century Tender Feeling icon, using the unique ancient wax tempera method.

Metropolitan Pavel presented the Iberian Mother of God icon (consecrated on Mount Athos) to the President, saying, "I wish that the Mother of God will bless our people, bless you — the head of this wonderful country and state — and increase your spiritual and physical strengths. May the Mother of God

look after Belaya Rus and all our pious people. Let the new calendar year be peaceful and successful for all of us — a true blessing. As you always stress, this depends much on ourselves. We'll pray and work and God's blessing will remain with all of us," Metropolitan Pavel said.

By Vasily **Kharitonov**



BELTA

Living stream

In the bright days of Christmas, the President traditionally presents five 'For Spiritual Revival' awards and ten special awards to figures of culture and arts

This year, the official ceremony was held at the Palace of the Republic, attended by those whose achievements are, without exaggeration, globally important, glorifying the country, helping preserve the cherished memory of our roots and strengthening our national identity and pride.

The awards were given to teams and labour groups for their outstanding contribution to the humanitarian field. The

winners of the prestigious award included the rector of St. Yeliseevsky Lavrishevsky Monastery of Novogrudok, diocese senior priest Yevseviy (Konstantin Tyukhlov), who has made a significant contribution to the spiritual, moral and patriotic education of young people, organising monastery activities and assistance to people in difficult situations, including to those living with drug addiction and alcoholism.

The National Rehabilitation Centre for Disabled Children was also awarded, for its work with disabled children aged 3 to 18 years, creating a barrier-free environment that helps them overcome stereotypical thinking, instilling hope and faith in their own strength.

The Belarusian State Pedagogical University (named after Maxim Tank) also collected an award, for promoting student volunteerism through over 800 charity events annually. These include holiday programmes and theatrical performances for children from orphanages, boarding schools and social and rehabilitation centres.

Yet another award went to the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, which organises many events for the patriotic education of citizens, including children, students and young workers, the economically active population and war and labour veterans. It helped in the major reconstruction of the Mound of Glory.



Laureates of 'For Spiritual Revival' prize and special awards to figures of culture and arts

of spirituality

Also, Sergey Sergachev was awarded who heads the Department of Architecture of Residential and Public Buildings of the Belarusian National Technical University. He is the author of 'The People's Architecture of Belarus: History and Modernity' and works to preserve folk architecture of historical and artistic value.

Addressing the laureates and, through them, all citizens, Alexander Lukashenko said, "Every year, in January, we meet with special people: those who heal our souls, who keep our memories and who serve mercy, goodness and beauty. The creative path is never easy. Today, worthy people, conquering new heights in culture, arts, journalism and sports, will climb this stage.

History has given our creative people a unique opportunity to contribute to the formation of the Belarusian nation. We, the present generation, have realised the centuries-old dream of our ancestors — creating the first-ever independent Belarusian state. Now, our task is to save the country and pass it on to those who will come after

us, free and independent. Independence is difficult to obtain, and yet more difficult to defend and protect.

Fortitude, solidarity and unity are the foundations without which we cannot survive today.

One thousand years ago Omar Khayyam said: 'the weak die prematurely'. This is so true! Only the strong-spirited know what to do and where to go. Without a strong rod, we are doomed to be defeated. Our people are very strong-spirited! Belarusians have experienced bloody wars, and have survived the most difficult times following war, rebuilding the country from ruins and defending its sovereignty at the crossroads of cultures and historical destinies.

To this day, some try to present Belarusians as people without historical roots. The appearance of such voices is no accident. Many are not happy to see independent Belarus living by its intellect and hard work.

The vocation of a real creator is to resist lies, falsehoods and hypocrisy, espec-

ially about the homeland. This is a field of spiritual battle for Belarus, for our values, ideals and traditions. To win this battle, in people's souls, is the genuine, great vocation of those whom we honour today, in this hall.

The basis of our national character is humanity, compassion, kindness, and responsiveness to misfortunes of others.

Perhaps, that is the reason why so many religions and races traditionally co-exist in our land.

We recognise Belarus as our common home, a family for all of us. There is no division between friend and foe. Our family works together, all helping each other. A family is always delighted for everyone and collectively takes care of each member, of children and the elderly. When we talk about and plan integration processes across the post-Soviet space and worldwide, we see ourselves as a real family. And, most importantly, within this family, we must be equal. Only such unions can survive. There's no other way to do it.

There's no point in seeking other ways, as it's a waste of time.

Belarus is good, responsive, freedom-loving, independent and living in harmony with its neighbours. This is the way it is today. How things go for the coming fifty years largely depends on those alive today, on today's 'creators.' The power of art is that it speaks not only the language of the mind, but the language of the heart...

Someone once said that art and creativity are valuable in their own right. I won't argue; perhaps, they're right. However, the value of art increases hundredfold if it serves a bright and noble purpose, if it serves good and mercy, if it serves the native land of the creator..."

Now, let's talk about things that give us reason to be happy, about those who've received the President's special prize for workers of culture and art. Among them are those who work for 'Golas Radzimy' (Homeland's Voice) newspaper: Departmental Head Ivan Zhdanovich and special correspondent Yekaterina Medvedskaya. Ivan's work has repeatedly received praise, including diplomas from the Ministry of Information and the Plenipotentiary Representative for Religious and Nationality Affairs. In 2015, he won 'Golden Pen' Award, from the Belarusian Union of Journalists, in 'Essay' nomination. Yekaterina Medvedskaya received the diploma of the Plenipotentiary Representative for Religious and Nationality Affairs in 2012, and the Letter of Gratitude of the Republican Centre of National Cultures in 2016.

The traditional award ceremony is a landmark event in the country's spiritual life, celebrated solemnly, over the festive period, and through to the new year. The official ceremony is followed by a major concert at the Palace of the Republic. As ever, the event was full this year, with a wonderful atmosphere. An elegantly decorated Christmas tree stood on the second floor and each winner was represented by a stand, drawing large crowds keen to see their achievements. I found it interesting to visit these stands (including our own, prepared by the editorial office). All was perfect, with portraits of Ivan and Ekaterina looking like works of

art. Friends and family approached to congratulate them, and to take pictures with the nominees (they only become winners on receiving their awards from President Lukashenko). Meanwhile, music was playing...

It's truly moving to know that you are among society's elite, at the Palace of the Republic. The first rows are, traditionally, occupied by veterans of war and labour and representatives of various faiths. Roman Catholics and Orthodox priests

to establish business and artistic connections with activists and freelance authors across a number of Belarusian foreign communities. Thanks to this systemic daily work, the geography of publications has significantly expanded. In particular, the newspaper contains articles about the life of Belarusians, as well as on the cultural and educational activities of public associations and cultural centres worldwide: in the former Soviet Union, Poland (where the Belarusian Socio-cultural Society operates), Latin America,



Ivan Zhdanovich and Yekaterina Medvedskaya

cordially greeted each other, as did the Mufti of Muslims of Belarus, Abu Becker Shabanovich. A mosque recently opened in Minsk, creating a holiday for believers of all nationalities countrywide. On this night, all who gathered were witnesses of the joy of our journalists. I chatted to them about the publication and about what makes their work so special.

'Golas Radzimy' has been in publication since 1955, issued in Belarusian. In 2006, it became part of the 'Sovetskaya Belorussia' Editorial Office, focusing primarily on Belarusians living abroad, with a circulation of about 2,000 (the website is <http://www.golas.sb.by/>). In past years, the newspaper team has used the latest technologies, including e-mail,

tural Society operates), Latin America, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, and, most recently, France (where a Belarusian community has been established).

The newspaper staff are constantly in touch with community activists, to discuss new ideas and support creative initiatives aimed at expanding the Belarusian cultural and spiritual heritage of our people abroad. 'Golas Radzimy' journalists are helping form new communities, establishing contacts between foreign art groups and communities and their Belarusian counterparts. For example, the Belarusian community in the Ukrainian city of Nikolayev has called itself 'Golas Radzimy' as a sign of gratitude to the newspaper for its support of NGOs.

Importantly, the cultural life of Belarusians abroad is expanding, thanks to publications in 'Golas Radzimy' newspaper. According to estimates, over three million Belarusians live abroad, with many in Russian Siberia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. They are eager to preserve traditions of their ancestors, their rituals, language and songs. Past newspaper articles have been dedicated to the life of Belarusians in the Dnepropetrovsk and Lvov regions (Ukraine), as well as those from the Tyumen, Irkutsk, Novosibirsk and Krasnoyarsk regions of Russia. There have been articles on art, cultural and edu-

In particular, every year, Kupala Night is celebrated in Belarus and within Belarusian communities abroad. Naturally, people adapt the holiday to suit their local conditions. In 2016, the newspaper published a story about the distinctive Kupala Dagda Fest, in Latvia, and the celebration of Belarusians in the Irkutsk Region, in Polotsk (Ekiman), on the banks of the Dnieper (in Alexandria), as well as in Lvov (Ukraine), Daugavpils (Latvia) and on the bank of the Dniester in Moldova.

Such a wide range of articles encourages the organisers in their work to benefit Belarusian culture and stimulates freelance

also receives wide coverage. It features visiting art groups and the leaders of various communities of Belarusians abroad, looking at the exchange of experience, concerts, meetings, participation in festivals and other joint cultural events.

The newspaper publishes articles on Belarusian communities worldwide acting as peacekeepers via their events. Members of Ukrainian and Russian communities attended last year's Belarusian Kupala Night, in Lvov. Belarusians in Moldova, according to the tradition of arranging Kupala Night on the Dniester, have worked alongside those from the Russian diaspora. Belarusians from Daugavpils (Latvia) and Narva (Estonia) have involved Latvians and Estonians in their creative projects, while Belarusians from the Irkutsk Belarusian Culture Society (named after Yan Chersky) are friends with local Chuvash and Buryat ethnic communities. Members of the Belarusian Friendly Association of Altai partner local communities interested in Slavic traditions and Belarusians from Astana (Kazakhstan) hold joint performances with Kazakhs, singing folk songs. There are many more examples of Belarusians strengthening 'friendship between peoples', as explored on the pages of 'Golas Radzimy'.

The newspaper pays particular attention to the spiritual, literary and artistic heritage of Belarusians. It publishes articles dedicated to the anniversaries of classics of literature, and to relations between Belarusian literature and Belarusian authors and representatives of other cultures. 'Literary Journeys' series is created jointly with the State Museum of Belarusian Literary History, and began with the story of a 120-day hiking trip along the state border in 1996, by Ivan Zhdanovich and me. There was even a concert featuring verse written during that journey, and excerpts from travel essays published in 'Belarus' and 'Maladost' (Youth) magazines.

I hope that this award will encourage my colleagues onwards, to further achievements and cooperation with the magazine. We are all in the same boat.

By Valentina **Zhdanovich**

Among those who've received the special prize of the President of Belarus for fruitful cooperation with their countrymen abroad and professional coverage of issues of intercultural dialogue in Belarus are those who work for 'Golas Radzimy' newspaper: Departmental Head Ivan Zhdanovich and special correspondent Yekaterina Medvedskaya

cational projects organised by Belarusians in Moldova, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Last year, the Union of Belarusians in Latvia headed by Valentina Piskunova initiated the Days of Belarusian Culture in Latvia, dedicated to the 525th anniversary of the famous pioneer and educator Frantsisk Skorina. The Days lasted over a month, featuring artists and teams from Belarus, with more than fifteen events held countrywide. With the help of freelance journalists based in Latvia, working for 'Golas Radzimy', a series of articles have been published on this important topic.

Our rich Belarusian culture is evident in folk rituals, traditions, holidays and festivals. The newspaper goes beyond reporting on these events, explaining the deep spiritual meaning of folk traditions and the special worldview of Belarusians, as manifested through holidays and rituals.

authors to collaborate with the newspaper, as well as extend useful experience and provide an example to other communities. Meanwhile, readers often become involved in national traditions, reminiscing about their spiritual heritage and re-establishing relations with their homeland and their relatives in Belarus.

Articles are often released under the columns of 'Planet of People', 'Community' and 'Together', while others are devoted to inter-ethnic and inter-faith harmony in Belarus, it being home to various nationalities. The newspaper gives its views on how to preserve peace and harmony in society and always features stories devoted to the Festival of National Cultures in Grodno. 'Multinational Belarus' international project, run by the Plenipotentiary Representative for Religious and Nationality Affairs,

Builders confirm their reputation

Incredibly, our road builders have laid more than 40 km of four-lane motorway within the last year, connecting the M6 Minsk-Grodno highway with the 'Olympic' road (M-1 Brest-Minsk-Russian border), closing the second ring road around Minsk and allowing traffic to fully navigate the MKAD-2 (Minsk second ring road)

Motorists are enjoying their New Year 'gift', while builders can be proud of their work being praised by the World Bank. The

latter states that Belarus has constructed roads for half the price of its neighbours, while rivalling them in quality. The President of Belarus attended the solemn opening of the Minsk second ring road in the Dzerzhinsk district, and added his praise of the work achieved.

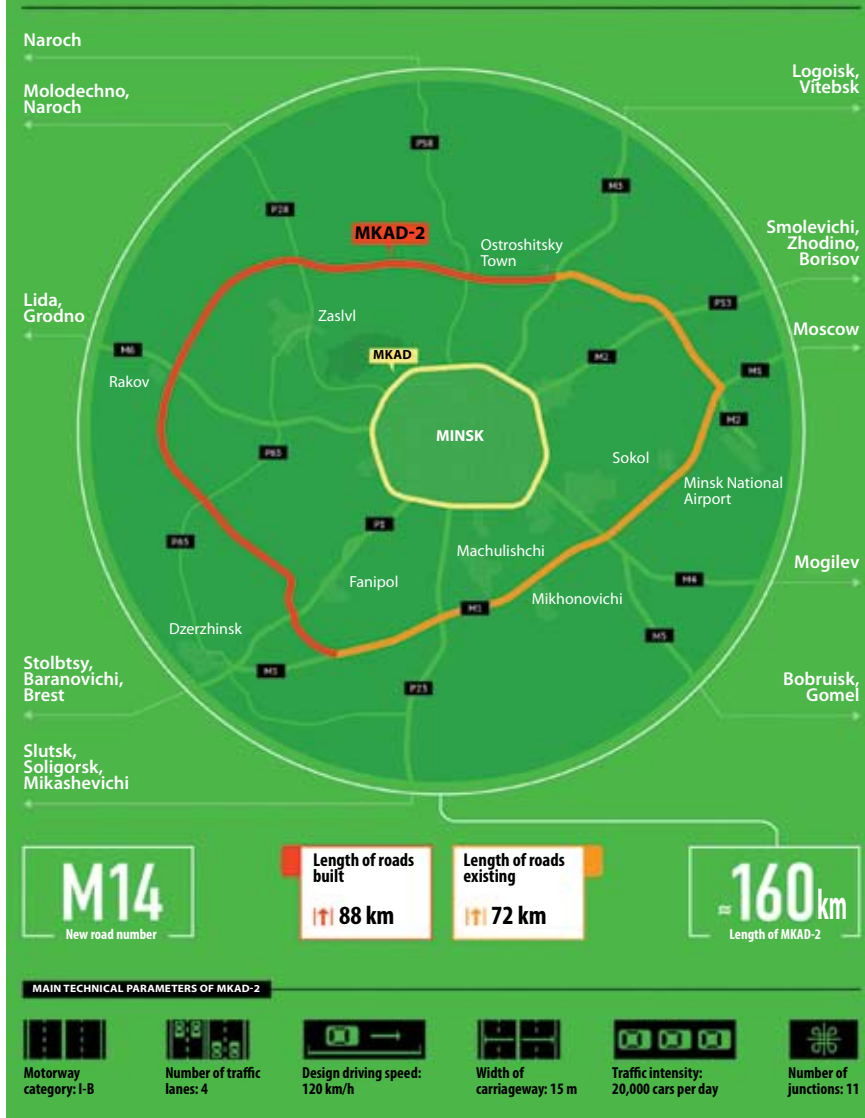
The wind across the open ground was wet and biting, so that even hot tea served by the organisers couldn't warm up the assembled journalists. The Minister of Transport and Communications of Belarus, Anatoly Sivak, was in a good form, however, despite the weath-



ARTUR PRUPAS

MKAD-2: route and characteristics

Minsk second ring road traffic scheme



logging 120,000 vehicles daily. Now, a considerable volume of transit transport can be redirected to the second ring road, which utilises contemporary technologies, including cement concrete, which has double the life span, halving repair and maintenance costs.

