

Definite leadership

Russian Public Opinion Research Centre (VCIOM) discovers that Russians still view Belarus as their most reliable and stable partner

By Yevgeny Semerin

In total, 1,600 respondents were polled across 138 towns and cities from 46 regions, territories and republics of the Russian Federation. Of these, 46 percent named Belarus as Russia's most reliable partner within the international arena, followed by Kazakhstan (38 percent) and Ukraine (17 percent). "Over the last five years, Russians have traditionally named Minsk and Astana as their most reliable partners within the CIS," notes the Centre.

Other countries significantly lag behind in the 'trust rating', with Armenia receiving just 5 percent, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan a humble 4 percent each and Uzbekistan only 3 percent. Moldova, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan polled a modest 2 percent each while Russians view Georgia as their least reliable partner within the post-Soviet space.

As far as the heads of CIS states are concerned, the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, enjoys the greatest trust among Russian residents (34 percent). He is followed by the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev (31 percent). The presidents of other CIS countries received the following 'votes':



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Ukraine's Viktor Yanukovich — 12 percent; Azerbaijan's Ilham Aliyev — 5 percent; and Armenia's Serzh Sargsyan and Kyrgyzstan's Almazbek Atambayev — 3 percent each. With just 2 percent of the poll were Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov, Turkmenistan's Gurban-

guly Berdymukhamedov and Tajikistan's Emomali Rahmon. The presidents of Moldova and Georgia, Nicolae Timofti and Mikheil Saakashvili, received the lowest trust rating: 1 percent.

Russians view Belarus as a leader among CIS states

for stability and success — as noted by 45 percent of respondents. Meanwhile, 33 percent prefer Kazakhstan; Ukraine is ranked third, with 19 percent. With modest figures are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Belarus is viewed as a leader in modernisation, as noted by 30 percent; the same opinion is held by 23 percent of respondents for Kazakhstan and by 14 percent for Ukraine. Other CIS countries failed to earn even 5 percent of public opinion.

Belarus is CIS leader for stability and success, according to the Russians

Sign of respect from European colleagues

Representative of Belarus elected Vice-President of European Federation of UNESCO Clubs, Centres and Associations

The Chairman of the Republican Public Association of UNESCO Clubs, Dmitry Subtselny, has been elected Vice-President of the European Federation of UNESCO Clubs, Centres and Associations. The decision was taken after the General Assembly of the European Federation of UNESCO Clubs, Centres and Associations, held in December in Bucharest.

The European Federation is headed by Daniela Popescu, President of the Romanian Association of UNESCO Clubs. The new leadership of the Federation aims to inspire co-operation between UNESCO associations, centres and clubs across Europe. "We need to develop international projects and programmes in the spheres of



education, science, culture, information and communication. In addition, we may create a special section for regional co-operation across Eastern Europe," she notes.

The election of the Belarusian representative to the post of Vice-President of the Federation shows that the work of Belarusian UNESCO Clubs has earned respect from European colleagues. Of course, the position brings responsibility for the vital development of the European Federation, which unites over 20 National UNESCO Clubs, Centres and Associations and was founded in 2001, with support from RPO BELAU.

Mir Castle to host festive formal dances

Three festive balls hosted by one of Belarus' most beautiful historical and cultural sites in early January: magnificent 18th century Mir Castle

By Nina Levitskaya

The first event is scheduled for January 4th: a Viennese Ball — widely popular in Europe. The original event is registered on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, hosted by the capital of Austria. The tradition has been borrowed by many states, including Belarus, and must follow certain protocols: being opened by young couples; having an obligatory midnight performance; and ending at dawn.

The organisers of the Viennese Ball at Mir Castle promise live instrumental music, performances by opera singers, waltzes and the polonaise, among various entertainments.

On January 5th, there



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Christmas balls become popular

will be a '1920-30s themed' dance in Mir Castle's Ivory Hall, presenting jazz and swing bands and the screening of silent films. This will be followed on January 6th

by an event for youngsters: a Christmas Ball held in the Stolovaya Izba. Father Frost, the Snow Maiden and unexpected Christmas adventures are promised.

Statistics empowered to declare

Belarus is CIS leader in car ownership per capita

According to the National Statistical Committee of Belarus, as of early 2012, there were 280 personally owned cars per 1,000 citizens. In Russia, this figure stood at 242 while Kazakhstan's was 203; Ukraine's was 143 and Kyrgyzstan's was a modest 64.

Since 2000, Belarusian ownership of cars has doubled, from 139 per 1,000 residents. It rose to 180 in 2005, 230 in 2009 and 264 in 2010.

CIS Interstate Statistical Committee reports have been used to produce *The Belarus and the CIS States* catalogue, which presents statistical information on the socio-economic development of Belarus compared to other CIS countries from 2000 to 2011. It tackles issues of demographics, employment, standards of living and gross domestic product. It also details average statistical data on the development of key branches: industry, agriculture, construction, transport and communications, and the consumer market. Data describing foreign trade is also published.

Interesting offer for tourists

Purchases of just Br800,000 to qualify for tax free benefits

The Deputy Minister for Trade, Irina Narkevich, has told the press that long discussions have resulted in the decision to allow foreign visitors to reclaim tax on purchases which total about \$100. "Lithuania and Poland offer tax rebates on purchases of about \$50 while, in Italy, the figure stands at about 180-190 Euros," the Deputy Minister explains. The Baltic States already operate such a system and Russia is debating the idea.

Ms. Narkevich believes the move is especially important on the eve of the 2014 IIHF World Championship since many tourists will attend. "It should help attract tourists," she asserts.

The system won't apply to tourists from the Customs Union but its introduction should inspire Belarusian trade, in particular for branded goods, since tourists like to buy souvenirs. The tax free system is common in Western countries since the money spent by foreign tourists usually greatly exceeds the sum of foregone VAT. Countries also often compete to offer the smallest sum at which tax can be returned. Visitors to Belarus will be able to reclaim their tax from 2013.