

Minsk welcomes guests

Belarus knows the true value of victory and of a peaceful life. Victory Day has always been a special, solemn and reassuring day in the country which lost a third of its residents during the war.

This year, we're celebrating it in a special atmosphere, with a big sporting event becoming a true gift for this year's commemorations.

On May 9th, Minsk hosted the opening of the IIHF World Championship. The country deserved the right to host this representative sport-

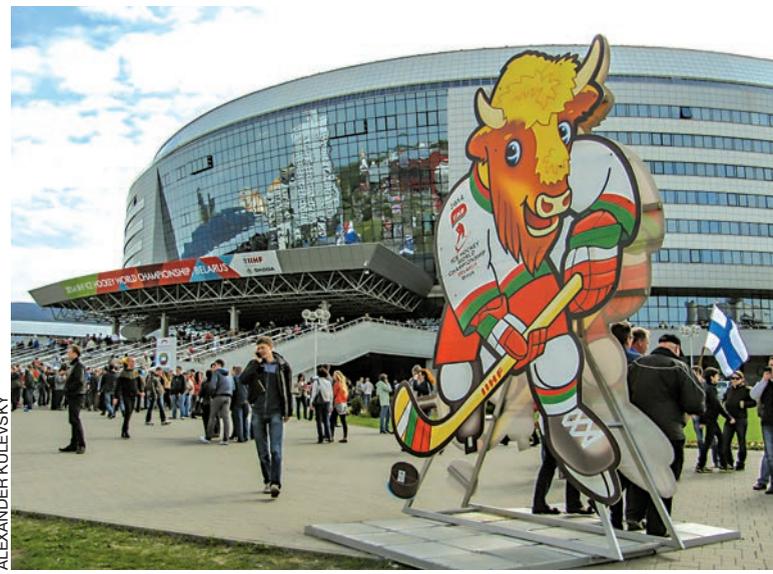
ing holiday due to its contribution in the development of world sport, including hockey, and in the strengthening of peace and stability on the planet.

Belarus clearly demonstrates its openness and hospitality to the whole world. Those who wish to visit Minsk these days don't need a visa — a ticket to at least one hockey match is enough.

Contemporary ice arenas have been constructed to welcome participants and guests of the ice battles, alongside new hotels and restaurants.

Leisure areas have been prepared, as well as a big cultural and entertaining programme. None will be bored during the competitions.

The guests of the championship will be able to support their favourite teams in comfortable conditions, while also being able to open up Belarus for themselves — a country with a rich history and huge potential for development, a land of hard-working and hospitable people who honour their history and national culture, enjoy sports and treat everyone kindly, regardless of nationality and religion.



ALEXANDER KULEVSKIY

Puck — in the play!

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Addressing the participants, spectators and guests of the World Championship, the President particularly noted:

Dear friends!

On behalf of the Belarusian nation let me heartily welcome the entrants and organisers of the Ice Hockey World Championship. I congratulate all fans of this exciting game on the opening of the world sport forum.

We've been working for five years to bring about this event. The championship has indeed become the largest national project. The entire country has taken an active part in preparing and implementing the project. We are sincerely glad to welcome this tournament in our country and hold a wonderful holiday to hockey amateurs.

Newly constructed sport arenas meet the highest international standards. Moreover, massive efforts have been put into accommodation for the comfortable recreation of the residents and guests of our capital. "In other words, everything has been done to make the World Championship in Minsk vivid, remarkable and the best in the world.

I won't conceal that we've had to overcome a lot of difficulties: blackmail, political pressure on the part of certain forces, which are prejudiced towards Belarus. Fortunately, sound sense and respect for sport values have prevailed. Players, who are legends and stars on the global scale, have come to us as part of the world's strongest ice hockey teams.

I'm convinced that representatives of the ice hockey federations, players of the teams, and fans will properly appreciate everything they see here. The sport infrastructure that has been created over the years will help increase the number of people, who go in for sports, and will help improve the health of Belarusians. Moreover, we've gained invaluable experience of organising such large-scale sport events...

I wish you all health, happiness and vivid impressions from the championship. I also wish ice hockey teams successful matches.

Today is a special day for us — Victory Day. In this respect, I'd like to remind that in that fierce war we fought together with the United States of America, we were on

the same side. We fought together against the brown plague, against Nazism. However, today, we will be divided by the red line on this piece of ice. I pray to God that we are separated by lines only in sport...