Opening the road, the President warmly congratulated workers from the road construction teams, telling them that the road is 'beautiful and reliable' and that he expects it to last many years, giving us continued pride.

Builders can be proud of their work being highly praised by the World Bank experts

Events in Ukraine significantly enhance the importance of our transit potential. The M-10 highway, traversing from the Russian border, through Gomel to Kobrin, is being reconstructed, aiming to support transport between the EU and China, bypassing the heavy-traffic hubs of Moscow and Minsk. The Minsk-Grodno highway is being reconstructed using the World Bank funding and the road leading to Polotsk is being considered for similar treatment.

The quality of international and republican roads affects our image abroad and potential investment, as well as transit revenue. Mr. Lukashenko is keen to see local roads improved, too, noting that a plan is being elaborated for their reconstruction, with a financing mechanism determined. Within five years, every agrotown should have a decent road link.

By Vladimir Khromov

er, clearly delighted that Belarus has gained another modern major motorway. Its first section was commissioned last year, connecting the Minsk-Vitebsk and Minsk-Grodno highways. Now, the second stage has been completed, creating a total length of around 160 km for the second ring road.

"The launch of the second section will help ease the burden on the first ring road, uniting key transit routes for the vital trans-European corridors, from the north to the south and from the west to the east. This will improve

the ecological situation in Minsk and should stimulate development close to the new road, including logistics infrastructure and satellite towns," the Minister of Transport and Communications noted, with pleasure.

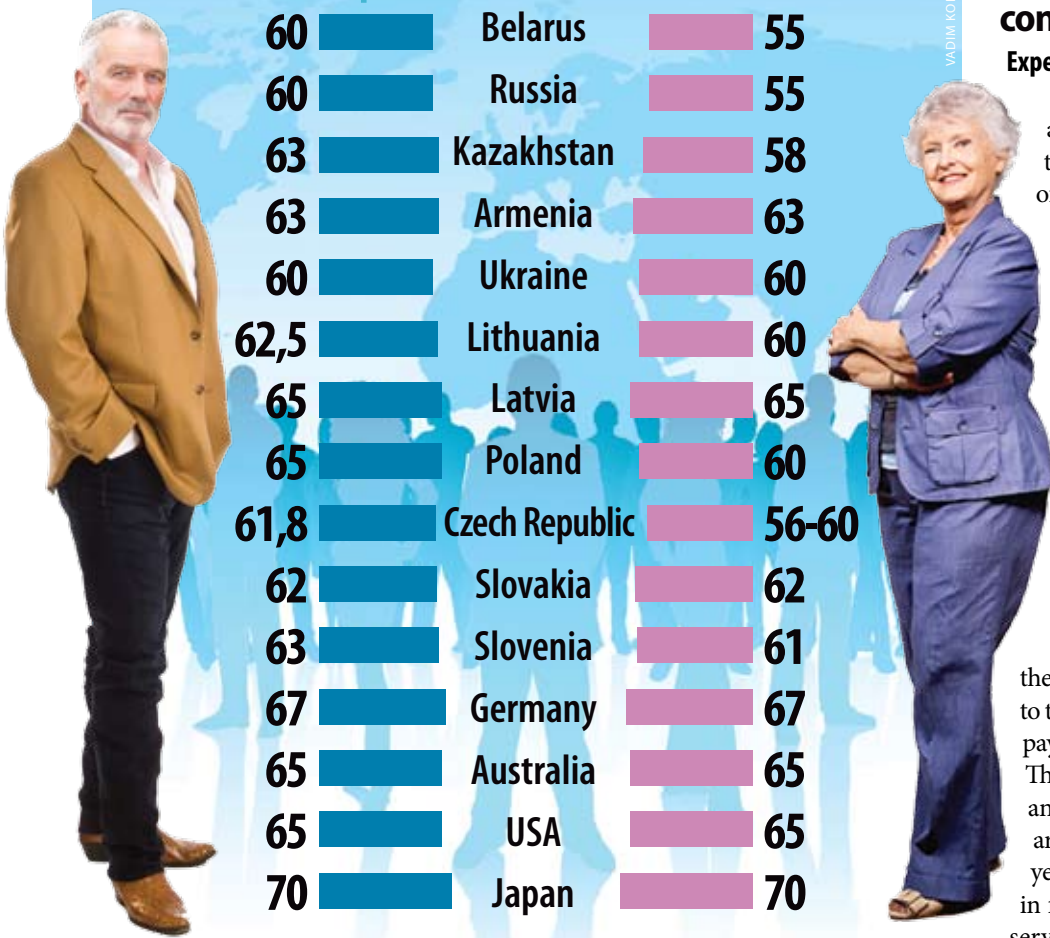
The Chairman of the Development Bank of the Republic of Belarus, Sergei Rumas, also looked pleased: the bank funded about 75 percent of investments into MKAD-2 ring road.

It was decided to construct MKAD-2 when it became clear that the existing ring road was overloaded,

VADIM KONDRASHOV

RETIREMENT AGE RISE

world practice (as of December 31, 2016)



60	Belarus	55
60	Russia	55
63	Kazakhstan	58
63	Armenia	63
60	Ukraine	60
62,5	Lithuania	60
65	Latvia	65
65	Poland	60
61,8	Czech Republic	56-60
62	Slovakia	62
63	Slovenia	61
67	Germany	67
65	Australia	65
65	USA	65
70	Japan	70

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, during an online conference, tells us more:

Expected effects

The increase in pension age will allow us to avoid reducing the size of the pension, against the background of our aging population.

Savings

Considering the negative experience of other countries and conditions in Belarus, we have no plans to introduce an obligatory savings element into our state pension system. Insurance organisations offer voluntary programmes to 'top-up' the pension, and savings for old age can be arranged at banks.

Length of service for granting of pensions

We've made the decision to raise the minimum required length of service to twenty years of work, with obligatory payments, due to our aging population. The increase in general life expectancy and length of time for which people are drawing their pensions (nearly 20 years) makes this essential. However, in future, we may adjust the length of service required. Economically developed countries have established even more rigid requirements.

Other changes

The decision governing the pension age will stand for the next six years, gradually rising. As to the long term, it depends on how the demographic situation changes, as well as upon how the economy fares and how much is paid into the Public Social Protection Fund. Employment and migration are important.

Guarantees for older specialists

Security remains for workers of pre-pension age, and appropriate changes have already been made to legislation. At the same time, many employers want to employ experts of older age, taking into account their experience, high level of qualifications and length of service.

By Tatyana Potvorova

New pension rules

Staged introduction of increased pension age launches on January 1st, raising retirement age for women to 58 years by 2022, with men working until the age of 63



Insurance to support those unemployed,

or What the dismissal safety net looks like

For all those paying insurance contributions, in cases of enterprise bankruptcy or staffing reduction, there will be eligibility to receive redundancy pay, alongside other social allowances

First Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Protection of Belarus Andrey Lobovich spoke a year ago about plans to introduce such a scheme. Now, the Ministry for Labour and Social Protection has confirmed that, in 2017, several draft documents will be prepared to determine how the system will be financed, as well as such factors as minimum insurance record and necessary periods of payment of benefits.

“Some countries offer insurance against unemployment as a form of social protection for the economically active population, due to the risk of losing employment,” notes the Deputy Vice Speaker of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of Belarus, Marianna Shchetkina. Some experts suggest emulating western experience, whereby employees contribute to insurance costs.

“World practice shows that individual insurance is the best solution,” notes Maria Akulova, an expert of the BEROCC Centre for Economic Research. “The state should join enterprises in making contributions into the Social Protection Fund, while employees also regularly pay a cer-

tain sum, creating their own safety net. When insurance is called upon, the first five months of allowances are paid from state resources, with the rest later drawn from an employee's own accumulated funds.”

Ms. Akulova notes the focus should be placed on promoting individual entrepreneurship and self-employment instead of subsidising non-efficient assets. She advocates for supporting small businesses financially, offering ‘tax breaks’, to enhance the role of the private sector.

Ms. Akulova would like to see a system of re-training for the unemployed, to help them meet the needs of the market.

Tamara Krasovskaya, the Chair of the House of Representatives’ Standing Committee for Labour and Social Issues, explains, “It’s impossible to say for sure how unemployment insurance will be arranged. Probably, the state will initially take on the insurance burden. Then, gradually, if salaries increase, employers and employees will cover payments. It’s difficult to say how much a person will be given on losing his or her job. It’s likely to depend on their insurance record and other factors. Maybe, the amount of payments will be connected with the minimum living budget or the minimum wage. The sum may depend on lost salary, and payments in cases of dismissal will be short-term. World practice shows that the amount of insurance payment reduces as time passes.

The country is paying a state allowance to those who have lost their job and are registered with an employment centre. Usually, this is no more than 1,375 Russian roubles monthly. Moreover, authorities promise all-round support to those who are unemployed, including offering subsidies to allow people to launch their own business. This year, 1,300 people used such start-up capital (varying from \$1,000 to \$2,000).

By Vasily **Malashenkov**

Big potential of small businesses

Major hopes are pinned on small businesses in 2017, aiming for them comprising at least 0.8 percent of GDP growth (half of total GDP growth for the year). There will be new jobs created and, by 2020, GDP from such businesses should have risen by 2.5 percent. Are small businesses able to meet these goals?



Government is optimistic, with Prime Minister Andrei Kobyakov recently announcing that small and medium-sized businesses are a powerful economic force. He notes that entrepreneurship accounts for 28.5 percent of our GDP and 28.5 percent of tax revenue, as well as 26.5 percent of total exports. A third of citizens are employed by small and medium-sized businesses.

BELTA

Polimaster Ltd. has been over 20 years developing instruments, equipment and systems that help to protect man and the environment against radiation threats

Over the coming five years, the state is targeting measures to ensure a stable 'doing business' rating and creation of favourable conditions for entrepreneurship.

Of course, it would be unreasonable to expect small and medium-sized business development without offering support; plants cannot grow on dry soil. Accordingly, the Government is focusing on improving licensing legislation, shifting to electronic administration and abolishing groundless inspections, alongside utilising public-consultative and expert councils. This should drive forward entrepreneurship, while aiding dialogue between the state and private entrepreneurs.

The winners of Entrepreneur of the Year contest have been announced, recognising managerial talent, as well as financial figures and the social function of businesses. Of the jury, half were entrepreneurs and members of business associations. According to Vladimir Karyagin, Chairman of the Presidium of the Republican Confederation of Entrepreneurship, this approach is creating economic and social lift. Previously, many felt that the same enterprises were being selected year by year.

Now, the names of novices are familiar to everyone, having seen major success over the last 2-5 years. A series of 30-second video clips have been commissioned by the Economic Ministry, for broadcast on regional television, aiming to help inspire such activity. Winners are given the opportunity to learn about development strategies from domestic and international professionals.

Business associations insist that all established entrepreneurs from the regions should take master classes. Despite there being a network of ninety entrepreneurship support centres and nineteen business incubators for small and medium-sized businesses, some initiatives are being developed intuitively, so the experi-

ence and advice of experts would be useful. Mr. Karyagin comments that, soon, the number of such businesses should reach 800,000, from 360,000. He is convinced that we must liberalise legislation, to cover self-regulating organisations and relations between employers and employees in private partnership. The launch of an assessment system looking at the regulating influence of normative legal acts within the private sector should simplify work.

Businessmen are understandably keen to access affordable loans. According to Pavel Kallaur, Chairman of the National Bank's Board, macroeconomic conditions (including loan access) should improve. Progress is already evident.

During the awards ceremony of Entrepreneur of the Year contest (according to Ernst & Young Audit Company), the Chairman of the Development Bank's Board, Sergei Rumas, noted that 'the Government has approved the attraction of the World Bank loan — worth \$40 million — for the support of small and medium-sized businesses'. Moreover, as part of this initiative, it's planned to reduce Belarusian rouble loan rates. Access to money brings freedom of choice.

By Maria Drukova

24% GDP

A strategy of development for small and medium-sized businesses until 2030 is being prepared. The Director of the Entrepreneurship Department of the Ministry of Economy, Piotr Arushanyants, notes that the task is far from being easy:

When we began to develop the strategy, we faced the issue of how to plan for the coming fifteen years without knowing how the situation may look within the next two years. Nevertheless, we need strategies. We should understand how business unions may progress, alongside supporting infrastructure for entrepreneurship. With so many issues, we must plan ahead, so that our targets are clear. We used to

plan ahead by only three years for small and medium-sized businesses, but then we realised we could predict trends five years ahead. In order to speak about institutional changes, we need to take into account several five-year periods. We plan that the strategy will become a serious document agreed by the Government and the President. The task before us is to raise small and medium-sized businesses' GDP share to 50 percent by 2030. The document won't tackle how to reform the state apparatus but it will look at all issues relating to small and medium-sized entrepreneurship: from administrative procedures and licensing through to issues of financial support, consultative programmes and education.





Capital to acquire satellites

Belarusian architects know exactly how Minsk will look in about fifteen years' time. It's not prophecy but town planning, the horizons of tomorrow's capital set out until 2030.

