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WAITING FOR CLEAR SKY AFTER A THUNDER-STORM

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Deserving of special attention

What are your plans for the future?' is a question we often hear. We all like to make plans, daily and weekly, as well as those for the coming five or ten years. Of course, the further we plan ahead, the more consideration is required. We can't leave everything to chance. We need goals, to steer our ship through seas rough as well as smooth.

Globally, it's become fashionable to prepare long-term strategies. Russia's plans extend until 2025 while those of Kazakhstan reach through until 2050. Belarus has a similar document: the 'National Strategy for Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of the Country until 2030'. Based on three pillars — people, the economy and ecology — it's an extensive document, covering over 130 pages, detailing the country's path towards sustainable development and looking at long-term risks.

Good trends always inspire hope. For the first time in nearly twenty-five years, we've recorded a natural increase in the population. On January 1st, 2016, there were 9,498,364 people living in the country; one year on, the figure stood at 9,504,704. The rural population is falling while the number of city residents is growing.

Speaking of the regions, Minsk undoubtedly leads, with almost two million residents, growing by 15,000 annually.

Meanwhile, Minsk's satellite-towns are all demonstrating a rise along the



demographic curve. Some have increased seriously, while others have demonstrated a slight rise. For example, Dzerzhinsk, Zaslavl and Logoisk have increased in size by over two hundred people since last year, while Fanipol has risen by seven hundred residents. Molo-dechno's population has also increased, as has that of Stolin, Gorki, Dobrush, Oshmyany, Luninets, Myadel, Kalinkovich and Skidel. Ostrovets, owing to the construction of the Belarusian nuclear power plant, has grown quickly. Of all districts in the region, Ostrovets boasts the most favourable situation for employment, with seventeen vacancies for each person officially registered as unemployed.

These are all local examples. However, they are taken from life and are illustrative.

Meanwhile, the international exhibition of contemporary art, 'From Lisbon to Vladivostok via Minsk', has opened in the capital of Kazakhstan. The art project, initiated by Belarus, has united artists from twenty-seven European

states. The creativity of the project's participants is diverse, yet united in showing the flavours of Europe, with its common cultural space.

European culture is (as the project confirms) a humanitarian counterbalance to political and social conflict, with its embracing of contemporary trends, built upon many centuries of traditions. It's good to see Minsk having become a negotiating venue for settling international conflict in the European region. Meanwhile, it's also a centre of cultural diplomacy, as we see from this international, integrated art project.

In my opinion, this deserves special attention.

VIKTOR KHARKOV

Integration is beneficial for everyone

President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, interviewed by Mir Interstate TV and Radio Company



During the conversation major attention was paid to the topic of integration within the post-Soviet space. The President shared his views regarding further development of integration structures. Alexander Lukashenko told in detail about the state and prospects of the Belarusian-Russian relations. In particular, issues of development of trade-economic cooperation have been discussed, in addition to the conduct of joint Zapad-2017 strategic exercise and the results of the recent meeting between the presidents of Belarus and Russia in St. Petersburg.

The Head of State said that various integration structures are currently functioning within the post-Soviet space. In some of them the countries have closer relations, in others they have less close cooperation. The President described these processes as multilevel integration.

“The European Union now starts using this term. You see that a more progressive association, a group of big states is formed there to support others. And they also use the term ‘multilevel integration,’” noted Mr. Lukashenko. “Our situation is the same. Those who wanted to stay in the CIS stayed in it. Those who wanted to leave it, like Georgia, left it. In fact,

Ukraine has, in fact, put its participation in the CIS on hold, although not permanently, and visits the summits from time to time. However, we have agreed that we cannot lose this platform.”

Mr. Lukashenko stressed that every country wants to benefit from the participation in integration associations. However, the states should proceed with care. “You should not try to benefit at the expense of your neighbour. You will benefit from something, they will benefit from something else, and there will be mutual concessions. But benefits are essential. It may seem mercantile, but if it is not beneficial, no one will need such a union and any steps in this direction,” he stressed.

The Head of State also answered questions, including on the maintenance of security in the region and the war on terrorism in the world.

Mir TV Channel familiarises its spectators with modern life and history of the countries within the post-Soviet space. It broadcasts day-and-night in four time belts on the territory of 13 states (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia). The potential audience is more than 130 million people.

By Vladimir **Velikhov**



▶ Country of surprises

Belarus launches new portal for presenting its tourist opportunities

One just needs to type ‘Belarus.Travel’ in the address window of any browser to get into a new national tourist portal for Belarus, recently launched. This is a beautifully created and well-thought-out website which vividly and concisely explains what can be seen in our country. “This year we’ve renewed the site of the National Tourism Agency which targets professionals. Now, we have a country portal ‘Belarus.Travel’ — our second instrument for promoting Belarus in the world,” commented the leading specialist of the National Tourism Agency’s Information Provision Department, Anastasia Shatkevich. “The website is aimed at the domestic market, tour operators and excursion guides, while ‘Belarus.Travel’ is designed for presentation of the country abroad.”

“The country of surprises, unexpected discoveries and warm memories. Do you recognise Belarus by these complimentary slogans? Users can browse through its tabs: ‘Unusual in Vitebsk’, ‘Inspiring in Grodno’, ‘Unique in Minsk’. Classical routes along castles, suggestions for gourmands, selections of unique places and wonderful local sites. The website will search all the necessary information and organise it according to the preferences of the target audience, with an accent placed on agro-ecotourism, sporting events and musical festivals.



Necessity of moving further on

Belarus and Russia settle all disputes at meeting between President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, and President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, on April 3rd, in St. Petersburg

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Alexander Lukashenko:

We've settled all problems and issues relating to oil and gas. We've been long discussing the agrarian problem but have agreed that it's on the agenda of the Supreme State Council, as is the issue of industrial policy. Very soon, we'll agree terms and adopt a decision regarding these and other issues, at the Supreme State Council session

Talks between the heads of state lasted for more than five hours, first tête-à-tête and then in an expanded format, featuring members of delegations.

The meeting began with discussion of the tragedy: an explosion on the St. Petersburg metro. Mr. Lukashenko expressed his condolences to Vladimir Putin, saying, "It's deeply regrettable that this has happened. Unfortunately, we've faced such problems in Minsk as well."

The President noted that security is the main issue for talks, continuing the long-term discussion of security issues, which predate the recent incident. Belarus and Russia have agreed on joint steps to enhance security. "You see what's taking place around us. All we want is to preserve stability in Russia and Belarus. Very few peaceful spots remain in this world. We've agreed on joint steps to preserve the stability of our states," asserted Mr. Lukashenko.

The meeting also settled disputes in the sphere of oil and gas, with the two sides determining a scheme for mutual concessions.

The presidents reaffirmed their readiness to create the necessary conditions for a common market of electricity by July 2019. Moreover, they confirmed their readiness to do everything necessary to develop joint rules for the common gas market by January 1st, 2018, and to prepare an intergovernmental agreement on a common gas market for the Eurasian Economic Union by 2024.

Another important issue of bilateral talks was interaction in the agrarian and industrial sectors. These spheres are to be discussed in detail during the next meeting of the Supreme State Council, to enable the adoption of firm decisions. "We've spent much time discussing agrarian issues and have agreed to include them on the agenda of the Supreme State Council meeting. We've agreed on the same regarding our industrial policy. In the near future, we'll co-ordinate terms and take decisions on these issues, at the meeting of the Supreme State Council," said Mr. Lukashenko.

Much attention was also paid to discussing collaboration in the agricultural sector. Russian specialists are soon expected to visit Belarusian companies, to ensure compliance with phytosanitary norms and to discuss problematic issues with counterparts.

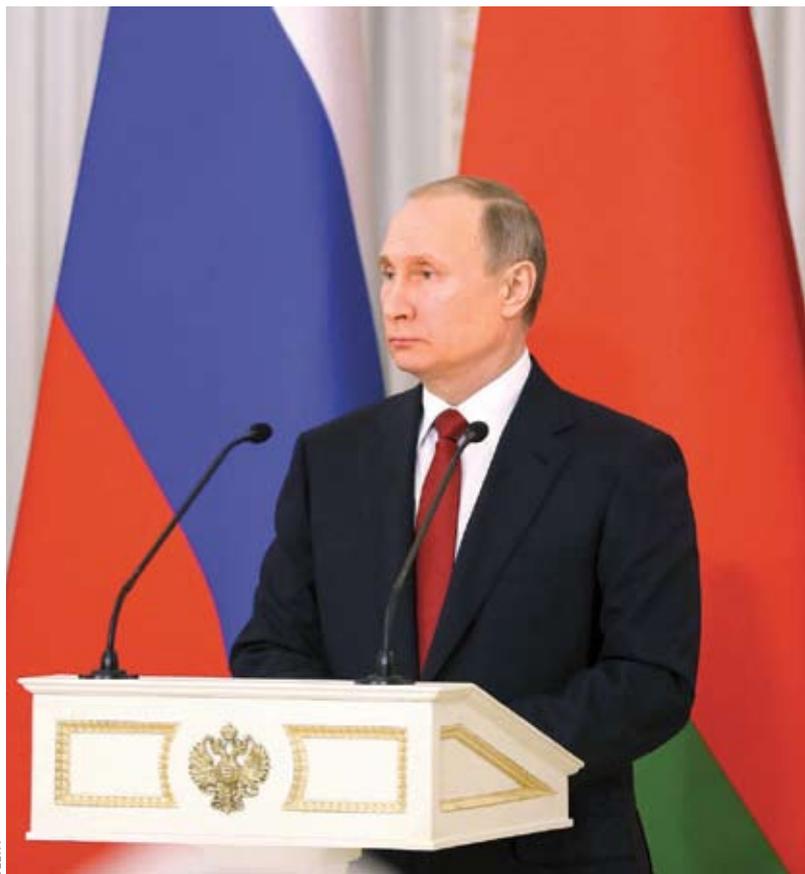
The leaders of our two countries focused on bilateral relations in the financial sector and high technologies, discussing ways to expand cooperation in the space industry. Russia has decided to meet Belarus halfway in refinancing the country's debt obligations to the Russian Federation in 2017.

Talks also highlighted issues from the international agenda. "We've discussed issues concerning us, our neighbours, and EU policy. We've exchanged opinions on relations with the United States and ways in which we can develop these relations," notes Mr. Lukashenko.

"Of course, I've asked Vladimir Putin not to forget about Belarus when building relations with big states. He's expected to take part in G20 meetings. I was assured that we'll be supported at all forums in the same way as before," asserts the President of Belarus.

The Head of State thanked the Russian leader for finding time for talks, despite recent events. "Despite this problem, you've held these negotiations. Of course, it's not good that presidents have to deal with issues of this kind but this is life and nothing can be done about it," he added.

Vladimir Putin said that no disputed issues now exist in Belarusian-Russian relations. "We'll move further, strengthening our relations within the Union State and working to improve the legal framework and development of the Eurasian Economic Union," underlined the President of Russia.



BELTA

Vladimir Putin:

No disputed issues now exist in Belarusian-Russian relations. We'll move further, strengthening our relations within the Union State and working to improve the legal framework and development of the Eurasian Economic Union

Potential vividly revealed

March visit of Alexander Lukashenko to Turkmenistan is likely to occupy a special place in the history of our bilateral relations, being dedicated to the opening of the Garlyk mining and processing facility

In order to better understand the scale of the project implemented by Belarusian specialists in Turkmenistan, it's necessary to present insight into the history of Garlyk potash salt deposit. It was developed back in the mid-20th century but faced difficulties, so that it was abandoned (despite the colossal resources of the USSR). Accordingly, the work of our experts is notable; they've launched the mining and processing facility from scratch, in the face of stiff global competition.

The President of Belarus notes, "This signals to the whole world that we're able to open any mine and extract potash fertilisers, as well as other mineral resources, using the shaft method, let alone open-pit mining. It was a very important project for us and it's good that we've finished it."

\$700 million has been transferred into the account of the Belarusian gen-



eral contractor, Belgorkhimprom JSC, for its work on the site, which will continue until 2020. The project is not only generating income but is building Belarus' reputation, showing our skills of design, construction and engineering. Hundreds of organisations have been working on the site, needing to be co-ordinated, to ensure efficiency.

Belarus-made equipment has been supplied to Turkmenistan: machinery by MAZ and Amkodor, electrical engineering devices, and tunnelling machines. All contracts have been signed after tenders, without any preferences given over other entrants. Belarusian and Turkmen potash workers may ally in future, to better face the world market, where supply currently exceeds demand.

Belarus' rich experience can benefit both Minsk and Ashgabat. On the eve of the opening of the facility, Alexander Lukashenko and Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow negotiated at Oguzhan Palace, before the presidents went to open the new Belarusian Embassy building, located in Ashgabat.

"We've constructed a complex of buildings for the Belarusian Embassy in under 18 months, where we diplomats should be able to triple our efforts," believes the Belarusian Ambassador to Ashgabat, Oleg Tabanyukhov, speaking of

raising trade turnover, as discussed by our presidents.

Last year, our countries achieved turnover of almost \$300 million, with more possible. The opening of the new embassy is another proof that our country has come to Turkmenistan with serious intentions for the long term.

With huge deposits of gas and oil, Turkmenistan has good start-up potential for development. It's now focusing on diversifying its economy. Mr. Lukashenko has praised its efforts, since few nations can boast more than 6 percent GDP growth per year, despite difficult conditions for the world economy. Belarusians who've constructed the facility in Garlyk have made a contribution to helping develop this friendly country.

This is only the beginning. Our country is ready to go further, sharing technologies and training staff. Chatting with Mr. Berdimuhamedow, Mr. Lukashenko accentuated, "We aren't building relations by lodging terms and conditions; we're cooperating as nations who lived long as a single state. You should know that you have a secure foothold and reliable friends in the centre of Europe and can always count on Belarus."

Turkmenistan isn't simply one of the leading players in the region but is a strategic crossing point for the transport corridors of Eurasia. It borders Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan and China, making it a convenient venue to enter the markets of third countries and a perfect opportunity to increase our trade turnover manyfold. We've managed to find our niche on the Turkmen market and now need to preserve and expand it, increasing exports of goods and services. Moreover, almost everything is in demand in Turkmenistan: tillers, harvesters, food products, lift equipment and machine tools.

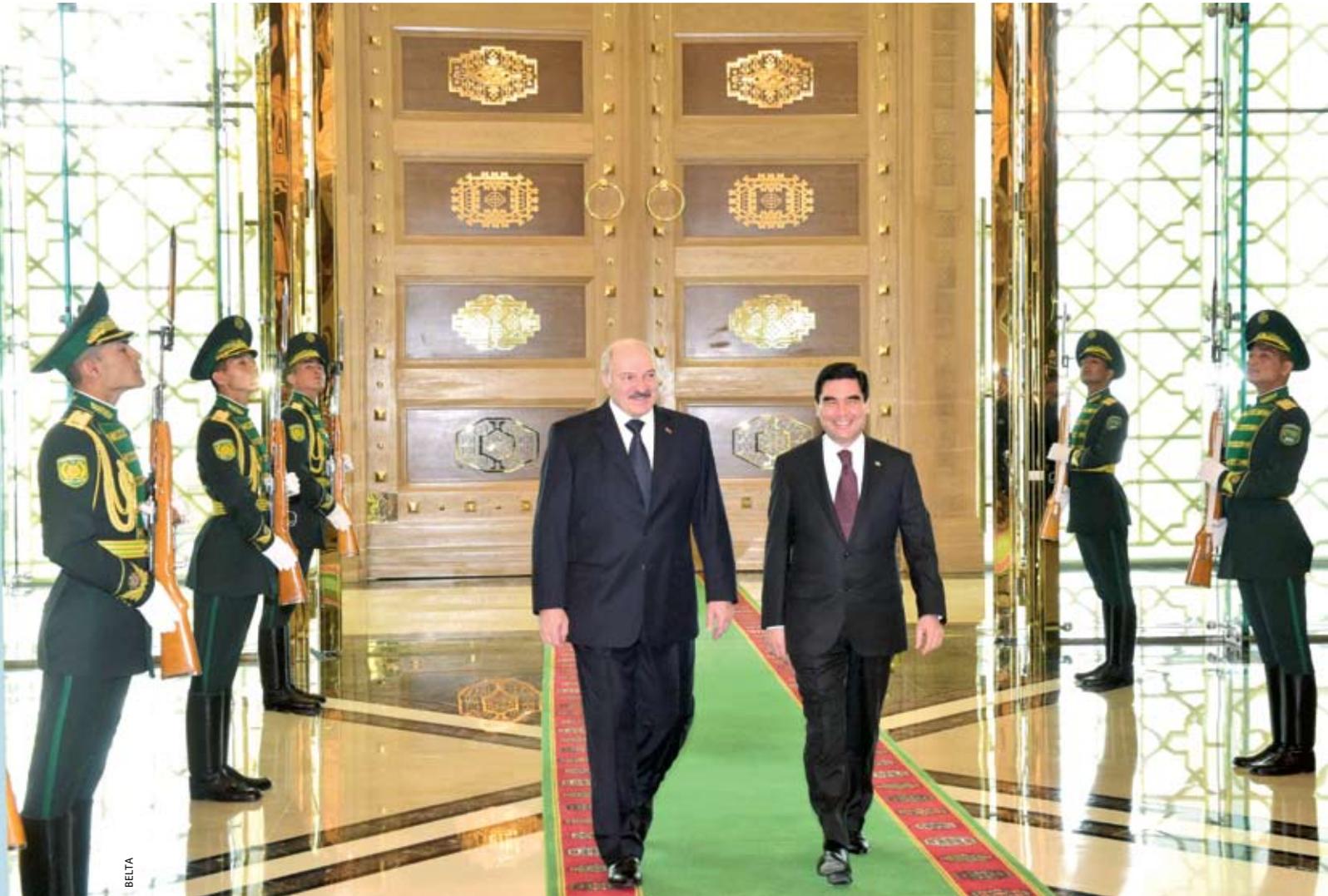
Our machine builders have suggested launching production of a special diesel train able to operate in a hot climate. Meanwhile, leading Belarusian IT companies have gained a strong foothold in the banking sector and the system of state management in Turkmenistan. Why shouldn't we extend these developments for transport and municipal services? Cooperation in jointly producing multi-functional unmanned aircraft also looks promising.

The service sector is also promising, with over 40 percent of foreign students in Belarus coming from Turkmeni-



Garlyk mining and processing facility officially launched

BELTA



Alexander Lukashenko and Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov

stan, helping generate Belarus' annual income from exported education services of \$25 million. Turkmenistan needs not only engineers and doctors but other qualified experts. Belarus is ready to open the doors of its professional-technical and secondary special educational establishments, to train Turkmen youngsters. The promotion of medical and tourist services is also likely to expand.

Business negotiations have resulted in a package of agreements tackling cooperation to counteract crime, as well as education, sport, culture and arts. Mr. Lukashenko and Mr. Berdimuhamedov have signed a joint statement to strengthen strate-

gic partnership across all areas and the President of Belarus has invited his Turkmen colleague for an official visit at any time convenient.

Taking the road to Garlyk is a true test of strength. First, you need to spend an hour flying from Ashgabat to Türkmenabat, then seven long hours on a train and, finally, an hour on a bus. More than a thousand kilometres are now behind us, as well as one more sleepless night. Our destination is located just 25km from the Afghan border. Mountains lie on one side, while desert is on the other. Only a few small shrubs of faded grass can be seen, in addition to camel's thorns. Local residents say that, in summer,

the air temperature can reach 50 degrees. After a while, the outlines of the new industrial giant appear in the beams of the rising Sun, as if a mirage, and gradually conquer the whole horizon.

Looking at this miracle in the desert, you can see how Belarusian specialists have worked with Turkmen partners under extreme climatic conditions. The opening was celebrated with a spectacular show organised by the hosts: of song, dance, theatre, and exhibition performances by athletes. Every foreign ambassador working in the country was invited.

Close to me, Turkmen journalists enthusiastically discuss the advantag-

es received by their country within 2-3 years of the launch of the facility. On seeing me, one compliments our country, saying, “Belarusians have really done well in having built such a huge facility. There are only a few large players on the world potash market, including Belarus, Russia, Canada and Uzbekistan. Soon we’ll join them and will be able to export more than a million tonnes of fertilisers annually.”

Undoubtedly, the major event of the President’s official visit to Turkmenistan and, probably, of the whole history of our relations, was the opening of Garlyk mining and processing facility.

of ore mining. Production of high-demand mineral fertilisers will enhance the development of agriculture and Turkmenistan will become one of the largest exporters of potash fertilisers in Asia. Meanwhile, Belarus has again demonstrated to the whole world the extent of its capabilities. According to Mr. Lukashenko, this is due, primarily, to having retained its production, scientific and technological potential inherited from Soviet times.

In creating the mining and processing facility, Belarus drew upon its experience and resources, as Mr. Lukashenko noted enthusiastically at the

“Also, 1,500 jobs are being created at the facility,” continued the President of Turkmenistan.

Mr. Lukashenko again chimed in, saying that ‘even 2,000 won’t be enough when the facility is running at full capacity’. He added, “I was pleasantly surprised that the first batch of fertilisers has already been given by the President of Turkmenistan to the country’s neighbours [in Afghanistan]. Well done! This is the way we should live, to earn respect. It’s a decent act, which elevates the Turkmen nation.”

The two presidents launched the facility, pressing a symbolic button to loud applause. Then, they examined the new production machinery and left a record in the Book of Honorary Guests. After Mr. Lukashenko and Mr. Berdimuhamedow had departed the site, people remained, keenly discussing the long-awaited event.

“This day will stay in my memory forever,” noted Belgorkhimprom’s Director General, Vyacheslav Korshun. “This project is excellent advertising for our science and technology. We’ve already received new proposals from other countries and we’ll be considering them.”

After the visit, the President of Turkmenistan bid a warm farewell to Mr. Lukashenko at the airport and they managed to chat briefly.

The talks in Ashgabat have resulted in eleven documents being signed regarding the development of cooperation across various spheres. In particular, a range of treaties have been concluded, alongside a memorandum between Belarusian and Turkmen universities. Moreover, an inter-governmental agreement on cooperation to battle crime has been signed, as has a cooperative programme in the sphere of tourism between the Sports and Tourism Ministry of Belarus and the State Committee of Turkmenistan for Tourism and Sport for 2017-2018.

By Vasily **Kharitonov**

Alexander Lukashenko:

We aren’t building relations by lodging terms and conditions; we’re cooperating as nations who lived long as a single state. You should know that you have a secure foothold and reliable friends in the centre of Europe and can always count on Belarus

Seven years ago, Mr. Lukashenko and Mr. Berdimuhamedow laid a capsule into the foundations of the planned super-modern facility. This time, they attended the solemn opening ceremony together. In a short period of time, colossal work has been achieved. This February, the first trial tonne of potash fertilisers was released.

Our specialists have used their experience and advanced technologies to create a complex ‘turn-key’ project: the first such in the history of modern Belarus. The presidents of the two states have arrived with the so long-awaited-for ‘key’.

Our Turkmen friends now have a new branch within their economy,

ceremony. “It’s been an honour for Belarus to help Turkmenistan launch an advanced enterprise. It’s been a true challenge to penetrate 0.5km into the earth, to mine this high quality mineral and extract the ore. Now, with our Turkmen partners, we’ll be able to build a mine even on the sea bed.”

After words of gratitude, Mr. Berdimuhamedow explained that the new enterprise will be manufacturing \$1.4 million tonnes of fertilisers annually.

The President of Belarus corrected his Turkmen colleague, noting that experts always underestimate figures, to err on the side of caution, and that more than \$1.4 million tonnes is quite possible.



BELTA

OSCE appreciates Belarus' involvement in its activity

On July 1st, 2016, during the 25th annual session of the OSCE PA, it was unanimously decided to conduct the 26th annual session of the Assembly in Minsk, from July 5th-9th, 2017. An organising committee was set up to prepare and conduct this session. Meanwhile, recently, Minsk was visited by the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Christine Muttonen.

On meeting Ms. Muttonen, the President of Belarus noted that the decision to host the annual session of the OSCE PA in Belarus was the right one. “The situation in Belarus is relatively calm against the backdrop of events happening worldwide. I promise to you that the situation will be the same in the run-up to the event, during and after it.”

In her turn, Ms. Muttonen remarked that the forthcoming OSCE PA session is very important, playing a vital role in the development of ties between nations. “We had very productive talks yesterday. I’m sure that all necessary things have been done and will be done to ensure that this session is a success,” she said.

Ms. Muttonen underlined that the OSCE PA has always enjoyed good relations with the Belarusian delegation and hopes this will continue. As far as the 26th summer session is concerned, hosted by Minsk, she forecasts interesting and contradictive discussions among politicians and parliamentar-

ians. She feels certain that the Minsk declaration, with recommendations to participants, will become the final document, saying, “In recent times, Minsk has become a venue for international negotiations and international events and we hope that our event will make its own contribution.”

January saw the 25th anniversary of Belarus as a fully-fledged member of the OSCE. In this respect, Vladimir Andreichenko, the Chairman of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly, noted, “We’ve always had a very serious attitude towards our work within this organisation, taking an active role and making a considerable contribution to the provision of security and collaboration in the European region.” He views the visit of the OSCE PA delegation to Belarus and the signing of the 26th annual session agreement as steps towards the development of interaction and dialogue across all spheres of mutual interest.”

This was the first visit of Ms. Muttonen to Belarus but she noted that she is

already looking forward to her meeting in July, for the OSCE PA’s annual summer session, when it elects its leadership and executives, and adopts declarations and resolutions. She commented that the Belarusian delegation has always been one of the most active, saying, “We appreciate your involvement in our activity.”

Of the seven hundred expected guests this summer, more than three hundred will be parliamentarians. “Minsk will see a live discussion of all interesting issues at international level,” noted Ms. Muttonen adding that she highly appreciates the readiness of the Belarusian leadership to take part in the forthcoming discussion.

Ms. Muttonen is the second female President of the OSCE PA within the last twenty-five years and is very pleased with the attitude she has observed towards women in Belarus. “When we were driving from the airport, I learnt that March 8th is an official public holiday and said that I’d like to borrow this tradition and bring it to Austria,” she admitted.

By Alexander **Pimenov**

More residents registered

For the first time in nearly twenty-five years, a natural increase was recorded in the population

The number of Belarusians is growing. As of January 1st, 2016, there were 9,498,364 people living in the country; one year on, the figure is 9,504,704. The rural population is falling and the number of city residents is growing, as the National Statistical Committee confirms. These trends, focusing on regions, districts, cities and villages, give much food for thought.

Speaking of the regions, Minsk leads, with almost two million residents, and growing by 15,000 annually. At the moment, over 1,974,000 people live in the capital. In addition, 13,000 more citizens have been registered in Gomel, partly due to the village of Kostyukovka being added to the city's territory (in early 2016, it was home to 9,900 residents). Brest and Grodno have risen by at least 3,000 people, while Mogilev is now inhabited

by an extra 2,000 residents, and 1,500 new residents have joined Vitebsk.

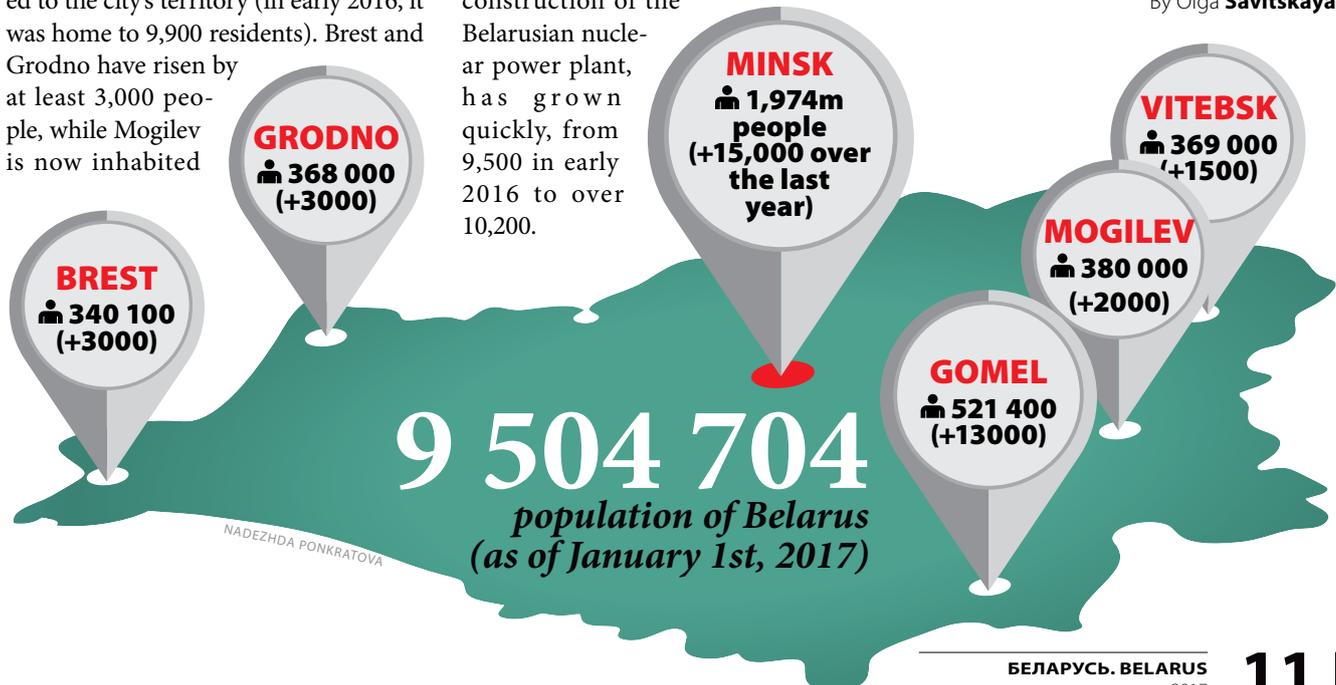
The country's largest cities lead, as is expected, with Minsk and Gomel being followed by Mogilev (380,000), Vitebsk (369,000) and Grodno (368,000). Meanwhile, Minsk's satellite-towns are all demonstrating a rise along the demographic curve. Some have increased seriously, while others have demonstrated a slight rise. For example, Dzerzhinsk, Zaslavl and Logoisk have increased in size by over 200 people since last year, while Fanipol has risen by 700 residents. Molo-dechno's population has also increased, as has that of Stolin, Gorki, Dobrush, Oshmyany, Luninets, Myadel, Kalinkovich and Skidel. Ostrovets, owing to the construction of the Belarusian nuclear power plant, has grown quickly, from 9,500 in early 2016 to over 10,200.

Of all districts in the region, Ostrovets boasts the most favourable situation for employment, with seventeen vacancies for each person officially registered as unemployed. The Slonim District Employment Service has taken advantage of the situation, inviting representatives of Belenergostroy to a recent job fair, to chat about working conditions, and encourage interest in application. Around twenty-five people out of a hundred invited to interview have received jobs in Ostrovets.

Irina Talchuk, the Chair of the Ostrovets District Council of Deputies, comments, "Our town is young and dynamically developing. New people are coming here to settle and raise families. Not long ago, 267 young professionals — teachers, doctors, workers of agriculture and forestry, policemen and rescuers — were employed in the town. Many companies and organisations are ready to assist with hostels for their workers. A new gymnasium and kindergarten for 190 children have also opened."

Sadly, some districts in Belarus are declining in size, such as the Rossony District, which is down to 9,351 residents, from 9,517 a year ago. The Krasnopolie District has lost almost the same number, now having 9,520 residents, and the Dribin District has 9,871 people, against 10,100 in 2016. All have a high percentage of rural residents.

By Olga Savitskaya



Modern view on future machines

The soil is a vital resource, which we aim to use effectively and prudently, with the use of machinery developed by the Scientific and Practical Centre for Agriculture Mechanisation, under the National Academy of Sciences, jointly with scientists, farmers and industrial enterprises

Chief research officer of Scientific and Practical Centre for Agriculture Mechanisation, Doctor of Technical Sciences, Prof. Leonid Stepuk



SERGEY LOZHIUK

In the time of our country's independence, we inherited out of date agricultural machinery, and no means of production of a new fleet. Belarus was obliged to spend foreign currency on importing much needed machinery, making it vital that investment be made into our factories. Scientists and industrialists united in developing this sphere. Now, several decades on, we're in a position to export such machinery. It is no surprise that this major work, taking over a decade, was listed among contenders for the 2016 State Award for Science and Technology.

"Our machinery aims to effectively, and wisely, apply the basic resources of agriculture: various organic and mineral fertilisers, liming materials and pesticides. Every year,

volumes worth up to \$1 billion are used. We need to distribute about 50 million tonnes of organic additives, 14,000 tonnes of pesticides, 2 million tonnes of dolomite, and 4 million tonnes of mineral fertilisers: impossible without machinery," stresses the chief research officer of the Scientific and Practical Centre for Agriculture Mechanisation, Doctor of Technical Sciences, Prof. Leonid Stepuk.

He knows what he's talking about, having headed an agricultural enterprise. As a leading force in modernising agriculture, he's convinced that technologies are the path to successful, effective farming.

There's still a long way to go in reducing prime costs, increasing productivity and saving fuel. This is the focus of the work of nominees for the State Award: the First Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Food, Leonid Marinich; the Director of the Institute of Soil Science and Agricultural



Chemistry of the National Academy of Sciences, academician Vitaly Lapa; and the Head of the Centre for Scientific and Technical Developments at Bobruiskagromash Holding, Candidate of Technical Sciences, Vasily Perevoznikov. They have presented twenty-two machines, which have passed all tests and now have certificates of compliance.

“70 percent of material, labour and energy costs involved in producing a harvest are spent on preparing, fertilising and ploughing fields. If we ignored these steps, we’d receive a smaller harvest or, even, make a loss. Cereal crops need nitrogen fertilisers at least twice in their growing cycle, with strict parameters for usage, with no more than 10 percent leeway. Lacking machinery for this purpose, we developed our RShU-18 (which remains steady in its delivery within 7 percent of the target),” explains Mr. Stepuk. He adds that each type of fertiliser has its own

Over
8,000
*machines have
been produced,
with approximately*
1,500
*sold abroad —
saving \$90.5 million
in foreign currency*

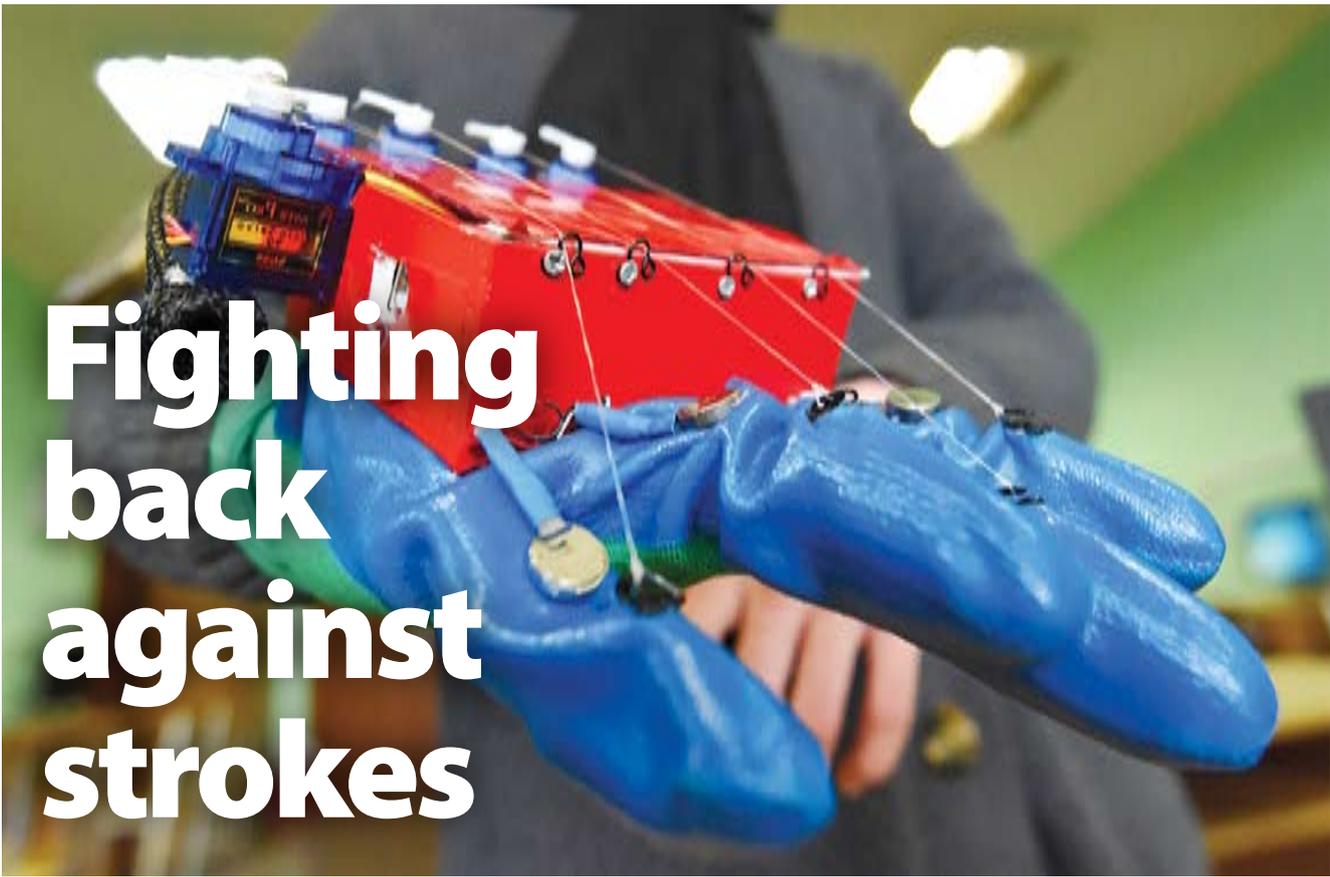
machinery and size standards, with mounted, trailed and self-propelled variants, to meet various needs.