May Minsk lives and breathes hockey. On Thursday, the anticipation of this great sport holiday was already felt in the air, making our hearts beat more excitedly. Fans were arriving in the city from all corners of the world, while the squads were settling down and testing the ice. Crowds of journalists were seen near the Minsk-Arena and Chizhovka-



ALEXANDER STADUB

Arena and foreign speech was heard everywhere. Faces were lighting with smiles while words were expressing hope. Before the start, everyone is equal and each was dreaming that their team will at least fulfil the minimum task and, of course, will try to do everything to reach the medals.

The first official event which gave the preliminary signal for the tournament was the flag-raising ceremony of the participating counties. The State Flag Square has brought together many landmark figures: from Belarus' Prime Minister, who heads the tournament's organising committee, Mikhail Myasnikov, to the President of the International Ice Hockey Federation, René Fasel. Of course, the latter was in the limelight of journalists and didn't refuse to answer questions. The face of the Swiss was smiling broadly — he was definitely pleased with the way Minsk



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all points. I'm convinced that the national team of Russia is also going to show better result than it did in Sochi and will make everything for this.

What about the national team of Belarus?

Home matches of the championship often make surprises. I know that your team has brought together its best hockey players for the first time over a long period. However, it's very difficult to play at home, as there's big pressure from the side of fans and press. Big expectations often hinder. Nevertheless, I think that Belarusians will cope with this. My forecast is that the national squad of Belarus will show a good result and will perform both in the quarterfinal and the semifinal.

I know it from my personal experience that the first impression of the new country is the strongest and, as a rule, the most correct. Therefore, it's very pleasant to hear only positive feedbacks from foreign journalists about Minsk and the organisation of the championship. Guests enjoy almost everything: clean green streets, a cosy centre, lots of cafes for every taste and pocket, the architecture of Minsk, affordable prices, and stylish drivers of the public transport, alongside cheerful fan zones and Petrovich the Giant Crab foretelling the results. The guests also like polite taxi drivers who always use taxi meters and even give a cheque after the trip, new hotels, benevolence of the law enforcement services, hospitality of Minsk and, of course, the scale of the tournament and arenas. Many are sincerely surprised at such abundance of positive emotions; they haven't expected that Minsk is such a delicate and contemporary city.

Belarus has very substantially prepared for the World Championship. We could only hope that hockey players won't lose their faces either.



men are pleased with the training sites," noted Mr. Fasel.

Nevertheless, the head of the international federation was also asked about sporting components of the championship. Mr. Fasel met any attacks on his 'goals' with diplomatic easiness:

Favourites of the championship? Each year, about six or more squads lay claims to victory. However, no one knows who will win. On Tuesday I attended the control match of the national squads of Switzerland and Canada and saw with my own eyes how strong the young Canadian team is. They appeared on the ice almost from the place and beaten the Swiss in

has prepared for the championship. "We've talked to the squads and, judging by their impressions, they're pleased with everything. The ice arenas are well equipped and the sports-

People's diplomacy of sport

Alexander Lukashenko has sent his greetings to the participants and guests of the 2014 IIHF World Championship in Minsk

The President noted the symbolism of the fact that the opening of the 78th Ice Hockey World Championship in the Hero-City of Minsk is held on May 9th, when the country is celebrating the Day of Victory in the Great Patriotic War. The greeting reads: "The tournament has brought together the strongest teams in the world to compete in strenuous ice hockey matches until a champion is crowned and the dedicated fans who selflessly root for their teams, share the joy of victory and the bitterness of defeat with them. We sincerely hope that the many fans will like Belarus and make new friends here."

As a form of people's democracy, sport opens up vast

opportunities for the bringing together of various countries, while breathtaking ice hockey battles are a popular and affordable entertainment for all people who are fond of this team sport. According to the Press Service of the President, Mr. Lukashenko encouraged ice hockey fans to support their favourites at this high-profile competition.

"I'm convinced that the Ice Hockey World Championship in Minsk will make sports history. Its guests will have good memories of their visit to Belarus and of meeting with our people and the main thing is that they will enjoy the performances of their favourite teams," noted the President. He wished for a good mood, fair play and success in ice hockey games to all the participants of the competition.