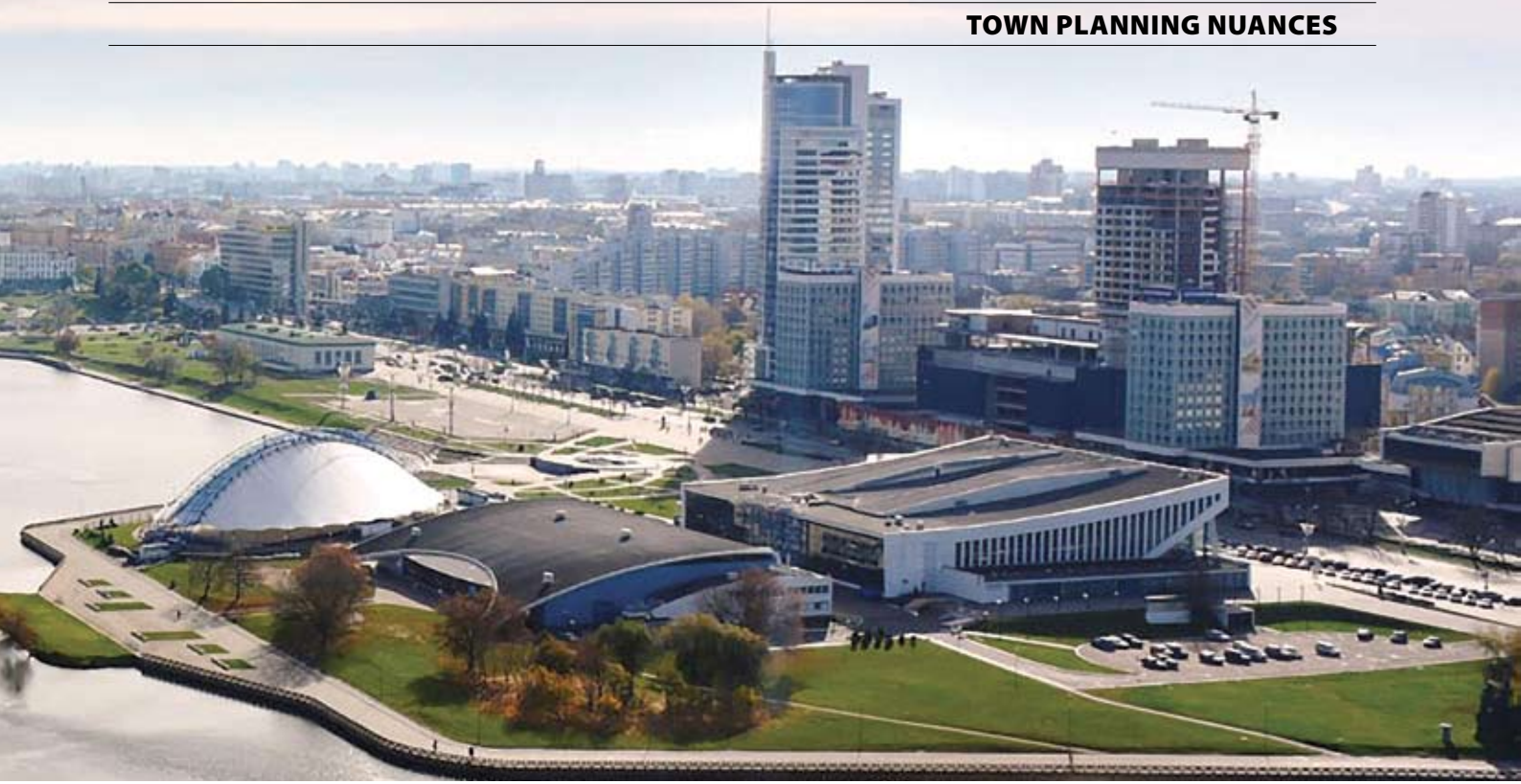
Sovereign Belarus acquired the first such document for Minsk in 2003, taking into account global trends, planning through until 2020. Of course, plans are flexible, and these have been twice updated. This autumn, plans were extended through until 2030.

"The President set the task of worthily shaping the city: putting town-planning in order. We're trying to reconsider the past strategy of rapid, extensive development," says the chief architect of Minskgrado, Alexander Akentiev.

Demographic top

The starting point for urban planning tends to be the number of residents needing to be accommodated. Five years ago, experts thought that the capital would grow behind the Minsk Beltway, enveloping settlements located there. It was expected that, by 2030, the population of Minsk would reach 2.2 million people. Today, every fifth resident of the country lives in the capital, which is obviously too much. Building of homes is outpacing building of schools, kindergartens and cultural centres needed by residents.

Minsk remains compact and it's been decided that the optimum size for the capital is two million, leading to the



same sort of restrictions as were in place during Soviet times. Meanwhile, the focus has shifted to developing satellite towns: Rudensk, Dzerzhinsk, Logoisk, Fanipol and Smolevichi. These are due to house extra 100,000 people, with most residents choosing these locations rather than wait for a flat in Minsk. Homes are being built in these towns with state support, and land plots are being made available, too.

“In just one year, volumes of housing construction in Minsk have halved, while satellite towns are rivalling the capital in terms of comfort,” says the Chairman of the Committee of Architecture and Town Planning of the Minsk City Executive Committee, Head Architect of Minsk, Pavel Luchinovich.

Enterprises leaving the city

Large enterprises are being encouraged to depart the city. Well-known Belarusian factory Galanteya which produces leather items and accessories, is among them. It's currently located just one kilometre from the parliament, which is clearly inappropriate. It's being relocated to Smolevichi. Enterprises are being motivated with stick and carrot, including increases in ground rent in Minsk.

Minsk improves its strategy and won't enlarge

Urban parks set to bloom

Minsk residents and visitors to the capital should see a modern, clean city in fifteen years' time, town planners say: a city boasting the latest facilities and better able to cope with transport needs. Naturally, the roads can only deal with a certain amount of traffic, and rapid housing growth takes its toll in this respect. Accordingly, public

transport is being significantly extended, with extra metro lines added. The first line of the capital's metro has been extended, and building of a third line, stretching about 25 km, is in full swing.

The key goal is to make it possible to travel from homes on the Minsk Beltway into the city centre within thirty minutes: this will be the 'golden' capital standard. The second Minsk ring road is being designed to connect satellite towns, while limiting trucks' entrance into the city.

The concept of micro-districts is disappearing from the town planning policy, with transition to 'quarters'. Meanwhile, more than two thousand hectares of new parks and squares are to appear in the capital, with the first ones planned in residential areas. Plans include further reconstruction of a quay on the Svisloch, the unique Loshitsa water park and Slep'yanka water systems.

By Olga Korneyeva



Third metro line, 2020

1 Thanks to the underground, our city's roads are eased of traffic. It's a global problem. The latest line features fourteen stations and will come into operation within four years, with construction of the fourth metro line being launched.

National Stadium, 2018

2 It's difficult to believe but the Belarusian capital lacks a modern stadium to host major international events such as the Second European Games (taking place in Minsk in 2019). The National Stadium, currently under design, aims to become Minsk's greatest landmark, being sited near the Minsk Tractor Works. It aims to look even 'cooler' than BATE's 'space-age' stadium in Borisov.

major perspective
long-awaited-for projects



VADIM KONDRASHOV

Tourist attraction

The ratings are calculated on the cost of a return flight from Moscow, in addition to two-nights accommodation in a three-star hotel, across thirty-five European capitals

According to the study conducted by Russian Lenta.ru, a vacation in Minsk costs 8,886 Russian roubles (around \$138.70). Flights cost less than \$61 and a night in a hotel averages at \$77.50. Moreover, departure from Moscow's Zhukovsky Airport allows considerable saving on tickets.

Minsk's attractiveness goes beyond hotel prices, which is no surprise to Moscow historian and blogger Alexander Usoltsev. Recently, he was among the representatives of Russian media visiting Belarus as a part of a major press tour. He asked the Belarusian President about tourism development: an issue of great interest to all travellers and holiday experts.

"Minsk is more than just a city to me. I've visited it many times and, each time, I fall more in love with its lifestyle and orderliness. In Minsk,

I proposed to my future wife, nine years ago. I don't regret it happening in this beautiful city," he says.

Mr. Usoltsev sees plenty of reasons for recommending Minsk and Belarus to his countrymen. He comments, "Nezavisimosti Avenue is worth seeing, with its space and Stalinesque houses, in perfect condition; you only see such views on Moscow's Tverskaya Street. This might be good or bad, but it's definitely nice for tourists that everywhere is so clean, light and safe. If you've never visited Minsk, make sure you come, or visit anywhere in Belarus!"

Vilnius is second in the rankings (\$183), followed by Budapest (\$187). The top ten capitals also include Kiev, Riga, Bratislava, Prague, Helsinki, Belgrade and Warsaw. The most expensive European capital is Swiss Berne, where two-nights cost almost \$200, with \$552.50 for a flight.

Minsk Citadel, after 2020

3 The reconstructed museum and tourist complex on the site of ancient Mensk-Menesk, on the bank of the Svisloch, is likely to become one of the most visited tourist sites. Its underground museum will showcase fragments of the old wooden town and roads, while the fortified embankments, walls and towers of the ancient citadel will be accessible at the open-air site. A sculpture of the Nemiga Battle (which marked the launch of the city's history in 1067) is to be erected on the riverbank.

Speedy tram, 2020

4 Speedy electric trains are already operating in the capital, and a network of speedy trams is being launched. Suburban lines are to connect the city with Minsk National Airport, through the residential districts of Nottingham, Zeleny Bor and Sokol, located beyond the borders of Minsk ring road. The fast trams will run to Logoisk and Borovlyany, as well as to the recreation sites of Ostroshitsky Town, Silichi and Raubichi Sports Complex.

Rakovsky Suburbs and Zolotaya Gorka, 2020

5 Alongside the tourist zones of the Troitsky Suburbs, the Upper Town and Loshitsa Palace and Park Complex — which are popular with Minskians and guests alike — the old city districts of Rakovsky Suburbs, Zolotaya Gorka and Kalvariya are being revived.

Housewarming for newly-weds

Belarus provides housing loans at low interest rates, but not at the expense of the treasury

Belarusian wellbeing revolves not around gold jewellery or sable fur coats, but on house ownership. The state no longer provides free housing (as was common in Soviet times) but it does offer support in other ways: particularly, to families with three or more children.

Minsker Pavel Sosnovich has two sons and a daughter, and his family recently moved into a good two-bedroom apartment. He tells us, "When my wife was pregnant with our

daughter, we began to plan how to expand our living space. In 2012, we received a privileged loan, at a rate of one percent (virtually, at prime cost). We managed to repay the loan within three years, and our children now have more space, being able to play in the corridor."

The Sosnovichs had no need to repay the loan so quickly, having up to forty years to do so. However, there are conditions to the loan, since flats can't be sold on within a certain period (to avoid speculation) and, to receive a loan, a family needs to be registered as 'in need of better housing'. Banks can

give loans for up to twenty square metres of living space per family member. Moreover, to receive a flat in Minsk, you need to have lived at least ten years in the capital.

"In 2015, 9,800 large families received financial assistance in paying off debt on concessional loans for the construction, reconstruction or acquisition of housing," explains the Deputy Chair of the Committee on Labour, Employment and Social Protection of the Minsk City Executive Committee, Irina Dudka.

Belarusbank has been allocating loans to large families for over fifteen

BUDGET HOUSING FOR BELARUSIAN FAMILIES



housing
built with state
support



to be built
with state support
before 2017



forecast cost
of m² subsidized housing
(about 34% of the
average market value)



At the opening ceremony of the dormitory for medical specialists in Kolesnikov Street in Minsk. The Narbins, new settlers

years but in recent years it has cut the volume of such loans. The state is unable to satisfy all housing needs, with families registered for over three years being first to receive privileges.

Marriage proposals follow falling in love, and then, what's next? Should new families live with their parents? Special terms for mortgages can be acquired, though on less preferential terms than for large families. Loans are offered at an interest rate of five percent per annum, with repayment within twenty years. Importantly, one of the spouses must be under thirty-one year of age at the time of marriage or birth of a child.

Local authorities prepare waiting lists, but it's impossible to say how long people need to wait. Everything depends on the economic situation. In 2014, 15,500 young families were able to buy apartments under privileged terms, while 300,000 families remained 'in the queue'.

Within five years

Children without parental care are covered by the state social policy. On reaching the age of eighteen years, orphans are provided with apartments for five years without charge, though these remain state property unless the

person can afford to buy them out. Such children are eligible for state loans at under one percent, with repayment over a period of forty years (for flats of thirty square metres). Ordinary bank interest needs to be paid for extra square metres.

A member of parliament comments

Yuri Dorogokupets, Chairman of the Standing Commission for Housing Policy and Construction, of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus:

It's impossible to acquire your desired square metres without effort. Those wishing to have a flat need to work and earn money. State support covers only socially vulnerable groups: those with disabilities, large families and parentless children. These enjoy certain privileges — such as the extraordinary right to receive preferential credit or subsidies for housing construction.

Many people dream of living in the capital. However, our satellite towns — Dzerzhinsk, Zaslavl and Logoisk — are developing, offering perfect infrastructure. New enterprises, schools and hospitals are opening. It's easier and cheaper to build a house or an apartment in a small town than in Minsk. A 30-40 minute ride from the capital is no obstacle. I recommend this option, as it's cleaner and gives easier access to state benefits.



Hilton has grown beautiful

Former heiress of world's largest chain of Hilton Hotels & Resorts, managed by Hilton Worldwide Corporation, Paris Hilton, may never have visited Minsk but the heads of the most famous hotel company are aware of our country and see great potential for investing in new hotels



The arrival of Jochem-Jan Sleiffer, Hilton Worldwide's Area Vice President for Northern and Central Europe, went unnoticed by the Minsk public. Nevertheless, on the eve of the Christmas holidays, he found time to cut the red ribbon at the new premium hotel, Double Tree. The atmosphere was cosy and calm, on the 21st floor, with journalists gathering at one of the most famous bars in the city. Mr. Sleiffer spoke of the country's and city's tourist potential while crisping shellfish chips.

Jochem-Jan Sleiffer:

I travel a great deal and see planes full of passengers flying here from Amsterdam, Vienna and other European cities. This demonstrates that your city and your country have good tourist potential

Since last autumn, the corporation has opened two sites in Minsk: the mid-priced Hampton Hotel and the premium Double Tree. Of course, they won't rest on their laurels.

Mr. Sleiffer explained, "Business activity is slowing down, but this is a small crisis which can't be compared to that of 2008. The current time is very good for investments in Minsk and in Belarus. I travel a great deal and see planes full of passengers flying here from Amsterdam, Vienna and other European cities. This demonstrates that your city and your country have good tourist potential."

Originally, the administration of Hilton Worldwide planned to bring the occupancy rate of the new facility to 70 percent within three years; they later reduced this to 60 percent. Now, the prominent hotelier isn't discussing certain figures, explaining that a range of factors come into play. However, he is absolutely convinced that the popularity of Minsk will continue to grow. He mentioned the IIHF World Championships held in the Belarusian capital, as well as the European Games that are to be hosted in 2019. Mr. Sleiffer is confident that such events are vital in raising the profile of Belarus and stresses that his corporation is



keen to focus on developing business tourism.

"People come for an event and stay three or four days, spending a lot of money, notes Mr. Sleiffer. "Believe me, we'll do everything we can to enable this hotel to embrace the Belarusian spirit."

The CIS and Eastern European market is a priority for Hilton Worldwide, which is raising its number of hotels from twenty-eight to fifty-two. The corporation has particular plans for our country, including the possibility of opening new brands from the chain in major cities, which is seen as economically feasible.

By Galina **Nikonova**



► Reserves found

On a wintery December evening, 'Strizh' (Swift) train arrived in Minsk from Moscow, for the first time, able to accommodate 216 passengers and to reach Berlin from Minsk within twelve hours: four hours quicker than previously

The travel time for the train's route has been significantly reduced thanks to switching from a 1,520 mm track gauge to a narrower gauge at the Belarusian-Polish border. From now on, at Brest station, the switching of the train, comprising Talgo carriages, will be automatic, taking only thirty minutes (inclusive of border and customs control) instead of two hours.

Alexander Petrunin, Deputy Director General of the Russian Federal Passenger Company, hopes to reduce the travel time from Moscow to Berlin still further, to less than twenty hours.

"On this section, 'Strizh' train is the speediest, able to run at up to 220 km/h. However, our task is to prepare the necessary infrastructure to suit such speeds. The train will travel to Germany on Saturdays and Sundays, and will also transport passengers from Orsha, Minsk and Brest to Warsaw, Poznan, Rzepin and Frankfurt (Oder)," he explains.



Heritage of intellect

Respect towards books, knowledge and people of science is a peculiar feature of Belarusian world outlook

2017

has been declared the Year of Science in Belarus, launching focus on how scientific achievements can drive forward our development, in all senses.

It's no secret that the path to knowledge begins with reading. The first mentioning of handwritten books connected with the enlightenment of Belarusians refers to the 11th century Turov

Gospel (some fragments survived) and to Yevfrosiniya Polotskaya (born around 1110). The heavenly patron of the Fatherland, and the first female saint in eastern Slavic lands, Polotsk Princess Predslava entered the Cathedral of St. Sophia Convent at the age of twelve, becoming nun Yevfrosiniya. In her cell, she 'spent her spare time copying sacred books', says an extract from a booklet produced by the St. Yevfrosiniya Monastery of Polotsk.