Over the last two decades, a system of import substitution has been

developed, allowing us to, even, export machinery. This has ensured our use of solid and liquid fertilisers, preparing and distributing organic additives and chemical pesticides, as well as lime fertilisation. Many of our innovations are now in industrial production and are being sold abroad. These are the result of years of theoretical and experimental research, forming the basis for thesis, monographs, and textbooks for students of agro-engineering. Under the supervision of Mr. Stepuk alone, ten candidates of sciences have been trained, and dozens of patents and certificates of authorship have been granted.

The scientific school ensures the further progress of the branch, introducing new machinery, and encouraging wider use of intensive technologies of cultivation, to raise productivity.

By Yulia **Vasilishina**



Fighting back against strokes

WWW.ONLINER.BY

Gomel student develops device for recovery after illness

Maxim Kiryanov's invention has exploded across the Internet. The 18-year-old student from Gomel has developed a robotic glove for use while recovering from a stroke. His robot — using a computer programme — helps the patient regain control of their fine motor skills, and can be controlled even from a mobile phone. The device is smaller than foreign analogues, and at least 100 times cheaper.

Maxim studies at the Gomel State Machine Building College, where we

met, Maxim bringing a laptop and two gloves. His invention appears simple: using a rubber glove, with a software box on top and wires passing through, to drive the fingers. The tensioning structure is attached through laundry hooks.

The programme makes the hand bend its fingers. He explains, "One of the two gloves leads and the other is driven; the 'brains' are in the driven — right — hand. The glove connects to Wi-Fi, picks up data from the server and starts working. A doctor can programme the necessary workout for the hand, adjusting how far the fingers bend, in what order and when to add vibration. Hospital and poly-

clinics can use my software to create a recovery programme for patients to follow at home; they just need an on-line connection and a glove device."

The special glove helping patients practise their fine motor skills aids in the recovery process early on, when mobility has been compromised, offering mechanical therapy.

Maxim had his idea for the device while spending time at the cardiological centre. "Chatting with doctors, I learned how expensive it is to organise rehabilitation after a stroke. Incredibly, stroke is the third most common cause of death worldwide, and the first for disability. In the Gomel Region alone, over

5,000 people have strokes annually. Of these, 70 percent lose sensitivity in their hands. Modern devices cost up to \$50,000 and tend to be large and heavy, so cannot be taken home. I've developed a compact, portable device with a battery lasting twelve hours. In developing the design and software, I consulted the Head of the Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery at Gomel Medical University, Natalia Usova. I needed the opinion of a professional to create a device which is convenient for both

The robot-glove won first place at a recent science and engineering contest, the Belarus Science and Engineering Fair, in Minsk. It currently costs Br50 to produce, but larger batch production would reduce this.

"People have been messaging me via my social network pages to tell me that their relatives are recovering from a stroke. They each offer to purchase the glove but I haven't been able to help yet, as we haven't launched industrial production. We need to complete clinical trials and gain cer-

tification. Moreover, it's important to make the design more functional. In future, we'll fulfil individual orders, using 3D printing, and could use the gloves for people recovering not just from strokes but from hand injuries and burns. I'm negotiating with the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and am hoping they'll come on board, to help me and all those recovering from a stroke," he says.

Serial production will follow clinical trials and patenting but a serious investor is required. Probably, the NAS will help. If not, Maxim is ready to launch the glove as a start-up project, using crowd-funding. He's convinced that money would pour in from around the globe for such a project, which is important for hundreds of thousands of people.

Saying goodbye to the inventor, I ask about his plans for the future. Maxim replies, "I'll enter a university which focuses on developing artificial intelligence. It's my dream: to develop a classic robot, as we see in films, able to analyse reality and make decisions. Modern science is at such a level of development that these dreams are almost a reality."

By Stanislav
Galkovsky

The robot-glove won first place at a recent science and engineering contest, the Belarus Science and Engineering Fair, in Minsk. The glove's purpose is to practise fine motor skills, with the help of computer programming. The device is able to kick-start the recovery process at an early stage, while the patient is yet unable to move their limbs independently

patients and doctors. It took me two months to complete my work."

Maxim is already a celebrity within his own college. Programming teacher Yelena Polyakova explains that the boy is always full of new ideas. "In his first year of studies, he created a robot able to navigate the college corridors to measure the level of gases, radiation and temperature. During his second year, he invented an autonomous watering system for lawns. Jointly with another student, he designed an electronic access system for the hostel. His glove-robot was made during his third year. I wonder how he'll surprise us with his diploma paper," she adds.



Will science fiction soon become a reality

Engineers, programmers, mathematicians and psychologists have been working on a Belarusian autonomous robot

Working in financial institutions will be a trifling matter, as such robots could easily replace a hundred professions. How will they look, what will they cost and should we be afraid that artificial intelligence will replace humans?

Robots can do more than work; they can communicate

“Hello, let’s get acquainted,” says the robot named Illariy, offering me its hand. I cannot contain my nervous laughter: it’s my first time in this situation.

“Your eyes are so beautiful,” says the steel lady’s man, which makes me blush. His eyes display heartlets. For each wom-

an who approached, the robot had a compliment.

“Our Illariy is a ‘jelly roll,’” comments Vitaly Bondarik, winking at the robot.

‘Skolkovo’. Olga taps Illariy on the shoulder to add, “It can be a nurse, animator, tutor, promoter, adviser and presenter, replacing people in a hundred professions.

The Belarusian robot will be erudite and able to converse on any topic — from the weather outside to philosophy. Meanwhile, as it communicates with people, it will continue to ‘learn’, taking on new phrases

Vitaly, together with wife Olga, has founded the company specialising in creating autonomous robot-assistants: the first in the country.

The robot is an innovative development from the company from Perm, which is a resident of the Russian Park

It likes to communicate, and knows four languages.”

Unexpectedly Illariy engages in conversation, saying, “Nevertheless, I don’t always know how to answer certain requests. In this case, please forgive me.”



VITALIY PIVOVARCHIK

Vitaly Bondarik says that the robot will be able even to distinguish human emotions

Robot-advisers employed in banks

Belarusian brains are working on the creation of our own robot, setting ambitious aims. Our artificial intelligence should be notable for a bigger IQ than its Russian rival. Work is entering its third year, with the names of developers kept secret (employing user names only, to avoid Belarusian talent being enticed away to other countries).

Negotiations are now being carried out with a major state bank and, by the end of this year, the first robot-adviser is to be introduced. Ten robot-managers already work in banks across Russia, and 3000 robot-lawyers are to be employed by the end of the year.

It may seem like some fantastic film but the Belarusian robot will be able to distinguish the location of a client, approach and communicate. In giving out tickets, the robot will be able to guide

visitors to where they need to go, and tell them about bank services, while also acting as a payment terminal.

Vitaly is enthusiastic regarding the prospects, saying, “The robot will be able to remember clients by appearance and name. If, one month ago, a woman called Svetlana Nikiforovna used its help, when she returns, the robot will greet her by name and say how long it’s been since it last saw her, giving her a warm welcome.”

Artificial intelligence with emotional soul

The Belarusian robot will also be able to distinguish emotions, having learnt to ‘read’ reactions and facial expressions. Yevgeny Grib, the first psychologist in the country who began to study artificial intelligence and its perception by people, points at Illariy, saying, “It’s difficult for a robot to distinguish our feelings so, when we take the robot to events, we capture

their reactions on video. We then use this material to ‘teach’ the robot to identify human feelings. The robot is equipped with a set of cameras and gauges, capable of distinguishing various emotions, such as pleasure, fear or excitement. Thus, the robot will be able to adapt its responses to the situation. For example, if a person is fearful, the robot will try to act in a soothing manner.”

Illariy can display about ten emotions with its eyes, and more are possible. The Belarusian robot will speak Belarusian, and be able to recite from Kupala’s poem ‘I’m a Belarusian Man’.

With a vocabulary of 70,000 words, the Belarusian robot will be erudite and able to converse on any topic — from the weather outside to philosophy. Meanwhile, as it communicates with people, it will continue to ‘learn’, taking on new phrases.

“How does that work?” I ask. Vitaly, seeing my surprise, explains, “The

robot saves all dialogue into a virtual cloud where we can analyse conversations and people's questions, alongside the robot's answers. We'll look at which questions remained unanswered and alter the programming to cover such situations."

Illariy seems not to like hearing this, saying, "Let's pretend that you've not said that and I've not heard it."

Illariy is programmed to joke around a little, finding humorous ways

to deal with questions it needs to evade. At one event, when stuck for an answer, Illariy offered to dance. It differs from the Russian model in having movable arms able to lift up to 7kg.

Are we anxious?

"We'll improve the regulating system, to allow adaptation," notes Vitaly, schematically drawing the future robot. "If the Russian robot can run for eight hours without needing to be recharged, we'll make sure that ours can run for twelve. It will also be more quick-witted. Sometimes, Illariy needs a couple of seconds to answer but ours will need just

tion. The software for the Russian robot uses an open platform while ours will be closed, making it more reliable in respect of cyber-safety and data storage."

The robot will have a male and female version, and there will be a robot-assistant and robot-nurse. Programming is planned for one hundred professions, as assemblers, cashiers, technical advisers, waiters, bookkeepers, warehouse workers and for use as surgical tools.

"We've already had an inquiry from a university for a robot able to read lectures," Vitaly tells us. "Though the profession of teacher isn't yet considered suitable for robotised technologies, St. Petersburg Electrotechnical University has bought a similar robot, wishing to involve it in the Department of Mechatronics and Robotics. It will give lectures alongside the teacher, and will be able to carry out practical training.

It seems frightening: the thought of robots taking away our employment and opportunities to earn money.

Olga Bondarik shrugs her shoulders, "You should understand: it's impossible to replace people.

Our purpose is not to replace people with mechanisation and automation, but to find ways of helping people, co-operating with them more effectively."

Belarusian robot for \$20,000

The Belarusian robots will cost from \$10,000 to \$20,000, becoming cheaper as more are produced, and data is gathered to improve their function.

Not long ago, research showed that, of three hundred companies, from various service spheres, two thirds were keen to introduce robots into their business. Thirty companies would consider taking on robots in the near future. Can it be really true, that the sci-fi fantasies of the future are becoming reality?

By Taisia **Azanovich**



VITALIY PIVOVARCHIK



Word-for-word

**Interior Minister
Igor Shunevich:**

The Head of State adopted our proposal that such a system is appropriate and necessary in any civilised state and has instructed a range of measures connected with the practical implementation of the project. Of course, these primarily relate to the choice of operator, who will be generating all ideas and will be involved in practical realisation: from buying 'hardware' to exploitation. We've been given corresponding instructions and will be improving this draft decree, adding national peculiarities and opportunities... We already have several elements, including several thousand sites equipped with video cameras, data transmission lines, servers, and local networks. The new system aims to unite all these resources... There is a number of sites which should be obligatory equipped with video surveillance systems in view of the already existing legal framework. We plan that about two-four thousand sites should be additionally equipped with video surveillance systems in the nearest time, I think within a year or maybe two years. Of course, it will be an opportunity rather than an obligation for private businesses and individuals.

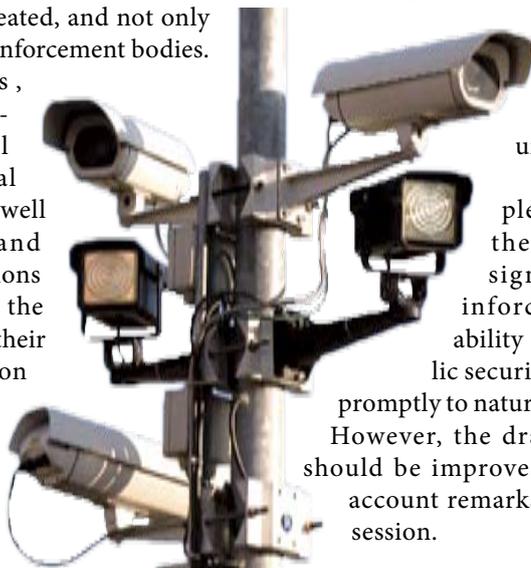
Components of modern security

No one is surprised to see video cameras on the streets, in public places and in offices, as they help deter crime and bring perpetrators to justice

Lots of local networks have been created, and not only by law enforcement bodies. Banks, commercial companies, medical and educational institutions, as well as transport and other organisations are monitoring the situation inside their buildings and on adjacent territories with the help of cameras.

There are now plans

to integrate isolated local networks into a single public security monitoring system, as stipulated by a draft regulation submitted for discussion at the President's session. Alexander Lukashenko has approved the idea, saying, "Such systems exist in many countries and have already proven efficient. Obviously, the introduction of automated processes for the detection of various threatening events, and the analysis of data, will help improve public order. Moreover, this will help release many workers and resources, optimising the structure of certain



government bodies. This process is already underway." The vital implementation of the idea should significantly reinforce structures' ability to ensure public security and respond promptly to natural phenomena. However, the draft regulation should be improved, taking into account remarks voiced at the session.

By Dmitry **Kryat**



A model of the 'Krasin' Arctic ice breaker, made in Minsk, which now stands inside the real 'Krasin' exhibition in St. Petersburg

Models replicating to smallest detail

Their hands have created models of almost every sort of transport found in Belarus, plus vehicles found in neighbouring countries. Famous people have such models in their homes, including our President. Our correspondent drops into the Minsk workshop to find out more.

It's fascinating to see model vehicles, even though we see the 'real thing' every day on our streets. Adults and children alike are entranced by the tiny details, such as seats and rear-view mirrors. Models are made to a scale of 1:20, 1:10, 1:87 or even smaller.

Often, they're made for presentation at a trade fair or exhibition, or to give as corporate gifts or souvenirs, though they're expensive to make, requiring many hours of care, by hand.

The director of the workshop, Ivan Tirinov, spreads the small parts of a future bus on the table, all a hundred times smaller than the real thing! He tells us, "We've been making models for more than ten years: vehicles, planes, ships, military hardware and even figures of people. Often, our clients are manufacturers."

Ivan takes buses, trains and trolley buses from the shelf. I feel as if I'm in a children's department store, although they're all exact copies of real machinery, at times, serious military hardware. He tells me, "Not everyone can afford to buy these models. Look, here's a bus in which a tiny driver is seated." Ivan holds the model in his hands. "At a scale of 1:20, about a half-metre in size, it would cost \$2,000 to make. A good quality model uses about 200 components, and requires skilful fingers."

The designers have been using software to create a 3D-model of Lebyazhy suburb. Ivan explains, "Many companies are using 3D-technologies to make mock-ups, of any complexity and configuration, using a printer. However, to create a smooth surface, without superfluous elements, and to paint it well, with small details, is far more difficult. You need more than just access to technologies.

The workshop has a 3D-printer but this is used only for general preparations; most of the work is done by hand, and with the use of a milling machine.

So, we set about making a bus, from the design on the computer. Information is sent to the milling machine and, before our eyes, it cuts out windows from plastic, with the smallest details, exact and smooth. There will be some priming, before paint is applied.



Ivan polishes with sandpaper, explaining that their standards are so high that it can take two months to make a single model. In 90 percent of cases, parts are made from plastic, with metal used in just 10 percent. Masters use sheet plastic from which flat details are cut out, while liquid plastic is cast into molds, where it hardens. Some materials are domestically made while others are imported from the USA and France. The grass used for models, such as creating a suburb, comes from Germany.

“The larger the model, the more detail it requires. Sometimes, a customer wants everything to be realistic, down to the hand-rail in a trolley bus, the racks covering electronic equipment, windows, the current collector, wheels, buttons, air conditioning, mirrors and fire extinguisher. Sometimes, we add batteries, so that headlights and indicators can be lit,” says Ivan.

These masters are sometimes among the first to learn of new vehicles being released. Ivan reveals, “About seven years ago, we made a model of the ‘Krasin’ Arctic ice breaker, which is now located in St. Petersburg, within an exhibition inside the actual ‘Krasin’ ship. We also made the first red ‘Vitovt’ trolley buses, before they launched in towns.”

Ivan opens up a photo archive and shows me shots of other models they’ve made: ZIS-150 and ZIL-130 trucks, a MAZ-231 bus, and a MAZ-5434 fire engine. There are models of Minsk hypermarkets, of the first Belarusian satellite, of the ‘Caiman’ armoured vehicle, of a coastal missile launcher with anti-ship missiles, of a marsh buggy, of various tractors, of the ‘Stadler’ train and of a Canadian all-terrain vehicle. There’s even a model of our embassy in Baku, and another of the hall of the Second World War Museum, with its battering ram tank. There are models of trams from Pyatigorsk and Daugavpils too.



