



Bearing out of State Flag in festive atmosphere, with guard of honour

Convincing symbol of unity

By Veniamin Mikheev

On the evening of June 2nd, State Flag Square was solemnly opened, preceded by the *Flourish, Belarus!* concert programme, attended by senior government officials and representatives of state administrative bodies and local authorities. Also in attendance were delegations from across the regions, and representatives of Minsk's educational establishments, labour groups, trade unions, public associations, religious confessions, creative unions, veterans of the Armed Forces and representatives of diplomatic missions and international organisations. The event was broadcast by major



Belarusian TV channels.

State Flag Square is located in Minsk's Pobediteley Avenue: a 50m radius circle connected with the major façade of the BelExpo Exhibition Centre via a 24m wide staircase. Seven granite stelas

bearing the coat of arms of the regions and of the city of Minsk are situated along its walkway, while symmetrically placed columns stand either side of the staircase, bearing the words of the State Anthem and a picture of Be-

larus' geographic map. A 70m pole carries a 14x7m flag.

The square will host festive events for the Day of the State Coat of Arms and the State Flag of the Republic of Belarus, as well as civil-patriotic events and visits by offi-

cial delegations from foreign states. The square will also become a tourist attraction, listed by the Minsk City Executive Committee as among the sites suitable for guests to the capital.

President Lukashenko noted during the opening ceremony that respect for state symbols is essential. "Each of us, regardless of our ethnicity, is proud to call ourselves a citizen of Belarus. The notion of being Belarusian is based on the great spiritual unity of all those who found their home in our generous, beautiful and gracious land. Showing respect and honour for our state symbols is the absolute duty and sacred responsibility of all members

of this big family," he underlines.

According to the President, understanding of the deep historical and political meaning of the coat of arms and the flag of the Republic of Belarus is essential, as is knowledge of the anthem and the Constitution: the country's fundamental law.

"It is imperative that we promote reverence for our state symbols, so that they are honoured in every Belarusian home as a source of national pride and patriotism," the Belarusian leader asserts. He sees State Flag Square, Independence Palace and the Ceremonial Hall as the major centre of the sovereign Belarusian state.

Speech by President of Belarus at opening of State Flag Square

Dear countrymen!

On the eve of our major holiday — the Independence Day — we're unveiling State Flag Square.

Within a few minutes, a red and green flag will fly 70m into the sky, symbolising our sovereignty and freedom: things craved by Belarusians over many centuries.

The road towards Belarusian statehood has been thorny and challenging. Only in the 20th century did we receive the chance to define our identity. The Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic became the first step towards independence and a foundation on which to build a sovereign Belarus. The BSSR, a UN founding member, adopted its red and green flag in 1951, emphasising the state's unique identity and independence.

For millions of Belarusians, the state symbols of the BSSR embody Belarus' achievements during the Soviet period. This is why, in the 1995 referendum, Belarusians chose their current flag, coat of arms and anthem. These symbols reflect the unbreakable bonds between the country's past and present.

The state flag of the Republic of Belarus is an integral part of our past and present. Its red colour stands for the courage of those who fought and bled to defend their freedom. The green —



represents life and hope, and the colour of our woods, meadows and fields; it is testimony to the peaceful and hardworking nature of Belarusians. The white stripe with ornamentation symbolises our purity and moral values.

For almost two decades, Belarus has been developing dynamically, establishing itself within the international arena under this flag. It flies over our sports victories and flutters on the highest summits and at the poles of our planet, representing our country abroad, cementing national accord and capturing the patriotic spirit of the Belarusian people.

Each of us, regardless of our ethnicity, is proud to call ourselves a citizen of Belarus. The notion of being Belarusian is founded in the great spiritual unity of all those who have found a native home in our generous, beautiful and gracious land. To respect and honour our state symbols is the absolute duty and sacred responsibility of all members of this big family.

Understanding of the deep historical and political meaning of the coat of arms and the flag of the Republic of Belarus, as well as knowledge of the anthem and the Constitution — the country's fundamental

law — should be held in the common mentality of Belarusians.

It is imperative that we promote reverence for our state symbols, so that they are honoured in every Belarusian home as a source of national pride and patriotism.

Belarusian lands have long been rich in memorable places and holy shrines: the priceless heritage of Belarusians. Meanwhile, our modern history of sovereign Belarus is a time of renovation of past monuments and construction of new sites, being a worthy contribution by our generation to the spiritual and cultural treasures of the planet.

Our years of independence have been marked with the restoration of Mir and Nesvizh castles, the Bolshoi Theatre and Yanka Kupala Theatre, the Palace of the Republic and the National Library (registered among the top 100 most wonderful achievements of contemporary world architecture), as well as the magnificent Memorial Church in Honour of All Saints, unique Minsk-Arena and other landmark sites, which are the pride of the nation.

We've constructed a whole complex in the centre of Minsk, comprising State Flag Square, Independence Palace and Ceremonial Hall. This is an eloquent symbol of our sovereignty and independence,



showing the whole world that Belarus has established itself as a state looking confidently to the future.

Youngsters will receive their passports on this site, under the Belarusian flag, proudly waving in the sky, while soldiers will take their military oaths here. Moreover, youngsters will be accepted into the Pioneer organisation and parents will come with their children, alongside veterans and guests from every corner of the world.

I'm convinced that this complex will become the major centre of our sovereign state: a source of pride for our citizens, as well as Belarus' calling card in the world.