Around 1125, she founded a new monastery, which grew from the small

wooden Church of the Saviour. In Polotsk, Yevfrosiniya was engaged in a variety of projects, including educational, and copying of books. At the end of her life, she made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land's Holy Sepulcher, dying in 1173 in Jerusalem. St. Yevfrosiniya is revered by Orthodox believers all over the world. The Catholic Church also recognises her as a saint, although, as we know, the churches began to diverge before Predslava's birth, before 1054. She presents us with a worthy example of respect for books and knowledge.

1517 is a landmark in Belarusian history, also because of books. This year, the world will celebrate the 500th anniversary of Belarusian book printing, with UNESCO marking the date. A native of Polotsk, Belarusian first printer and educator Frantsisk Skorina spent three years (1517-1519) working hard in Prague, publishing twenty-two books of the Holy Scriptures in ancient Belarusian language: Church Slavic, with a large number of Belarusian words (which, at first glance, look Russian). One of the books published by the first printer was the Russian Bible. Dr. Frantsisk Skorina wrote the introduction for the 'Russian-language Bible'; Russians were called Muscovites at the time, so, to avoid confusion, it's suggested that the term used be 'Ruthenian Bible': in research, scientific discussions and messages and articles relating to that period of history, 500 years ago.

On the long historical path to the name 'Belarusians', our ancestors received many names. In the times of Skorina, they were called Rusyns (by nationality), and Litviny (by Grand Duchy of Lithuania citizenship). Skorina called himself a Rusyn during his exams at the University of Padua, as recorded in documents from 1510. Later, Karl Marx used the same term.

Rusyn originates from word 'Rus' (Russia). The first written mentioning of 'Belaya Rus', in a (Latin) source (which says: Alba Ruscia) dates from 1217. Thus, it's quite reasonable to

consider an 800-year anniversary. It would be great to have a copy of that document at the National Library of Belarus and to inform the world about the deep roots of Alba Ruscia/ Belaya Rus (White Russia). Also, to tell them about our ancestor Rusyns, from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (not to be confused with today's Russians from the Russian Federation). Frantsisk Skorina was not a Russian educator, he was a citizen of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Online, we can read that he was 'a humanist and a representative of European culture, accused of heresy in Moscow, and his books burned while he was forced to flee'...

In Soviet times, there was speculation that the history of Belarus only started in 1917. It was said that, until then, it was a land of peasants, marshes and poverty. For some reason, our palaces, ancient castles, churches, mounds and Slutsk belts, and numerous handwritten and printed books confirming our thousand-year history of highly cultured life, were ignored, as was our dramatic, and often tragic, history.

Recently, I was chatting about our long history of science and culture with a colleague. They mentioned that the Belarusian Academy of Sciences was only established after the revolution, in 1928, however, I pointed out that Frantsisk Skorina was a doctor of medical sciences, having successfully passed the exam for this title at the University of Padua in 1512.

In the 15th century, young people from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania went to study in Krakow, Prague, Leipzig, Bologna and other well-known universities of Europe. Meanwhile, many of our countrymen later studied at Vilnius University. However, each of us must find our own truths. There are plenty of information sources on this subject.

The edition entitled 'Belarusian proverbs, sayings and idioms' (1992) offers nearly 500 pages detailing aspects



VITALY PIVOVARCHIK

of our folk history. A diligent researcher and collector of folk wisdom, Fiodor Yankovsky, created a chapter entitled 'Mind, Science, Learning.' It gives us such pearls as: 'An eye can see far, and the mind even farther'; 'Learn from an early age, it will be precious when you're old'; 'Learning always comes in handy'; 'Talking with someone wise is like enriching your mind, talking with a fool may lose you the remnants of your mind'; 'It's better to lose something with a wise companion than to find something with a fool'; 'Science is a torment, but teaches us how to live'; 'Knowledge is power'; and 'The mind isn't an axe; it can't be borrowed'.

The last saying beautifully explains why large machine-building enterprises were established in Belarus after the war: the Minsk Tractor Works (MTZ) and Minsk Automobile Works (MAZ). In modern terms, they were set up in an area with a high human development index, yet where they would not spoil historically important sites. Such plants require skilled manpower and major scientific support. Later, more

technology-intensive companies were launched in Belarus, such as Integral, Horizont, the Belarusian Optical and Mechanical Association and BelAZ.

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a comprehensive indicator of life expectancy, literacy, education and standards of living, used worldwide. Belarus now tops the list, having a high HDI; there is every reason to assume that it will continue to rise from its current rank of 50th (among nearly 190 countries).

How is Belarusian science developing? As we know, Belarus traditionally has a strong school of higher mathematics. Indeed, as the saying goes: 'The mind isn't an axe; it can't be borrowed'. When computer technology began to develop rapidly, it was relatively easy to streamline software engineer training; we now have many world-level professionals, some of whom work abroad.

To make better use of its human capital, Belarus established a Hi-Tech Park in 2005. More than 90 percent of software produced at the Park is exported, with almost 47 percent going to Europe, more than 40 percent to the United States and Canada, and yet another 10 percent to Russia and CIS states. The Belarus-designed World of Tanks online game boasts 145 million users globally. The developer, profitable game company Wargaming, is still based in Minsk.

Of course, all achievements take time and rely on knowledge, in the traditions of Yevfrosiniya and Frantsisk Skorina. We should esteem books in this path of learning, as all Belarusians know. It's in our genes. Our human capital stems from those roots.

In this Year of Science, we plan to bring you articles detailing the most fascinating research projects and the latest developments made by our Belarusian scientists.

By Ivan **Zhdanovich**

Country's advancement apparent

Belarus is an absolute leader within the CIS for developing information and communication technologies (ICT), according to the annual report on Measuring the Information Society issued by the International Telecommunication Union. The Union assesses the ICT Development Index of 175 countries, across eleven criteria: from specific technological criteria to the number of mobile subscribers and active Internet users. Belarus is ranked 31st, with an ICT Development Index of 7.26, up from the 84th position in 2008. Our closest CIS rival, Russia, is ranked 43rd.

The country's confident growth in its international ranking is primarily connected with Belarus having made concerted ef-

forts, notes the Dean of the BSUIR's Faculty of Computer Systems and Networks, Valery Prytkov. He tells us, "The High-Tech Park is developing at very optimistic rates, as

are services in the sphere of providing access to IT. From our side, as a faculty training personnel in this sphere, we're closely integrating educational programmes with practice. Branches have been created on the premises of IT companies, alongside several training centres of world manufacturers of computer equipment and software, such as Cisco, IBM and NVidia. We're training in the use of their technologies, giving our students international certificates."

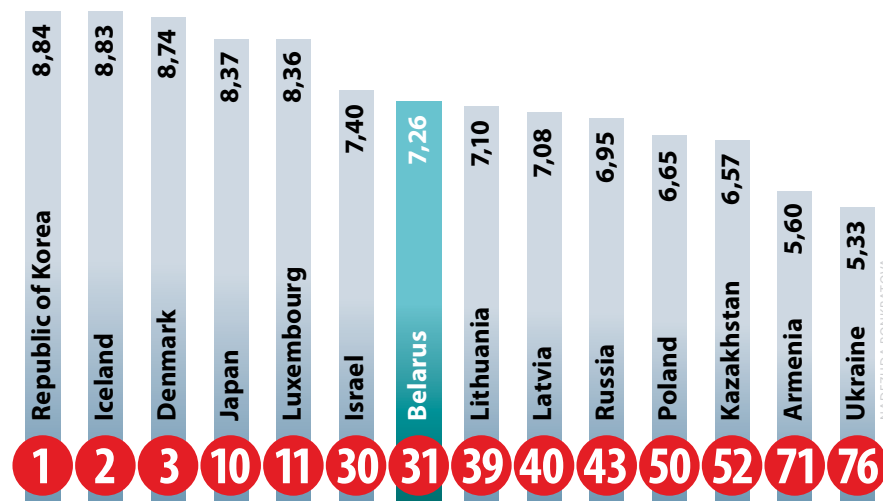
He continues, "The Olympiad movement is also developing. For two years in a row, our teams have qualified for the finals of the ACM ICPC World Programming Championships. In the latest, we were ranked 17th and brought home bronze medals in 2012. It was a great result, taking into account that 128 teams performed in the finals, while the selection rounds saw more than 13,000 teams compete. We organise Olympiads at our faculty, testing on the use of databases, Linux administration and 1C programming. Our students are extremely motivated: admission scores across some specialities remain at a level of at least 360."

The cost of broadband Internet access in Belarus has been praised for its affordability: \$7.2, against a global average of \$40. The Connected Consumer Survey, conducted via Google, places Belarus among the most active Internet users, with 91 percent of those with Internet access logging-in daily. The older generation doesn't lag behind, with 78 percent of those aged over 55 using the Internet for personal purposes, unconnected with work. This corresponds to the level seen in Denmark and Finland. Belarus is ranked 23rd for its number of subscribers to broadband connection (31.15 per 100 residents), neighbouring the USA and Greece. By 2020, this figure should rise to 34.7 per 100 residents.

By Anton Kostyukevich

INFORMATION SOCIETY-2016

Belarus is a CIS leader regarding information and communication technologies (ICT)



This data is contained in the new report by the International Telecommunication Union — Measuring the Information Society-2016. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is a specialised UN agency determining standards in the sphere of ICT, including in the sphere of telecommunications and radio. The Index uses eleven indicators, tackling access to and use of ICT, as well as working knowledge of technologies by the population.

Chairman of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly Mikhail Myasnikovich visiting the experimental laboratory for extracting human lactoferrin from transgenic goat milk



The Institute will produce at least 5 kg of the substance per year: enough to provide dietary supplementation for 2,000 people. The world need is estimated at 90 tonnes per year

Line working for health benefit

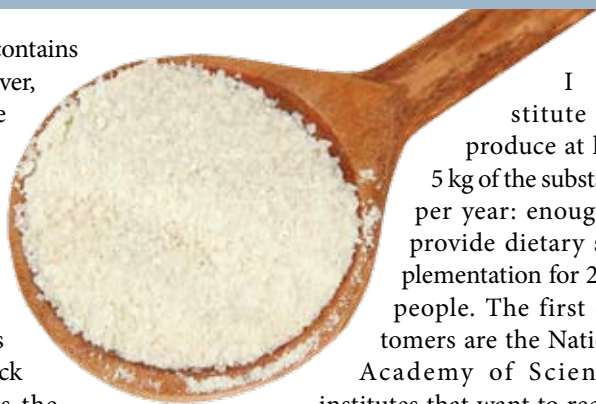
Human lactoferrin from transgenic goat milk is now in production at the Microbiology Institute of the National Academy of Sciences. Its experimental laboratory is extracting, purifying and drying lactoferrin, though not yet on an industrial scale.

Until recently, plans for the unique protein were rather vague. The project is the work of Belarusian and Russian scientists as a part of two major Union State programmes — BelRosTransgene and BelRosTransgene-2.

Human lactoferrin is contained in breast milk, supporting congenital immunity, fighting bacteria and viruses, preventing development of cancer tumours, and counteracting inflammation and aging. It has antioxidant and regenerative characteristics. The problem of initial material for extraction was solved via creation of transgenic goats at the Scientific and Practical Centre for Animal Breeding at the National Academy of Sciences of

Belarus, whose milk contains human protein. However, the milk needed to be frozen, as there was no place to process it. The line in Veliky Novgorod able to process up to a thousand tonnes of such raw material stands idle. A stumbling block to promotion across the Union State has been toughening of Russian legislation regarding GMO, under which this recombinant protein formally falls.

Projects dealing with lactoferrin have been included into Belarusian state programmes, and the line at the Microbiol-



ogy
Institute will produce at least 5 kg of the substance per year: enough to provide dietary supplementation for 2,000 people. The first customers are the National Academy of Sciences' institutes that want to receive protein for their research. Lactoferrin can be used in baby food, as well as for sport and dietary nutrition. It will also find application in pharmaceutical and cosmetic products. The world need is estimated at 90 tonnes per year.

By Yulia Vasilishina



Understanding others' pain

BELTA

'Palliative care' firmly established in medical practice but only recently covered by legislation

There has been made a true breakthrough not only in medical care but in psychological, social and spiritual support. New approaches are being discussed at the state level and among the public, especially with reference to treating children. Even if illness cannot be beaten, this doesn't mean that young patients can't be helped.

During a recent sitting of the National Commission on Children's Rights, the issue was high on the agenda, as the Deputy Prime Minister, Natalia Kochanova, notes. She said, "In Belarus, 892 children are included on the register of those in need of palliative care. Most live with families and receive home care, as parents want to care for their children independently.

We have a clear system of training (for professionals and family members), to support such care, at all stages."

Ms. Kochanova underlines plans for special training and re-training of all employees involved in this field. The First Deputy Minister of Health, Dmitry Pinevich, adds that over 80 percent of children in Belarus receiving palliative care do so at home, surrounded by relatives. This is the most effective option, especially for the family, but the latter do need attention and support, so that children may remain with loving and caring people until their last days.

At present, these children — even in the most remote regions — enjoy individual approach. Hospitals have beds for such patients and the level of care at

special institutions is increasing all the time. Minsk children's home No. 1, for children suffering from central nervous system defects, is a wonderful example, having palliative care wards. Since 2002, the hospital has provided support to families whose children are in need. Its four wards can accommodate twenty-five patients, and are equipped with ventilators.

All the children currently receiving support there have loving families and many of their parents are preparing to take their children home, having concluded their special training. These families now need support and, to achieve this, the interaction of all services and organisations is vital.

By Olga Savitskaya

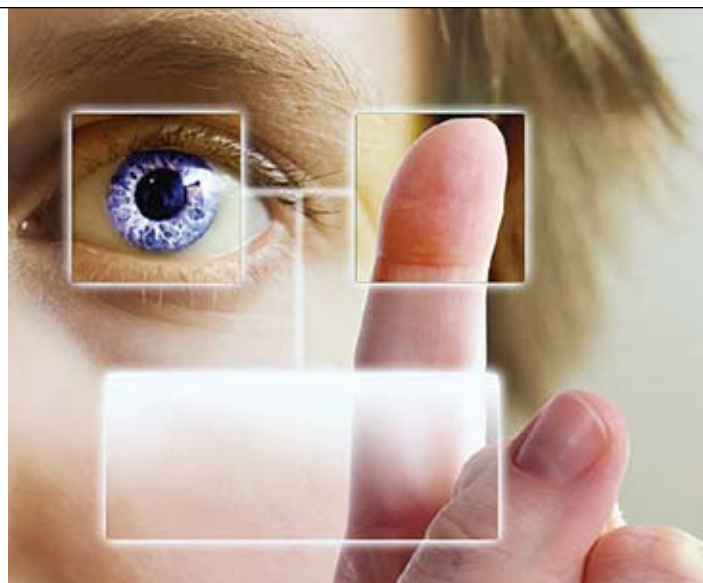
Technologies change form

Biometric passports and national ID cards to launch in late 2018

Alexei Begun, Head of the Citizenship and Migration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus, notes, “We’re planning to launch biometric passports for travelling abroad and an ID card.”

According to the plan for development of biometric technologies for 2014-2018, Belarus is initiating measures to infuse national documents with biometric technologies: passports for travel abroad and national ID cards. Plans have also been made to introduce these into the Belarusian integrated service-payment system.

ID cards are plastic cards with biometric information stored on the chip. They are successfully used in many countries, being compact and durable, and almost impossible to counterfeit. Meanwhile, biometric passports make travel across state borders faster and more convenient.