Ivan Tirinov:

The creation of a good quality model uses about two hundred technologies, including the work of the master’s skilful fingers, without whom all would be impossible

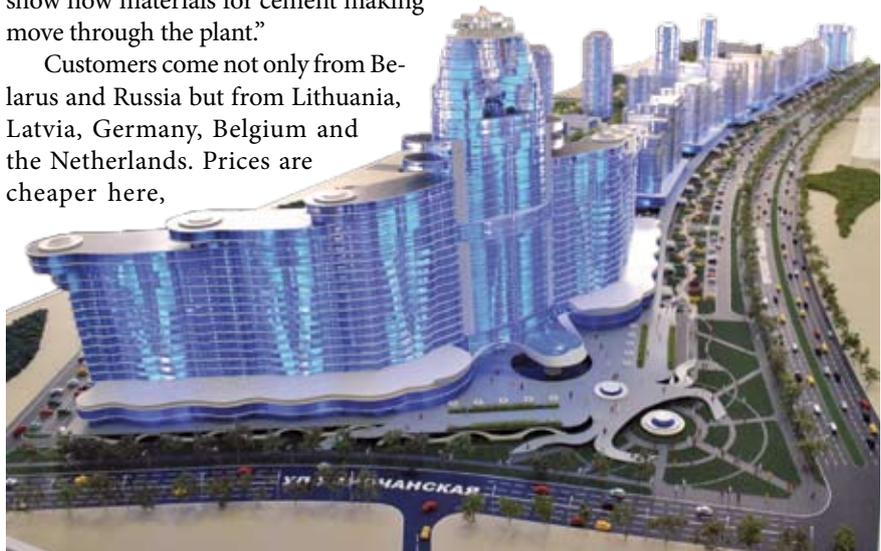
Once, an oligarch from Russia ordered a huge drilling machine. Some customers ask for models plated in gold... Ivan shows me a video, explaining, “We made an interesting model of the cement plant in Krichev, which we illuminated with special lights in various colours, to show how materials for cement making move through the plant.”

Customers come not only from Belarus and Russia but from Lithuania, Latvia, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. Prices are cheaper here,

with those in Lithuania 200 percent higher. He adds, “We rarely follow what happens to the models once they’ve left us but some go to museums and trade fairs, or are given as gifts. ‘Amkodor-Pinsk’ placed an order to give to Alexander Lukashenko as a present. The President has our model of the beautification of the bank of the River Naroch, while the Minister of Defence of Russia, Sergei Shoigu, the Emergency Situations Minister of Russia, Vladimir Puchkov, and the Mayor of Moscow, Sergey Sobyenin, all have our model fire engines, as does Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev.”

We tend to create models for exhibition, at a scale of 1:10, 1:20, 1:50 or 1:100. Creating models to a scale of 1:43 is a rarity, as our country has few connoisseurs of miniatures. Moreover, magazines for children and adults offering customers to collect issues (containing details) and then to assemble a whole model, are much cheaper. The magazine might only cost Br6 Roubles, while our hand-made model cars often cost \$200. “However, they’re worth the price. Like our model trains, the details make them look real.” Mr. Tirinov shows us a ‘Stadler’ model train engine, at almost two metres in length, and a 6cm bus. They aren’t toys; rather, they represent our modern age. “You can touch as well as look,” he invites.

By Galina Kiseleva



A model of Lebyazhy suburb, created over several months by the design workshop



Upward trends

The financial market is experiencing a positive trend. In March, for the first time in two years, gold and currency reserves exceeded \$5bn. Inflation is falling: in 2014, it was above 16 percent, falling to 12.5 percent in 2015 and 10.5 percent in 2016. This has brought a fall in the refinancing rate: since March 15th, it has stood at 15 percent per annum, bringing cheaper loans for enterprises and revival of the private sector. Salaries depend on economic growth, with the President promising that, by late 2017, the average salary should hit \$500 in equivalent. How can we solve this problem and what resources can we use?

Strategic reserve

Speaking of rising salaries, we need to take into account the fact that the economic system of our country is based mainly on large, state-owned industrial enterprises; they account for over half of all industrial production and employ 65 percent of the population. Meanwhile, small and medium-sized enterprises are underdeveloped, accounting for just 30 percent of GDP. The dominant position of state-owned enterprises, with preferences in regard to financial resources, energy prices and regulatory obligations, is hampering the development of the promising private sector. Its potential regarding production development, creation of new jobs and wage growth remains largely unrealised.

For example, in the USA, over 20 million small and medium-sized enterprises operate, providing jobs for over half of the country's working population. According to US economists, around thirty percent of American families are engaged in business. In addition, the low

level of development of small and medium-sized enterprises makes Belarus vulnerable to external shocks, such as fluctuations in the price of commodities and the macroeconomic indicators of its main trading partners.

Lack of access to loans is hampering our business development, according to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Bank lending is the main source of external financing for small and medium-sized companies in Belarus and abroad. However, the volume of domestic credit to the Belarusian private sector amounted to only 28 percent of GDP in 2015: against 147 percent in developed countries and 48 percent in Central and Eastern Europe.

Most small businesses still rely on their own funds to finance investments.

Companies in need of funds cannot gain access to external funding, either because they aren't given credit, or because they don't apply, faced with impossible conditions. This problem becomes particularly significant when firms grow larger and can no longer rely on state support programmes.

Other obstacles to the development of business initiatives are tax rates and inadequate personnel training. Accordingly, the creation of equal conditions for all businesses, regardless of their size or ownership structure, is a

key task for the state. This would promote sustainable economic growth and provide a medium-term increase in the average wage.

A comprehensive state strategy is needed, with the establishment of an authorised body overseeing economic policy governing small and medium-sized enterprises. It's important to create an institutional 'platform' for dialogue between the state and businesses, on issues

The creation of equal conditions for all businesses, regardless of their size or ownership structure, is a key task for the state. This would promote sustainable economic growth and provide a medium-term increase in the average wage

of entrepreneurial development. At the moment, economic policy governing small and medium-sized companies continues to be based on the principle of 'top-down', while consultations between the state and the private sector are conducted without regularity.

It's also necessary to simplify legislation and automate the flow of electronic documents relating to entrepreneurship. For example, the use of e-government services has helped reduce operating costs for businesses in Azerbaijan.

Their electronic platform is viewed as an example of best practice, not only in the region but beyond.

Finally, we must encourage the development of private market services for businesses, while laying the foundations to introduce training programmes as a key competence.

By Oleg Mazol, a researcher at the Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Centre (BEROC)

p. 24

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Salary based money-making

The President's goal of increasing incomes has caused much dispute. Opinions are often guided not by the analysis of a possibility or the probability of achieving a goal but by critics who aren't always constructive. Revenue growth is associated with uncontrolled emission, inflation and the risk of devaluation. As an alternative, economic structural reforms are proposed, often related to changing property relations and the state leaving the economy.

Is the administrative approach to the population's income contradictory to the requirements of lowering state participation and expanding entrepreneurial initiative? No matter how property relations change, authorities must continue to meet the challenges of improving public welfare, and promoting efficiency. Regardless of sphere of operation, the private sector shares a desire to raise rev-



The second group of factors is connected with mechanisation, automation and computerisation of production, introducing advanced production processes, applying new materials

capital, despite ever-increasing competition. Unfortunately, we cannot say that these concepts have become routine yet. They are rather viewed as a set of tools. There is much yet to do. The principles of marketing and logistics can only be fulfilled when every employee takes responsibility for the final product.

State steps to emancipate entrepreneurial initiative and reduce the administrative burden on businesses are helping reformat and optimise production in the face of increased competition and growing barriers on new and traditional markets. In this regard, in the medium and long term, export diversification and mastering of new markets are mandatory for sustainable salary growth.

The conclusion is evident: employees are more responsible for the growth of their income than the state. Commercial success depends on whether working teams can form a corporate culture aimed at the creation of a highly competitive product, to optimise costs and master new innovative technologies.

By Valery **Borodnya**,
a deputy of the National Assembly's
House of Representatives

The principles of marketing and logistics can only be fulfilled when every employee takes responsibility for the final product

enue and salaries. However, these must reflect labour productivity. Money must be earned. Managerial, technological and structural factors influence productivity, from personnel training and motivation, to management innovations, and the organisation of production and labour. It's no secret that the longer a company operates, the more set in its ways it tends to become. However, as regards motivation, our industrial giants are capable of rapid and significant changes.

and improving product construction. There is great potential for growth and problems can be solved, thanks to the high intellectual potential of the High-Tech Park.

Structural factors include the possibility of producing more expensive and less labour-intensive products, and outsourcing to improve efficiency of production and industrial cooperation. The application of logistics and marketing can accelerate the turnover of

► Polotsk changing its status

Country's oldest city celebrates new status

The 'Polotsk — Youth Capital of the Republic of Belarus 2017' Republican holiday gathered thousands of guests from around the country, including numerous foreign tourists. Celebrations marked the transfer of the honorary title to the city, from Baranovichi. Celebrations were evident all around the city: at St. Sophia's Cathedral, at Boris' stone, at the Jesuit Collegium, at the Lutheran Church, at monuments to Vseslav the Magician, Francysk Skaryna, and the letter 'Ў', and at St. Yevfrosiniya's Monastery. Every street was alive with excitement.



Guests had much to see, with Polotsk-Steklovolokno's Palace of Culture hosting the opening ceremony of the holiday. The symbolic title of 'youth capital' was transferred from Baranovichi to Polotsk, and young entrepreneurs and scientists from the Vitebsk Region received awards. Moreover, the 'Keeping the Theme: Recharge!' youth project was launched.

Dozens of interesting projects for young boys and girls have begun in the Polotsk District, while the 'Together We Are Belarus!' forum has gathered members of educational institutions, as well as those from enterprises and organisations around the city and the country, suggesting creative ideas. Polotsk will be a major venue for campaigns through 2017.

► Here's a fine how-do-you-do! The first year of school — from 5 years old

Deputies change regulations of admission to schools

Today 98 percent of Belarusian children go to an educational institution from 6 years old. Since September 1st, it will become possible to accept a child in school at the age of 5. It could be earlier, but permission of the Ministry of Education was first required.

On the one hand, it has become easier for gifted children who are ahead of their age in mental and physical development. On the other hand, is it right to take away childhood from a child? This question has caused serious debate. The Chairman of the Standing Commission of the House of Representatives of the National

Assembly on Education, Culture and Science, Igor Marzalyuk, considers people's fears ill-founded, "Many have not paid attention to the keywords — on the wishes of the parents, instead of obligatory. Though in my opinion as a parent: it is still too early to take a child to school at such an age."

Since January 20th, parents' committees in kindergartens and schools have been forbidden to collect money from parents for repair and other economic needs. Any donations must be voluntary and can be received only on account of the educational institution. Nobody has the right to define the amount or to demand payment receipts from parents for making a report.

There are no queues for child care places in kindergartens even in the capital. The state provides a place in preschool institutions for each child. Even if it is not always near the house, but one-two bus stops away — it is still obligatory. Soon each child could go to kindergarten 'within walking distance'.

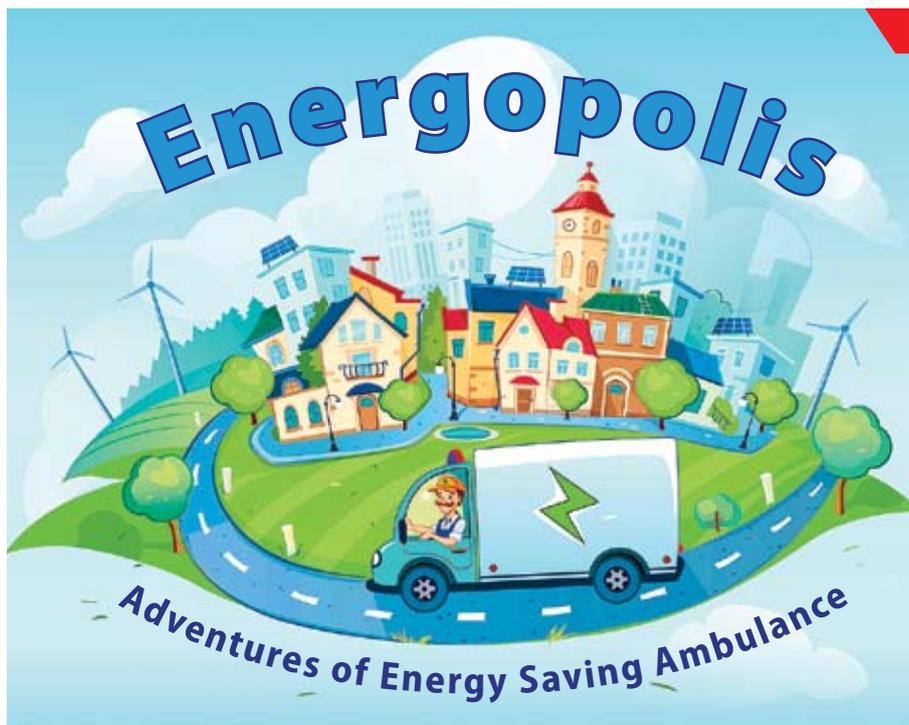


► Parade of best qualities

Among the remarkable events dedicated to the centenary of the Belarusian police was a solemn parade in Minsk's Oktyabrskaya Square

The procession featured 1,200 military from the Interior Ministry, accompanied by a column of old and modern vehicles. Army parades always look the same but the situation differs when it comes to a police parade — organised for the first time in Belarus but easily rivalling that of the Armed Forces. The President addressed parade members and, accordingly, all staff of the Interior Ministry. The Commander-in-Chief is convinced that the Belarusian police force fully meets its obligations and duties.

"Internal affairs bodies have gained recognition among the Belarusian people — for their determination, dedication and strength of spirit; despite danger, you protect the Belarusian nation. In Belarus, we're proud of everyone who protects the esprit de corps — being a model of personal honesty and commitment to principles. We appreciate true professionals worthily performing their duty. You aim to embody the best human qualities: responsibility, courage and readiness to help at any moment. I'm convinced that the Interior Ministry's military personnel will efficiently solve all tasks and serve the Motherland with honour," he said.


Dividends from the project:

- The EU funded project, implemented by the UNDP, has helped Belarusian educational institutions to save more than Br158,000;
- Around 2,000 children are now studying in more comfortable environment;
- The consumption of heat energy by four pilot facilities has reduced by 45 percent and that of electricity by 43 percent within six months since the launch of energy-efficient technologies;
- The project has equipped educational institutions with the latest technologies, while bringing the idea of energy efficiency to a wide audience of children and adults.

Amusing formula

Major project aiming to promote energy-efficient programmes concludes successfully

The project, launched in 2013, has been funded by the European Union and implemented by the UNDP, while the Department of Energy Efficiency under the State Standardisation Committee of the Republic Committee has acted as the national executive agency. Four years ago, energy audits were conducted at twenty-seven educational institutions across the Minsk, Viciebsk and Hrodna regions. That allowed to indicate the need to modernize buildings and equipment, to improve insulation and retention of heat. Based on a contest of initiatives, and taking into account the energy audit, four pilot projects were selected for funding: secondary

school #4 (Dziaržynsk), kindergarten #6 (Ašmiany), kindergarten #45 (Hrodna), and Viciebsk's M.F. Shmyryev State Vocational Engineering College.

The project has enabled a whole range of energy-saving measures, including wall and roof insulation, double-glazed windows, and energy-efficient lighting systems. Moreover, innovative solar panels heat water, reducing the consumption of electricity. There are also heat recovery ventilation systems that enhance thermal resistance and thus reduce heat loss.

'Smart' energy-efficient technologies are gaining popularity in Belarus, enabling pilot facilities to save more than Br158,000 in six months since the launch of the equipment, and a thousand gigacalories of heat energy, reducing its consumption almost twice. Electricity consumption was cut down by 43 percent; 75,500kWh have been saved, on average, per educational institution.



of energy saving

■ **Andrea Wiktorin, the Head of the EU Delegation in Belarus:** *These projects are especially close to my heart. As a teacher by profession, I attach great importance to supporting young people and students. I have visited the facilities and have seen how wonderful the improvements are. We are setting an example in energy efficiency and saving. It is very important for the European Union to use resources wisely, so we are delighted with our collaboration on this project*

Technical aspects have been only one component in this multi-faceted project. Raising awareness is just as vital, as is strengthening the potential of local executive and regulatory structures in conducting training events. The project has encouraged the involvement of local residents in helping realise energy-efficiency, training courses on energy saving have been launched within educational institutions.

The project began its information activities by organising thematic presentations for representatives of executive and regulatory bodies, and for local initiative groups, discussing main goals and tasks, with modern technologies

presented. Participants were able to learn about national priorities in the sphere of energy efficiency and Belarusian experience of launching innovative technologies in this area.

The seminars were attended by around a hundred representatives of local authorities and interested groups, who enhanced their level of knowledge about the potential benefits of the project, the use of energy-saving technologies and renewable energy sources.

The project has included a cycle of training events for teachers, with improved methods of passing along knowledge and engagement on energy-saving issues.

A guidance manual entitled 'Energy Efficiency in Schools: Time to Act!' has also been released, it was compiled by educational employees who took part in the training seminars in 2014 and 2015.

Teachers are now passing along their knowledge in the sphere of energy efficiency, and applying modern technologies from pilot projects and extra-curricular training courses.

The information campaign within the project has included both traditional and creative approaches, such as organising a drawing contest, entitled 'Draw the Green School of the Future'; four Belarusian cities took part within an eco-festival financed by the EU. Meanwhile, Novogrudok presented its 'Energopolis'



Andrea Wiktorin, Head of the European Union in Belarus, is getting acquainted with the promo-materials at the Eco-Festival in Navahrudak

table game, the Head of the EU Delegation to Belarus, Andrea Wiktorin, attended the presentation. The pilot institutions also joined the ‘UN 70 Belarus Express for SDGs’ and ‘Inclusive Belarus’ information campaigns.

■ **Ekaterina Paniklova, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative:** *Sustainable Development Goal 7, on ‘Affordable and Clean Energy’, relies on achieving energy-efficiency, and Belarus is doing everything it can to achieve this by 2030. I’d like to note the considerable contribution made by the teaching staff, and that of the UNDP team, in the successful modernisation of educational establishments*

In 2016, all of the project’s pilot facilities took part in the EU’s Sustainable Energy Week, the organisation of it coincided with the visit of the UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative to Belarus, Sanaka Samarasinha. He visited M.F. Shmyryev State Vocational Engineering College in Viciebsk and saw the new improvements, as well as the events conducted as part of the Sustainable Energy Week. Mr. Samarasinha noted that the project team and the administration of the college had done a great job.

Since its implementation, the project has annually joined the Republican Contest on Energy Saving, the ‘Energy Marathon’ organised by the Education Ministry of the Republic of Belarus and the State Committee on Standardisation, under the Department for Energy Efficiency.

M.F. Shmyryev State Vocational Engineering College has won the contest many times, while in 2015, the kinder-

garten #45, from Hrodna, was awarded a second degree diploma at the contest’s regional stage, in the nomination ‘Cultural and Spectacular Events Promoting Efficient Use of Energy Resources’. The award was granted for their theatrical performance, ‘How Kolobok Found More Ways to Save Energy’. The energy-saving system installed at the secondary school #4, in Dziarżynsk, was recognised as the best in the Minsk Region, allowing the school to represent the region at the Republican ‘Energy Marathon-2016’ contest.

