

Guten tag, Minsk

Bilateral contacts, experience sharing and unforgettable cultural meetings held as part of German Week in Belarus

By Lyudmila Minkevich

It isn't unknown to hear the German language on the Minsk metro, in shops or on the street, since guests from Germany often visit the Belarusian capital. Sometimes, school-children and students chat in German to show their knowledge of the foreign language, just for fun. It's a language which has become especially popular in Belarus of late, alongside German films, books and theatrical performances. Our republic recently hosted the 7th German Week, honouring the 20th anniversary of German reunification.

"Twenty years isn't a 'silver wedding' but it allows us to look back and thoroughly assess what has been done," notes Peter Dettmar, Deputy Head of Mission of the Germany Embassy to Belarus. Changes and achievements in Germany over the past twenty years were discussed by round tables at the event, which was attended by the German Ambassador, H.E. Mr. Christof Weil, alongside German and Belarusian historians and public figures. The meetings also tackled sci-tech co-operation between Belarus and Germany, with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) presenting new scholarship programmes and a cycle of lectures on today's economic theory and practice. The German-

Belarusian Economic Club and the German Economy Office in Belarus organised a Day of the German Economy in Belarus. It was dedicated to bilateral collaboration in the energy sphere, attended by twenty German companies involved in producing energy efficient technologies. With the aim of developing economic co-operation and investment activities in the sphere of power engineering, energy- and resource-saving, the latest developments and bilateral contacts were presented and a briefing was conducted.

Meanwhile, the Germany-related days were primarily dedicated to cultural events, since all other spheres of human life are built on culture. It forms the crust of the 'pie'. Of course, even those without knowledge of German could take part, listening to Schumann at the Belarusian State Academy of Music, tasting German wines and admiring the *ReplikRepublik Berlin-Minsk* fashion show. The latter was a very unusual project, with Minsk's Alesya Knitwear Factory re-creating famous Berlin designs. Both the Belarusian copies and German originals took to the catwalk, allowing the audience to admire garments by Wolfen, Frank Leder and Chris Holzinger — alongside their Belarusian counterparts.

German films were screened,

including new *Heiligendamm* by Michael Blume, *The German Gambit* historical drama by Hans-Christoph Blumenberg and *Solino* by Fatih Akin (a German director of Turkish origin). How did pizza and spaghetti arrive in Germany's Ruhr region? They were brought in 1964 by the Amato family, who arrived from the sunny Italian region of Apulia, inspired by stories about the country of economic wonder. Akin's film tells the story of the family's nostalgia for their homeland, their professional success and personal tragedy.

Meanwhile, the *Shorts at Moonlight* festival of short-length films was organised for those unable to listen to a history covering 20 years, or unwilling to spend an hour and a half in a cinema hall. The Germans have been organising the event since 2003, each summer in the open air, in palaces and parks in the regions around Frankfurt and Mainz. Spectators are offered around 100 films, from which the favourites are voted for by the public. Gudrun Winter, Director of *Shorts at Moonlight*, presented Minsk with a range of films from the 2010 programme. Most were shot without words, making them accessible to Germans and Belarusians alike, as well as to adults and children.

Special events for children were also organised as part of German



ReplikRepublik Berlin-Minsk is German Week project

Week, with the Goethe Institute's library, in Minsk, demonstrating the latest books for children and young people. Young readers were able to enjoy books, while also creating pictures from the paints, coloured pencils, corrugated paper and other

items available to them.

Minsk has hosted German Week seven times now, allowing Belarusian residents to discover more about German culture and the country, which is our reliable friend and partner.

Vivid acquaintance

Oman Is Calling artistic exhibition opens at National Library of Belarus

The exposition showcases over 50 exhibits, including canvases by famous Iraqi artist Hussein Al-Jaman, which depict scenes from Oman's everyday life, and works by Oman photographers, capturing the natural and cultural heritage of the country: folk craft items and contemporary architecture.

National music was played at

the opening ceremony, performed by Oman's *Arabian Takht* Musical Ensemble of the Sultan Chancellery. Famous Oman designers Anisa Al Zadjali and Afaf Al Farsi demonstrated samples of national costume. Meanwhile, the Embassy of Oman to Russia donated literature in the Arab language to the National Library, including books on the history of Oman and a model of an 18th century Oman vessel.



