

Speaking in the language of mutual understanding

By Veniamin Khromov

Russian President Vladimir Putin's greeting to participants of the forum was read by Vitaly Ignatenko, President of the World Association of Russian Press. Of course, Minsk and Brest are hero cities of the USSR, as Mr. Putin noted in his message: 'On Belarusian land, in the June days of 72 years ago, Belarusian people stood in the breach. All peoples of the USSR endured the hardest trials together, holding out in that struggle until they won the most severe war of the 20th century. The feat of the Brest Fortress defenders will remain among the most heroic pages of the Great Patriotic War: a symbol of courage and invincible will. I would underline that treasuring a sacred memory of those years is our common duty and responsibility. The role of the media in giving impartial coverage and opposing all attempts to distort the historic truth cannot be overestimated.'

The World Congress of Russian Press is a traditional annual meeting of the heads of Russian-language media, aimed at discussing topical issues in the Russian-language information space, as well as how best to preserve the use of Russian language: the fourth most-spoken language globally. This year, the forum took place in Belarus, attended by more than 200 representatives of the Russian diaspora, from approximately 60 countries: editors-in-chief, publishers and leading journalists abroad. "This is a high respect for Belarus, an appreciation of how does the Russian language is treated in your country", said Mr. Ignatenko.

The 15th World Congress of Russian Press was organised by the World Association of Russian Press and BELTA News Agency with the assistance of ITAR-TASS News Agency in Russia, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other state administration bodies of Belarus. Meanwhile, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko participated in the plenary meeting, which took place at the National library.

Journalists from 300 media outlets took part, covering newspapers, magazines, news agencies, web-based media, TV channels, and national and regional radio broadcasting. The meeting

was attended by state and public figures of Russia, and representatives of Belarusian state administration authorities alongside students and academics from the Institute of Journalism of the Belarusian State University.

"Belarus is often criticised for absence of free speech but it's ridiculous to do so when we have free access to the Internet. Those who make such comments

wiretapping, ordered publications, and the manipulation of public opinion by global media corporations."

According to the President, our electronic era has aggravated such problems, often leading to confusion among the public, despite their initial delight. He noted, "Mankind's access to hitherto unknown possibilities for instant information exchange has simultaneously lowered the quality of

out of business, despite the popularity of the Internet, since many editions have simply acquired an on-line presence. "This once again confirms the simple fact that language is at the heart of all matters. It has always been the case and, most likely, will be so in the future. Word and thought have been recorded in various ways through history, from ancient papyrus to modern computers, but the sense

ing ethics, the economy may gradually transform into a parasitic and inefficient system. "In our country, we've refrained from adopting the precepts of individualism, as embodied in the free market philosophy of survival of the fittest. Kindness, respect for humanity and assistance to the weak are the highest Christian ideals, which inspired Russian civilisation. These are the basis of the Belarusian social and eco-

divide between the rich and the poor in Belarus; nor will you see property stolen from people. We've always understood that an economic system based on deception is unsustainable. Those whose wealth is unearned won't use it correctly — unlike that which you earn through hard work and talent," he added, noting that Belarusian statehood and its model of development comprises special spiritual values and cultural achievements — as given to mankind through Russian civilisation. "Solidarity and justice are the two keywords describing our principles," the Head of State underlined.

Addressing the World Congress of Russian Press, Mr. Lukashenko stressed that, in spite of representing very different countries and their publications expressing different views, all present shared the desire to promote the great, rich and wise Russian language. "This language creates a unique spiritual space, embracing millions of people across all corners of our planet," said the President.

He emphasised that Russian language receives special treatment in Belarus, adding that our peaceful, friendly and stable nation has no desire to oppress anyone for their language. "I remember the barrage of accusations from local radical-nationalists when I pointed out that Russian is a native language for Belarusians, rather than a foreign one: it is the common heritage of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. I remain convinced. Russian language created great Russian culture and is the property of many, used to express Russian culture and the legacy of Russian civilisation in the broadest sense. We can say that we all belong to this language."

Alexander Zhukov, the First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, added that the preservation of Slavic unification is vital, adding that he thought Mr. Lukashenko's speech 'very impressive', tackling 'the preservation of culture and language, as well as the unification of Slavic people' which he believes to be 'very important'. He views Russian language as a means for Eurasian integration, noting, "Language is a means of communication. Nothing brings people together as effectively as a common language."



are usually hypocritical, knowing that no country of theirs absolute freedom. Media sources not dependent on their government voice the views of their individual owner, or their advertisers, or pander to the whims of the public. Meanwhile, articles express the personal misunderstandings, emotions and delusions of the journalist responsible," asserted President Lukashenko, addressing the media.

Mr. Lukashenko believes no universal formula exists to ensure objectivity, noting, "Even countries which are proud of their centuries-old traditions of free speech occasionally have scandals exposing the seamy side of the modern media. We're constantly observing information juggling, illegal

journalism, as well as journalists' sense of responsibility. Previously, newspapers were responsible for every word written, so they checked facts and supported a minimum level of conscientiousness. Now, it's unclear whom we can trust and where facts end, becoming gossip. Impressive 'scoops' can appear to be falsehoods on closer examination — not even tomorrow but in half an hour. Strange as it may seem, this phenomenon has a positive side [since it will teach the public to be cautious]. Disappointment in sub-standard information will encourage demand for high-quality, intelligent and authentic journalism."

According to the President, print publications are not yet in danger of going

and content remain the essence," he emphasised.

Mr. Lukashenko underlined that it's too early to speak about the 'disappearance' of journalists, publishers and editors. "Thanks to the Internet, anyone can become a 'journalist', sharing their views on anything. This does not mean that they all enjoy a large readership or success or recognition. Professional skills, despite technical innovations, remain rare, while genuine stories must be researched through hard work and mental strain. The future of the media in all its forms remains in your hands: talented, fair and dedicated."

He added that, in ignor-

economic model."

Mr. Lukashenko explained Belarus' refusal to adopt radical reform which could have brought disaster to hundreds of thousands of people. "Our society is based on principles of solidarity and mutual assistance, rejoicing not only in the success of the strong, but supporting the weak and protecting the poor." He underlined that justice is vital, saying, "We've never supported equality in poverty but we accept only those riches maintained by honest living, personal diligence and talent, not those earned through blind fate, fraud or robbery."

"You won't find a huge