Pilot sites have achieved major improvements, often at their own initiative, promoting energy saving and energy efficiency, and a ‘green’ way of life. They’ve organised dozens of interesting campaigns and contests, alongside with concerts and performances. Each educational institution has tried to find its own way of implementing the initiative, using original ideas. For instance, the pilot site in Ašmiany organised a trip for preschool teachers from the Lithuanian Republic, who highly praised the work of their Belarusian colleagues in promoting energy-efficiency in everyday life.

■ **Mikhail Malashenko, Director of the Department of Energy Efficiency:** *I’d like to congratulate everyone on taking the first steps in developing this project. What we’ve achieved is only the tip of the iceberg. The most important is what’s to come: the harvest of our first seeds planted in the hearts and minds of our pupils, with the hope that these will grow throughout their whole life. I’d like to thank once again the EU and the UNDP for assistance in promoting awareness among our youngsters.*



Viciebsk College traditionally works with high technologies and its enthusiasts have created several computer games, including the 'Savers' game. This helps participants acquire knowledge of energy saving while encouraging energy-efficient behaviour for real-life situations.

The pilot project in Dziaržynsk organised a large-scale festival of teaching ideas, called 'On the Way to Saving', as well as a 'green' crew. The local school took part in the Republican 'Green Blogs' contest and won in the 'Most Energy Efficient Team' nomination, being awarded a trip to Lithuania.

The concept of 'Energy Saving Ambulance' is the calling card of the Energy Efficiency in Schools project. As part of the project, five animated social video ads have been created, they are describing energy-efficient technologies launched by the project in a playful manner. They were broadcast on Belarusian TV channels and one was ranked third at the 'Adnak' National Advertising Festival, for the 'Best Social Video'. The 'Energopolis' table game was created from its basis, taking players on an adventure through an energy-efficient city boasting all existing 'green' technologies.

As part of the 'Energy Saving Ambulance' concept, two colouring books for pre-school children and two comics for schoolchildren have been released, proving to be so popular that they've been re-published several times, all in the Belarusian language.

Undoubtedly, the project's information campaign has laid the foundation to motivate targeted groups in better energy efficiency behaviour. No doubt, there will be further independent measures in this direction, at local level.

Meanwhile, the pilot sites demonstrate a comprehensive approach towards energy-efficient measures and the launch of 'green' technologies, enabling us to change the outlook of children, their parents, teaching staff and the local community.

By Vladimir **Mikhailov**



Living in agreement is a good tradition



Representatives of various nationalities and religions have been living in Belarus for a long time, without conflict. Valuable traditions of tolerance, mutual respect, and interest in others' faiths, customs, traditions, and culture are evident. Belarusian experts have been exploring our 'experience of peace and harmony'.

Our homeland is the place of our birth

In songs, poems and paintings, Belarusians are often portrayed as being blonde-haired and blue-eyed. Yet, there are some dark-haired and dark-eyed people among us, whose features resemble those of people from the East. The reason is clear: Belarus is a multinational country inhabited by representatives of more than 140 nationalities and 26 confessions. Moreover, representatives of a number of nationalities (Lithuanians, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, and Jews) have lived here for centuries. They have every right

to call Belarus the land of their ancestors, since we can say that our homeland is the place where we are born.

Our ancestors travelled the globe, settling in new places, and, even, overseas. Many descendants of indigenous Belarusians now live in Latin America, the US, Canada, and Australia, not to mention Western Europe, as well as across the vast space of Russian Siberia, where Belarusians were initially exiled but, later, went of their own will.

International families are not rare for Belarus





Representatives of various nations after planting forest in Ivenets

Representatives
of more than
140
nationalities
and **26** confessions
live on the territory
of Belarus

Belarus sent its sons and daughters into the world and accepted foreigners into its lands. Migration continues today, as is inevitable for a country located at the crossroads of Europe. However, in the Soviet era, natives of Belarus would mainly move within the territory of the USSR. Then, as you know, socialist and communist ideas reigned everywhere and slogans suggesting the unity of proletarians of all countries were highly honoured, with international education dominating schools and universities. The idea of a new community, of Soviet people, was emerging.

Recently, I come across offensive opinions online, suggesting that the Soviet regime 'created Belarusians', that Belarusian statehood and language did not exist until the 1920s, under the Bolsheviks. These 'historians' should refer to the work of Professor Yefim Karsky, whose three-volume edition, entitled 'The Belarusians' was published before the revolution, in 1903-1916. At that time, the Soviet Union was non-existent and the Bolsheviks were not yet in power. Experts call this study an encyclopedia of Be-

larusians. Moreover, they regard it as the highest achievement of European Slavic science of the late 19th and early 20th century. What's it about? If we cite what's written online, it's based on an in-depth, comprehensive, comparative historical analysis of major evidence. Yefim Karsky proved that the Belarusian ethos existed in space and time as a national entity with a unique culture and language. In 'The Belarusians', Karsky considers the ethnogenesis of Belarusians at a high level, coming to the conclusion that they were an indigenous population, which formed as a separate ethnic group from the 13th to the 15th century.

Both Tatars and Jews

Belarusians' folk memory is also an archive of our identity, amidst our residence among a diverse population. We have lived in unity, without inter-ethnic disputes. Doctor of Philological Sciences Vasily Shur, who interviewed residents of his native village of Stodolichi, in the Lelchitsy District of the Gomel Region, refers to this in his essays on local history. In his 'There was Such a Village' local history work [[http://www.](http://www.maladost.lim.by/byla-takaya-veska)

[maladost.lim.by/byla-takaya-veska](http://www.maladost.lim.by/byla-takaya-veska)], he provides the local explanation of the origin of the surname Kolesnik. He writes, "Among the founders of Stodolichi, there were no blacksmiths or carpenters. However, there is a Tatarian, retired from the army and returning to the Crimea with various stolen treasures and numerous prisoners. Another version states that he was a prisoner who escaped the Tatars, and was a good blacksmith, who artfully produced and fixed axes, scythes, knives, and wheels. Because of this, he was given the nickname Kolesnik (the Russian for wheel being 'koleso'). Stodolichi has many people with this surname."

He claims that diverse interactions occurred between Belarusians and Tatars, particularly the Crimean Tatars, referring to various historical documents. Stodolichi dwellers say that some Tatars settled in the nearby village of Lipliany, and that its new residents mingled with the local population, so that their descendents 'display the features of the Mongol race, in face, eyes, and hair'.

If you've visited Belarusian Polesie, in the south of the country, especially

the regions close to the Pripyat River, you've probably noticed that there are many people with dark hair. Vasily Shur states that, from 1474 to 1569, Crimean Tatars made seventy-five raids on the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: the ancient state of our ancestors. They travelled through Belarus, returning to the Crimea via the Polisie marshes.

It's believed that the first great victory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania over the Crimean Tatars occurred in 1506, during the famous Battle of Kletsk, on the Lan River (today, near the town of Kletsk, in the Minsk Region). Grand Duchy of Lithuania troops, led by Duke Mikhail Glin-sky, battled 12,000-13,000 invaders, inflicting heavy losses on their enemies and taking captives in Polesie and in the territory of Ukraine, while releasing about 40,000 of their countrymen.

As the Crimean khan refused to pay for the release of his people, they eventually settled on our lands, and Tatars still live close to the town of Kletsk, in such villages as Orda and Yaksha (words of Tatar origin). Some Crimean people, says Vasily Shur, settled in southern Polesie, especially near the towns of Turov, David-Gorodok and Stolin, as local surnames make clear: But-Gusaim, Besan, Kurash, Buglak, Konchak, Kardash and Kabak.

Jewish families lived in larger towns in the south of Belarus, such as ancient Turov, Rechitsa, Mozyr, Lelchitsy and Gomel, and nearby, before World War II. Local historians note that 20th century events led to many moving to Israel and, as we know, most fell victim to the Fascist invaders in 1941 and 1942. More than seven hundred residents of Lelchitsy and neighbouring villages were killed in those years.

Vasily Shur, in his history of Stodolichi, mentions the many Jewish families living there and across the Mozyr District, where they 'were perceived as an integral part of the



In the Folk Crafts Centre in Ivenets

The experience of harmonious and conflict-free living in Belarus by representatives of various nationalities and religions is translated to other countries and public communities beautifully, through public diplomacy

indigenous local population, engaged in agriculture, and working as cobblers, blacksmiths, and merchants'. He also writes about Meleshkovichi, located halfway between Mozyr and Stodolichi, saying: 'A few Jewish families lived and worked there before the war. Meanwhile, Jewish families comprised the majority of Mozyr and Lelchitsy residents.'

People's Artist Mikhail Finberg is descended from Jewish cobblers from Meleshkovichi; both his father and grandfather shared this profession. Prof. Finberg, a State Prize winner of Belarus, heads the National Academic Orchestra of Symphonic and Popular Music of Belarus.

Dialogue leads to agreement

Today, many Western European states are heavily investing in science, economy, and new technologies. Scientific and technical progress is viewed by many as a means to raise standards of living. However, economic power is not everything. As wise people say, 'ideas rule the world'. The mind and the soul need to be in harmony, with spirituality, morality, and shared culture as important as commercial success. We haven't forgotten the 1930s plague of Europe, when powerful and highly educated Germany created the world's 'brown plague' of Nazism. We must protect ourselves from such anomalies of public consciousness.

Recent events, including the EU's migration crisis, ethnic and religious conflicts, and bloody acts of terrorism in Brussels, Paris, London, Berlin and other European cities, clearly demonstrate that something is going wrong with 'respectable' society. In the wake of a mass influx of refugees from the Middle East, facing difficulties of adaptation, nationalism is raising its ugly head. The 'ghost of Neo-Nazism' is wandering Europe. The lessons of history are hard learnt, and we must not slip into a new catastrophe. We need a balance of ideas, and international aspirations (whether integrational or globalist). We must avoid extremes! Each nation needs to not only respect its roots but remain open to others. Of course, those emigrating into our states need to be ready to adapt but we must all be open to change. To live comfortably, even in a very rich state, you need peace and harmony, as cannot be bought with money. To enjoy peace, people of different nationalities and religions need to co-exist in a friendly manner, as we see at the geographical centre of Europe, in our own Belarus.

How can we learn to live in concord? It's a question every world religion has long debated, as have psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, political

and social scientists, historians, biologists and, even, astrologers.

Last November, representatives of the government and academia, as well as leaders of ethno-cultural associations, gathered at the Victoria Olymp Hotel's Barcelona Conference Room, in Minsk, to share their experience of creating harmonious social co-existence. There were no disagreements or criticisms expressed during the round table on 'The Role and Place of National Associations in Conserving and Consolidating Peace and Harmony in the Republic of Belarus'. Wise and considered dialogue is highly valued, being an important feature of Belarusian mentality, influencing the minds of all nationalities living in Belarus.

Activists of Armenian, Greek, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Jewish and other diasporas and international associations chatted about the activities of various ethnic communities in Belarus. In particular, the Chairman of the Minsk City Armenian 'Hayastan' Cultural and Educational Society, Georgy Yeghiazaryan, said, "We don't feel like strangers here. We work for the benefit of the Belarusian state, contributing to strengthening peace and inter-ethnic harmony in our country."

A native of the Ostrovets District (Grodno Region), and Lithuanian by nationality, Alfonsas Augulis was the first Lithuanian Ambassador to Belarus and now heads the international public organisation Gerveciu Club. He advises colleagues to preserve their national customs, while remembering that they live in Belarus and, therefore, should respect its laws.

Yevgenia Yefimova, Chairwoman of Soligorsk Jewish Association, shares her opinion on why the round table was so businesslike and constructive, saying, "It's good that the national associations of Belarus are headed by reliable leaders, rather than extremists. These people adequately assess both the boundaries and potential of civil society, in building truly civilised ethno-confessional relations. Showing prudence and wisdom, they never stoop to playing on fears. Having a good relationship with them, I'm convinced of this."

According to Ms. Yefimova, it's common for husband and wife to be of different nationalities, proving that Belarus is a highly cultured and tolerant society, formed over many centuries. She notes, "Such families prevail in our community. Meanwhile, although I've



Japanese Masako Tatsumi (R) in Yanka Kupala's homeland, in Vyazyinka. She lives in Minsk and translates the poet's verses into Japanese

been leading the organisation for quite some time, I've never heard of conflict between spouses because of participation in public affairs. The secret, I think, is simple: it lies in the social climate: in the inter-ethnic situation called the 'United Nation of Belarus', as has been built on Belarusian land for centuries and is now ably supported by the authorities of Belarus."

Earth without dispute or conflict

It's no secret that many disputes, conflicts and, even, wars arise on religious or ethnic grounds, as Leonid Gulyako, Commissioner for Religions and Nationalities, stresses. The well-known Belarusian official believes it's vital to retain the stable ethno-confessional situation evident in Belarus. Mr. Gulyako has been in office for more than a decade and has never heard anyone in Belarus complain of feeling uncomfortable because of the presence of another religion. A state servant, he believes that we have this situation thanks to daily hard work at all levels of government, and as a result of state policy. Last year, speaking at the visiting college of the Commissioner's Office,

he emphasised that all the tenets prescribed in the Constitution and other laws concerning religion and religious issues are working effectively in Belarus. Meanwhile Belarus, he said, is the only European country providing free land for the construction of houses of worship of any confession.

At the round table, the Commissioner unit was represented by the Head of the Department for Affairs of Nationalities and Legal Work, Alexander Sosnovich. He shared an interesting experience, speaking about the 'Belarus Multinational' international project, that involves artists from various nationalities representing amateur artistic groups from Belarus: activists as well as scientists from the Centre for Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus. Enthusiasts, with the support of the Commissioner's Office, Belarusian diplomatic missions and Belarusian activists abroad, have traveled to various countries to give concerts, including Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Finland, Ukraine, and Moldova. Last year, they had unforgettable trips to Austria and Italy. According to Mr. Sosnovich, such trips encourage

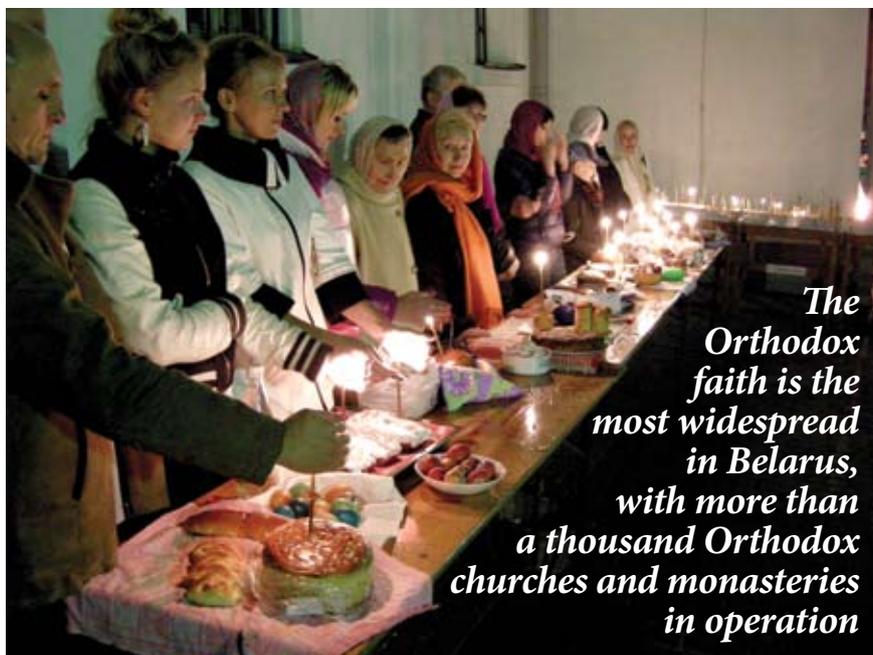
friendly cultural relations and stimulate mutually beneficial international initiatives, including those relating to trade and investment. The experience of harmonious and conflict-free living in Belarus by representatives of various nationalities and religions is translated to other countries and public communities beautifully, through public diplomacy.

The Republican Centre for National Cultures, under the Ministry for Culture, works closely with national-cultural associations at state level, as its Director, Olga Antonenko, told the roundtable. You can read our interview with her in 'Belarus' Magazine edition 12, from 2016: 'A Place where Talented People Meet'.

According to lawyers and researchers

Preservation and strengthening of peace and accord in society requires considerable effort. The aforementioned roundtable was jointly organised by the Ministry for Justice and the Commissioner for Religions and Nationalities, and was attended by activists, and representatives of more than thirty national public associations registered in Belarus. The press release distributed by the Ministry for Justice on the eve of the event stated: "In accordance with the Concept of National Security of the Republic of Belarus, approved by Presidential Decree No. 575, of November 9th, 2010, ensuring harmonious development of interethnic and interfaith relations, is of fundamental national interest in the social sphere."

Justice Minister Oleg Slizhevsky, speaking at the round table, emphasised that, of the country's 2,710 public associations, 113 unite representatives of national minorities. He believes that dialogue between the state and civil society helps identify problems, for timely solution. According to Mr. Slizhevsky, it's advantageous to exchange opinions and ideas on pressing issues relating to co-existence of people of various nationalities living within Belarus.



The Orthodox faith is the most widespread in Belarus, with more than a thousand Orthodox churches and monasteries in operation

Christian values unite



Young artists and scene designers Yekaterina Shimanovich and Sergey Ashucha

In songs, poems and paintings, Belarusians are often portrayed as being blonde-haired and blue-eyed. Yet, there are some dark-haired and dark-eyed people among us, whose features resemble those of people from the East. The reason is clear: Belarus is a multinational country

Round table participants were very interested to hear Candidate of Historical Sciences Sergey Gruntov discussing the role of national-cultural associations in preserving and strengthening traditions of tolerance in Belarus. Mr. Gruntov works as a researcher for the Department for Nations Studies, at the Centre for Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature, under the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus.

The high level of tolerance in Belarusian society has been known since the Middle Ages, with various nationalities living in Belarus for a long time without conflict, thanks to centuries-old efforts by individuals and all society. In particular, the Tatars have been living in Belarus since the 15th century: local princes invited them for service as outstanding military men. Even earlier, Jewish people appeared: in 1388, Grand Duke Vytautas awarded the privilege of settling in a number of cities of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, including in Brest. In this way, Jewish people received refuge from persecution, from the pogroms of Central Europe, while the Grand Duchy of Lithuania received opportunities for intensive development of trade and crafts. Gradually,

step by step, representatives of various religions and nationalities learned to live together within Belarusian lands. Today, using the language of scholars, there is 'no segregation by ethnicity'.

