

Desire to read and re-read remains popular

Minsk hosts 18th International Book Fair, with many book lovers in attendance

By Yevgeny Grudanov

It was very crowded at the exhibition opening, with people at the entrance asking for an extra invitation, as at significant cultural premieres. The five day event was well able to accommodate everyone of course.

The major fair saw 23 states take part, including such giants of the book industry as the USA, Russia, Italy and Sweden. This time, Germany was the honorary guest of the Minsk exhibition. The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Germany to Belarus, H.E. Mr. Christof Weil, noted that books are one of the best forms of dialogue. He presented the German pavilion, which proved a huge hit with people from various cultures.

The German book publishers presented a diverse range of editions under the

slogan 'Germany: Wealth of Colours and Flowers'. Hundreds of books were divided into thematic stands, with a compilation by 2009 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature Herta Müller taking pride of place. Books ranged from those on ecological architecture to comics. After the exhibition, all the editions from the German pavilion were donated to Belarusian libraries.

German authors also attended the book forum. Katrin Schmidt, the author of *You Won't Die*, translated into Belarusian, signed books for fans while Clemens Meyer, whose *When We Were Dreaming* novel is now a European literary bestseller, organised a literary soirée. Uwe Rada presented the Belarusian edition of his book on how the international River Nieman flows, overcoming barriers and obstacles.



First Deputy Head of the Administration of the President of Belarus, Alexander Radkov, at Germany's stand

Of course, the host country also had much to show. Last year, over 11,000 books were released in Belarus, with a total circulation exceeding 40m copies (at least four copies per resident). Many novelties were exhibited, with most of the large Belarusian publishing houses preparing their own stands, as did regional and university publishing houses. Themes varied from poetic collections to textbooks.

Newly released books caught the eye, with editions to suit every taste, even the most sophisticated. These included *Fairytales of Children of Belarus*, and a serious research work on ethno-cultural processes in Eastern Polesie.

There was even a textbook on electrical equipment diagnostics.

Publishers shared their experience, with seminars and round table discussions organised to tackle aspects of the book business. The trade fair also proved popular — with specialists and the public. Belarusian State University student Yuri Uskov has attended the event several times. "I'm attracted by the atmosphere and the opportunity to buy interesting books," he explains. Of course, the book fair always offers the chance for purchases.

The Pocketbook Company, producing electronic books, took a stand. Its inventory includes hundreds, even

thousands, of works in electronic form, for download. The advantages are great, since readers can easily find any line and can make notes 'in the margin'. The innovation also has its opponents, who argue that nothing can replace the aroma of a new book, with the rustle of pages.

Judging by the latest trends, it appears that electronic books are rising in popularity, compared to the romanticism of paper editions. The circulation of traditional books has fallen steadily worldwide, as noted by several discussions at the Minsk forum. The American Embassy organised a lecture entitled *There, Beyond the Horizon: Electronic Books, Readers and*

Other Technical Means.

It's too early to speak of the death of traditional books of course, as proven by the fact that the first five books will be released this year by Minsk's Khudozhestvennaya Literatura Publishing House (of a 50 volume series) — *The Golden Collection of Belarusian Literature.*

This year's forum also saw a campaign to support reading. This is likely to be a success, being encouraged by the state in every possible way. Alexander Radkov, the First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, notes, "We can have the Internet and electronic display boards but we must also have books. Each book has a soul."

Demographic processes could be effectively managed

By Matvey Vasiliev

In the coming five years, Belarus' birth rates should exceed the European average

Everything matters in the social sphere. Each decision is anticipated by millions of people; their salaries, pensions, allowances and quality of life may depend upon a particular course of action. Accordingly, it's extremely important to outline priorities wisely and weigh the risks.

"Human potential is the most important factor of socio-economic development," explains the Labour and Social Protection Minister, Marianna Shchetkina. "Global demographic trends, primarily de-population and people's ageing, have led to demographic growth becom-



State task is to create conditions for raising children ing a priority for the country's national security." With this in mind, cumulative birth rates should rise to 1.6-1.7 by 2015. According to the Minister, there's no need to take European figures of 1.2-1.4 as an example. It's necessary to reach a higher level, since the present birth rate ensures only 65.5 percent of the pop-

ulation's reproduction. One of the most important state tasks is to create conditions for parents to be able to raise children without harming their own professional or personal growth.

Ms. Shchetkina believes that 'demographic processes could be and, more importantly, must be governed.'

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