



9th Republican Festival of National Cultures held brightly and colourfully in Grodno

Festival to suit every taste

The 9th Republican Festival of National Cultures, held traditionally every other year in cosy Grodno, brought together a record number of entrants this year: around 2,000 representatives of 33 nationalities, living and working in Belarus, where they've found their wonderful second home

By Valentin Petrovsky

Noisy crowds of Gypsies paraded the central streets of Grodno, joined by Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Ukrainians (159 have arrived from the neighbouring state), Hindus, Iranians and Venezuelans. Their faces lit up with smiles while their eyes radiated a spark of benevolence. National crafts stands invited guests to try juicy shashlyk made from spring lamb, dolma wrapped in grape leaves (as is traditional), delicious vareniki (curd or fruit dumplings) and thick hummus with lavash.

Eight Ambassadors took part in the jovial event. Meanwhile, Belarus' Deputy Prime Minister, the chairman of the festival's organising committee, Anatoly Tozik, read a warm greeting from the President at the opening ceremony, stressing that the forum demonstrates the consistency of state policy in developing international relations, inter-cultural dialogue and collaboration.

"Belarus will continue to ensure all-round support for its countrymen abroad, which may number up to 3.5m (first, second and third generations). Most recall their historical homeland so, of course, it's vital (as for any state) that we promote these ties."

"This is a unique festival in its essence and scale — unrivalled worldwide," notes Belarus' Culture Minister, Tadeush Struzhetskyy, proudly. "It is one of



Cheerful colours of Festival of National Cultures in Grodno

the most popular cultural events in the Republic. We were asked whether we'd like to give it international status but we refused. It's long been an international event but it's important for

us to preserve the word 'Republican' in its title, as it represents the culture, customs and traditions of all nationalities working and living in Belarus. The Festival of National Cultures

is a true symbol of international friendship and unity of nations and nationalities, peace on the Belarusian land, the spiritual wealth of international relations and the fruitful development of

centuries-old traditions."

It's impossible to embrace the boundless and it would be difficult to have visited all 44 performances staged by the 30+ people, notes the Executive Direc-

tor of the Festival, Vladimir Sergeichik. There was something for every taste: concerts, contests, exhibitions, theatrical performances and combat sports.

Such forums include more than just singing, dancing and cuisine. Some serious work was also afoot in the Oval Hall of the New Castle, including a meeting of the Advisory Council for Belarusians Abroad (established by the Culture Ministry). Its first session took place in 2010 in Minsk and Novogrudok, at the Festival of Medieval Culture; the second was organised in Vitebsk in 2011.

Belarus' Culture Minister, Pavel Latushko, noted at the event that major work has been undertaken to set up a network of Belarusian cultural centres abroad: one is already operational in Warsaw, with another to appear in Moscow in 2013. In future, similar centres are to open in Lithuania, Germany and Ukraine.

"It has been proposed that we open a House of Belarusians Abroad in Minsk, at the Culture Ministry's Institute of Culture or at the Republican Centre of National Cultures. Moreover, the 2012-2015 draft state programme, *Belarusians in the World*, is soon to be submitted for consideration by the Council of Ministers."

In 2014, Grodno will host the 10th Republican Festival of National Cultures; by then, ideas are likely to have found real embodiment.