

Memories of the past remain in our hearts

On March 22nd, 1943, Nazi fascists burnt to the ground the Belarusian village of Khatyn together with the local population. Today, it is a memorial dedicated to all the thousands of villages burnt in a similar way in Belarus during WWII

By Viktor Korbut

According to scientific calculations, the Nazis burnt 9,200 Belarusian villages during WWII, including 628 with their residents. Natalia Kirillova, who has been investigating this aspect of history, believes that little is known of those days of horror abroad. She is co-ordinating a new project, run jointly by the Remembrance, Responsibility and Future German Foundation, the Belarusian Peace Foundation and the National Archives of Belarus, entitled *Enhancing the Status of the Survivors of the Burnt Villages of Belarus*. Some witnesses remain alive — able to share their accounts with a wider audience.

“Unfortunately, the tragedy of Belarusian villages, destroyed by SS-soldiers, is unknown in the West, although there cases of genocide occurred in Czech Lidice, French Oradour and Lithuanian Pircchupis. However, these were isolated cases. In Belarus, the Nazi occupation resulted in such destruction of the local population as may be called genocide,” stresses Ms. Kirillova.

However, the victims of the Nazis from the burnt villages have failed to receive compensations. As a result, German and Belarusian enthusiasts have been helping those in need voluntarily. As part of the project, which has already been launched, they

record the recollections of those who survived the fires. Naturally, it is no easy task.

Leonid Levin helped design the Khatyn memorial, on the site destroyed by the Nazis in 1943. The village has become a symbol of those many thousands of others burnt by the SS. Mr. Levin admits that witnesses find speaking of their traumatic experiences difficult. “People can’t describe their tragedy. They hide behind dates and figures, taken from books. They are afraid of looking again into the face of terrible truth. However, they must remember, telling us ‘how it was’, so that nothing similar can ever happen again.”

At the same time, a da-



Day of Remembrance at Khatyn Memorial Complex

tabase of residents of burnt villages is being compiled, to appear on the website of the National Archives (www.narb.by) next year. In June, the Archives also plan to release a book devoted to the tragedy of Belarusian villages, containing 200 important documents, many of which are little known.

Ms. Kirillova believes that Belarus will be able to reveal the truth of its huge losses

during WWII via the Internet; these include not only the burnt villages but those killed in ghettos, prisoners of concentrated camps and those subjected to hard labour in Germany.

Mr. Levin, who has created several memorials to honour those who died during the German occupation, believes that not all tourists arriving in the country are keen to explore the horrors of the past.

“Evidently, some tourists have no desire to ‘penetrate’ grief and sorrow; rather, they want to see beautiful places, castles and nature. Khatyn inevitably touches your soul, as infants and elderly people died there. The same happened in thousands of other villages. It is only here that you begin to understand the tragedy of Belarus and why the war still resounds in the hearts of contemporary Belarusians.”



Ecologists to protect Polesie area

Project to assist in joint co-ordination

Belarus, Ukraine and Poland to set up trans-boundary Zapadnoe (West) Polesie Biosphere Reserve

The unique project will enable our three states to unite their efforts in protecting flora and fauna, while preserving rare wetland eco-systems and hydrologic systems in the Polesie area. “The reserve aims to more efficiently manage nature sites and conduct joint scientific programmes and investigations, revealing the newest habitats of rare animals and plants. This will help us bring them under protection,” notes Alexander Rachevsky, the Head of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Ministry’s International Co-operation Department.

Collaboration of our three countries within the project should inspire sustainable devel-

opment in the Polesie area, with not only environmental tasks but tourism issues solved. “The established reserve will be extremely interesting for tourists, enabling us to attract additional funds to develop Polesie,” adds Mr. Rachevsky. “Tourism will be tasked with preserving the ecology of the reserve, so that the biological diversity of the landscape remains unaffected.”

The Polesie area boasts ecological corridors of pan-European significance. Despite having an existing system of specially protected nature sites, the area is split between neighbouring states, with environmental and economic strategies differing on each side of the border. By uniting their efforts, Belarus, Ukraine and Poland will be able to co-ordinate and more effectively fulfil projects.

Belavia shifts to summer schedule, meeting air passengers’ needs

By Olga Bukhvostova

Several new routes added, making it significantly easier to plan holiday flights

On June 1st, the regular Minsk-Helsinki-Minsk flight will become operational three times a week, using CRJ-100/200 aircraft, carrying up to 50 passengers across business and economy classes. Tickets are already available for sale, with fares starting at 199 Euros in both directions. The timetable is designed to connect with Belavia’s flights to Yerevan,

Moscow and Tbilisi, attracting transit via Minsk and onward via Helsinki to the rest of Scandinavia, alongside South-Eastern Asia and North America.

The Minsk-Helsinki flight brings Belavia’s 2011 summer season network to a total of 37 cities across 22 Eurasian countries. From June 10th, the network will expand to include the Brest-Kaliningrad route, enabling Belavia passengers to visit Kaliningrad without a transit visa. As is traditional, the airline’s summer schedule includes flights to Hanover,

Manchester and Sochi, as well as joining the Germany-Kazakhstan transit route (with a connection at Minsk’s National Airport).

Flights between Minsk and Ashgabat, launched in December, will preserve in summer, while those to Simferopol will resume (having been cancelled for several years). Belavia also plans to raise its number of direct and transit flights on existing routes, such as those to Baku, Batumi, Warsaw, Kaliningrad, Larnaca, Paris, Prague, St. Petersburg, Stockholm, Tehran, Tel Aviv and Frankfurt.

White storks return

First white storks arrive in Belarus after wintering in warm countries

The birds have been noticed in the Minsk Region’s Zhodino, with ornithologists expecting sky larks, common plovers and starlings also to soon return, followed by geese, chaffinches and wagtails.

Nature lovers can share their observations of spring bird migration by taking part in the European *Live Spring* birdwatch campaign, which



Birdwatch Day in Grodno District

is also traditionally organised in Belarus. Ornithologists suggest we primarily pay attention to the brightest ‘messengers’ of spring: white storks, barn swallows, common cuckoos, black swifts and European bee-eaters. The latter are rare in Belarus, being registered in the Red Book. “With assistance from bird watch-

ers, we can determine the new nesting sites of European bee-eaters,” notes Ruslan Shaikin.

Last year, ornithologists received over 4,000 messages from birdwatchers, placing Belarus among the top five European states participating in the project in terms of their number.