

Franco Milasi:

‘I’d like people to speak of Belarus in the superlative’

Franco Milasi, who heads the Italy-Belarus Association, has big plans for bringing people around the world into closer, more kindly contact. I first met Franco at Minsk’s House of Friendship (at an event organised by the Italian Embassy to promote the Calabria Province, where he lives).

Beforehand, we only knew that Belarus had suffered greatly during WWII. Frankly, this wasn’t a great

own but I gained understanding over the course of time, and began to view things positively. Belarus is very civi-

located by the coast). Students from all over the world attend, including those from the Belarusian State University’s Philological Department. The association headed by Mr. Milasi promotes the University abroad.

What inspired you to set up this bridge between Italy and Belarus?

F.M.: *Undoubtedly, my own enthusiasm guided me. Belarusians I’d met shared my enthusiasm so our mutual affection and energy led to joint projects. Some are already completed, while others continue.*

From where did your enthusiasm originate?

F.M.: *I sincerely wanted all the wonderful things I’d seen in Belarus to be more widely appreciated, including in Italy: art, music, painting and ballet. I want people to speak about Belarus in the superlative.*

What have you achieved so far?

F.M.: *The Days of Calabria in Belarus have been held successfully at the Minsk House of Friendship while concerts featuring Belarusian music students have been hosted by the Cilea Theatre in Reggio Calabria — at the invitation of the Italian Academy of Music. We’ve arranged ‘reciprocal exchanges’, inviting your students to take master classes which*

conclude with a joint concert by Belarusian and Italian students. Belarusian students can receive a scholarship in Italy of 600 Euros per month to allow them to attend. These cultural events all aim to strengthen the bridge connecting Belarus and Italy.

How do you describe Belarus to friends and acquaintances in Italy? What do you tell them about first?

F.M.: *I stress that Belarus is culturally rich. I’d like more Italians to experience this, so I tell them to come here themselves. There are also other tourism opportunities. Many of my friends are keen on hunting, and would enjoy your genuine hospitality. Such trips create a solid bridge for developing business ties, since people remember the warm atmosphere here. They then tend to return.*

How do you find Belarus on arriving after a six month break? Do you ever notice changes?

F.M.: *People never lose heart, remaining positive regardless of difficulties. I’d like also to note that, in recent years, I’ve noticed more construction in Minsk, which makes me think that the economy must be moving forward, despite the global crisis. It impresses me greatly.*

By Victor Mikhailov

FRANCO MILASI, “After the Chernobyl disaster, closer collaboration began between ordinary people from Italy and Belarus, with many families welcoming your children for recuperative stays. These children, naturally, grew into adults and studied Italian. Our association gathered pace and, over the last decade, I’ve visited Belarus frequently.”



I immediately felt he radiated kind-heartedness. His smile was typically Italian and his ‘Victor, how are you?’ disarmed me. I’d heard that he was implementing joint projects with Belarusian partners. Also, I’d discovered that he is a Professor and teaches Italian to non-native speakers. However, my knowledge was tenuous. He had visited out country many times, which alone was a reason for professional interest. He easily agreed to be interviewed and, as I switched on my Dictaphone, he began to draw a diagram to show the history of his association.

In fact, Mr. Milasi is President of the Italy-Belarus-Russia Association. He explains, “Everyone has heard of Russia while Belarus isn’t as well-known around the world. We

used to have one big organisation: USSR-Italy. During the Cold War, Italians knew little of the Soviet Union but, with my friends (who were also keen on Russian culture) I worked hard to promote better understanding. At the time, many were looking to the West and America for values but my friends and I were looking to Russia.”

To Russia or to the Soviet Union?

