

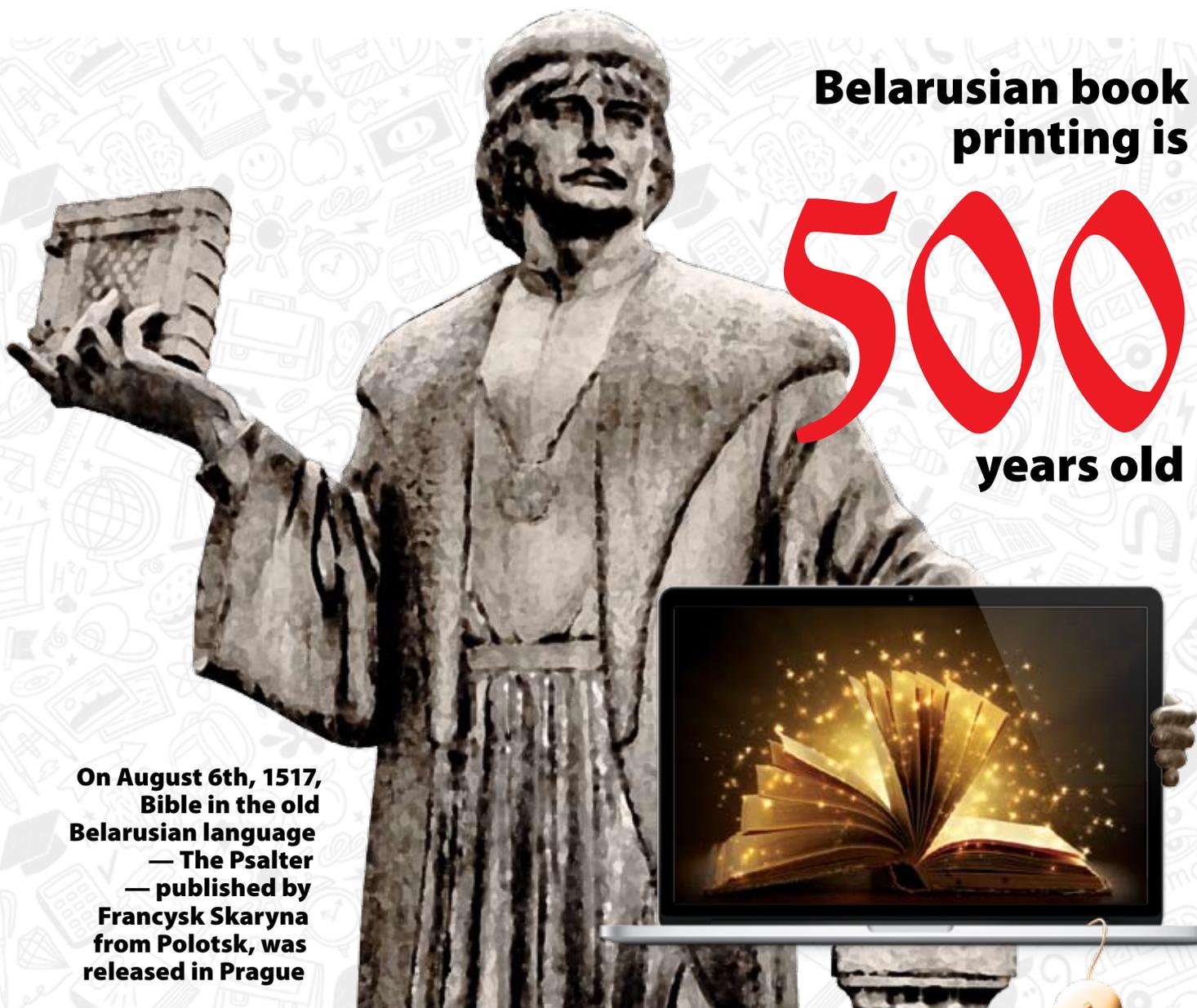
MAGAZINE FOR YOU

No. 8 (1007), 2017  
Беларусь. Belarus

# BELARUS

Politics. Economy. Culture

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**Belarusian book  
printing is**

# 500

**years old**

**On August 6th, 1517,  
Bible in the old  
Belarusian language  
— The Psalter  
— published by  
Francysk Skaryna  
from Polotsk, was  
released in Prague**

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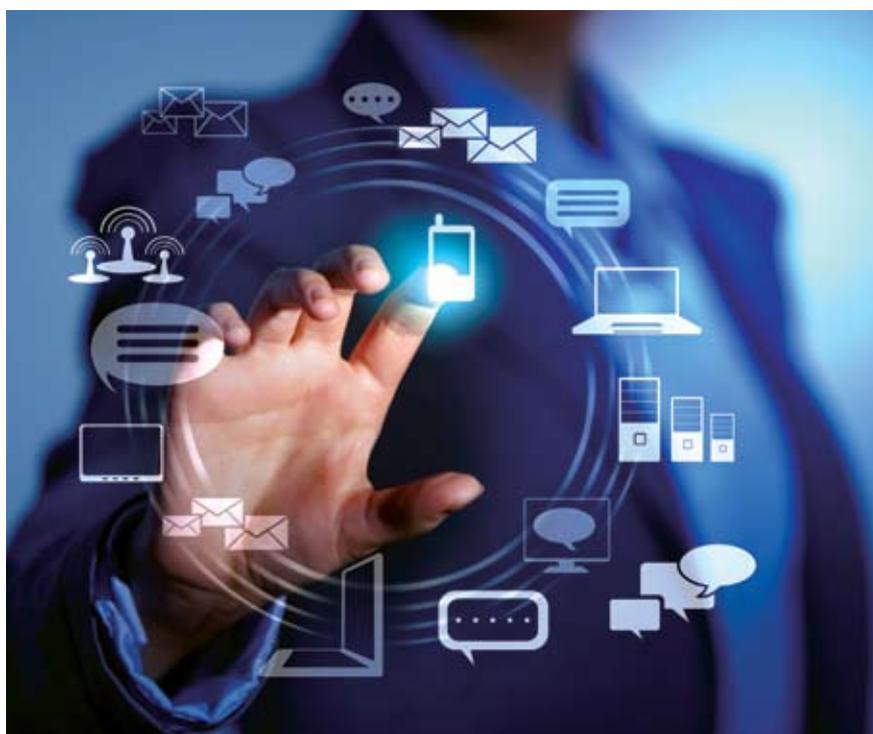
## Ahead to the future — with respect for the past

