

Promoting women's health and wellbeing

Belarusian Women's Union celebrates 20th anniversary, with National Library hosting solemn jubilee conference

By Galina Novoletova

The Belarusian Women's Union (BWU) is a serious public organisation, uniting 183,000 people. It has achieved much, through projects such as *No Abandoned Children in Belarus*, *Woman's Health is the Nation's Health*, *Women against Excessive Female Drinking*, *Spring of Kindness and Memory* and *Woman of the Year*. Mother's Day has also appeared at the initiative of the BWU. Of course, all these endeavours continue to be developed.

Discussing future plans, the Chair of the BWU Board, Nadezhda Yermakova, stresses that we can all make a difference by supporting those around us with words

and deeds — be they mothers with troublesome children or a wife suffering from domestic violence. They need not material assistance, but advice and moral support.

Speaking of whether gender equality is an acute issue for the BWU, Ms. Yermakova notes that, at present, men's rights are to the fore, as they need to defend their rights and responsibilities: their involvement in children's upbringing. According to Ms. Yermakova, men are being challenged to be strong providers for their families. She explains that Belarus is placed 19th worldwide in terms of women's representation on legislative bodies, although Antonina Morova, the Co-Chair of the Be-



Chair of the Belarusian Women's Union Nadezhda Yermakova chats to members of the public organisation

larusian Women's Union and the Chair of the Standing Committee on Education, Science, Culture and Social Development of the Council of the Republic, believes that this is a worthy achievement to date. Ten Third Millennium Development Goals have been outlined, including that of achieving 30 percent female representation. Belarus is among 27 countries which have already reached this goal.

Of course, problems remain: female drunkenness and drug abuse, and abandoned and neglected children who need to be taken into care. Fortunately, many parents are rehabilitated, allowing them to

regain guardianship of their children. Sadly, Ms. Yermakova tells us that there are also those who fail to take responsibility for themselves or their offspring, also trying to avoid their responsibility in paying fees for the maintenance of their children in state care.

Many people are making a contribution to changing this situation, including journalists. The Information Ministry recently joined the BWU in organising a contest among the printed and electronic media, entitled *Strong Family — Strong State*; 82 creative works entered, with prizes awarded on the eve of the BWU's 20th anniversary.

Not every contemporary Belarusian woman wants to have a big family. It is the personal right of everyone to determine the size of their family. The six year old granddaughter of Nadezhda Yermakova tells us that she hopes to have eight children and is already planning the number of boys and girls! Let's hope she is blessed with happiness multiplied by eight!

Of course, being a mother and beloved wife as well as having a career is a challenging task, especially without support. However, if the whole Belarusian Women's Union is behind us, it's worth trying.



Nesvizh Mayor Ivan Krutko (R) accepts symbol of cultural capital

Baton picked up by city rich in traditions

By Nikolay Anisimov

Gomel transfers honorary status of Belarus' cultural capital to Nesvizh

The project was launched in 2010, with Polotsk becoming the country's first cultural capital; it was followed by Gomel in 2011, which hosted 12 festivals and 27 concerts by national and foreign groups this year, as well as over 80 exhibitions. Never before have ballet, opera, operetta and variety performances been so richly presented in the city, which boasts a population of half a million.

The ceremony of transferring the honorary status to Nesvizh included a summary of Gomel's achievements. Artists from various genres appeared on Gomel's stage — from circus performers to cembalists. Nesvizh, with its 14,000 population, has a high bar to match. Applause for Gomel was spontaneous in the packed hall.

We can certainly expect a wonderful schedule of events from Nes-

vizh for next year, as the Culture Ministry stresses. The honour not only allows local residents the chance to experience amazing performances; it will encourage guests to visit the town, promoting it as a tourist venue. Its *Muses of Nesvizh* Festival, as well as opera and ballet nights at the Radziwill Palace will delight audiences. Undoubtedly, the castle is the major cultural resource of the town, with four halls now open to the public and 40 rooms still being revamped. By 2012, it will be fully open.

Belarus' Deputy Culture Minister, Tadeush Struzhetskyy, believes that one of the major results of the *Cultural Capital of Belarus* project is the enhancement of high cultural standards. He explains, "This project is vital to the country. Each year, we acquire new experience. Those towns becoming cultural capitals can find their own ways of revealing their unique character. Nesvizh must consider seriously how to do this beautifully and worthily."

Natural beauty always pleasing to the eyes

Fifteen thousand Russian families to meet New Year with Belarusian fir trees

By Vladimir Yakovlev

Belarusian forestry workers are welcoming a pre-New Year parade of spiky beauties, meticulously assessing their form and grading them for height and volume. The most beautiful will be sent to fir tree markets in Belarusian and Russian cities. Last year, local forestries supplied 1,500 fir trees to Moscow and St. Petersburg while, this December, they plan to increase exports ten-fold.

"The first merchants arrive even before the snow falls to examine our plantations," notes Sergey Durko, chief forester of Smorgon's experimental forestry, describing the subtle details of pre-New Year trade. "They're primarily interested in trees which are 1.5-2m high. To reach such a size, they need to grow for 7-10 years. Fir trees cut during coppicing and those near power lines are also sold. Young pines are quite popular and, for those eager to keep their tree



5,000 New Year fir trees to be sold by Skidel forestry

longer, we offer blue spruces in pots and tubs. We have a special greenhouse and a nursery garden for growing them. In spring, you can plant your fir tree near your porch or summer cottage."

Before their long trip, trees' brittle branches are removed, and they are tied up, making them more compact and less liable to damage. From the forestry, prices are very reasonable, rising to around 300 Russian Roubles in Moscow or St. Petersburg. A spruce in a pot can even fetch

3,000 Roubles. Belarusian sales of coniferous tree seeds and saplings to Russia have also sharply increased, replacing woods damaged by fire.

According to Mr. Durko, Belarusian forests have plenty of spare capacity. He explains, "We cut around 500 New Year fir trees from each hectare, while annually planting 500-600 hectares of forest. We can certainly meet almost any order, ensuring enough New Year beauties for local residents too."