

# Grey-haired, young Polotsk

The magnificent Saviour Monastery of St. Yevfrosiniya and St. Sophia's Cathedral, the restored monument honouring the fallen heroes of the 1812 war and the Field of Battle Glory Museum are just a small snapshot of Polotsk's attractions. Many contemporary sites have also opened, making the city a wonderful place to live. Others are still being worked upon, so the face of Polotsk could look very different within two years.

Of course, the city is a true national treasure; we should be proud, showing it off to tourists as much as possible. Moreover, it is located at the geographical centre of Europe — as proven by the juxtaposition of the co-ordinates of the extreme continental points in the North, South, East and West. Polotsk is a tourist pearl which we should allow to shine in all its colours.

The 2008-2012 comprehensive programme for Polotsk's development (approved by Presidential Decree in December 2007) has borne fruit. Arriving to congratulate the city and residents on the jubilee, President Lukashenko voiced his pleasure at how his instructions have been carried out. His first 'stop' was to see the newly opened humanitarian departments at Polotsk State University. Of course, the walls themselves are steeped in history, having once housed a collegium. However, only the ruins of the original building remain. In 2003, the President instructed restoration to begin and he admitted, "I didn't believe that you would restore it... but you've done so very well."

Our 'two' Polotsks are separated by just a decade. The contrast is even more striking if we compare one century with another — as we see from reproductions of Vladimir Likhodedov's old postcards depicting city views. These hang on the walls of Polotsk State University, presented by *SB Belarus-Segodnya* newspaper, following its *Searching for the Lost* project, which received the 'For Spiritual Revival' Award. The editorial office then donated the postcard reproductions to the university.

The President viewed the exhibition of university archaeological findings and walked the corridors and classrooms, also dropping into the assembly hall, the media centre and the library — where students were studying. Mr. Luka-



In the streets of festive Polotsk during celebrations of city's 1150th anniversary

shenko asked whether they found it comfortable there and the youngsters nodded in a friendly manner.

However, the President questioned the quality of several textbooks, which he thought were clearer and more interesting in Soviet times, having better illustrations. He noted his desire for publishers to make more effort in this sphere. However, he praised a Great Patriotic War textbook for 10-11th grades and admired the presence of many editions in both

Belarusian and Russian on the shelves, noting, "Everyone should be able to freely choose which of the state languages they use for studying."

Discussions continue regarding languages of study but the President believes everyone should make their own choice. He asserted, "Why do we need to raise questions which have been already settled in a calm manner? If Kosinets (the Chairman of the Vitebsk Regional Executive Committee) wants to study

medieval history in Belarusian, let him take a textbook and do so. If Radkov (the First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration) wants to study in Russian, he can do so."

The President heard of some aspects of Polotsk's development, revolving around the fundamental principle that all historical relics should be preserved or restored. Those lost should be recreated while the city should be harmoniously filled with contemporary and functional

infrastructure to make the city even more comfortable for Polotsk residents and guests.

Later, Mr. Lukashenko made his assessment, addressing Polotsk residents on the eve of the festive concert. "I was glad to see that the city hasn't frozen in its development, becoming a city-museum only living through its former glory. Its aspiration towards the future is seen in

all corners, with life busy everywhere. The economy is developing successfully, as is social infrastructure for Polotsk residents and their many guests, while the heritage of past centuries is being carefully and sensibly preserved," he noted.

Mr. Lukashenko told those who are against Polotsk's sensible development, "To those who openly or secretly try to counteract the modernisation of our city, I say that modernisation doesn't mean reconstruction in a contemporary way. We try to retain all we can from past centuries, so that our nation can be proud of Polotsk's legacy. Especially for those people, I'd like to say that I've adopted a general plan for Polotsk's restoration. The city of Polotsk will definitely exist, as will our spiritual foundations and the culture of our nation."

At this moment, applause interrupted the President's speech but he summed up by saying, "We'll turn Polotsk into a true 'Mecca' for those who are cultured."

The Belarusian leader lavished praise on the city, calling it 'the father of Belarusian cities, a mirror of the history of Belarus, the spiritual cradle of the nation and the origin of our statehood'. He added, "Every Belarusian should certainly visit this city, feeling pride in not only their own efforts but in our hard-working and talented people. Moreover, every European should visit this geographical centre of Europe. On walking these streets, where the traditions of the West and the East, as well as diverse faiths and cultures, have intertwined for over a thousand years, we can more easily understand that our common past is to make a step forward."

He continued, "Belarus isn't the backyard of Europe but a Eurasian gateway: a practical embodiment of integration. The union of the potential of the European and Eurasian unions will enable us to create absolutely new opportunities for dynamic development and holistic co-operation between the nations of the continent. We see it as the major mission and geopolitical role of our state to link them, promoting liaisons."

Mr. Lukashenko heartily congratulated Polotsk's residents on their wonderful anniversary. Festive celebrations continued until dusk.

## Symbols over city

By Sergey Gumenov

**Once visited, no one forgets this ancient city, the cradle of Belarusian statehood and the centre of Orthodox relics. It possesses a special magnetism.**

Trade and crafts have always flourished in Polotsk, since the dawn of history, as have architecture and enlightenment. Moreover, its ancient churches have elevated the spirits of Belarusians while guiding them through life's troubles.

The history of Polotsk is closely connected with the unique formation of Belarusian spirituality, faith and the establishment of Orthodox rites. One of the most beautiful churches — the Holy Transfigura-

tion Church — was erected in the 12th century at the behest of Yevfrosiniya Polotskaya, as mentioned in the *Life* of the divine protectress of our Belarusian lands.

It was designed by an architect called John, whose monument was recently unveiled in Polotsk. The Holy Transfiguration Church is deservedly considered to be a true pearl of ancient Slavonic architecture, worthy of UNESCO's World Heritage List. We can view genius John as the first Belarusian architect. The monument in his honour was created by Minsk sculptor Alexander Shappo, who was brought up in Novopolotsk. Naturally, he is knowledgeable on the ancient churches of his native land. Graduating

from the Belarusian Academy of Arts 13 years ago, he chose 'Architect John' as the topic of his diploma paper. Then, in 2009, Alexander won a contest for the best monument design: now brought to life.

His bronze John is 3.5m high and stands on an 11-tonne boulder. He holds a model of the Holy Transfiguration Church in his left palm, while blessing it with his right. The monument watches over the crossroads of Bogdanovich Street and the avenue bearing his name — in the newly erected residential housing district, close to the airport. It symbolises the ties of the ancient Belarusian architectural school with its modern achievements.