New direction for old craft showcased at exhibition

Diverse creativity

Minsk's Modern Fine Arts Museum hosts *Aspects of Life: Relief and Sculpture from Wool* exhibition, by Swedish textile painter Gunilla Paetau Sjöberg

"Words fail me," noted Ms. Sjöberg at the opening of the exhibition in Minsk. "I don't think that I've ever had so many people at my exhibitions in Sweden." People's Artist of Belarus Vasily Sharangovich called her works 'contemporary high art' and stressed, "I'm glad that this event has taken place in Belarus." Meanwhile, the Ambassador Extraordinary and

Plenipotentiary of Sweden to Belarus, H.E. Mr. Stefan Eriksson, congratulated all those present, saying, "Since my arrival in Belarus, I've been keen on folk arts. Our cultures boast many common arts features."

The show was organised with support from the Swedish Institute and the Swedish Embassy to Belarus. Gunilla Paetau Sjöberg trained in Sweden and Finland, using the ancient craft of felting for artistic purposes and studying local felting techniques in Belarus, Hungary, Mongolia, Turkmenistan and Turkey.

Features of art of transformation

By Tatiana Pastushenko

Junior Eurovision entrants bring to life images from artist Andrey Smolyak's pictures

Belarusian entrants to the *Junior Eurovision* have tried on images from canvases by the outstanding master Andrey Smolyak as part of the *Revived Paintings* project.

The idea of the project, launched at Gomel's Rumyantsev-Paskevich Palace, is to unite talented and honoured people of Belarus via pictorial art. The project involves politicians, musicians, businessmen, directors and athletes, who transform into the characters of the artist's pictures, with each personality bringing their own individuality to the painting.

"We try to keep up with the times. Last month, when Minsk was hosting the Yuri Bashmet Festival, we were working with famous pianist Rostislav Krimer. In November, the Belarusian capital is hosting the finals of the *Junior Eurovision-2010* and we've invited participants in the contest from previous years," explains the author of the project and artist's wife, Olga Smolyak.

Junior Eurovision-2005 win-



Ksenia Sitnik and Andrey Smolyak

ner, Ksenia Sitnik, transformed for a while into a ballet dancer from Smolyak's *After Ball* painting while Andrey Kunets and Yura Demidovich — also competitors in the musical event — transformed into the founder of the *Rolling Stones* and one of the characters from the *Reflection* triptych. Belarus' entrant at this year's event, Daniil Kozlov, was captured as a young flute player from the *Quartet* picture. Mrs. Smolyak particularly emphasised Ksenia Sitnik's courage, since she attended shootings despite having a broken leg.

According to Mrs. Smolyak, both the children and organisers of the project are extremely

pleased with the results. "When we saw children with corresponding clothes and character make-up we felt that they had just walked out of the pictures. It's barely possible to distinguish Ksenia Sitnik from her character," notes the author of the project.

According to her, the *Junior Eurovision* entrants have managed to fulfil the task perfectly, since they are the best actors, and are impossible to outplay. "Children had plenty of topics for conversation. Yura Demidovich and Andrey Kunets performed under number 12 and Daniil Kozlov is to perform under the same number this year. The young artistes supported Daniil and gave him advice," continued Mrs. Smolyak.

Of particular interest were the flutes, which helped three boys fit into the images of musicians, and were borrowed by the organisers from the Presidential Orchestra of Belarus. There was even a flute, worth over 20,000 euros, amongst five borrowed musical instruments. "The results have surpassed all our expectations," noted Mrs. Smolyak.

Honourable guests also in attendance

Germany to become honourable guest at 18th Minsk International Book Fair — held from February 9th-13th, 2011 in the Belarusian capital

Each year, the exhibition in Minsk brings together representatives of the

book business from different countries. Over 600 organisations from 26 countries took part in the 17th book fair in Minsk this February, with France being its guest of honour. The preparations are now underway for the 18th fair; its honourable guest shall become Germany.

The fair's organisers make every effort for the event — which opens up the year of exhibitions and fairs in the post-Soviet space — to become representative, bright and memorable. Its business and cultural programme is likely to contribute to this.