Private account for each patient

This year sees a breakthrough for Belarusian medicine, as the World Bank allocates \$65 m for global informatisation, aiding progress

The Department of Organisational-methodical and Systematic-technical Support of Informatisation for Public Health Services, at the Belarusian Centre for Medical Technologies, Computer Systems, Administration and Management of Health, aims to remedy the situation. Semen Polyakov, who heads the department, explains that regions are being targeted, with a list of participants drawn up. The goal is for at least 70 percent of medical institutions to have joined the electronic public health system by 2021.

The aim is to create a uniform central information platform, joined by a huge server, allowing doctors to access medical data: from our blood type to past treatments. Meanwhile, patients will be able to receive electronic prescriptions and electronic appointments, as well as online access to their records and the option to leave feedback. Russian and foreign developers will probably be involved in creating this unique information database. Many countries have taken this path, with 99 percent of prescriptions being given electronically in Estonia these days.

Doctors are keen to preserve paper records, planning to duplicate electronic prescriptions with paper versions for Minsk patients, for the coming year. Polyclinics also plan to launch bar codes, facilitating appointment-making with doctors.

By Lyudmila Kirillova

Friends get together

What is inclusion? Has Belarus achieved its goals of sustainable development? How can we overcome barriers to achieving equality for all vulnerable groups of the population? The UN's regional campaign, 'Inclusive Belarus', endeavours to answer these questions. In the last, December, issue of our magazine, we published material dedicated to this topic, exploring how participants of 'Inclusive Belarus' campaign travelled from Minsk to the regional centres of Brest and Grodno. Now, we offer you continuation of this topic.

Third city on the way

Gomel was the third city to join in 'Inclusive Belarus' campaign, with the Centre of Culture hosting the official opening ceremony, gathering representatives of UN agencies and local authorities. Various venues around Gomel have been hosting events.

"We all aspire to sustainable development," the Deputy Chairman of the Gomel Regional Executive Committee, Vladimir Privalov, said at the opening ceremony. "We're glad that, one year on from 'Express UN-70' campaign, Gomel again gathers international experts, representatives of state structures and non-governmental organisations to discuss one of the major goals of sustainable development."

Zeynal Hajiyeu, who heads the International Organisation for Migration in Belarus, added, "Campaign 'Inclusive Belarus' is a logical continuation of 'Express UN-70', underlin-

ing our commitment to sustainable development goals, which we're fulfilling in practice today."

Jean-Yves Bouchardy, Representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Belarus, noted that the Gomel region has taken in many refugees from Ukraine and Syria and is an excellent example of Belarusian hospitality towards displaced people. He urges us to take part in campaign activities, and to attend the exhibition, to see 'how inclusion can save lives'.

Within the Campaign, the United Nations Development Programme and its partners shared results of their activities on achieving by Belarus the Sustainable Development Goals, with accent on Goal No. 10, to be achieved by 2030.

Together with the National Centre of Legislation and Legal Research of the Republic of Belarus, the

UNDP organised a seminar, entitled 'Strengthening Inclusive Local Governance in Belarus'. This introduced the best international practices regarding principles of inclusion into state service, aiming to meet the needs of the population.

The Gomel Scientific and Technical Library also hosted some activities on the theme of building an inclusive society. The media gathered to discuss how best to create a barrier-free city environment, identifying the role of the media in shaping public attitudes towards vulnerable groups and promoting positivity.

There was also a webinar round table, entitled 'Education – inclusion – sustainable development: experience and resources for collaboration in the regions'. This gathered representatives of educational institutions from Gomel and the Gomel region, alongside pupils and teachers of Minsk's gymnasium No. 19. Participants



UN Resident Coordinator in the Republic of Belarus Sanaka Samarasinha opening 'Inclusive Belarus' campaign in Vitebsk

shared experience and examples of their inclusive educational practices. The first 'A' form of Gomel's secondary school No. 5 is one of seven experimental inclusive classes, where children with special psychophysical developmental needs attend regular classes. Meanwhile, the visitors from Minsk reported on a number of social projects initiated by pupils.

The sports element of 'Inclusive Belarus' in Gomel featured joint events by the UNDP and the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Belarus. The Gomel Engineering Institute's lyceum, under the Ministry of Emergency Situations, hosted sports events, aiming to promote healthy living. Pupils from the lyceum joined those from Gomel's

school No. 70 in relay races, as well as a blindfolded mini-championship in tennis, and a tug-of-war, while others took part in pool events and games. Vladimir Izotov, who won a gold medal in the 2016 Paralympics, in Rio de Janeiro, offered young swimmers some coaching.

Gomel also hosted a discussion on preventive

Roma community

Olga Nechaeva, who heads the Roma diaspora organisation in Gomel and the Gomel region, tells us:

Our organisation is only three years old. However, we've already realised joint projects aiming to informally educate adults in the Roma community, providing sexual education, employment and preservation of cultural traditions. Recently, we launched a new project, called 'Educating Roma: Looking to the Future'. We're targeting four community groups: pupils, preschool children, parents and adults in general, aiming to eradicate illiteracy. We're also offering courses in computer literacy and business, to help Roma parents support their children's learning, so they can become worthy citizens of Belarus. The main problem is adult illiteracy among Roma people, which prevents them finding employment. They have no documents, even birth certificates. We want to encourage a positive view of the community, helping with practical matters, including administrative procedures.





For the sports element of 'Inclusive Belarus' campaign in Gomel, the UNDP and the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Belarus joined their efforts

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been approved by heads of states and world governments, including the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, on September 25-27th, 2015, at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in New York



The eventful programme of 'Inclusive Belarus' campaign in Gomel ended with a concert

programmes relating to HIV and tuberculosis attended by members of the Country Coordinating Committee on Cooperation with the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. There was also discussion of how civil society can support consistent treatment of HIV-infection and tuberculosis.

The EU-UNDP joint 'Development at Local Level' project reported on initiatives being realised in the Gomel region, including 'Souvenirs of Loev Land', which helps people with physical disability (aged 18 to 31 years) in finding employment. Meanwhile, 'We Choose Life' initiative motivates young people to live healthily, without taking mind-altering drugs, and supports those with addiction in beating their illness.

The Belarusian Children's Hospice showed visitors how to make paper storks of happiness and encouraged them to take part in charitable campaign '#AistDom', donating their time or money to help in the construction of a summer house for volunteers, at the hospice's summer centre.

The hospice's evening concert also encouraged donations, with performances by Maher, a refugee from Syria, who addressed the audience with a touching speech about the importance of 'Inclusive Belarus' campaign. Maher lost his family in the war, but has found a new home and life in Belarus.

Also performing were Sasha Nemo, Uzari, the Children's Cinema Production School Choir, and Gomel border forces' woodwind orchestra.



Mogilev takes up the torch

On December 2nd, 'Inclusive Belarus' campaign visited the regional centre of Mogilev, with the city's Ice Palace hosting the main activities.

The Deputy Chairman of the Mogilev Regional Executive Committee, Valery Malashko, joined the Deputy Representative of the United Nations Population Fund, Elena Kasko, and the

Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Belarus, Peter Dettmar, in a ceremony to launch the Mogilev part of the campaign.

Mogilev saw a diverse programme of activities, including reports on the breadth of UNDP activity, and opportunities to chat with experts working on UNDP projects. Popular showman Yevgeny Bulka hosted a quiz on sustainable development goals, with prizes.

Promotion of healthy living is a key element of 'Inclusive Belarus', with Mogilev hosting an awards ceremony for winners of a newly launched competition. This has encouraged local initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles, as part of 'Preventing Non-Infectious Illnesses, Promotion of a Healthy Lifestyle and Modernisation of Public Health Services' initiative, in Belarus. It is financed by the European Union and implemented by the UNDP, WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health of Belarus.

Representatives of sixteen media outlets based in Mogilev and the region met to discuss their role in shaping a barrier-free environment and a society of equal opportunities. 'Barrier-Free Environment: Media Angle' session noted the vital importance of overcoming physical and psychological barriers to allow people to play a full role in the society and enjoy all rights, alongside fully-able citizens.

Oleg Pishchenko, Deputy Head of the Central Administrative Board and Head of the Department for Ideological Work of the Mogilev Regional Executive Committee, reminded participants of the media meeting of signing and ratification by Belarus of the Convention on Rights of People with Physical Disability, in October of 2016. He

Vesnovo care home

Tatiana Lisovskaya, a leading research worker at the National Education Institute, tells us:

As a part of a Swiss Development Fund project, at the National Education Institute we have prepared two guides to teaching children with difficulties. When we arrived at Vesnovo care home, we understood straight away that such children need us. It's not enough to give a comfortable, safe home to children. They need to feel purposeful: engaged in education on an individual level, as a way of expressing their personality. We're happy that the number of children in this situation is falling. Teachers are managing to get children previously bed-ridden up and moving, against the expectations of many. They then begin engaging more with what's around them.

Teaching social skills is vital, helping youngsters gain independence. Vocational skills are similarly useful in planning young people's future.



At Vesnovo care home, sports and creative activity is a way for the children to overcome their diseases

‘Inclusive Belarus’ campaign, organised by the United Nations Organisation in Belarus and the Government of Belarus, in cooperation with state and non-state organisations, with assistance from members of the business and international community, is a logical continuation of ‘UN 70 Express’ initiative in Belarus. It aims to fulfil Sustainable Development Goal No. 10, to reduce inequality and promote fuller discussion of related issues



Alexander Grebenkov, who heads the UNDP ‘Improving Energy Efficiency in Residential Buildings in Belarus’ project, explained future residents some of the advanced technologies and how to use them

set the direction of the discussion, saying, “We all understand that ratifying this Convention does not mean that people with physical disability will see their life change immediately. We need to discuss the role of the media in ensuring inclusion of people into an active role in society.”

UNDP experts joined the Mogilev Regional Executive Committee and the Ministry of Information of Belarus in organising a round table on the aims of sustainable development. This gathered representatives

of local authorities and vulnerable groups, discussing closer cooperation in solving problems in the social sphere of the region. The Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Belarus, Peter Dettmar, was the special guest of the round table, sharing German experience in reducing inequality.

About forty women (all heads of large enterprises and banks in the region) joined the ‘School of Women’s Leadership’ round table, discussing questions of gender equality and its influence on social and

economic development. The ‘School’ is organised in the region together with the Academy of Public Administration, under the aegis of the President of the Republic of Belarus and public association Belarusian Union of Women.

The Mogilev programme also included a tour of the city’s first high-rise energy efficient apartment block, revealing its hi-tech secrets to future residents. Alexander Grebenkov, who heads the UNDP-GEF ‘Improving Energy Efficiency in Residential Buildings in Belarus’ project, explained some of the advanced technologies and how to use them. Most of those gathered wanted to know how much can be saved on household electricity and heating bills. Everyone taking part received a gift: board game called ‘Energopolis’, helping children learn the principles of energy saving. The game is part of the UNDP’s ‘energy efficiency’ project ‘Developing an Integrated Approach to a Stepped-Up Energy Saving Programme (Energy Efficiency in Schools) financed by the European Union.

The campaign in Mogilev ended with a concert at the Palace of Culture, to a full house of over a thousand. Popular singers, such as Belarusian and Russian R’n’B singer Max Lawrence, showman Dyadya Vanya, virtuoso-accordion player Vitaly Voronko, and DOMINANTA Belarusian Medical University choir took part, alongside local newcomers.

The centre has already put its best foot forward

Denis Glushnevich, Head Engineer of the Vitebsk Fire Safety Centre, tells us:

We created the volunteer fire safety centre in the agro-town of Kovali, in the Liozno district of the Vitebsk region. The closest Ministry of Emergency Situations post is 25-30 km away, inspiring us to create the voluntary team. We chose people with initiative and bought a fire-engine with a grant from the EU-UNDP programme 'Support to Local Development in Belarus'.

We've equipped an educational children's playground with fire-prevention elements, helping adults and children learn about fire safety. Our new fire crew is the first in Belarus to feature the Ministry of Emergency Situations workers alongside volunteers. Moreover, we've already been active in proving our fire fighting capabilities.



Vitebsk welcomes all

Vitebsk was the last of the regional centres to welcome 'Inclusive Belarus' campaign, with most events hosted by the Vitebsk Concert Hall. In the morning of December 6th, a caravan of buses brought participants from across Belarus and abroad for the official opening ceremony and signing of a declaration of adherence to goal No. 10 of the Sustainable Development Plan. In attendance was the Chairman of the Vitebsk Regional Council of

Deputies, Vladimir Terentiev, joined by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the UNDP in Belarus, Ekaterina Paniklova and the Head of the World Health Organisation Office in Belarus, Batyr Berdyklychev.

UN agencies and public associations organised exhibitions, as did the embassies of Israel, Palestine and the Swiss Red Cross, in the foyer of the Vitebsk Concert Hall: all devoted to equal rights and social inclusion, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion or birth status.

The Deputy Permanent Representative of the UNDP in Belarus, Ekaterina Paniklova, told journalists that 'Inclusive Belarus' campaign is a 'unique' one. She explained, "It's the only campaign launched by the UNDP in the region aiming to support sustainable development goals, focusing on social inequality. We're highlighting the best practices in this region." She noted that UN agencies plan on meeting representatives of local authorities and public organisations, in order to learn more about the region's challenges, with the aim of planning targeted support.

The Vitebsk events included a seminar looking at how the Integrated Customs Centre is rendering services. There was a media session and a Festival of Films on the themes of human dignity, equality and justice. There was even an inclusive fashion show and master classes in making nests for owls and handmade cards.

Questions of how best to develop leadership qualities among women in the Vitebsk region were discussed at the 'School of Leadership for Women', and questions of inclusion were tackled during a round table with local administrative bodies and representatives of UN agencies, diplomatic corps and public associations.

By Vladimir **Mikhailov**



In Vitebsk, popular Belarusian showman Yevgeny Bulka awarded prizes with the UNDP symbols to participants of the blindfold tennis competition

Two coins, or Test of humanity

I'll never forget those
shiny two kopecks.
Whenever I hold
again those
coins that were
in circulation
when I was a young
girl, it makes
me smile.

Galina sat behind a cash desk in a big department store in Minsk, like all the other cashiers. However, her radiant smile and warm, friendly responses to customers' questions, set her apart. She might only be saying, 'Who's next?' or 'You're welcome!', or 'Can I help you?', but Galina's tone drew customers to her. Like so many, I'd wait to be served at her cash desk, despite the other queues being shorter.

In the 1990s, with the collapse of the USSR, a difficult period began for Belarus: a time of great change, which altered how people thought and lived. You can visit <https://news.tut.by/society/404016.html> to learn more about the limitations and restrictions that appeared on almost all goods, from cereals and sugar to TV sets and fridges. Even if you had the money, nothing could be purchased without the relevant coupons. Of course, it affected how customers and shop assistants behaved. We became used to seeing empty shelves and keeping track of our coupons.

One Christmas Eve, when Galina was just 18 (so, it was impossible not to call her Galochka or Galinka) I was queuing at her till. From a distance, she resembled a fluffy dandelion, with a halo of curly ash-coloured hair. I was musing on how we behave in difficult circumstances and realising that it's clearly best to adapt our attitude to a situation if we cannot change it. Despite my youth, I was wise enough to see that positive thinking makes us stronger; pessimism only brings unhappiness. Perhaps, I owed this attitude to my parents who had survived the Great Patriotic War,

starvation and other calamities, but continued to delight in small things.

Watching Galina's behaviour, dealing with customers who, at times, resembled screeching crows, I felt proud of 'my' girl. Some customers were frustrated at not being able to purchase what they wanted, whether sugar or sausages. They showed their dissatisfaction in the way they spoke to the cashiers but Galina remained polite, courteous and friendly, patiently explaining and always smiling.