Such conclusions and generalisations are based on scientific fact. Sergey Gruntov tells us that the National Academy's Institute of Arts, Ethnography and Folklore has been researching the various cultures of Belarus since its foundation, in 1957. Meanwhile, in the 1920s and 1930s, the Belarusian Institute of Culture had Polish and Jewish divisions, whose employees studied the material and spiritual culture of these nationalities and conducted field studies. The results were collated in a 13-volume edition, entitled 'Belarus', with the authors granted the 'For Spiritual Revival' Award. Also, the 'Belarusians. Ethnic Geography. Demographics. Diaspora. Confessions' (1996) atlas was released.

After fundamental work was completed in the 2000s, the scientific community began to form a new understanding of the ethnic life of Belarus and its components. Researchers have paid more attention to the problem of migration and small ethnic groups.

The latter, says Sergey Gruntov, have become increasingly prominent in the cultural, economic and social life of Belarus, which means they deserve attention. The 'Who Lives in Belarus' in-depth study and 'Modern Ethno-cultural Processes in the Regions of Belarus' series have been authored by the abovementioned experts, from the Nations Study Department.

This series, Mr. Gruntov says, investigates the ethnic culture of Belarusians and explores ethnic groups formed relatively recently as communities within the ethnic profile of Belarus. "Many years of research prove the importance of traditions of tolerance in maintaining peace and harmony among ethnic groups that have historically co-existed in Belarus", emphasises the researcher. "Traditions of tolerance are becoming particularly important as the number of ethnic groups increase and the country is becoming more open to global processes."

The website of the Ministry for Justice presents the texts and theses of round table participants, and Belarus is ready to share its valuable experience of inter-ethnic peace with all who need it.

By Ivan **Zhdanovich**

How to become a laureate

Some might think that those nominated for the State Prizes in Literature, Art and Architecture are ambitious but, in truth, their focus is on their art. Their work is their vocation: their joy that of artistic self-realisation. 'Grey Legend', at the National Bolshoi Opera Theatre of Belarus, offers the opportunity to demonstrate talent, while guiding the nation towards the true temple of art.

Vladimir Gridyushko, theatre director:

I'm delighted that the preparatory committee — which chooses applicants for this prestigious state award — has recognised our performance. 'Grey Legend' is a major cultural project, a visual and musical treasure, with an historical theme, taking place in the 17th century, in Belarus, near Mogilev. The libretto was written by Belarusian Vladimir Korotkevich, and composed by People's Artiste Dmitry Smolsky, a laureate of the State Award of Belarus. The opera was first staged in 1978 and, in September 2012, was revived. In this time of strengthening the statehood of sovereign Belarus, 'Grey Legend' is inspiring public interest in our history and culture, generating patriotism. I'm convinced that this highly professional and spectacular production deserves inclusion into the golden fund of modern theatrical art.

The opera is performed in good Belarusian language, as Vladimir Korotkevich knew perfectly, and features top performers. It's a great pleasure for me to talk about its main actors, who have won State Prizes in Literature, Art and Architecture: Honoured Artistes of

Belarus Oksana Volkova (playing Lyubka) and Stanislav Trifonov



of Belarus Oksana Volkova (playing Lyubka) and Stanislav Trifonov (Kizgailo), and People's Artistes Anastasia Moskvina (Irina) and Sergey Frankovsky (Roman). Without them, the staging wouldn't be as spectacular or emotional. They are truly great artistes.

Stanislav Trifonov's velvety, dramatic baritone brings charisma to his Kizgailo while Anastasia Moskvina's Irina is an example of female devotion. Her crystal-silver voice expresses the inner beauty of her character. Leading tenor Sergey Frankovsky creates the image of a hero who is executed for the sake of his patriotism, playing nobleman Roman Rokutovich. He and Irina are symbols of Belarus, personifying its heart and soul. Meanwhile, Lyubka (brilliantly performed by Oksana Volkova) is the catalyst bringing war. Opera lovers will enjoy not only her beautiful mezzo-soprano, with its wide range, but her sympathetic acting skills, evoking a woman suffering from unrequited love.



Scene from 'Grey Legend' performance

Honoured Artistes of Belarus Oksana Volkova and Stanislav Trifonov, People's Artistes of Belarus Anastasia Moskvina and Sergey Frankovsky, a laureate of the Special Prize of the President of Belarus to Figures of Culture and Art and the chief artist of the Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre Alexander Kostyuchenko, join People's Artiste of Belarus and chief choirmaster Nina Lomanovich in being nominated for the State Prize of Belarus in Literature, Art and Architecture

Alexander Kostyuchenko, who has created the sets for 'Grey Legend', deserves special mention for his achievement. He is a vital force behind the Bolshoi Theatre, and a holder of the Francysk Skaryna Medal, as well as being a laureate of the special prizes of the President of Belarus to figures of culture and art. By his side, People's Artiste of Belarus Nina Lomanovich, the choral-director of the Bolshoi Theatre, has

brought to life a world of tycoons, with ever changing sets and extensive choral scenes, creating a cinematic effect.

The artistic public and critics have praised the performance, as have foreign and Belarusian media, in print and online. Russian musical critic Alexander Matusевич has written of 'Grey Legend': 'This is a real success for the theatre: a rare example of opera, musical and theatrical art integrated in

harmony. It's evident that much skill, mastery and soul have been invested, as is worthy of national Belarusian opera. Only this staging would have been suitable'.

Since its premiere, the 'Grey Legend' has been staged sixteen times, attended by over 10,000 people.

Below, we hear from the leading actors and from the director behind the staging.

Oksana Volkova:

'Grey Legend' is a wonderful opera. It has substance, and I feel a special love for it, probably because it's sung in Belarusian. Its music is very beautiful and the sets are wonderful. It differs significantly from what we're used to. I'm proud that this is our 'Belarusian product'.

Lyubka (performed by Oksana Volkova) is complex and contradictory, being arrogant, proud, somewhat rigid and, even, malicious. She is devoted to the love which brings her suffering. Lyubka expresses the tragedy of duality, lov-

ing Roman while pitying Kizgailo. Ms. Volkova plays Lyubka convincingly, with expressive solo arias, and duets with Kizgailo and Roman. Her scene with Irina, in a prison, emulates Shakespeare's emotionality.

As Russian theatrical critic Alexander Matusевич admits, "Passionate Pani Lyubka, as interpreted by international star Oksana Volkova, is ruthless and acts with spite." Her ill-considered actions lead to war, making her a flower of evil: domineering and utterly ruthless, as well as capricious and cunning, she is multifaceted. While she is 'demonic' in her

behaviour, we also pity her, for enduring the burden of unrequited love. Lyubka's elegant, European-style singing is complimented by her physical beauty, making her power easy to believe, such that we are amazed that she fails to achieve her goals.

Anastasia Moskvina:

I love singing in Belarusian, as it's our native language, our Belarusian history. When I'm singing, I feel a deep sense of pride in my country. It's an honour for me to take part in this performance.

Roman's lover — the opera's leading character — radiates purity and inner light, combining trembling feeling and tenderness in the opening scenes, and protest against oppressors who embody evil, sowing grief. Ms. Moskvina's ability to show various emotions is incredible, and her vocal skills are wonderful, in tone and emotionality. She takes audiences along with her. Musically and scenically, Irina is light and clean, determined, courageous and sympathetic. From the first scenes, we know that drama is afoot, as her incredible beauty and strength attracts Roman and forces him to take her part. Ms. Moskvina's voice is resolute and firm, even in her duet with Lyubka. Her lyrics are luminous and sincere, while also showing a natural impulsiveness.

Critics have said: 'Ms. Moskvina's beautiful voice is light and iridescent, creating the image of an innocent soul stubbornly opposing the onslaught of her violent rival'. Her scene in prison is convincing and she achieves high tragedy in the final scene, where Irina accepts execution rather than betray her love. The character is tender and loving while being strong minded. The role is one of the most memorable for Ms. Moskvina, as Irina symbolises the Belarusian ideal: a woman who courageously suffers for the sake of love.



Oksana Volkova plays Lyubka

■ Oksana Volkova has been with the theatre troupe since 2002, performing such roles as Olga and Polina (in 'Eugene Onegin', and 'The Queen of Spades', by Piotr Tchaikovsky), Konchakovna (in 'Prince Igor', by Alexander Borodin), Lyubasha (in the 'Tsar's Bride', by Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov), Amneris (in 'Aida', by Giuseppe Verdi), and Carmen (in Georges Bizet's opera).



Anastasia
Moskvina —
Irina

■ Anastasia Moskvina has been a member of the Belarusian opera company since 2002, performing such parts as Leonora, the Priestess, and Anna (in 'Il trovatore', 'Aida', and 'Nabucco', by G. Verdi), Nelly, Lauretta, and Mimi (in 'Gianni Schicchi', and 'La Boheme', by G. Puccini), Lisa (in Tchaikovsky's 'Queen of Spades'), and Zemfira (in 'Aleko', by S. Rachmaninoff).

Stanislav Trifonov:

It was easy for me to appear in this production. I'm grateful to my colleagues and the whole troupe. In my opinion, the second staging of Grey Legend is more interesting, despite being shorter. Rather than being compromised, events move more quickly, so audiences don't have time to become bored.

Kizgailo, in 'Grey Legend', is unusually complex, such that we should admire the composer having found

musical expression for his rich feelings: intense love and passion, and burning pain at the thought of the sufferings of his native land. Mr. Trifonov's character suffers from contradictions. Kizgailo understands the shame of his deed but, as a real nobleman, pursues his moral path to the end, dying in battle from Roman's hand. We see his love for his wife and his desire to keep his word to his best friend, his transition to another faith and his patriotic guilt, as well as jealousy over Lyubka and his act of betrayal, his doubts and his tragic confusion.

From first appearing on stage, through to the finale, Mr. Trifonov cuts a dynamic figure, transforming from a charming member of the gentry to a tragic hero. He performs the *mise-en-scenes* perfectly, with dramatic singing and a soulful performance. His aria of 'My Land, Don't Forsake Me' is, without exaggeration, worthy of being included in the golden fund of Belarusian opera. As Mr. Matusevich believes, "Kizgailo, played by Stanislav Trifonov, is worthy of being a top 10 hit. Incredibly, handsome, Mr. Trifonov's mere presence on stage attracts the audience's attention. We hear the sensuality in his voice, and his passion. The romantic pathos of 'Grey Legend' comes naturally to Mr. Trifonov, making his Kizgailo bright and memorable, evoking sympathy."



Stanislav
Trifonov —
Kizgailo

■ Stanislav Trifonov has been a soloist with the Bolshoi Theatre of Belarus since 2007. In that short period of time, he has become a leading soloist, performing the best baritone opera parts: Count di Luna, Nabucco, and Georges Germont (in Verdi's 'Il trovatore', 'Nabucco', and 'La Traviata'), Escamillo (in Bizet's 'Carmen'), Marcel, and Scarpia (in Puccini's 'La Boheme' and 'Tosca'), Gryaznov (in Rimsky-Korsakov's 'Tsar's Bride'), and the title role in Wagner's 'The Flying Dutchman'.

Nina Lomanovich:

I'm so happy that this emotionally intense opera, by a modern Belarusian composer, has joined the Bolshoi Theatre's repertoire. Dmitry Smolsky deserves recognition. 'Grey Legend' is a creative success for producer Mikhail Pandzhavidze, with amazing battle scenes. I'm happy with the work of the choir too, which is used to exemplary effect, in all respects.

The choir of the 'Grey Legend' plays an extremely important role, both dramatically and vocally. Each member of the choir takes their participation seriously, the material being complex and compelling. The mise-en-scène requires the choir to sing with their backs to the conductor, as well as lying down with heads thrown back, both in motion and during a sword fight. They are required to move a great deal, while participating in battle scenes, and cope well with the task, while still singing in unison, and will obvious emotion, strong and convincing. They are clearly well rehearsed, arousing admiration. They perform with the necessary degree of exaltation, and are interested, alive and fresh, creating complex characters.

Sergey Frankovsky:

My hero is the most noble and respected person in the land: a knight, covered in glory. By his code of honour, every generation should multiply the glory of his ancestors through his actions. Roman is a leader, a warrior, a man who does not accept any class boundaries or prejudices: a person who will stop at nothing to be with his beloved.

Roman's character is as complex as Kizgailo's. Mr. Frankovsky's wonderful performance surprises not only with wonderful vocals but with great artistry, emotionality and inner impetuosity. His Roman is sincere, fair, invincible and brave, surrounded by a halo of romantic heroism. Incredibly powerful, his dramatic tenor manages all technical difficulties, while revealing his character through such diverse scenes as the 'As heart Aches' aria, his duet with Lyubka, and the tragic, sublime finale. One of the strongest episodes is the duel between Roman and Kizgailo. Performed by Mr. Frankovsky, it's an incredible drama, with depth and loftiness, undercurrents and a tragic atmosphere.



Sergey Frankovsky in the role of Roman

■ It's hardly possible to imagine the theatre without Sergey Frankovsky, who is believed to be the best Belarusian performer of Verdi's music. Among his most memorable roles, besides his Roman (in 'Grey Legend'), is Hermann (in 'Queen of Spades'), Jose (in 'Carmen'), Canio (in 'Pagliacci') and Ismaele (in 'Nabucco'). He has also sung the leading tenor in Mozart's 'Requiem' and that of Verdi.



Nina Lomanovich is pleased to take part in press conferences (second to the left)

■ Nina Lomanovich has been chief choirmaster since 1993, and is known as a bright conductor and an outstanding organiser. The theatre's choir, a highly professional team with unique creativity, is her brainchild.

Alexander Kostyuchenko:

For our sets, I went to view the ruins of Ruzhany Castle to soak up the atmosphere, as well as Mir Castle and Nesvizh. Our sets aim to create a 'mirage', as if the legend has come to life, filled with suffering, blood and pain, as well as the eternal values of purity and faithful love. The performance tells the story of the former greatness of the nobility, corroded by the rust of internal and external conflict.

I wanted to convey timeless themes through 'Grey Legend': that we exist as a single nation, with our own spiritual identity, as we see in the stories of saints Peter and Fevronia. The main characters' love



symbolises supreme spirituality, purifying, and bringing light. It's no surprise that it's a moving performance. Love unites Roman and Irina and remains, despite all difficulties, which is worthy of praise. I see this as the enduring theme of 'Grey Legend': the deeply Christian doctrine that only by loving others can we save ourselves.

Alexander Kostyuchenko's vision makes this performance unique, with the image of suffering Belarus personified by the martyr-lovers: Roman without hands and blind Irina. Their plight resembles that of Orthodox martyrs Peter and Fevronia. The romantic and historical aspects of the story echo those religious and spiritual. Mr. Kostyuchenko views the choral pieces of the second act as among the most powerful, accompanying death, executions, and

a set which portrays a land overgrown with gallows and dead trees. In the final scene, of Roman and Irina's punishment, we see much crying, gallows, blood, severed hands, blindness and black colours, representing 'dead history'.

At last, we see Irina and Roman entering the shining light of eternity, receiving the hypostases of Peter and Fevronia, within a multi-levelled set, which transforms dynamically and unexpectedly, in cinematic fashion. The forest's hunting scene is replaced by that of Lyubka and Kizgailo's bedchamber, in the majestic, though gloomy, interior of the old castle. Meanwhile, tension is heightened by columns in the bedroom showing 'teeth' and the castle's beacon illuminating the place of punishment, while torches transform into candles, used in prayer for the martyrs.

By Mikhailina **Cherkashina**

The 'Grey Legend' opera was first staged in 1978 and, in September 2012, was revived. In this time of strengthening the statehood of sovereign Belarus, 'Grey Legend' is inspiring public interest in our history and culture, generating patriotism. This highly professional and spectacular production deserves inclusion into the golden fund of modern theatrical art



Alexander Kostyuchenko with one of the layers of the set for 'Grey Legend' performance

■ Alexander Kostyuchenko has been a leading figure with the Bolshoi Theatre of Belarus since 2009, creating sets for such ballets as 'The Circle', by O. Zaletnev, S. Prokofiev's 'Cinderella', R. Wagner's 'Tristan and Isolde', and 'Metamorphoses' by J.S. Bach. He created original sets for Y. Chomodurov's new production of 'Aida', as well as for G. Verdi's 'Nabucco', G. Puccini's 'Tosca', 'Faust' by A.H. Radziwill, and G. Rossini's 'Barber of Seville'.



Composer Vladimir Kondrusevich receives State Prize for outstanding accomplishments in the area of theatre and music art: composing music for the ballet 'Mephisto' and musicals 'Glass of Water', 'Julia', 'Sofia Golshanskaya' and 'Biker'

In space of music

Vladimir Kondrusevich is among those rare personalities who treasure each day as if it were their last, embracing every mood. Vladimir Kondrusevich has composed music for over two hundred performances. He's a great optimist and a hard worker, in all aspects of life. Perhaps this is why happiness and success are his constant companions.

Mr. Kondrusevich has long been on good terms with music. He hears and feels it, he is inspired by it and drinks it... He lives with music, creating unexpected, original works. It seems he always knows what to write about and how to do so, as if the music itself dictates his theme. In the music world, Mr. Kondrusevich is known as an author of operas, symphonies, ballets, oratorios and musicals. He's also worked with filmmakers, on such hits as 'On the Back of a Black Cat', and 'Belye Rosy: Return'. He's authored several cartoons and loves the theatre. As a young man he studied

the piano and guitar, being a fan of 'The Beatles'. He often improvised, which caught the eye of those who invited Mr. Kondrusevich to compose music for performances.

His 'Sun Through Leaves' is a heartfelt love song, which I first heard at an amateur concert, at the Young Spectator's Theatre. Vladimir sometimes filled in for his brother, Pavel, who worked for the theatre's orchestra. Back then, he had enough time, with youth's unrestrained energy. He'd often play his guitar for, and with, friends, staying out all night, having fun, or reading until dawn. He played with 'Pane Bratse' band, to full houses. In the 1970s, rock-n-roll music was extremely popular and he played with a group called 'Beatleman'. To mark a jubilee of 'The Beatles', his band even prepared a solo concert in Polish, thanks to drummer Vitaly Romanov, who was a first-class organiser and sang beautifully in Polish. As Vladimir regrets, he's lost touch. As regards the band, it received a write up in Poland's 'Sztandar Mlodych' (Banner of Youth) newspaper.

Even now, the rhythm of his life is intense; some might say 'mad', but he copes well, stealing time for creativity

by only sleeping four hours a day and rarely taking holidays. He doesn't find it tiresome, having gotten used to being busy. What does he lament? That fewer 'live' instruments are being played, replaced by synthesisers. Moreover, people have less romanticism in their lives, and less creativity. Naturally, he'd love to devote more time to creative pursuits himself.