F.M.: *At that time, of course, it was the Soviet Union. When it collapsed, the USSR-Italy Association ceased to exist. However, a decade ago, with my friends, I decided to renew Italian-Russian ties by setting up schools for the study of Russian language and culture. Then, Chernobyl occurred and, of course, we learnt more about Belarus.*

deal of knowledge about your country. After the Chernobyl disaster, closer collaboration began between ordinary people from Italy and Belarus, with many families welcoming your children for recuperative stays. These children, naturally, grew into adults and studied Italian. Our association gathered pace and, over the last decade, I’ve visited Belarus frequently.

What was your first acquaintance with Belarus?

F.M.: *I first learnt about Belarus from children staying in Italy for recuperative trips after the Chernobyl accident. I knew a little of the history of wartime in Belarus but it was the Chernobyl tragedy that made me travel here. My friend at the Italian Embassy in Minsk assisted, inviting me to stay, ten years ago. It was a rather different world to my*

lised, your people being well-brought-up and educated (by European standards). Minsk is the cleanest city I’ve ever seen and respect for the law is evident everywhere. I’d like to mention again that your people are exceptionally kind-hearted and friendly. There’s no aggression towards those who differ, unlike in Italy. Belarus’ benevolent, friendly and heart-warming atmosphere inspires me to return repeatedly. Dozens of my acquaintances have come to Belarus with me; many have since married and some live and work here. Meanwhile, many Belarusian students come to Italy to study.

Franco resides in Reggio Calabria, in the south of Italy, teaching Italian to non-native speakers at the Dante Alighieri University (the only one for foreigners,

Open ground for language

By Ivan Paramonov

Centre for Russian Language, Literature and Culture launched in Grodno

The Days of Russian Language have been hosted by the Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno. Teachers and students participated in a round table discussion entitled *The 1150th Anniversary of the Birth of Russian Statehood* and visited a photo exhibition: *Monuments in Russian Architecture*. The event culminated in the official launch of the Centre for Russian Language, Literature and Culture at the university.

“We have established solid relationships with Belarusian universi-

ties, including the Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno,” noted the Head of Rossotrudnichestvo Representation in Belarus, Victor Malashenko. “However, as time passes, we should seek out new paths of co-operation. The creation of the Centre for Russian Language, Literature and Culture at the Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno will support our mutual work.”

The Head of the Russian Language Department at the Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno, Professor Alexey Nikitevich, believes that the Centre will contribute greatly to developing liaisons with Russian colleagues, raising the standard of education.

“The Centre for Russian Language, Literature and Culture is important to us primarily as a unique teaching site; we plan joint seminars, competitions and student exchange programmes. We’ve already agreed that famous Russian scientists will lecture at our university. Now, our main task is to acquire the latest textbooks and to create a modern computer base for the Centre.”

The Days of Russian Language in Grodno enjoyed a rich programme, including a concert by the St. Petersburg House of Music. Meanwhile, students from the Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno gave a philosophical and lyrical performance.

Grant comes in handy

Over 300,000 Euros allocated to reconstruct palace of Duke Anthony Tizengauz, in Postavy

The residents of Postavy are receiving the substantial grant thanks to a cross-border co-operation programme entitled *Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus*. The neurological department of the central district hospital and blood transfusion station are located in Tizengauz Palace. In fact, this is one of the most popular tourist sites, included on Belarus’ ‘Magnificent Seven’ list, voted for by the public.

The hospital ‘inherited’ the building but, of course, it requires ongoing maintenance. Eight years ago, a grant from UNESCO was received for this purpose and, now, the building has been put forward for the European

Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument Programme. The grant is adequate to pay for all necessary work explains the Chief Doctor of Postavy’s Central Regional Hospital, Vladimir Chekavy, who is taking an active part in arranging the re-equipment of the ancient palace. The basement and semi-basement are being converted for use as rooms for tourists, a local history museum, a chamber music hall, conference office and other units, covering 450 square metres.

All work should be completed by the end of the year, with an extension to the main building of the hospital planned; this will allow doctors to free half of the palace, leaving its administrative offices, hotel and café for themselves.