

Europe in miniature

Residents of Ostrovets District of Grodno Region speak four languages, while Lithuanian capital offers education in Belarusian

By Viktor Korbut

The Ostrovets District is known for being the site chosen for the nuclear power station. Being close to the Lithuanian border, many Lithuanians live there, being native residents of the region. The Lithuanian and Belarusian languages are heard in equal measure in the villages of Rymdyuny and Gervyaty; moreover, local people know Polish and Russian too. The number of languages understood and spoken reminds us of the Benelux border; no doubt, areas close to Ostrovets are like Europe in miniature.

Priest Leonid Nestyuk serves at the Gervyaty Roman Catholic Church. Being a Ukrainian, he studied in Kaunas — where he learnt Lithuanian. On coming to Gervyaty, he could easily understand local villagers. He keeps cultural traditions and acts as a true diplomat, teaching believers to be tolerant and respectful of each other's faith and origin.

It takes just ten minutes to drive from Gervyaty to Rymdyuny, where the Lithuanian Centre of Culture and Information (unique for Belarus) has operated since the 1990s. It has a school offering classes in Lithuanian, while a

Belarusian language school is situated nearby. Children from both share a canteen, gym and playground. Perhaps no other such place exists with such strong friendships between nationalities. Belarusians and Lithuanians live side by side, finding a common language.

Only two schools offer Lithuanian language classes in Belarus: one is situated in Rymdyuny while the other is in the village of Pelyasa, in the Voronovo District. The Head of the Education



Gervyaty's young villagers

Ministry's General Secondary Education Department, Yuri Gladkov, notes that 120 children attend.

This year, 4,770 boys and girls study their native language — Polish, Lithuanian or Hebrew — at 114 Belarusian schools, attending special lessons or additional

courses. There is a joint consultation commission overseeing schools for Belarusian minorities in Lithuania and for Lithuanian minorities in Belarus. It last met in June 2010, in Vilnius, with the forthcoming sitting sched-

Lithuania, H.E. Mr. Vladimir Drazhin, notes the exclusivity of this Belarusian-Lithuanian project in the field of education. The Centre successfully represents and promotes Belarusian culture in Lithuania, co-operating with scientific establishments from Belarus, Poland, the UK, the USA, Slovakia, Ukraine and Russia. Close ties exist with the Maxim Tank Belarusian State Pedagogic University's Department for Belarusian Philology and Culture and its Department for Russian Philology. Interestingly, Maxim Tank — a Belarusian literary classic — began his artistic path in Vilnius, in the 1930s.

Under the Centre's initiative, a secondary school named after Frantsisk Skorina was set up in Vilnius in the 1910s, offering lectures in Belarusian. It was the first Belarusian gymnasium to open in Vilnius, running until 1944. The building, not far from famous Ausros Vartai, remains; not long ago, a commemorative plaque

was unveiled there, honouring one of its teachers: Roman Catholic Priest Adam Stankevich. The school trained many outstanding personalities and famous Belarusians: writers, poets, scientists and doctors. Belarus-born American scientist Boris Kit lectured there.

“Half of our pupils are Belarusian while a quarter are from mixed families,” explains the school's Director, Galina Sivolova. “For example, the father of one of our pupils works in the United Arab Emirates. I asked him why he'd chosen a Belarusian school and the boy replied that, on graduating, he'd work at Minsk Airport — as his father once did. Last year, many Russians joined the school. Annually, two or three alumni continue their studies in the West, while five to seven move to Belarus. Others remain in Lithuania.”

Last year, the Frantsisk Skorina School underwent repair, with 25 builders

sent by Minsk's authorities; around \$30,000 was allocated for the work. It was among the top three Lithuanian schools receiving EU money for renovation. Vilnius' authorities also annually allocate funds for the purchase of new textbooks, repair works, teachers' ongoing training and children's out-of-school activities.

The Belarusian school follows the Lithuanian curriculum, with obligatory Belarusian language classes for primary school age children. From the first year, pupils are taught four languages: Belarusian, Lithuanian, Russian and English. German or French are added in the seventh school year. Meanwhile, two school folk bands — *Lyanok* and *Syabryna* — take part in various festivals.

Belarusians and Lithuanians live hand in hand between Vilnius and Ostrovets, helping each other preserve their common traditions, while studying the culture of each other's nation.



Roman Catholic Church in Gervyaty, with its old mill, is among Ostrovets District's most attractive sites

Attractive force of agro-tourism

Belarus to promote itself as a European region offering inexpensive yet comfortable leisure

By Irina Dobrynina

Tourism is becoming viewed as a catalyst for regional development, with about 700m people travelling annually worldwide. In fact, 12-30 percent prefer rural holidaying, for which Belarus boasts huge potential. It could easily offer an alternative to coastal holidaying yet currently occupies less than one percent of the total share of global tourist turnover.

Meanwhile, the number of attractive tourist sites is growing countrywide, much owing to the efforts of patriots, who know its history and value its cultural-historical heritage and unique culture. Studies of the tourist at-

tractiveness of rural areas show that people are most attracted by landscapes, villagers' subsistence farming, historical monuments and open air recreation.

Oksana and Valery Salkovsky are true pioneers of agro-tourism in the Grodno Region. Their Nad Nemanom guesthouse, situated in an oak forest, is well known far beyond Belarus. Their creativity, hard work, enthusiasm and skilful use of their natural wealth resulted in their homestead being named the best in the Republic in 2008 and 2009.

The number of guesthouses has risen from 4 (in 2007) to 26 (in 2011) in the Lida District — recently chosen to host a sitting of the Council for Co-op-



Nad Nemanom guesthouse hosts: Valery and Oksana Salkovsky

eration of Local Self-Governing Bodies. All are members of the Belarusian Association of Rural and Ecotourism — Country Escape. The village of Dokudovo deserves special attention, having five guesthouses. A tourist village

is likely to be one day established there.

In 2010, Belarus was visited by 4m foreigners, with exports of services bringing in revenue of \$147m (almost 7-fold more than five years ago).

Homestead resembles a picture

By Lilia Novikova

Artists from Belarus, Lithuania and Poland take part in international open air show, not far from Grodno

The original theme of the event involved the creation of a series of works showing the holiday possibilities of Belarusian rural guesthouses, hosted by a recently revamped mansion. Many years ago, its first stone was laid by famous Grodno Mayor Antony Tizengauz, later finished by other hosts. From Soviet times, it had remained deserted, falling into disrepair until chosen as a tourist site.

The *History and Modernity* show crowned the open air event, with Grodno residents being the first to enjoy it. Soon, the pictures and graphic works are to tour Lithuania and Poland, showcasing the beauty of the Grodno guesthouse.