Years ago, theatres and filmmakers often worked with live instruments, as Vladimir recalls. Jointly with film director Igor Dobrolyubov, they created 'The Weeping of the Quail': a seven-part television drama, with a big orchestra and choir. Some of his favourite directors — Valery Raevsky, Andrey Androsik and Valery Maslyuk — are now dead but they could as easily entertain today's audiences as those of decades ago. However, Vladimir knows we must move with the times.

Mr. Kondrusevich has been creating music for over four decades. I first heard his work at a performance at the Young Spectator's Theatre, when his music was mentioned as being 'especially theatrical'. His scores not only enhance the action but personify its essence, with style, charm and good taste. It's not for noth-

ing that Mr. Kondrusevich is admired for his originality and stunning purity, penetrating each story, and highlighting the events and characters.

I'm always delighted to hear of his success. Not long ago, during President Alexander Lukashenko's visit to the Bolshoi Theatre, he chatted about cinematography with Mr. Kondrusevich. Later came the announcement that Vladimir was being given the State Prize for his contribution to literature, art and architecture. Of course, the award pleased him. Awards do act as an incentive, as we like to be recognised for our efforts. These days, he's exploring the theme of the poet in society: Yanka Kupala, during the time he lived in St. Petersburg; and Sergey Yesenin and Vladimir Mayakovsky (who tragically took their own lives). He has already chosen poems that excite his imagination.

In 2009, I was at the National Art Museum, eager to see one of my favourite paintings by Vitold Byalynitsky-Birulya, which depicts a window opening into a flowering garden. That day, at lunchtime, the museum was almost empty but I suddenly saw Vladimir approaching 'my' picture. He spent quite



'Sofia Golshanskaya' musical.
A scene from performance



Vladimir Kondrusevich's inclination towards virtuosos improvisation began with the guitar

a long time in front of it, before moving on to other exhibits, and I realised that the painting might well influence his composing of music, with its vivid colour palette.

Interviewing him, I failed to ask about that day but it wouldn't surprise me to learn that he caught the spirit of the picture in a future performance. Chatting with Vladimir, he told me of how he studies the past for inspiration. His 'Sofia Golshanskaya' musical, which won the National Theatre Award, is a perfect example. Few may realise, attending the performance at the Musical Academic Theatre that Vladimir tried out six librettists before choosing Yelena Turova. He was adamant that his performers needed to fully enter the atmosphere of the time, taking on the mantle of history. A superb libretto is essential and Vladimir wrote his own for his musical 'Biker'. Based on the 18th century erotic novel of

'Dangerous Liaisons', by Choderlos de Laclos, it has been often filmed but Mr. Kondrusevich's version is set in modern times, featuring a young, contemporary cast. Ultimately, it displays the best of human nature, uplifting us.

"The play is very important for me," says Vladimir. "It dictates a lot to the composer. When I like a play, I'll read it more than once. It doesn't matter when it was written. 'Belarusian Vaudevilles', which we performed at the Young Spectator's Theatre — is based on the works of the Doletsky brothers and Mikhas Charot, which have wonderful characters. Although somewhat simplistic, I was able to create music that emphasises elements of the actors' performance, drawing out the themes clearly. As it's vaudeville, I help the actors to tune in to the spirit of the performance with the help of music."

I once asked Olga Klebanovich — a People's Artiste of Belarus and a leading stage master with the Maxim Gorky National Academic Drama Theatre — how Vladimir creates such lightness in his music, pleasing to the ear. She replied, "Vladimir doesn't impose; he's delicate and subtle. Our last meeting took place when we were working on Somerset Maugham's 'Love Circle'. He's very attentive to actors' singing, as he knows that good vocals enrich a performance. He takes the same attitude to those not singing as well. Vladimir has been cooperating with our theatre for a long time. I remember him from 'Sign of Misfortune', staged by talented director Valery Maslyuk, who viewed Vladimir as a wonderful friend.

Sasha [Alexander Denisov — Honoured Artiste of Belarus and Olga's husband] also loved him. He appeared in 'On the Back of a Black Cat', which featured Vladimir's score."

Mr. Kondrusevich's ease and purity of music derive from his talent and professionalism, nurtured by intelligence and delicate taste. I'm always ready to praise him and am happy to hear of his success!

By Valentina **Zhdanovich**

Precious exhibits to be kept in Minsk



Library's Deputy Director, Alexander Susha, spent over a year preparing the exhibition

Unique Bible texts brought to National Library of Belarus from all over the world

Rivalling Dürer

The volume has a thick, leather binding and the edges of its pages are almost black, having been thumbed by untold numbers of hands over the centuries. Neighbouring editions are embedded with precious stones, gathering crowds of awed visitors, their voices hushed in the exhibition halls, as if in church. The unique display at the National Library of Belarus demonstrates the two thousand year old history of a single book, the Bible.

The exhibition is dedicated to the 500th anniversary of Belarusian book printing, with a hundred rare editions on display, including handwritten and printed biblical texts from Eastern and Western Europe, from ancient times to our modern day. Among them are Bibles for 16th century church services, and a fragmented German-language edition from the 17th century (print-

ed by Protestant translator Johannes Piscator) which is a real work of art, decorated with a hundred engravings, to rival those of German artist Albrecht Dürer.

Another unique exhibit is a facsimile of the Epistle of Apostle Peter, in Greek, dating back to the 3rd century AD. This is the first exhibition of the work in Belarus, thanks to a donation by the Vatican Apostolic Library, and the valuable relic is to remain henceforth in Minsk.

Five minutes: too much or too little?

“It was decided, a year ago, at meetings of representatives of the Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Culture of Belarus, to collect and present these rare books under one roof,” explains Alexander Susha, the Deputy Director of the National Library.

Which exhibit has the most interesting story?

For me, the facsimile of the Polotsk Gospel, which dates from the late 12th-early 13th century. We’ve collected the book from several locations, as the main part of the original is stored at the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg, while two pages are kept at the Russian State Library in Moscow, and so on. Our colleagues have presented us with digital copies of their pages. In 2012, the Belarusian Exarchate [Belarusian Orthodox Church] Publishing House joined the Academy of Sciences to issue a facsimile edition.

Who’s most likely to be interested in the exhibition?

Philologists, students, and foreign delegations. Some official groups come for five minutes, just for a glance, which is hardly adequate, while historians might spend half a day in the halls, complaining that they lack time to study everything.

By Olga Demenchuk

Skaryna invented the 'medieval GOOGLE'

How Belarus' first printer was ahead of his time

Francysk Skaryna and His Epoch' is expected to become the largest jubilee project. The organisers aim to bring together almost all the original editions from the first Belarusian printer. "The

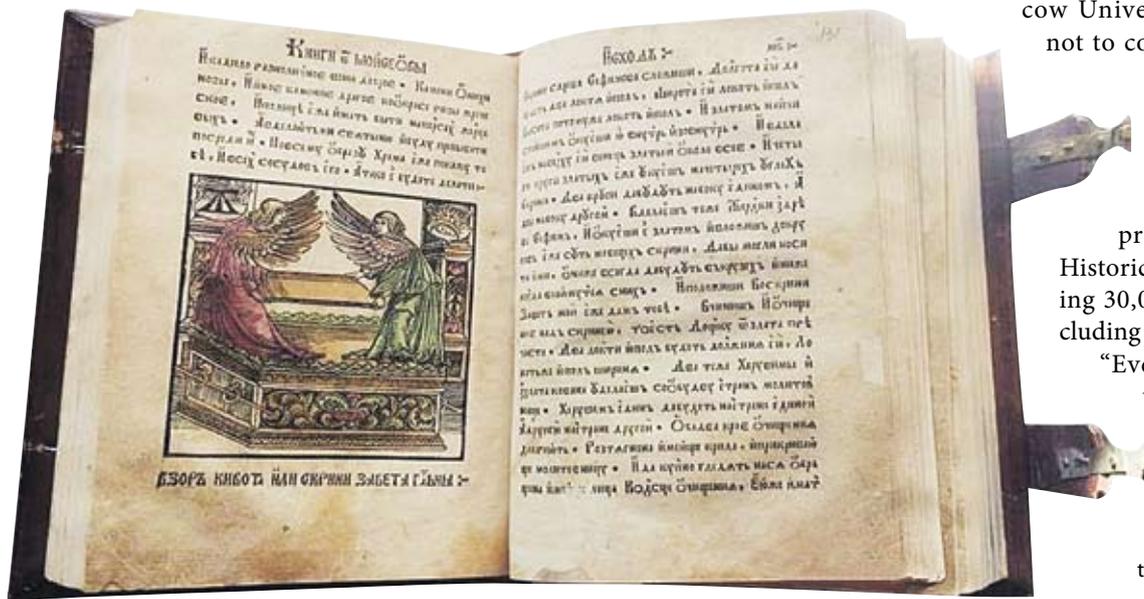
difficulty is that almost all books by Skaryna are kept abroad: in Russia, Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic — around 50 countries in total. Researchers are aware of 520 surviving copies," notes Roman Motulsky, Director of the National Library of Belarus.

One of the major exhibits will be brought from Moscow, where the State Historical Museum's Department of Manuscripts and Black-Letter Books

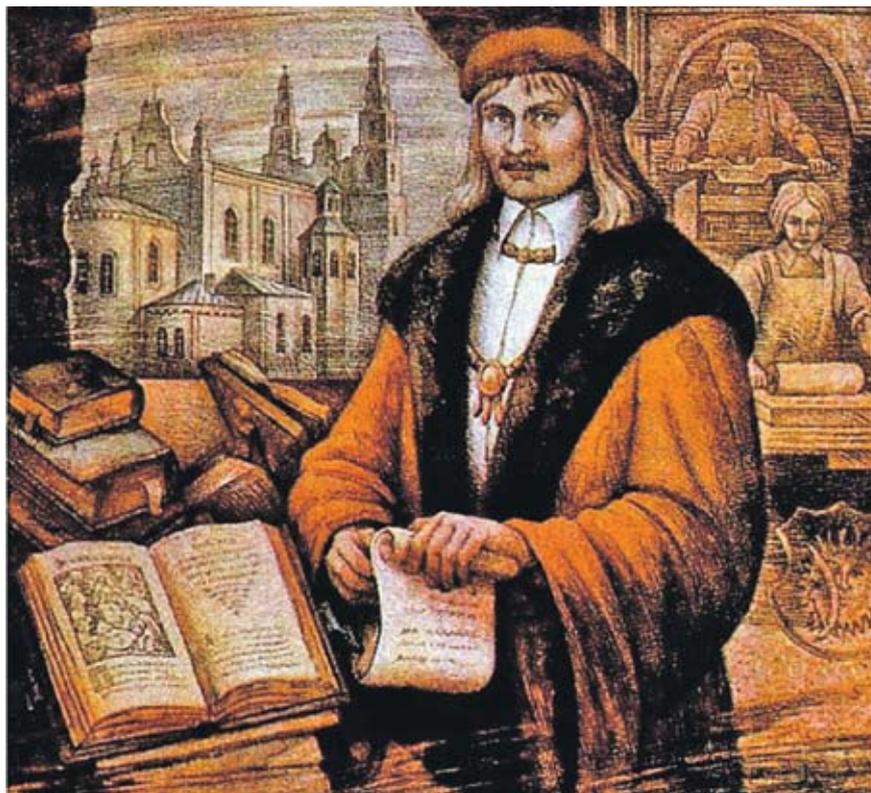
keeps several Bibles, printed by Skaryna between 1517 and 1519. Our correspondent even managed to hold the Pentateuch or the Law of Moses.

Collector Pavel Shchapov bequeathed this unique exhibit to the Historical Museum in the late 19th century. His father made his fortune through trade and his weaving factory. After attending lectures at the Historical-Philological Department of Moscow University, Pavel decided not to continue in the family business. His passion was for book collecting. Before his death in 1888 he bequeathed his priceless library to the Historical Museum, containing 30,000 rare volumes, including Skaryna's Bible.

"Even if we just glance through the edition it becomes imme-



The illustrations in the books of Polotsk's first printer showed the reader images of things they'd never seen



Reference

■ Francysk Skaryna was Belarus' first printer. A philosopher-humanist, a writer and a physician, he was born to a merchant family in Polotsk between 1485 and 1490. In 1504, he entered the University of Krakow and, after graduating in free arts, received a Doctor's Degree. Skaryna studied at the Faculty of Medicine for five years, receiving his Doctor's Degree from the University of Padua in Italy. In 1517, Skaryna founded a printing house in Prague, where he published his Psalter: the first Belarusian book. Over the coming two years, he translated and published twenty-two more Bibles. Moving to Vilnya (Vilnius) in 1520, he published The Small Travelling Book and his Apostle. Skaryna died in the early 1540s.

If we don't understand the meaning of a word we can now search for it in Google. However, in the 16th century, on reading the word 'elephant', our ancestors could only imagine the sort of animal it was. Skaryna used engravings as reference which rivalled the works of western European masters in their artistic advantages

diately clear what a great typographer Francysk Skaryna was," explains senior research officer of the Historical Museum, Galina Shitova. "To make the text of the Holy Writ simple and understandable, Skaryna began to print a foreword — a short summary of the content. He replaced the Old Church Slavonic words with Belarusian synonyms and decorated the pages with bright patterns. His engravings rival those of Western European masters in their artistic merit. If we look closer, we can see the overlapping sun and moon on many of his engravings — the printed signature of Skaryna."

Russia's first printer Ivan Fiodorov, [who released his Apostle 47 years later than Skaryna's Psalter] also had his own pictorial signature. If we don't understand the meaning of a word we can now search for it in Google. However, in the 16th century, on reading the word 'elephant', our ancestors could only imagine the sort of animal it was. Skaryna used engravings as reference. If you didn't understand what the Arc of the Covenant was, there it was depicted underneath the text.

Gorgeous illuminated letters graced the first word of each chapter and sec-

tion, while the pages were numbered. He even managed to make each line the same size — a considerable achievement at that time. Moscow will also celebrate the 500th anniversary of Belarusian book printing. On April 18th and 19th, the Russian State Library is hosting a Russian-Belarusian conference, '500th Anniversary since the Release of the First Slavonic Bible by Francysk Skaryna: The Establishment and Development of the Culture of Book Printing'. The forum will be held exclusively for historians and philologists.

By Irina **Mustafina**



What is the town of Shklov known for?

The town on the right bank of the River Dnieper was mentioned by a Polish ambassador in 1520 as ‘merchant’, located on the trading route ‘from the Varangians to the Greeks’

Sitting at the President’s desk

Today, Shklov is known as the place where the first President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, grew up, lived and worked. Alexander Lukashenko spent his childhood in Shklov’s suburbs, in the village of Alexandria. Upon the initiative of teachers and pupils, a small, improvised museum has been operating in the local school for two decades, describing the childhood and adolescence of the President. The desk at which Mr.

Lukashenko sat in the junior forms remains, so everyone can sit at it and have their photo taken.

Another famous fellow countryman is actor Piotr Aleinikov, who has appeared in such films as ‘Seven Courageous’, ‘Tractor Drivers’, ‘The Big Life’ and ‘The Little Humpbacked Horse’ (a fairy-tale). All have entered the treasury of Russian cinematography. In 2014, a monument was installed in Shklov and a museum opened in Piotr’s native village of Krivel, to mark his centenary.

Embracing Yekaterina’s poplar

Shklov was at its height under General Semen Zorich, a favourite of Empress Yekaterina II. She gave him the town as a gift, and, under his influence, manufacturing began. There was even a ‘bond-servant theatre’, which became famous all over Europe. Shklov opened a school for nobility, which later became the site of the first Moscow Cadet Corps. At the beginning of the 1812 Patriotic War, the school moved from Belarusian Shklov to the centre of the Russian Empire.

Residents do honour their heroes: in 2007, a monument was unveiled to General Zorich in the central park. Meanwhile, the park itself is a monument of garden and park art, ranked among the top five in Belarus. A poplar planted by Zorich in honour of Yekaterina II has been growing there for over three centuries.

To imagine how the town looked in those times, we need only observe the paper mill — the ‘brainchild’ of the leader of the local nobility, former Minister of Railway Transport for the Russian Empire, Apollon Krivoshein. Since 1898, the workshops have been preserved in their original state, alongside paper-making machines, all in good working order.



PAUL SAVELIEV

Shklov boasts a whole range of architectural treasures, including former synagogue buildings and unique stone constructions from the late 18th century

Now, the enterprise is called Spartak but hasn't changed its two-centuries-old profile and continues to produce paper.

Finding Duke Czartoryski's treasure

Shklov boasts a whole range of architectural treasures: a late 18th century synagogue and unique stone crosses, stairs and gates. The major pearl is the stone town hall, from the late 18th century. Only five such exist in all Belarus. The one in Shklov is 43m tall, and is the only one built into the market place. It's listed among the monuments of world architecture.

According to legend, underground tunnels link the town hall with the home of Duke Adam Czartoryski, and contain buried treasure. The nobleman didn't want to swear fealty to Empress Yekaterina II after the partition of the Rzecz Pospolita and tried to remove everything precious from the town. He left his servant, Jakub, to protect part of his treasures. Since then, the town hall tower has said to be haunted by Jakub, carrying a candle,



defending the treasure and awaiting his master's return.

Tasting 'noble' cucumbers

Local residents are keen on monuments, boasting a huge, smiling cucumber in the central square, close to the market. Shklov has a reputation as the 'cucumber capital' — similar to Lukhovitsy (in the Moscow Region). Tasty cucumbers were delivered once to St. Petersburg, eaten even by Yekaterina II.

In summer, the holiday of cucumbers features a wealth of home-pickled gherkins at the market, where customers can sample.

Resting on Lysaya Hill

The highest point in Shklov is Lysaya Hill, which can be climbed via a forest of birch trees and ancient oaks. The landscape resembles that of Alexander Rou's fairytales. It's easy to imagine Baba Yaga and Dragon Gorynych living there.

There's an extremely beautiful view over the River Dnieper from the hill, with a tourist and excursion complex located at the top. Lysaya Gora facility offers accommodation, a bathhouse, sports grounds and lots of other opportunities for passing the time outdoors.

By Svetlana **Markova**



OLGA KISLYAK



Naviband: There will be nothing outrageous

In an interview representatives of Belarus tell us how they plan to conquer audience at 'Eurovision-2017'

Finals of the international musical contest will be held on May 13th in the capital of Ukraine, with two semi-finals scheduled for May 9th and 11th. Belarus selected its heroes back in January: folk group 'Naviband', performing 'Story of My Life', as chosen by our local audience and professional jury.

