

# Waves of 'River of Memory' marks '11.04.2011' date more expressively than any words

A year has passed since that terrible day when the Minsk metro was ripped apart by an explosion

By Galina Overyanova

The pain of the terrorist act was experienced by the whole country. At 17:56 on that dark Monday, some were hurrying home; it would surely have been better for them to have worked late or to have left earlier. Of course, we cannot change the course of history. Here, in Belarus, 15 people died and 315 were injured as a result of one moment in time, which remains 'frozen' forever.

We learnt much about ourselves as a result, discovering that we are strong. We don't panic and will help those needing our assistance rather than running in fear, trying to save ourselves. We can sympathise as a nation, as well as individually; our hearts have no limits.

Lamps and candles have been placed near the metro entrance, alongside flowers on the platform and mourning wreaths. Blood donor points are crowded as people come to offer more than just sym-



'River of Memory' memorial sign unveiled at Oktyabrskaya metro station

pathy, transported free of charge on inner-city mini-buses. We have survived confusion, pain and fear.

A year has passed since the event, with time returning us to our everyday routines: we run to the metro in the morning because

we're late; we criticise snow fall in April and enjoy the sunshine; we keep an eye on the cost of housing; we take part in subbotniks and we plan our holidays. Life continues.

However, we also remember and mourn those who died and

pray for those who still need help. Time is said to cure all wounds: an eternal wisdom which gives us strength to overcome troubles without hardening our souls. Perhaps a year is a too short a period for all wounds to close and for pain

to cease — especially for those directly affected by the explosion; their lives are divided into 'before' and 'after'. When the explosion tore through the station, eleven innocent people breathed their last; four more would die in hospital, despite all efforts by doctors. Meanwhile, over 300 passengers were left injured, some requiring long-term treatment.

Throughout the past year, people have laid flowers near Oktyabrskaya metro station and have lit candles. Last Wednesday, they were again lit to honour the memory of those who died. Hundreds of people attended a ceremony to unveil a bronze stella-monument. Among those in attendance were people personally touched by the tragedy, and those whose sympathies extend to others without reservation. On the 'River of Memory', the names of those lost are engraved on the crests of 15 waves, with the date below: '11.04.2011'. No further epitaph is required.

## Mission is possible, with high praise

Diplomacy follows its own obligations and protocols. For example, an ambassador 'officially' begins their activity in a country only after presenting their credentials to the head of state. No such ceremony exists on leaving but Belarus has established its own tradition, with the President personally parting with those ambassadors he believes have worked hard to develop good mutual relations, with positive results.

Recently, Alexander Lukashenko addressed words of gratitude to the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to Belarus, H.E. Mr. Paul Friedrich von Fuhrherr, praising his fruitful activity. "You've left a pleasant and significant legacy from your work in Belarus," he said. "Openly speaking, unlike

Mr. Paul Friedrich von Fuhrherr

Mr. Fuhrherr has seen that he can help, he always has done. The President expressed his wish that all Western ambassadors work in a similar manner, establishing kind relations with Belarus.

The Maltese Order is an influential organisation in the Catholic world so Mr. Lukashenko mentioned Belarus' interaction with the Catholic Church. "In honesty, we hoped to see more progress in co-operating with the Catholic Church. We believe more could be done to build relations between Belarus and Western Europe — dis-

regarding the European Union, as we know who plays the key role there. We'd love to send this

signal via you..." he said. "You have strong influence in the Holy See. There are many influential people there who should — at long last — look at relations with the country which has the second largest Catholic confession within the post-Soviet space, and whose kind people wish to live in peace and concord," the President added. Mr. Fuhrherr admitted that he has formed a warm attitude towards the Belarusian nation and asserted that the Maltese Order has done everything possible to influence Belarus-West dialogue for the best. "Our Government's task is to promote the use of dialogue to solve problems; we must talk to each other."

The Ambassador also noted that no other post-Soviet country enjoys such good collaboration between the Orthodox and Catholic churches and the state. He expressed his assurance that the Maltese Order will play a positive role in relations between Belarus and Western Europe.

## Meeting accentuates generous, warm wishes

**Belarus has always hoped for active support and assistance from the Catholic Church, notes Alexander Lukashenko on meeting the Apostolic Nuncio for Belarus, Claudio Gugerotti**

"Being aware that you're going to the Holy See, I'd like you to convey my warmest wishes and congratulations on the Easter holiday to Pope Benedict 16th. I recollect our meeting with great warmth. My words have acute meaning, as I've been monitoring the media both inside Belarus and abroad. Some wish to drive a wedge in our relations with the Pope of Rome but I say it won't work. We've taken a course of co-operation with the Catholic Church and have done much to aid relations between the state and the Catholic Church," the President stated, adding, "All the plans outlined during my conversation with the Pope of Rome have been practically implemented. Only one step remains: preparation for the signing of an agreement is currently underway and we aim to reach this goal."

I'd like to stress again that we've always counted on active support and assistance from the Catholic Church. I see how some media, especially in Poland and other countries, have

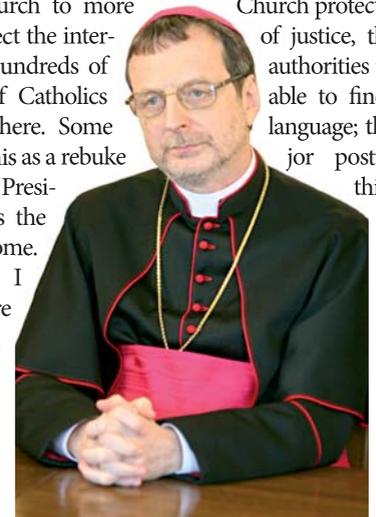
responded to my appeal to the Catholic Church to more actively protect the interests of the hundreds of thousands of Catholics who reside here. Some have taken this as a rebuke from the President towards the Pope of Rome. Believe me, I have no desire to reproach anyone. Nor have I sought to make demands or requests. I'm aware that the Pope of Rome — who is familiar with politics — knows what's going on in Belarus and understands that the thousands of Catholics who live here need his daily support and protection. I want you and the Pope of Rome to know that the President of Belarus and the entire Belarusian power structure will follow the course we've agreed upon.

Today, we've given Catholic and Orthodox believers, as well as other confessions, the opportunity to construct as many churches as those living in Belarus need. We'll be solving all issues in this direction. This is the essence of our policy and there are absolutely no require-

ments being set. If the Catholic Church protects the interests of justice, the Belarusian authorities will always be able to find a common language; this is our major postulate. Everything should be fair."

Mr. Lukashenko also spoke of how to develop dialogue in the wider sense, saying, "I think that the Pope of Rome may soon be able to meet the faithful of Belarus. We'll be glad to meet him and should work in this direction with our Patriarch; we're working to see this happen. We can work on effective ways of strengthening not only Catholicism, but the abilities of all to observe their religion in Belarus: Orthodox, Catholic, and others."

In turn, Claudio Gugerotti assured the President, "The Pope of Rome has a deep love and commitment to Belarus. I'm very pleased that you're aware of the daily work conducted by the Catholic Church in promoting peace, justice and contacts."



Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti