

# Natural desire to do good

‘For Spiritual Revival’ awards and those for figures of culture and arts are Christmas tradition

By Igor Slavinsky

In early 2011, fifteen laureates were honoured on the stage of Minsk's Palace of the Republic. According to the President of Belarus, churchmen, cultural workers, publishers, doctors and teachers from orphanages are worthy of being called truly benevolent.

Spirituality is revealed through various professions, as asserted by Lyudmila Torteve, the head doctor at Gomel's Zhivitsa Regional Children's Rehabilitation Centre. "It's not just the latest medical technologies which revive people's hope; human compassion, sympa-

thy and love are just as important," she stresses. According to Ms. Torteve, everyone should display these qualities, allowing us to battle apathy and disinterest.

Hegumene Yevdokia, Mother Superior of the Convent of the Saviour and St. Yevfrosiniya in Polotsk, echoed these thoughts, saying, "Each person should perform only good actions."

Addressing the laureates, Mr. Lukashenko underlined the importance of morality, saying, "People have always searched not only for material prosperity, but for spiritual heights. Today, morality and culture play a leading role in



‘For Spiritual Revival’ award ceremony at the Palace of the Republic

artistic creativity, science, education and medicine. Our future directly depends on ideals, approved today."

According to the President, our sovereign Belarusian state is inspiring us to 'do as much as possible to strengthen and grace our common house'. Developing this thought, he quoted Belarusian literary legend Vladimir Korotkevich: 'This is a land of open souls and doors; this

land is our home and cathedral'. This poetic attitude towards our native land — as to a sacred relic — unites and inspires Belarusians.

The President of Belarus focused on the development of national culture in his speech, emphasising that it guarantees the preservation of our national identity; it is the cornerstone of independence. "You, creative personalities, shouldn't forget your social

and spiritual mission," noted Mr. Lukashenko. "The country is expecting wonderful, major works from you, to educate our people in the spirit of traditional ideas and values. These should reflect the positive changes taking place in our lives." Mr. Lukashenko explained that the state will always respect the right of artists to enjoy freedom of thought and self-realisation.

## Conditions should be equal

By Yelena Yurkyavichene

**President of Lithuania calls on EU leaders to simplify border crossing for Belarusian residents**

Dalia Grybauskaitė has called upon the EU leadership to simplify visa procedures for Belarusian citizens, making the Schengen zone more available to them, according to BelTA.

The Press Service of the Lithuanian President has announced that Ms. Grybauskaitė has written to the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, and the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, to stress the importance of changing visa conditions for Belarusian citizens. This would enable them to visit EU states under the same terms as those from neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe.

The Lithuanian President believes that isolation of the country and its citizens is non-productive, having produced no results, so new paths of communication are needed with Belarus. Ms. Grybauskaitė suggests discussing issues of simplified cross-border movement for Belarusian citizens and strengthening of their contacts with EU citizens at forthcoming meetings of the European Council on Foreign Relations and at the Council of Europe.

Lithuania has announced its intention to reduce the cost of its national visas for Belarusian citizens on a bilateral basis. However, without the EU's consent, it cannot reduce the cost of visas for the Schengen zone.

## Direct contacts to replace representative mission

OSCE Office in Minsk completes its work

Belarus has decided to end the mandate of the OSCE field mission, explains the Foreign Ministry's Press Secretary, Andrei Savinykh. He asserts that 'the OSCE Office's results testify to its mandate having been fulfilled'.

In seven years of operation, many joint projects have been implemented, including in the fields of alternative energy development, rural tourism and restoration of Chernobyl-affected

regions. Additionally, special attention has been paid to creating efficient mechanisms of interaction between state and public organisations, developing legislation for local self-government and counteracting human trafficking. "Belarus highly appreciates the efforts made by OSCE staff to realise joint projects," stresses Mr. Savinykh, adding that OSCE activity has helped improve the work of state institutions.

Similar OSCE offices have closed in recent years in Latvia, Estonia and Georgia, having completed their mandate. However, interaction shall continue successfully via direct contacts with the OSCE. Mr. Savinykh emphasises, "We are ready to strengthen and enhance the efficiency of our practical interaction, in all avenues of the organisation's programme activity." Belarus is actively participating in the organisation's work, with President

Lukashenko, speaking at the OSCE Summit in Astana in December, noted that the OSCE needs reforming.

The Director of the BSU's Centre for International Studies, Vladimir Ulakhovich, believes, "Belarus' decision not to extend the work of the OSCE Office in Minsk should not be construed as the state undervaluing the efforts of this organisation." Rather, he is certain that the adoption of the OSCE charter — as several states consider appropriate — would clarify the work of certain representations: 'field missions'. "It's possible to say that the latter are not as efficient as they could be in fulfilling tasks they supervise. On the other hand, they often go beyond the scope of their mandate; as a result, the question arises as to how to interpret a mandate," he adds.

## Positive example for other states to follow

Poland to abolish consular fees for its national visas for Belarusian citizens



Reduction of visa barriers to bring benefits

By Yevgeny Semiletov

Poland has decided to allow Belarusians entry on a national visa free of charge (removing previous charge of 20 euros). The pan-European Schengen visa (issued by Polish consulates in Minsk, Brest and Grodno) will still cost 60 euros for Belarusians, which is more than is paid by Russians and Ukrainians.

Polish consular establishments issued 172,500 visas last year — both national and

Schengen. Paweł Marczuk, the First Secretary of the Polish Embassy, explains that only particular categories of citizens can apply for a national visa: those intending to stay in Poland for a long period of time, having been invited to work by a Polish company. From January 1st, our citizens do not need official permission to work in Poland, merely requiring a document from their employer, confirming employment. National visas are issued in some emergency situations,

such as needing to attend the funeral of a relative in Poland.

Mr. Marczuk promises that, soon, Poland will explain the details of how to receive a free national visa, via the press. Judging by the published articles, Lithuania is also considering a similar scheme for Belarusians. Andrei Savinykh, the Press Secretary of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, notes that this would please Belarus, since the reduction of visa barriers should aid mutual understanding, while aiding collaboration between European states. "We hope that Poland's example will enable the European Union to accelerate negotiations with Belarus, to ease visa procedures," he adds.

Parliament has recently ratified agreements with Poland and Lithuania, enabling residents from border areas to move freely across the border.

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