Singing in native language

The band has three musicians and two vocalists: Ksenia Zhuk and Artem Lukyanenko. We met during rehearsals.

What makes you want to take part in 'Eurovision'?

Artem: In our country, we've been known for a long time. Every two years, the Lira National Award is organised and we've already received it, as well as performing at the 'Slavianski Bazaar'. We now have the chance to storm the European stage. We've given concerts in small clubs but, this time, we'll perform at a large stadium, with global TV broadcasts. We're quite nervous! After all, Europeans will finally learn about our talented Belarusian youth.

This contest is not only musical but... political. However, there's no sense in dwelling on that. Sports and beauty contests are also inseparable from politics. We'll simply sing.

In what language?

Belarusian. We did consider re-writing the chorus in English but later decided to leave it as it is. If anyone wishes, the song translation is available on the Internet.



VALIWA KONDRASHOV

EURO
SONG
KY



The more extravagant the artist, the more chance of winning. Should we expect dancing with wolves or skaters with a Stradivarius violin?

Artem: Nothing outrageous; our concept is a magical forest theme, with wizards. People are tired of showing off. None of our Belarusian colleagues who've participated in 'Eurovision' have seen success, and nobody is surprised. Belarus' last performance was in bad taste, I'm sorry to say. We prepared a good 'show' but the song was weak — despite Sasha Ivanov [singer IVAN] doing his best and producer Victor Drobysh investing a great deal of time.

Grishkovets crowns the album

The results of Belarus at 'Eurovision' include two 'golds' from the 'Junior Eurovision' Song Contest. The best result among adult artists is only sixth place, thanks to Dmitry Koldum. What's the problem?

Reference

■ 'Naviband' was founded in 2013, releasing its first album, 'Catch', within a year. In 2016, the band took part in the national selection round for 'Eurovision', with its 'This Land' song, taking fourth place in the finals. During the 'Eurovision 2017' selection round, the band was fifth by audience vote but the jury gave it the highest score, ensuring victory.

Artem: We're better prepared for the junior competition. We have experienced teachers and many music schools. I want to believe that we'll be able to join the top three.

Not so long ago, you recorded the 'Lullaby' song, jointly with famous Russian writer Yevgeny Grishkovets...

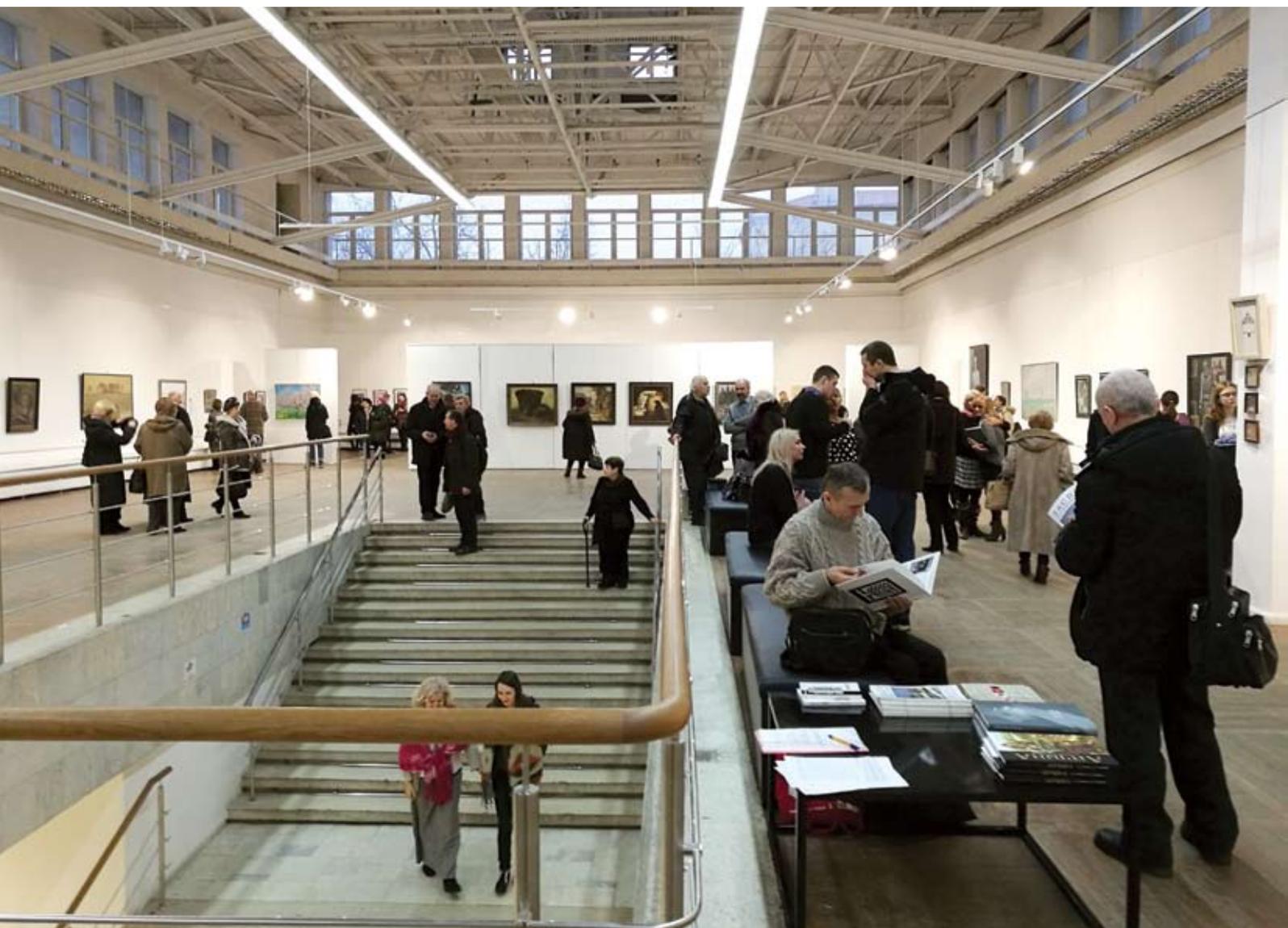
We met by chance. A year ago, we had a concert in a Gomel bar. Yevgeny then toured the city. He came to the bar to relax in the evening and saw our performance. He listened to our song and then approached us, saying, "Guys, you're a ray of light!" We loved his words so much that we even called our third album 'Illumination'. The idea was born to prepare something jointly. Ksyusha wrote the lyrics and we recorded the song at Oleg Nesterov's Moscow studio. We're now working on the second track.

Has he congratulated you on your victory?

Ksenia: We sent him a photo from the finals of the national selection round, of us holding a statuette and a diploma on stage. Mr. Grishkovets isn't fond of competitions but he was happy for us, even promising to watch our semi-final performance at home.

By Irina Matveeva

Waiting for clear sky after a thunder-storm



Recently, Minsk Palace of Arts hosted an exhibition by a member of one of the creative associations of the Belarusian Union of Artists. At the launch, much was said of those who've left their legacy, making a powerful contribution to national art. Many members of this association have died, but their creativity lives on, and has been enjoyed at various exhibitions at the Palace of Arts. Among such 'stars' was Minsk artist Mikhail Rogalevich, who deserves our attention.



The apple-tree was an enduring theme for Mikhail Rogalevich, who painted dozens of blossoming gardens and spring panoramas, seeking out his own soul through the spiritual metaphor of nature in renewal. His life was difficult, and in many respects, tragic. For some years, he was recognised and honoured; in others, he was undeservedly forgotten. However, Mikhail had a good family, where he was happy, finding support and peace of mind. The family supported him and helped him in fulfilling his numerous creative plans.

And his death, museums and other establishments, and collectors, bought up his picturesque canvases and drawings, so that his large, airy workshop (which he received only after retirement), once packed with his works, became empty and cold...

One of the banks has purchased Mr. Rogalevich's most admired works, and a colour catalogue of the collection is to be published. The new Museum of Modern Art has promised to dedicate a whole floor to Mikhail: recognition such as he'd never have imagined in his lifetime, of his talent, and his contribution to national culture.

Mikhail Rogalevich's first personal exhibition, dedicated to his 50th birthday, was hosted by Minsk's Palace of Arts in 1983; it was an unexpected event — a revelation to many. Over a hundred paintings and almost the same number of graphic works (only part of his artistic achievements) filled two floors of the country's largest exhibition site. His images and colours were full of energy, like intellectual 'fireworks'; emotions, deep sense and feelings harmonised to reveal this talented artist to his countrymen.

Little was written about artist Mikhail Rogalevich for his first personal exhibition, which reached beyond socialist realism and stereotypes. At that time, another mood was stirring, the Palace of Arts having hosted displays of Belarusian painted carpets, and personal exhibitions by Piotr Sergievich and Mikhail Sevruk (who also displayed their own style). There was a reconsideration of the heritage of figures of national history and culture, such as Mikola Gusovsky and Francysk Skaryna. People began to mark traditional national holidays, such as Kupala night, and to sing Christmas carols once again. The self-identification of Belarusians, as an independent nation, was reawakening.

Mikhail Rogalevich began to acquire proper support, his exhibition touring

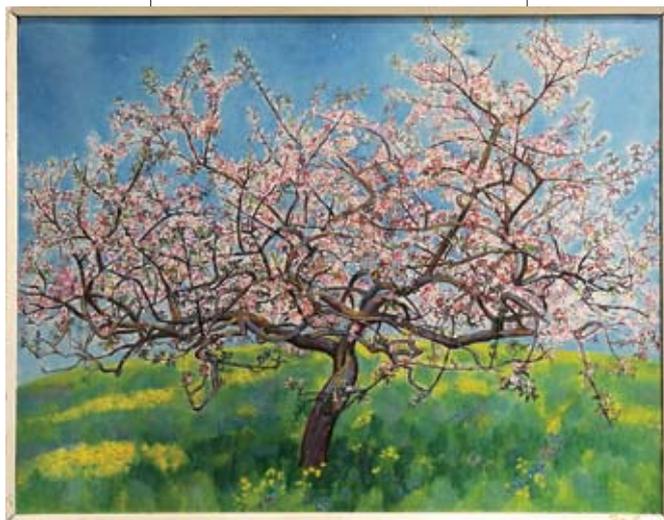


'Autumn Flowers'
by Mikhail Rogalevich (1987)

Molodechno and Mogilev, Gomel and Vitebsk, with success. The 'Art of Belarus' magazine responded to the event with full-scale articles, and enthusiastic responses were published by 'Maladost' magazine, and the weekly journal 'Literatura i Iskusstvo' (Literature and Art). Such admiration was deserved. Rogalevich's open, intimate style, and gentle simplicity was refreshing for audiences.

From the 1960s onwards, for eight hours daily, he worked as a designer, only painting or drawing in his spare time. Nevertheless, his talent allowed him to bring symbolic value to his works, so that their concepts resonated widely. He took part in most republican exhibitions, offering as much variety as he could.

His inspiration came largely from his own life. He worked eight hours daily as an artist-designer, creating his own works in his free time, so had no time to travel into the countryside. He drew whatever was close by, drawing on personal feelings and impressions. His images are certainly strong, arousing the emotions of all who look upon them.



'Apple Tree in Blossom' by Mikhail Rogalevich (1982)

He was the first in Belarusian art to explore Stalin's oppressive regime: 'Stagnation' (1965), 'Violence' (1965) and 'Navala' (1976) describe the de-kulakisation of his family and the arrest of his father and brother. He also created a series of works dedicated to the hardships and sufferings of his mother — a true requiem: 'We Were Arrested Together with Mother' (1965), 'Difficult Years' (1978), 'Mother in a Remote Land' (1980) and 'Recollections' (1985). She was three times arrested after the arrest of his father and uncle, and failed to return home.

His other enduring theme is that of the rural dweller uprooted from village to city, carrying their 'luggage' of customs, traditions and world outlook. Of course, this was taken from his personal experience and reflected a social phenomenon of the time.

Belarus' intensive industrial growth, in the second half of the 20th century, reduced the importance placed on traditional agriculture. Villages lost their importance in producing food, but the habits and traditions of those from

rural areas cannot be changed quickly. Customs formed over centuries remain with us, in our genetic memory, influencing our behaviour, as Mikhail Rogalevich's creativity demonstrates. His theme of family dominates all others, neither naive, nor glamorous but showing an emotional truth. He saw that art is most powerful when speaking of what the heart holds dear, supported by creative maturity and professionalism.

Mr. Rogalevich also explored the theme of love: 'Anton and Anna' (1978) and 'Birthday' (1985). The joys of his early family home are seen in 'Autumn' (1980) and 'Gathering Apples' (1982), which pay homage to family life. Having been orphaned as a child, he felt especially sharply the preciousness of family, defending family values as the greatest treasure.

Rogalevich conveyed the love of urban Belarusians for their rural roots, and their preservation of their customs, showing how they decorated their homes with folk items. He often painted symbolic rushnik linen cloths, embroidered with red horses (as are passed down within families). We see such a rushnik in his diploma work 'Otvedki' (1964), in the foreground, as a family heirloom, from his father. It reappears in 'Young Family' (1978) and in 'Autumn' (1980), demonstrat-



ing an understanding of our spiritual heritage.

Mikhail Rogalevich also liked to paint images of independent, hardworking women, as in 'Belarusian Woman' (1976) and 'The Present' (1998). In some works, they are the main focus, in others, they appear within family scenes, as symbols worthy of respect. We see his delight in the virtue of working women in 'Mistress' (1966), 'Evening' (1968), 'Morning' (1975) and 'Going to Reap' (1984). We see this again in his series of drawings — 'the one who sews', 'the one who knits', 'the one who washes', 'the one who cooks', 'the one who reaps' and so on — each expressing women's character, drawn with strong line and tone.

These works are only a small part of his enormous creative potential, though they are memorable in capturing the figure, movements and harmony of a woman going about her everyday chores. In some pictures, he lifts her to monumental greatness, as in 'Memory' (1974). In others, he adds figurative characteristics of goddesses of ancient mythology, who 'spun life's threads' or 'solemnly touched the beads of time'. In his 'Festive Evening' (1979) and 'Cranberry' (1983), he cleverly reveals the secret, hidden aspects of what most deserves admiration and glorification in womanhood. These works are among his most wonderful and this is his greatest creative heritage.

This theme dominated his work for many years: the image of woman as toiler, keeper of the family hearth and home. Later, she becomes a symbol of magnificence, almost transcendent, as if by a process of idealisation. Many think that he painted the same model repeatedly. Like Botticelli or Modigliani, it was his wife, daughter and mother who inspired him. He also synthesised the idea of a muse for his idealised female images, such as Anna in his 'Anton and Anna' (1978), in his 'Tree of Life', and 'What a Wonderful World' (1974-1977). His girl does not run but soars over the earth, with a flower in her hand.

In his 'Birthday' (renamed as 'Love' in 1985) he added an ethereal element.



The woman is his mother, who died in Stalin's camps in Mikhail's childhood. She is like an icon, appearing again and again, recreated from her passport photograph: a young woman with beautiful, curly hair. Anna Rogalevich-Alenskaya appeared in his 'My Mother' series from 1968 through until 1972 and, later, in his 'Mother in a Far-away Country' (1980) and 'Memoirs' (1985). Each is highly dramatic, with vivid use of colour and a lyrical feel.

In 'Memoirs', he uses the metaphor of deepest crimson roses, bearing sharp thorns, which evoke the intolerable pain of his memories of parting and loss: an echo of the whole nation's pain at losing family members.

Mikhail Rogalevich did not paint to earn money. He loved those works like his own children, and never wished to part with them, although he made exceptions for Belarusian national museums and funds, on the condition that he could reproduce each picture. To earn his living, he worked as a designer at the Institute of Physics, within the National Academy of Sciences. There, in his office, he stored most of his works. Meanwhile, in the halls and corridors, he hung his pictures, to the delight of his fellow workers.

In his spare time, Rogalevich painted portraits of research workers and well-



'A Theoretical Physicist'
by Mikhail Rogalevich (1978)



Mikhail Rogalevich conceived the picture as a metaphor for our human state, in constant fluctuation between earth and sky, between death and life. In order to live, we must seek out support, not only earthly but spiritual

known professors and academicians. Many were exhibited at personal and national exhibitions while some were bought by museums. Each discloses his view of workers of science as people endowed with an other-worldly beauty, physically and spiritually unique. Phenomenally original, they are the most valuable pieces among his legacy.

He portrayed those close to him within natural settings. Often autobiographical, these works include his 'About Time and Myself' (1992), which is set on a riverbank. A tree stands apart, on the brink of breaking, about to fall into the raging river, its roots and trunk hanging down. However, the large branches of a neighbouring tree safely hold it back. Strongly intertwined, as in an embrace, they defy the dark clouds of a coming storm, clear sky appearing between them.

Mikhail Rogalevich conceived the picture as a metaphor for our human state, in constant fluctuation between earth and sky, between death and life. In order to live, we must seek out support, not only earthly but spiritual. His art touches our most secret soul, which

aspires to the spiritual and all that is lofty, admiring the beauty of life and the value of our humanity.

Belarusian artist Mikhail Rogalevich has definitely left his trace on national pictorial art. Without exaggeration, the image of an apple tree was the starting point for Mikhail Rogalevich's creativity — becoming known as his motif across dozens of artworks. Blossoming gardens and fresh views of apple trees in blossom fill his soul with the spirit of awakening spring and spiritual relaxation. His life was difficult and largely tragic, featuring recognition and honour for some time before being undeservedly forgotten. Mikhail enjoyed a perfect family life however, finding happiness, support and spiritual calm. Those close to him supported his work and helped him in realising his many creative plans.

Despite his suffering, he retained his belief in our essential goodness, exploring this time and again in his work. Mikhail Rogalevich's works proclaim this loudly and clearly.

His artistic legacy is well established. A colourful booklet is to be published showing his artistry while the new Museum of Modern Fine Arts has promised to allocate a whole floor to Rogalevich's works — of which he could hardly have dreamed in his lifetime. His talent and contribution to national culture are at last recognised.

During times of trouble, it's thought that art takes a backseat, yet Rogalevich's exhibition is always full of visitors: painters and architects, as well as students and doctors of science, in addition to ordinary workers. Foreign languages are heard, showing that his art touches the most sacred part of all human souls, regardless of nationality.

It is part of the Belarusian psyche to yearn towards spiritual purity and elevation, eternal adoration of the beauty of life and the dignity of humanity. The artist suffered so much in his life yet retained his faith in people, exploring this via his true talent.

By Veniamin **Mikheev**



Mikhail Rogalevich. A fragment of 'Loshitsa' picture (1971)