

More students expected

Belarus' accession to Bologna Process should boost exports of educational services



Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics offers high quality education to foreign students

The Education Minister, Sergei Maskevich, recently reminded an online conference of the state decision to accede to the Bologna Process. Concrete steps are being taken in this field. According to the official, one of the major results of this accession would be Belarus gaining more

recognition within the international educational arena as a country providing high-quality education. "It is very important — perhaps the major reason why we are so interested in accession to the Bologna Process," Mr. Maskevich noted.

"If transition to European stand-

ards worsens the quality of our courses (as could happen for certain fields) we will simply make appropriate adjustments based on national interests," the Minister stressed.

Contrary to expectations, the accession of Belarus to the Bologna Process will not impact on employ-

ment of Belarusian graduates abroad. "Many incorrectly believe that joining the Bologna Process automatically solves issues of employment abroad," he noted. According to Mr. Maskevich, it's up to employers to decide whether to recognise the education diploma of a job applicant.

Floating hotels may come into fashion

First floating hotel opens in Gomel Region

Pinsk's Shipyard recently presented the unique floating hotel to Turovshchina JSC. Towed by motorboat, the novel hotel has already made its first voyage along the River Pripyat, travelling to the town of Turov. It's expected that the first visitors will soon be welcomed onto Belarus' first river-based hotel. The project uses the most contemporary technologies and equipment, ensuring comfort, while leaving the environment undamaged.

"The hotel is operating jointly with the motorboat and can accept up to 30 people," notes Victor Brutsky, Director of Pinsk's Shipyard. "The hotel can cruise for up to 10 days, possessing the necessary amount of fuel and water." He is confident that the project will prove highly popular among tourists, driving forward the creation of similar floating hotels countrywide; a whole network of floating hotels and recreation facilities may appear across Belarus.

Companionable escorts

Young companions ready to go to the cinema or to a friend's wedding

By Victoria Tomashevskaya

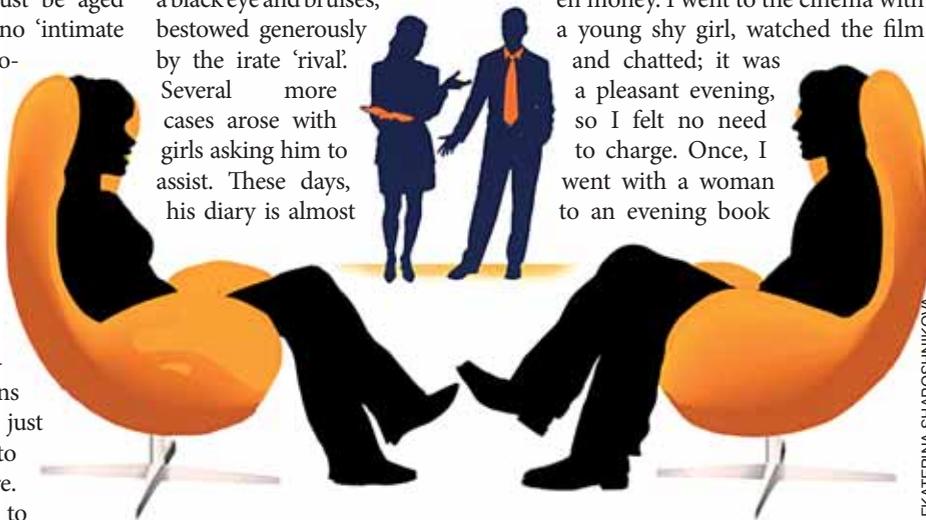
We're long accustomed to the idea of hiring a babysitter or handyman to help us out. Now, a new service has appeared on the market, called 'friends for hire'. Around twenty young people work in Minsk, ready to become 'yours' for a few evenings at an affordable price.

As in any business, fees are charged, with an advance payment required. Customers must be aged over 18 and, naturally, no 'intimate services' are offered. Anonymity is guaranteed.