Most customers calmed down on speaking to her. Those who didn't were referred by her to the manager.

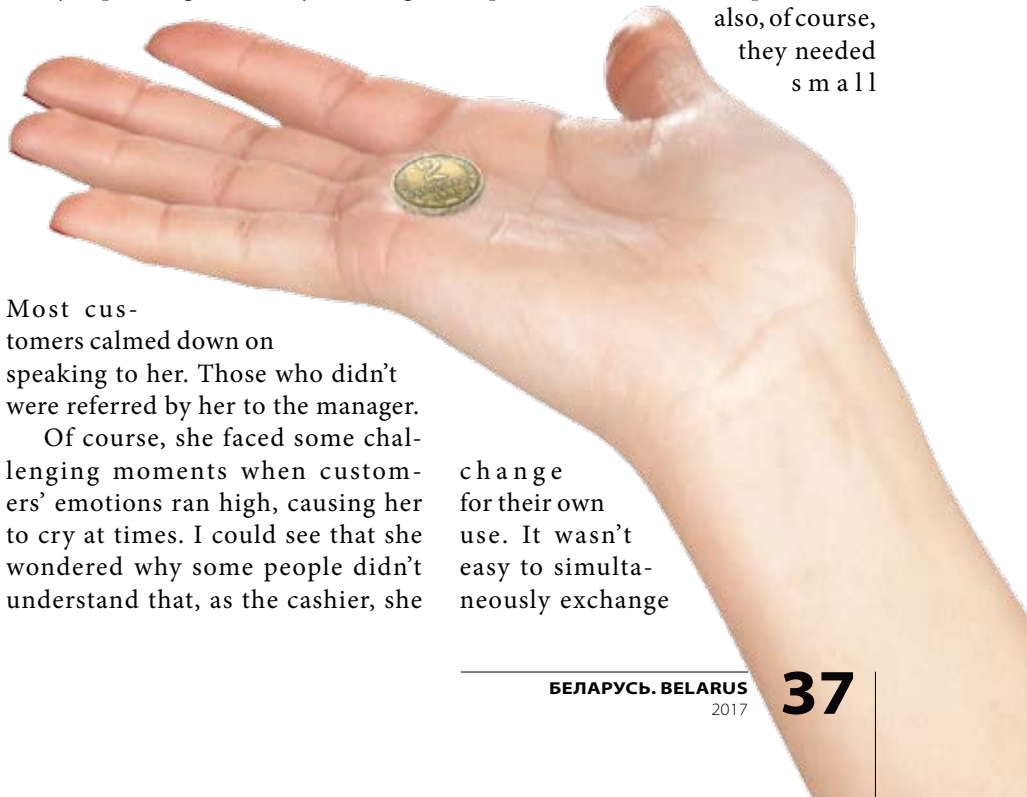
Of course, she faced some challenging moments when customers' emotions ran high, causing her to cry at times. I could see that she wondered why some people didn't understand that, as the cashier, she

couldn't know all the details relating to the goods on sale. When customers thanked her, Galina would smile, slightly embarrassed, yet, with quiet dignity, would accept people's gratitude. Presented with a small bunch of snowdrops or a sweet pushed across the counter, she'd blush, and her green eyes'd grow wet.

My story with Galya began with a two-kopeck coin. For pay phones, you needed either a two-kopeck coin or two one-kopeck coins, placing them in a special slot, where they'd drop down when you were connected. If you failed to get through, the money remained in the slot. Two kopeck coins had certain significance in this respect. No matter how long you chatted, the call cost no more than two kopecks, and pay phones were installed on every corner. In a non-mobile era, it was very convenient, all the more so because not everyone had a fixed-line telephone at home. Two- and one-kopeck coins were hoarded, from post offices and shops, in readiness for phone calls. You couldn't always count on cashiers' generosity in taking time to exchange ten or twenty kopeck coins for two-kopeck ones;

also, of course, they needed small

change for their own use. It wasn't easy to simultaneously exchange



money while serving customers. The cashier could be reprimanded by those standing in the queue.

On this particular frosty Christmas Eve, of January 6th (by the Orthodox calendar, whereby Christmas is celebrated on January 7th). I urgently needed to call a 24/7 pharmacy, to ask if they had medicine for my sick son. I lacked the right coins, so, I rushed to the shop on the opposite side of the road. No one was standing at the pay phone to help me in exchanging money and there were few people in the street, since most had completed their holiday shopping. I entered the half-empty grocery store and rushed to a cash desk, then the next one, and the next, but none of the cashiers had two kopecks for me. Galina's cash desk was empty. 'She's probably out,' I thought, while staggering along the shelves to find something to buy, to acquire the correct change. Then, I noticed my girl returning.

She saved me, having both two and one kopeck coins. Later, whenever I asked her for those 'twos' she would always have them. You might think what's so special about her giving out two kopecks, but I once asked her if she collected them on purpose for people who needed to make a call, and she admitted that she did. She told me, 'if an ambulance doesn't come on time, someone might die.' She was so young, yet so wise.

I'd often wonder why the other cashiers didn't help me that night on Christmas Eve. Perhaps, they'd already surrendered their coins, or were too tired to bother. Anyway, destiny gave me a chance to get to know Galina better, and make friends. This is how we explained it to ourselves later. Once, I saw that she was very tired after her working day but was still smiling. I invited her for a cup of tea, at my place. No one was waiting for her at her hostel.

As we chatted, I learnt that she came from Western Ukraine, from a

place called Zaleschiki. Maybe it was our common Ukrainian roots that attracted us to each other — I came from the south-east of Ukraine. Yet, I think there was more to it than that. I was attracted by her innate dignity and ability to listen to others: a rare quality. Due to her kind-heartedness and benevolence, we started calling each other sister. My little son also played an important role in our relations; his pure soul was easily attuned to Galyunya's (as I called her, in Ukrainian style). Some people make you feel warm and comfortable, and she was one of them. We

and every corner is spotless. A neat person is neat everywhere. I'll tell you a secret: Galina's house is brilliantly clean, and her wardrobe always neatly arranged.

Galina is also an excellent cook. Maybe that's why her shop is filled with quality ingredients. She has her strict side, as I found out once on shuffling about the cheeses, searching for a particular brand and weight. I heard her voice behind me, whispering an admonishment to put them back neatly! I hadn't heard her creep up on me.

She has all the qualities essential for a good manager: intellect, reas-

Like a drop of water reflecting the ocean, small things show our inner self and our ability to respond to others' sorrows and joy

also bonded over Ukrainian songs that we'd sing together to our friends, on holidays, who'd join us in singing in Belarusian.

Galya didn't work at our grocery store for long, as she was studying trade and food management at the Belarusian State Economic University. She learnt the art of building a harmonious family relationship, raising two daughters, then her career sky-rocketed.

Today, she's the director of one of Minsk's largest Vitalyur supermarkets, heading about 140 people. For many years, people addressed her by her first name and patronymic, Galina Vasilievna. Her beloved calls her Galyochka, and I still call her Galyunya.

The store she works at is quite a distance from our home, but we like to shop there, as the atmosphere is pleasant, and the shop assistants are polite and amiable. The smell of fresh pastry and pizza is delicious,

on, the ability to express her ideas, self-confidence and good communication skills. Moreover, Galina is friendly to everyone, with a maternal touch. Despite having lots to do in her office, she often comes down to the shop floor. She's esteemed by those who work under her: the junior shop assistants, cashiers, salesroom administrators, security guards and section chiefs. Her leadership skills could inspire a whole other article. However, I want to focus on the importance of displaying humanity, in this age of gadgets and rushing about. Even we, mature people, are interested in new trends, and can be prone to become isolated from relatives and friends, seeing them less often, only exchanging messages and videos on holidays.

It's good that we more often see elderly people with smartphones and that we have devices for storing and sharing so much information. How-

ever, it's not so good that we seem to have less time to chat to each other. We may have gone to the Moon, but we may not find time to talk to a new neighbour. Are we losing something vital? I can't answer for everyone but, for myself, I know that life without talking to those dear to me is like having a meal without seasoning.

Our gadgets can't save us from boredom; we need each other. For several years, my husband and I have gone to the Logoisk District's village of Posadets on Christmas Eve — to Galyunya's mother's place. Raisa Timofeyevna is hospitable, kind and sympathetic. According to Ukrainian tradition, she makes rice pudding on Christmas Eve, and a delicious Christmas dinner on the following day. She grew up in a large, hard-working family of old believers in Russia, in the village of Yelantovo, near Naberezhnye Chelny. Galina absorbed her best features, including her ability to keep her wardrobe neat, and to be responsive to people's needs, to sing Ukrainian songs at the table and communicate joyfully. These are Raisa Timofeyevna's 'gadgets'. Now, I understand that the two-kopeck coin is like a drop of water reflecting the ocean, reflecting my Galyunya's great soul, as when she was a young girl.

We often see young people looking at their gadgets. Running into people, they hardly dare tear their eyes from their devices for a second, living almost in a virtual world, quite separate from reality. However, this doesn't mean that the younger generation is 'bad'. I once asked a young man to lend me his phone, having left mine at home, and he was all too happy to help, once I'd made clear my problem. Often, young people listening to music on their tablets or smart phones give up their seat to older people on public transport. I may just be lucky but I think rather that these youngsters may have parents not unlike my Galyunya.

By Valentina **Zhdanovich**



Galina's favourite flowers are orchids



Knight's move

Vladimir Azarko meets a lot of children, having driven a school bus for the past decade which serves nearly ten villages in the Verkhnedvinsk district. Covering 150 km daily, he's learnt how to remain relaxed, smiling at childish pranks. Some years ago, Vladimir set up an agro-eco-estate in his native village of Yustiyanovo, buying horses, so that he could offer children rides, free of charge.

Vladimir meets me near his gate, telling me that his 'payment' for the horse rides is promotion of happiness, rather than money.

In the backyard, behind the fence, I can see horses chomping at the bit: restive Nora, white Chaika and obstinate Kamysh. The quietest one is Zorka, who recently turned

twenty years old. Local children know his six horses well, as do adults. Vladimir and his animals take part in local events around Verkhnedvinsk: for Maslenitsa (Pancake Week) and the City Day.

Three years ago, a girl with problems walking visited from Novopolotsk. Her parents had been trying hippotherapy with her for a long time, at various schools and estates, but it was only with Vladimir's horses that she gained an emotional connection.

Vladimir's story of how he came to create the agro-estate is unusual, as he had no business plan or expectation of earning an income. Nearly ten years ago, after moving to Yustyanovo, he bought a horse — to plough his kitchen garden and to ride in the forest. The horse was, simply, a pet. However, Vladimir felt he wanted more. His only son had long since grown up, and had moved to distant Nesvizh.

Vladimir had kept horses since childhood, his parents having had a large farm, so it was natural for him to want them. Yustyanovo children would often ask Vladimir if they could ride his horse, as he went by. Villagers say that he's too kind to refuse the youngsters. He'd put aside his own schedule, to help them ride for hours.

In due course, Vladimir acquired a pair of other horses, just for fun. One was malnourished and unwell, requiring nursing for several months, like a sick child. He spent many days and nights at the veterinary hospital. Meanwhile, the estate received more and more guests.

His friends suggested that he officially register his agro-estate, to enable him to charge for riding. The district doesn't have any riding schools, the nearest being fifty kilometres away, in Osveya. The situation is favourable for Vladimir, although it took time for his business to become successful. He simply lacked the true business spirit, wishing to encourage youngsters, regardless of their parents' ability to pay. He tells us, "We're in a village, where salaries are small. Children and their parents can't afford such entertainments."

Vladimir charges a suggested voluntary donation of 50 Belarusian kopecks; it can elicit only a smile in comparison with other riding schools.

A Chinese restaurant that introduced the same voluntary payments, allowing customers to pay whatever they thought was fair, went bust within three months. Vladimir, by and large, observes the same principle but his

business has been operational for three years. He still offers free rides, despite having costs to meet. A single collar for a horse costs 700 BYN, while a saddle is even more expensive. However, Vladimir stresses that his work feeds his soul, and that his horses are healthy. He's convinced that the work keeps him young.

Horses need to be cared for, their harnesses repaired, and forage provided for winter. Meanwhile, each is unique in character. To communicate with them, you need the inclinations of a zoologist, veterinary doctor and, even, a psychologist.

Vladimir is learning these skills gradually, but recognises that he still can't compare with a professional groom. "If a horse wiggles its ears, it indicates that it's disturbed. A toss of the head shows irritation, while refusal to eat indicates illness. Luckily, my local vet is very helpful."

Vladimir has no plans to buy more horses, but he won't say that it'll never happen. He'll help a horse in need. He currently offers rides in his home-made carriage or on horseback, takes riders through the forest, and shows them the sights. Naturally, he needs to know what he's talking about, and follow health and safety regulations. It's one thing to lead a horse by the bridle while a child sits in the saddle, but another to allow the child to take independent control. Vladimir is kind and sympathetic but also very responsible.

He doesn't have a business plan for rendering extra services and some villagers do make fun of him, but Vladimir shrugs off those comments. One year ago, Ilze Stabulniece, Chair of the Latvian Office of Euroregion 'Country of Lakes', who owns a well-known horse estate, visited Yustyanovo. Ilze praised Vladimir's care of his horses and discussed plans for developing horse tourism. He offered cooperation, so, perhaps, Vladimir's kindness will be repaid.

By Sergey Muravsky



The Silk Road

A novel on ancient Turkmenistan and China written by Belarusian and Tadjik

Belarusian magazine 'Neman' has already published the work of our countryman Leonid Chigrin, who lives in Dushanbe, about his feeling of belonging to Belarus and about how his family moved to Central Asia. Leonid is a Russian writer, translator and publicist living and working in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Born in 1942, in the Vitebsk region of Belarus, his mother was a member of the antifascist underground, and spent time in a German concentration camp. His grandmother raised Leonid until the war ended, when his mother returned home, though in poor health. Doctors recommended a change of climate, which took her and her young child to Tajikistan, where her elder sister had moved earlier.

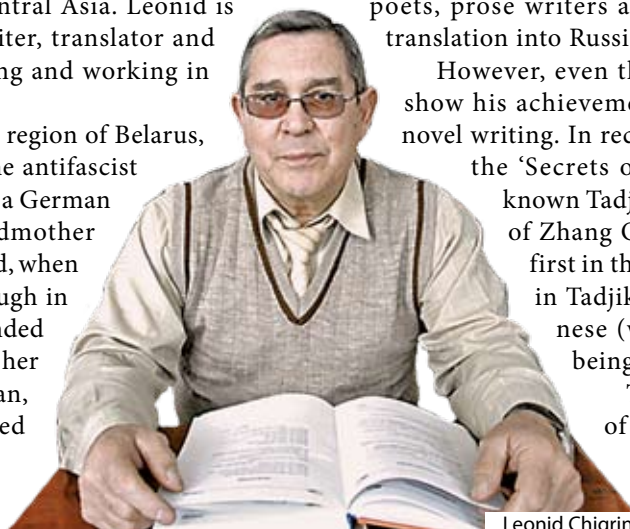
Sadly, in 1946, his mother died, and he passed to his

aunt's care. His father, Nikolay, eventually returned from the army but took a mining job and was killed.

Years passed, and the boy became used to Tajikistan and learnt Tadjik language perfectly, becoming a talented journalist and writer. Much of our knowledge of Tadjik poets, prose writers and playwrights is due to his translation into Russian.

