

Great news with regard to

Can the Internet win the battle for news readership, overtaking traditional media, and what will happen to the media following integration across the former Soviet territory? Two hundred heads of major Georgian, Baltic and CIS media sources recently discussed the matter at the 7th annual Forum of European and Asian Media (FEAM-2012), which was held in Minsk.



Director General of RIA Novosti, Nikolai Biryukov, at forum in Minsk

By Vladimir Khromov

Mediaexpress of integration still picking up steam

The FEAM-2012 forum could hardly provide concrete answers to such questions, since no one can foresee the future. However, the issues raised in Minsk were undoubtedly worth debating, as evinced by the greetings sent by President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko and President of Russia Vladimir Putin.

"It is symbolic that your event, devoted to integration processes within the post-Soviet space, is held in Belarus, which has recommended itself as the most ac-

tive initiator of convergence and full co-operation between our citizens," noted Mr. Lukashenko in his greeting. He stressed that the effectiveness of integration depends directly on the political will of heads of states and the constructive position of the public. Mr. Putin stated, "The idea of close multidimensional integration is finding ever more supporters; accordingly, the media should play a united and leading role."

Reality more important than dreams

The first day of the forum revealed the presence of major contradictions. It was debated how

best to combine states' integration aspirations with their desire for national sovereignty. The question of the media's role was discussed, with the Union State Secretary, Grigory Rapota, noting, "Expert help is essential since it's already obvious that our countries have now established sovereignty while those within the Union State have achieved much on the path to integration." The future of the print media was also discussed, with the Russian Deputy Minister for Communications, Alexey Volin, emphasising that traditional media sources need to fight for their readership. He admitted, "People's trust in the media has obviously fallen, with many no longer viewing traditional sources as reli-

able. The media is facing increased competition from 'unstructured' sources: the Internet, social networks and bloggers. It's a question of survival."

Challenges require adequate response

The Director of the Belarusian High-Tech Park, Valery Tsepka, noted that, from January 1st, 2013, even world famous *Newsweek* will be issued online only. Mr. Tsepka notes the new challenges and threats brought by online information sources, which lack regulation. Internet blogs are particularly questionable, yet attract a certain part of the audience of the traditional media.

The question of allowing freedom of speech while ensuring information security online remains one for debate. Mr. Tsepka noted the example of Julian Assange, whose controversial WikiLeaks site gave access to secret information. "How would you feel if your medical records or a list of your friends' phone numbers appeared online in the same way?" he asked. He also questioned the wisdom of forums allowing anonymous comments, since slanders can go unpunished. "Social networks are a public reaction to this, since users can block insults from anonymous users."

Clearly, some regulation is required. Some proposals for 'saving newspapers' were presented at the forum. One 'wall to wall' discussion on *The Internet: Infinite Information or Limiting Freedom* saw Mr. Volin comment, "Some believe that governments can subsidise the media but such intervention is brief and rather ineffective. You can walk and stand by using crutches, but you can't run."

Post-Chernobyl experience can benefit partners

Japan keen to use Belarusian technologies to tackle aftermath of Fukushima catastrophe

Belarus and Japan are working on expanding co-operation regarding rehabilitation of areas affected by radiation — as resulting from the Chernobyl and Fukushima-1 nuclear power plant accidents. Leonid Moskalchuk, who heads the Anthropogenic Contaminated Areas Rehabilitation Laboratory of the Joint Institute for Power and Nuclear Research at Sosny (of the National Academy of Sciences) recently visited Tokyo. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Japan hosted a presentation of Belarusian advanced decontamination technologies and it was agreed to explore the possibilities of attracting Japanese funding for further collaborative research.

Mr. Moskalchuk held a series of meetings and presentations with Japanese companies (Sojitz Corporation, JTP and others), during which the interest of the Japanese was confirmed. They are eager to find practical and commercial use for Belarusian technologies in helping tackle the aftermath of Fukushima.

Fewer commercials

Advertising to be reduced during prime time TV by two minutes

A law entitled 'Amendments and Additions to certain laws of the Republic of Belarus on Advertising' has been adopted at the House of Representatives at its second reading. According to the current law, each hour of prime time TV can have up to 18 minutes of advertising but this is to be reduced to just 16 minutes. Sound levels for advertising must also match those of programming being interrupted. Advertising of beer and soft drinks on TV and radio is to be prohibited between 7.00am and 10pm (until 8pm now).

Games and lots of fun for guests

Folklore, traditions and thrills to become mane accents of winter tourist season

By Margarita Dorokhova

Few tourists are surprised by a snowy winter scene but, of course, this can become the fairytale background for new activities. The National Tourism Agency's calendar of around a hundred of the top events countrywide is expected to attract far and wide.

Among the festivities on offer is a trip to see the 'Tereshka's Wedding' folk custom, on January 6th, in the Lepel District. You can become part

of the country's intangible cultural heritage by attending as a 'wedding guest'. Later, on January 13th, UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage listed 'Kolyady Tsars' (in the photo) is held in the Kopyl District's Semezhevo village.

The village of Pogost in the Zhitkovich District became known all over the world on the eve of 2011 for its 'Shchedrets' custom (celebrating New Year Kolyady). It greatly impressed the American CNN company, earning

Pogost ranking in the world's top three places to celebrate the winter holidays, ahead of Salzburg, Sidney and New York.

"Before compiling our calendar, we sent letters to regions and districts asking them to let us know what interesting events they were planning," explains Yekaterina Lipen, from the Marketing Department of the National Tourism Agency's Tourist Information Centre. The custom of 'Mizhrechcha



Fortunetelling rite in Vetka Folk Art Museum

— Yorauski Karagod', which is also on the UNESCO List of Historical and Cultural Heritage, is among those events expected to attract many visitors.

The Head of the Culture

Department at the Zhitkovich District Executive Committee, Sergey Agievich, tells us, "For us, Kolyady is very traditional, held in almost every settlement. It isn't viewed as something ex-

clusive. Pogost has received amazing attention for its 'Shchedrets' celebrations but our other villages — such as Richev and Ozerany, also celebrate spectacularly. They remain hidden gems."