The Internet advert reads: 'Company, a chat, help with repairs — we can suit every fancy'. I call and a pleasant male voice answers, "Yes, I can go with you anywhere: weddings, parties, receptions, presentations or business meetings. I just need some warning, to give me time to prepare. Some people just want to take a walk through the city, go for a coffee or to the cinema or theatre. Meanwhile, others want to go to the countryside for shashlik. A couple of times, I've been asked to repair something in the house — such as a tap — or to sharpen knives. I always do my best to help, since women can be lonely. It's not difficult for me to assist."

We agree to meet but I feel rather worried, strangely. In fact, we get on well. I choose our rendezvous — a quiet café in a Minsk backstreet. As we arrive, several women sitting nearby turn to look at the tall and charming young man. I feel my shoulders push back quite proudly. He introduces

himself as Nikita and explains that he's neither an actor nor a psychologist. He has a technical education but his chosen profession didn't suit him. When he heard of the new service he realised it could be perfect. A year ago, his neighbour asked him to pretend to be her date, walking past the windows of her former boyfriend's home, to make him jealous. Nikita was so believable in the role that he returned home 30 minutes later with a black eye and bruises, bestowed generously by the irate 'rival'. Several more cases arose with girls asking him to assist. These days, his diary is almost



'Friends for hire' becomes popular service

fully booked, although he tends to work through word of mouth, rather than Internet bookings.

He explains, "Of course, it's a strange way to earn a living. I don't tend to talk about it; not because I'm ashamed but because people make certain assumptions. Of course, it does no real harm if people assume things that aren't true. I try to understand each female client's feelings, to know what they need. They often have particular emotions which are upsetting them, so I try to keep in touch and maintain a degree of friendship — although the profession rather frowns on that. My own

feelings rebel against 'playing it cool' however; I like to feel that I've truly helped them overcome whatever is worrying them. It takes time, of course. Once, I was walking down the street when I saw a former client with a man. She hadn't had a boyfriend for many years and had developed quite a complex about it but our meetings relaxed her, helping her overcome her fears. There have been a few cases when I haven't taken money. I went to the cinema with a young shy girl, watched the film and chatted; it was a pleasant evening, so I felt no need to charge. Once, I went with a woman to an evening book

Mysterious habits of rare species

By Mikhail Fedorov

Grey owl bewilders Polesie ornithologists

The great grey owl has been a welcome sight in the Ivatsevichi District's forests, close to Lake Vygonoshchanskoe, being a rare species in Belarus. Sadly, this spring, the small population of this protected bird appears to have failed to breed. Ornithologists began watching possible nesting sites from April; by mid-May, they realised that their hopes were in vain, as the time had been and gone without any eggs being laid. Some assert that lack of food may have caused the owls to refrain from breeding; last winter, field mice — being the owls' major food

source — died due to snow melting and further frosts.

The Deputy Director of the Polesie Agrarian-Ecological Institute at the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, Victor Demyanchik, believes that other birds who eat mice have managed to breed this year, so is uncertain as to the true cause of the rare owl's lack of offspring. He finds the bird to be full of contradictions, choosing remote places to nest, yet happy to allow people to approach as close as a few metres. Unlike other owls, it hunts during daytime as well as at night and builds nests both on land and in trees. Birds are known to be sensitive to external influences, so ornithologists do their best to monitor habits closely.

New flight route to reach Amsterdam

By Tatiana Pimenova

Belavia and Dutch Airlines to offer joint flights between Minsk and Amsterdam

Belavia National Airline has signed an agreement with KLM Royal Dutch Airlines to operate a route between Minsk and Amsterdam, allowing passengers of the Belarusian air carrier to use its partner's flights to reach South and North America and Africa, transiting via Amsterdam.

From July 1st, Belavia will raise its number of Minsk-Amsterdam-Minsk flights, adding an additional Friday flight to its existing Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday schedule. With five flights weekly, Belavia's schedule will match that of



KLM, with minimal time spent in Amsterdam for changing plane.

Belavia has also signed special pro-rate agreements with Air France and American Delta, envisaging special prices for clients of these partner companies. Additionally, Belavia customers can travel to the USA, as almost a dozen American air carriers have joined the agreement.