However, even those 'Neman' writings fail to show his achievements in the field of historical novel writing. In recent years, he has co-authored the 'Secrets of History' series, with well-known Tadjik novelist Ato Hamdam. 'Life of Zhang Qian, or The Silk Road' is the first in the fascinating series, published in Tadjik, Russian, Turkmen and Chinese (with publication in Turkmen being prepared).

The series tells of the founder of the Silk Road. Having gone to seek allies for China, in 138 BC, Zhang Qian was taken prisoner by the Huns. Af-



Leonid Chigrin

ter ten years of slavery connected with many heartrending experiences, the courageous traveller appeared in Bactria. The novel tells us that 'the ambassador of the Chinese emperor and the leader of the Bactrian people silently looked at the twisting line of the Silk Road, painted on smooth sand at their feet'.

"I'll transfer this painting to paper and I'll show it to the emperor," said Zhang Qian. "The Silk Road will become a bridge connecting not only distant countries, but human hearts."

I must stress the dynamism of the novel by Leonid Chigrin and Ato Hamdam, with its complex protagonists and unveiling of layers of plot and motivation. Even at first glance, you can see that the book would make the basis of a wonderful film script, on the origins of the Silk Road. The adventures of the Chinese ambassador, undoubtedly, would interest Turkmen audiences. It would be great to make such a film together: Belarus, Turkmenistan, China and Tajikistan!

The novel by Belarusian L. Chigrin and Tadjik A. Hamdam (himself a member of the Union of Writers of Belarus) is now in the hands of Turkmen readers. When I last visited Turkmenistan, I wrote to Agageldy Allanazarov, who, for the last 10-15 years, has written verse for children and historical novels for adults, telling him about Chigrin's work.

"I've heard about Chigrin from his co-author, Ato Hamdam," Agageldy told me. "Ato's a frequent visitor to Turkmenistan, attending 'Golden Book' fair which we host annually in Ashgabat. It would be wonderful to publish something thematically connected with Turkmenistan, our ancient land, including in the Turkmen language. I'd love to see that happen..."

I'm sure that the novels of Ato Hamdam and Leonid Chigrin could stand alongside the historical prose of such Turkmen authors as Berdi Kerbabaýew, Klych Kuliev, Hydyr Derýaýew, and Narklych Hojageldyýew.

Leonid Chigrin spent some years serving as a soldier in his host country, while Ato Hamdam is a frequent visitor to Ashgabat. As a publisher and translator, he has achieved a great deal to help develop Tadjik-Turkmen literary ties.

By Kirill Ladutko



► To climb seven peaks...

A lot can be done to pass exams successfully; some people are even prepared to learn Chinese in a night. The situation is even more tricky when a diploma is to be defended. Future biologist Vasily Yevsikov has a creative approach.

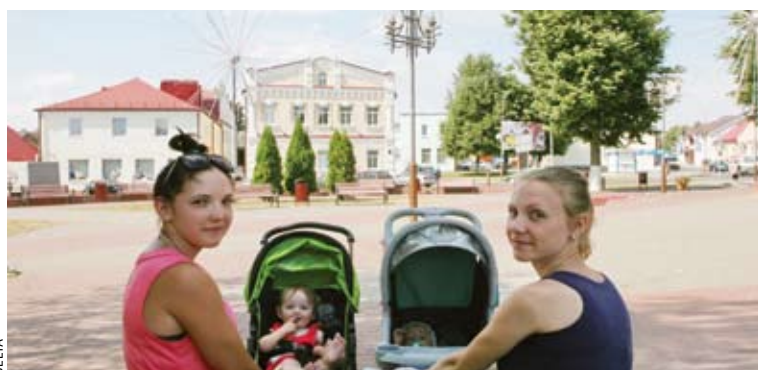
Vasily Yevsikov, a student of the Grodno State University, has written a thesis on the subject of rare flora.

The Grodno Agricultural University student has devoted his diploma paper to the flora of the African tropics. To prepare for the work, he even climbed mount Kilimanjaro. It took him almost three days to reach the camp: his journey began with a long flight and then continued with a hike through the jungle in a tropical downpour. His conquering of the highest peak in the world started in severe African heat and was completed at 20 degrees below zero. Mountaineers from Russia and Ukraine joined our countryman, who found his new friends on the Internet.

"I would have definitely failed without training," Vasily says. "I ran for ten kilometres 3-4 times a week, also attending the gym to train my back to be able to carry heavy loads. When one feels lack of air, he or she starts suffering from altitude sickness — feeling dizzy and demonstrating lower performance and endurance. We were saved by sweet drinks and chocolate."

Eventually, the long-awaited moment happened! Vasily placed the flag of his alma mater at an altitude of almost six thousand feet, admitting that he didn't feel any emotion on the finish line. "We thought we would scream and jump for joy. We were expected to feel like heroes but we were completely exhausted by the time we reached the peak. We were most concerned with how we'd find the strength to descend and return to camp. While staying in the mountains, I understood what really mattered in life: friendship, mutual assistance, solidarity and responsibility must be the basis," he said.

Vasily will use all his observations and discoveries in his scientific work. He has a new dream now: to climb seven peaks on six continents. Mount Kosciuszko in Australia will become his first summit on this route.



Not all secrets revealed,

or Five reasons to visit Slonim



Appreciate Oginiski's legacy

1 In the centre of Slonim, there is a plaque dedicated to Michal Kazimierz Oginiski — Lithuanian Hetman and candidate for the Polish throne. His money was used to build the famous Oginisky Canal that connects the Baltic and the Black sea.

Upon his order, an Italian architect built a theatre, with the latest technologies. It wouldn't look amiss on a lakeshore or in the mountains. Lit by thousands of fireworks, Italian, German and

Polish singers performed on its stage, in addition to Oginiski's choir and ballet troupe. It ran its own ballet and music schools.

His famous nephew, Michal Kleofas Oginiski, received his musical education there. In his honour, his immortal Farewell to the Homeland polonaise is performed at noon daily, from the fire tower. The International Polonaise Festival is held in May, making a good reason to visit the city, which is transforming into a hub for artistes and musicians from around the world, to sing, dance and play.

Discover Albertin's treasure

2 Two stone lions guard the mansion of Duke Albertin, near Slonim. The two-storey turquoise palace, in late Classical style, is typical of the architecture of its time. Some of its outbuildings remain, including its entrance gates (brama), mill and stables. The park, including ponds, waterfalls and intricate avenues, is a favourite relaxation spot for townspeople.

Initially, the manor was called Yurzники. However, after the death of Albert, one of the favourite sons of Duke Wojciech Puslowski, it became known as Albertin. According to the legend, the young man wanted to escape persecution for participating in the 1863 uprising. He stole all the family jewels but drowned while trying to cross the lake. Interestingly, the latter is also named after him. Even now, people search for the missing treasure.



The Slonim mosaic

Relax near the 'Eiffel Tower'

3 To see the 'iron lady', there's no need to go to Paris. Two years ago, the centre of Slonim gained its own, smaller version of the famous tower, drawing visitors from far and wide, including newly-weds, wishing to take photos.

Another attraction is Slonim's coat of arms, approved in 1591, when King Sigismund III gave the town its right to self-government. The golden lion stands on its hind legs, holding a silver arrow in its front paws.

Ask for patronage

4 Baroque lovers will find themselves in paradise: in 1642, one of the oldest synagogues in Belarus was built in this style. The snow-white facade of the Baroque Roman Catholic Church of St. Andrew's features sculpted gables and elongated niches typical of the Vilno baroque (as loved by Belarusians).

The Orthodox Transfiguration Cathedral, also built in the same Western Belarusian style, is situated in the centre of the city, and believers from far beyond Belarus make the trip to Zhirovichi Monastery. Its Mother of God icon is among the hundred most revered shrines for the Orthodox Faith, thought to have powers of healing, as well as offering guardianship and patronage.

See the 'dream of knights'

5 The palace of the Puslowski dukes (Kosovo Castle) was named the 'dream of knights' for its fabulous architecture and luxury. Architects from Warsaw and Italy

created twelve faceted towers — honouring the months, each decorated with pointed arches. Incredible stories are told of its former luxury and wealth, with stories of hall floors made of glass and exotic fish swimming beneath, in large aquariums. A real lion prowled its corridors by night and a passage 'wide enough for a carriage with two or three horses' ran below ground for 25 kilometres.

By Kristina Khilko

Versions

How did the city gain its name?

- In chronicles, Slonim is mentioned as Uslonim, Vaslonim and Vslonim. Most researchers consider that the name comes from eastern Slavonic word 'uslona', meaning 'shield'.
- The name could derive from 'slon' (elephant). In ancient times, elephant (mammoth) bones were unearthed there.
- It could derive from Polish word 'sloma' (straw) or 'slonina' (bacon), as there were many thatched roofs in the city and local residents traded in bacon.
- It could merge two words of Greek origin: 'solo' (one) and 'nim' (name), which means 'cognominal'.

Guests enjoy the carnival

The Bolshoi Theatre of Belarus opened its doors during the Old New Year — the night between January 13th and 14th. This winter night, the theatre organised a Christmas ball



This large Belarusian cultural project has become a tradition, and many townspeople cannot imagine the first month of the year without the grand event, where there are ladies in beautiful evening dresses and long skirts and men in elegant suits, tuxedos and dress coats. Perhaps, it is the

only night in the year when a girl can feel like Cinderella, while the men are well-mannered gentlemen. Life-changing meetings also happen during such balls, and as a result new families are sometimes made.

The big ball in the Bolshoi Theatre is a rustle of dresses, cheerful laughter, clinking of glasses, fine music and dances — from the waltz to the polonaise. The most important thing on January 13th is that we enjoy opera and choreographic art by the outstanding artistes and musicians of the Bolshoi, which this year made the evening truly magical.

At precisely 8 p.m. the theatre opened its doors and the visitors

began to enjoy the creative entertainments. In the foyer of the theatre we were met by Skywatcher, as well as heroes of fairy tales by Alexander Pushkin. The Wise Cat invited us to take part in literary competitions, while the Goldfish encouraged us to catch some good luck. The Golden Cockerel was present to congratulate us on the New Year.

At 9 p.m. the ball started. Everything appeared to sparkle, even the chandeliers and mirrors seemed to shine brighter and reflect the dresses and dazzling smiles of the visitors. Everyone could choose their preferred activity from a visit to the literary salon where they could write verses to the film studio to have a shot as an actor or a cartoon-portrait. It was also possible to learn how to understand the language of colours and flowers, make a greeting-card or paint a message on one's own body with the help of the Mehndi method. You could choose to find your destiny in the astrological salon and, of course, there was plenty of dancing.

At 11 p.m. the concert in the grand hall began. The whole stage sparkled





and the voices of the opera singers rose higher and deeper than ever, while the ballet performances bewitched the audience with their mastery. At midnight, everyone was treated to champagne and the ball commenced. People continued to dance long into the night.

For the second year in succession, since November, Yulia Dyatko, an Honoured Artiste of Belarus, has taught the art of dancing to those who had bought a ticket for the ball and wanted to show off some difficult and interesting steps on the night of January 14th. “Last year I was really worried as it was my first New Year ball in the Bolshoi!” Yulia said. “Now I have some experience, and I hope that it will be easier to work with those who wish to learn dances for the ball. All my trainees were different. I remember couples for whom it was very difficult to control their bodies initially, but eventually they learned to dance well and even won prizes. Once again, I believe that the main thing is the desire to dance. If there is such a passion, then the ability will follow.”

The New Year ball in the Bolshoi is a beautiful event where one can plunge into the atmosphere of previous centuries, not only to see how women in evening dresses and men in dress coats dance the polonaise, polka or waltz, but also to appear among them, to become a part of this fine evening.

By Mikhalina Tcherkashina

Invitation to the Book Ball

Frantsisk Skorina seems to descend from the famous engraving, thoughtfully studying an old folio inside the festively decorated lobby of the Opera Theatre. The appearance of this famous ancient Polotsk personality near the Christmas tree — decorated with books instead of toys — is no accident: the annual Christmas Charity Ball could hardly be held without our first book printer!

2017 will celebrate the 500th anniversary since Skorina’s publishing of his first book. Meanwhile, the passing year of 2016 was marked with the traditional Book Ball — held as a part of Our Children republican campaign. The auction featured the best samples of national book printing and generated funds for charity.

The Minister of Information, Lilia Ananich, notes that the Book Ball is like a Christmas report for readers, showing future plans. She says, “In the Year of Books, our President said that we’d lose the country if we lose books. This is the leitmotif of Belarusian book publishing. We’ve not lost our books and we’re soon to celebrate a landmark date: the 500th anniversary of Belarusian book printing.”

Our publishers have many grounds for pride. According to the Minister, over 10,000 books are published in the country annually: more than 2.3 per capita. In 2016, Culture of Belarus six-volume encyclopaedia was published, in addition to Olympic Belarus (featuring the autographs of famous athletes), and Pride of Belarus: Young and Talented (with autographs by artistes from the Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre of Belarus).

The recent auction was international: the Association of Publishers, Printers and Booksellers of Kazakhstan donated a trilogy by Ilyas Esenberlin, called Nomads, while the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications of Russia gave The Journey of Heir Tsarevich (in three volumes). The latter was among the most expensive lots, gaining a bid of 1,000 BYN. Meanwhile, the most sought-after edition — Olympic Belarus — was sold for 1,500 BYN. Overall, the Ball raised 8,600 BYN for the Shklov Special General Boarding School for Children with Visual Impairment.

“There was a feeling of the New Year holiday and magic,” the Director of Mastatskaya Litaratura Publishing House, Ales Badak, admits. “We donated an edition of Yakub Kolas’ New Land, which includes forty illustrations by People’s Artist Vasil Sharangovich. It was our most expensive lot, sold for around 1,000 BYN. In addition, I’m Not Sad — released recently for the anniversary of Maxim Bogdanovich’s birth — sold out quickly. It’s become a rarity.”

By Lyudmila Ivanova

Belarusian choreographer
Valentin Yelizariiev:



Belarusian roots of Maya Plisetskaya

She dreamed of celebrating her birthday in style, stepping out onto the stage of her favourite Bolshoi Theatre, to see all those to whom she'd showed her talent for many years. The ballerina personally developed the programme for gala concert AVE MAYA, in which she never performed. In her long career, she touched the lives of many. The famous Belarusian choreographer, Valentin Yelizariiev, worked with the ballerina in 1976 on Anatoly Efros' 'Imagination', based on Turgenev's 'Spring Tides' novel. Since then, Valentin and Maya met many times, connected by a true artistic friendship.

Being inspired for Adam's movements by my son

Along with Efros, Plisetskaya and Smoktunovsky, you took part in the filming of 'Imagination' in 1976. How did you find working with such great personalities?

I learned a great deal. The literary basis for the movie was Turgenev's 'Spring Tides' but Mr. Efros cleverly invented a new title to illustrate how everything is possible in our imagination. This was an experiment, an attempt to combine ballet and drama.

At that time, our daughter was born and Ms. Plisetskaya brought us a parcel of toys and clothes from her artistic trip to Italy. Small acts of kindness such as this one are never forgotten. Since my student days I've been familiar with Rodion Shchedrin. I think it was he who advised Mr. Efros to invite me to perform. The year before, I had staged 'The Carmen Suite' for the National Academic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre; Mr. Shchedrin worked on its musical production. I believe he is a 20th century classic composer as good as Stravinsky – though underestimated. His music is complicated and, because of this, he is not as popular as he deserves to be. To perform the music, the level of artistry must be brilliant. It's much easier to play Strauss's waltzes, which also makes the public happy.

Dossier

■ Valentin Yelizariiev was born in 1947. From 1973, he worked as the chief choreographer of the State Academic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre of the Belarusian SSR. From 1992 to 1996, he was the artistic director of the Bolshoi Theatre's ballet troupe and, from 1996 to 2009, worked as the director and artistic director of the Belarusian Ballet Theatre.

He is a People's Artiste of the USSR and BSSR, a holder of the Belarusian State Award and Benoit De La Dance award of the International Association of Figures of Dance, among others. Mr. Yelizariiev is an honourable citizen of Minsk and a Professor of the Belarusian State Academy of Music (BSAM).

Among his most famous performances are 'The Carmen Suite' (1974), 'The Creation of the World' (1976), 'Till Eulenspiegel' (1978), 'Spartacus' (1980), 'The Nutcracker' (1982), 'Bolero' (1984), 'Romeo and Juliet' (1988), 'Don Quixote' (1989), 'Passions' (Rogneda) (1995) and 'Sleeping Beauty' (2001).

She didn't like to repeat her work

The choreographer and the ballerina last met at a competition in Japan, where the composer recollects a warm meeting after several years apart. Maya lived in Munich. She had a very narrow circle of contacts but I was among them.

There were probably experimental works at that competition. Did Ms. Plisetskaya take any new ideas for her dance?

She was among the first ones to work with Maurice Béjart and Jerome Robbins and was sympathetic to their experimental pieces. She also had complete trust in those with whom she worked. Maya loved to say that she worked with a certain choreographer only once. She followed that rule all her life.

I was in touch not only with her but also her husband, composer Rodion Shchedrin — staging ballets on his music. I saw how Maya was to Rodion — as a person and an inspiration. It was wonderful to observe the way they idolised each other, which I was lucky to see.

What sort of a person was Ms. Plisetskaya in her work?

Of course, she knew her own worth but was open with me. We cooperated very intensely and fruitfully. It seldom happens that there is compromise from both sides in an artistic process; some resistance often emerges from one or the other. She was able to achieve set goals, was skilful in her explanations and could combine in dance everything she saw and heard.

Only a few people remember that Maya had two brothers: Alexander and Azary who also had lives connected with ballet. I was familiar with Azary. He worked in Cuba for a long time and then cooperated with Maurice Béjart's troupe. Ms. Plisetskaya's uncle, Asaf Messerer, staged the classic Swan Lake three times at the Bolshoi Theatre. The Plisetskys-Messerers family is a significant dynasty which has enriched our culture. Maya has Belarusian roots: her mother was born in Vilno and her father came from Gomel.

“

Maya Plisetskaya:

'I don't like to repeat movements at all — not for any choreographer! I have my own identity, I feel differently. However, I wanted to do exactly everything suggested by Mr. Yelizariiev'



Among the most bright performances is the main part in 'Romeo and Juliet' ballet by Prokofiev

Her parents' fate was tragic. How did she manage not to become embittered with life?

We didn't tackle this issue in our talk, discussing only artistic aspects.

Do you see any modern ballet personalities similar to Maya?

In art, it is difficult to compare as personalities differ. Ms. Plisetskaya is a unique creative individual.

One of your most famous performances is 'The Creation of the World' ballet, staged in 1976. What does it symbolise?

While composing Adam's party, I was inspired for many of the movements by my son. I watched how he was crawling and walking unsteadily. I needed that plasticity for my show. I've not watched the 'Creation of the World' for a long time. When I last saw it, there was a feeling that the performance was losing its vitality. There is an unwritten rule that, if a show is not staged once in two months, then it is slowly collapsing. My performances are now rarely staged.

By Valentin Pepelyayev

In fact

Where does 'Imagination' come from?

■ Movie-ballet 'Imagination' was shot by director Anatoly Efros in 1976 and was based on Ivan Turgenev's 'Spring Tides'. A small extract was taken from the novel: Sanin's memories of his meeting with Polozova. Maya Plisetskaya personally worked on the scenario and played the leading role. Fragments of Pyotr Tchaikovsky were played. The choreographer was Valentin Yelizariiev. The key roles are performed by Maya Plisetskaya (Marina Polozova), Innokenty Smoktunovsky (Dmitry Sanin), Anatoly Berdyshev (Sanin, a ballet role), Andrey Popov (Ippolit Polozov) and Tatiana Vedeneyeva (Gemma).



In order to dance, we must read more

Grand Prix of the 29th International Modern Choreography Festival, IFMC-2016, in Vitebsk awarded to soloist of the Central Song and Dance Ensemble of the Army of China Yucheng Yao

Winner of the 29th International Modern Choreography Festival, soloist of the Central Song and Dance Ensemble of the Army of China Yucheng Yao

BELTA

Miniature My Meridians was staged for him by choreographer Zhang Qiang who won the IFMC ten years ago. For eight and a half minutes, the Chinese artiste told a very clear story: looking back at the past, we ponder the choices we could have made, avoiding torture and grief. We pay a price for our freedom of action.

The concept was embodied perfectly, using music, light and move-

ment in harmony: a feat not achieved by every entry. The jury chairman, Beijing Dance Academy Professor Xiao Suhua, commented, "More or less worthy works reached the final. The technique of dancers and dance is much higher than it was six years ago, when I was in Vitebsk. However, some works lack meaning and depth."

Xiao Suhua was delighted that judges awarded not only points but feedback. First prize of \$3,000 went to After Before joint project, performed by the Choreography Chair of the Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts, with Matsey Kuz-



Scenes from premiere ballets of the Bolshoi Theatre of Belarus 'Six Dances' and 'The Little Death'

minsky. The dance told of the life of refugees. Second place (of \$1,000) was shared between Second Floor, by Yekaterina Vodzyanskaya and Anatoly Vodzyansky, and Four Images of Sin by the Tabile Modern Ballet, both from Kiev. Third place went to an entry from Tallinn.

For the first time in many years, the expert council of the festival didn't choose a recipient for the Yevgeny Panfilov Award, bestowed upon the best choreographer. None of the thirty-two performances was viewed as worthy. Instead, the prize fund was divided between groups from Vitebsk, Omsk and Chelyabinsk.

The Colleagues Award went to Salt, by Anastasia Kharchenko and Piotr Naku, from Kiev (awarded for the first time, based on the entrants' voting).

As always, contemporary dance trends were discussed during the festival. What is new quickly becomes old, with innovation sought continually. At competitions, this is especially relevant, with choreographers being keen to stand out.

According to the Chairman of the Advisory Council, Larisa Barykina, every performance was worthy, but there were no grand sensations to speak of either. She explains, "It

shows clearly that all have learnt basic skills and concepts, and all move well. Nearly fifteen years ago, we didn't see so many well-trained people in Vitebsk. Now, having mastered the body 'alphabet', it's necessary to learn to speak. Anyone can declare to be a choreographer of modern dance, unlike in other kinds of dancing. As a result, individuality has disappeared from the stage, while incompetence and non-professionalism progress. We began with extreme tolerance, allowing all to speak, since every personality is unique and has the right to express itself. However, I think people should ask themselves whether they really have anything to say, when a thousand spectators are watching and listening. Emotion is vital to modern dance, so we shouldn't be ashamed to show it. You need to do more than move to the music or portray an aspect of global suffering. Such dance cannot bring answers."

Despite years of artistic freedom, the major problem was lack of originality, as the Head of the Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts' Choreography Chair, Professor Svetlana Gutkovskaya, noted. She admitted that, for most performances, after

five seconds, the jury were looking at their programme, to see how long the choreography would last.

Choreographic trends are said to spiral back on themselves. Initially, themes may dominate, but dancers lack expressive technique. The latter then develops, but without 'meaning', so, dancers are well-prepared but lack a certain magic.

Well-known choreographer Radu Poklitaru tells us, "Young dancers are addressing global themes instead of something certain. My first-year students like to stage dance on the theme of the night sky, yin and yang, the Divine, angels and demons... They're inspired by the philosophy of the Earth. It's easier to reveal a philosophical theme while telling the story of one person or relations between a couple."

We'd like to believe that participants of future contests will follow advice from experts. This includes the suggestion that they read good literature, immersing in serious texts in their pursuit of answers. We, the grateful audience, will try to understand.

Next year's festival in Vitebsk will be the 30th one. We hope for grand innovations!

By Olga Kruchenkova



PAUL CHUYKO

Art tour from Lisbon to Vladivostok begins in... the capital of Belarus

Unique project, embracing works by thirty painters from twenty-eight European states, launches in Minsk

The project is the brainchild of the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Belarus to France, Pavel Latushko, and Belarusian artist Victor Alshevsky. Within one year, they have made all necessary plans,

working with European diplomatic missions in Belarus, and the Foreign Ministry, to organise the art project. The exhibition project is being held under the official aegis of UNESCO, underlining its international humanitarian significance. The exhibition is unique in Minsk, unifying European representatives of contemporary art of European states.

Today, European culture acts as the humanitarian counterbalance to

political and social conflicts, drawing on centuries-old traditions, while also demonstrating the most contemporary forms of painting and sculpture. Minsk recently became one of the most active negotiation venues for settling international conflict in the European region, presenting itself as a centre of cultural diplomacy.

Vladimir Makei, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus and Chairman of the National Commis-

Belarus, situated at the intersection of roads connecting Europe and Asia, has always tried to promote peace and good neighbourliness to the region. We advocate for the development of good neighbourly relations with other countries worldwide, regardless of their geographical location or length of borders. We have a respectful attitude towards our partners and hope for a corresponding attitude towards Belarus from their side. The current exhibition is a contribution of the Belarusian diplomacy into a diverse palette of cultural events in our country.”

sion for UNESCO, noted at the solemn opening of the exhibition, “Belarus, situated at the intersection of roads connecting Europe and Asia, has always tried to promote peace and good neighbourliness to the region. We advocate for the development of good neighbourly relations with other countries worldwide, regardless of their geographical location or length of borders. We have a respectful attitude towards our

partners and hope for a corresponding attitude towards Belarus from their side. The current exhibition is a contribution of the Belarusian diplomacy into a diverse palette of cultural events in our country.”

The exhibition is being held, symbolically, near Minsk’s ancient Upper Town, where tourists tend to gather over the New Year and Christmas holidays. The art gallery named after People’s Artist Mikhail Savitsky,

which is hosting the event, will become a centre of attraction for Minsk-ers keen on modern art, as well as for guests from around the world.

The gallery is a part of the Minsk City History Museum: a unique project organised by Minsk city authorities, uniting historic buildings in the Belarusian capital, including recently reconstructed sections of the Upper Town, so greatly enjoyed by both Minsk-ers and guests.



Discussing works of Belarusian artist Victor Alshevsky



PAUL CHUYKO

The exhibition participants were popular among journalists

Artists taking part in From Lisbon to Vladivostok via Minsk exhibition include experienced masters of contemporary art and budding young artists, who are up and coming in their home nations. Their creativity is diverse, yet shares a common thread, linked by European identity.

Serbian artist Radovan Trnavac Mića has interpreted 'Belgrade

Summit' in the truest sense, transferring the state symbols of participating countries to wooden chairs using acrylic paint, thus creating an original art object. Meanwhile, Ukrainian painter Ruslan Kutnyak has created collages with money: for instance, he's designed a portrait of the Queen from British Pounds.

The capital of Portugal — Lisbon — is represented by Luis Rodríguez,

making his first visit to Belarus. He tells us, "For me, it's vital not just to reflect myself on the canvas but to communicate with the audience and to see their reaction towards my creativity. Therefore, when I received an invitation to come to Minsk I didn't hesitate even for a minute. This is an opportunity to learn about the Belarusian audience."

17,750 km separate Lisbon from Vladivostok; they are geographical accents on the European map. However, art brings us together.

Canvases for the exhibition were chosen by curator Victor Alshevsky, who also selected artworks for the debut of Belarusians in France, at the Art en Capital exhibition in Paris. He is the only participant of the current exhibition representing Belarus.

The exhibition has a diplomatic aspect and marks the end of our Year of Culture. It has already set a record, spending 11 months establishing contacts with painters from the European diaspora, involving all embassies.

Luis Rodríguez:

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Victor Alshevsky, Pavel Latushko and Vladimir Makei

Berlin painter Ulrich Uffrecht has brought his favourite abstract canvases for the show in Minsk and tells us about refugees from Syria and Afghanistan, whom his wife and he sheltered. His colours are chosen to bring something positive into the life of people facing difficulty. His abstract pictures conjure the street, filled with rain, or the gentle evening light through windows, evoking warm emotions aroused by urban landscapes.

“This event gives bright testimony that we can do much to make Europe our common home, where peace, calm, beauty and confidence reign,” noted Vladimir Makei, Chairman of the National Commission for UNESCO and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, opening the exhibition.

Beauty, tranquillity and confidence radiate from the exhibition, regardless of colour palettes or themes. Zurab Tsereteli’s ‘red hot’ canvases will make a sure first impression on visitors, while Helsinki’s Irina Schuvaloff uses high-contrast monochrome tones and Ruslan Kutnyak, from Ukraine, explores irony.

Tsereteli, Fuchs and Hamilton are world acknowledged painters. However, both ‘patriarchs’ of painting and young authors received invitations to Minsk. The art venue in the Belarusian capital has again proven itself to be a centre of cultural communications. Its festive fir-tree symbolised the major concept of the project: Europe without division, and neighbouring states as branches on a single tree.

Painter Victor Alshevsky, curator of the exhibition and participant from Belarus, tells us, “The project offers an intellectual journey, via the capitals of the world. It’s an inspiration to compare and comprehend the spiritual culture of each capital, each state, and each author’s work. Meanwhile, the project shows our desire to embrace the supreme unity of our spirit.”

The project is unusual in being artist-led, as Mr. Alshevsky explains. Each artists chose which works to present at the Minsk gallery, while the artists representing each country were also not decided in Minsk. The result is a great

diversity of styles, while being consonant and harmonious. Many of the donating artists attended the opening of the exhibition, showing their interest in Belarus as a country and a centre of cultural community.



Not only pictures were impressing



The exhibition proved that Zurab Tsereteli is not only a great sculptor

Radovan Trnavac Mića, from Serbia, uses political satire in his works, while Monaco's Christian Bonavia creates pop art, such as his image of Princess Grace.

The exhibition is nothing if not varied, forming a platform from which to explore art. Warm sun colours dominate, however, creating a strong emotional impression: the one of truth.

"Art gives us a unique opportunity to understand both the history and modern times of various nations. It enables us to simultaneously comprehend our diversity and our communion in this huge world. Symbolically, Minsk is now a centre of unity and a common cultural space, bringing nations closer," asserts Andrey Shorets, the Chairman of the Minsk City Executive Committee.

The exhibition features painters living not only in European capitals, but in Vladivostok, the most eastern city of the Eurasian continent, and in St. Petersburg, which is the recognised cultural capital of Russia.

This is the first exhibition of the kind uniting these participants in a single exhibition hall, although many have known each other for a long time.

Less than a year has passed since the idea was initiated to create the pan-European exhibition in Minsk. Creators, diplomats and financiers found a common language unexpectedly quickly, though the number of participants in this ambitious art project has been a surprise for everyone. On the night before the opening, pictures from Andorra and Monaco were delivered via diplomatic bag, and the final exhibition catalogues were printed. Meanwhile, artists were arriving in Minsk from Portugal, Lithuania, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Finland and elsewhere, to present their works to the first guests.

From Lisbon to Vladivostok via Minsk exhibition will run almost to the end of winter, before travelling on to Lisbon and, then, to other European capitals.



PAUL CHUYKO

Ulrich Uffrecht: there is hardly anyone who can speak on the essence of a picture better than its author

By Veniamin **Mikheev**



Victor Alshevsky. World Museums. Prado. Man as an Artifact. 2016. Oil on canvas, 190 x 150 cm