**U**nderstanding comes through comparison. Not so long ago, mobile technologies launched in Belarus and mobile phones were a novelty. Now, mobile networks have five million users: half of the country's population.

The affordability of the latest modes of communication is clear evidence of changing circumstances. Meanwhile, technologies are moving forward rapidly. Beltelecom has launched a new service allowing subscribers to exchange video information, seeing the person you're speaking to, despite long distances. Of course, we're all familiar with booking plane tickets online, using our mobile phone or computer. Belavia National Airlines now offers this service.

Most of us can remember a time when we lacked various amenities. Our material wealth has improved significantly but this isn't the only change. Besides our economy growing, we're keen to see improved human relations. Modern history is being written in front of our eyes. However, we continue to revere our past, since it forms the foundation of our present and our future. It is our rich heritage.

This August marks the 500th anniversary of Belarusian book printing, both for Belarus and for the whole world community. On August 6th, 1517, enlightener Francysk Skaryna published his first book — The Psalter — in old Belarusian, in Czech Prague. In the Renaissance Age, demand for new technologies appeared, enabling the spread of knowledge through Europe. The Pol-



otsk-born resident and graduate of the Krakow Academy, who later received a doctorate in medicine from the University of Padua in Italy, responded to the needs of his age.

The spirit of his work continues today, via our modern technologies. Belarusian IT specialists have implemented a unique project, making available textbooks online which can 'speak', as you can read in our article 'E-books of Tomorrow'.

Recent years have seen the expansion of contacts between Belarusian and Chinese book publishers. Delegations from Belarus have taken part in book trade fairs in China, while Chi-

nese book publishers and writers are constant guests at the traditional book trade fair, held in February in Minsk. Read our interview with the Director of the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Publishing, Peng Dongmen, speaking of relations in the book industry. Learn how Belarusian and Chinese book publishers are developing a new format of inter-relations, in 'We Unite Cultures of Different Nations...'

It's good to be flexible, to react to changing times.

VIKTOR KHARKOV



## Responsible for the word

**Each year, in early August, 'SB. Belarus Segodnya' newspaper celebrates the arrival of young, ambitious journalists, and marks its birthday. This time, the date is special, as 90 years have passed since the release of the first issue of 'Sovetskaya Belorussiya'.**

**'S**ovetskaya Belorussiya' was and remains a reliable source of news, able to capture readers' interest. It's a contemporary, multi-profile holding, using the latest information technologies to preserve the values of traditional journalism.

When the First Deputy Head of the Belarusian Presidential Administration, Maxim Ryzhenkov, read out congratulations from the President, in the assembly hall, Alexander Gradyushko felt his life flashing before his eyes! He once headed the rural life department of the newspaper, travelling all over the country, visiting its 118 districts.

A major tradition of 'SB' is to help people in trouble, and to help whole branches in solving acute issues. Mr. Ryzhenkov underlines, "Many articles in our edition go on to help shape social policy and serious state decisions."

"Sovetskaya Belorussiya' hasn't lost its print influence, and now works successfully online and via FM-broadcast, keeping up with the times," Belarus' Information Minister, Lilia Ananich, noted, thanking the editorial office's staff.

At the solemn meeting dedicated to the newspaper's jubilee, much was spoken of its creativity. Boasting a readership of at least 500 million, it's the most influential newspaper countrywide, so people hold strong views on how it should look stylistically. Naturally, facts need to be fully verified and topics need to cover what's relevant today. Anyone with a smartphone may lay claim to being a 'journalist', capturing news as it happens in front of them. Of course, investigative journalism is another matter, as is the ability to spot trends, as the true professionals of 'SB' know well.

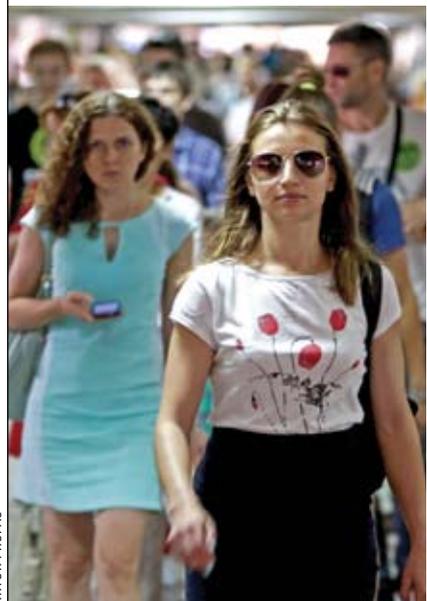
## ► Demographic trends

**By June 1st, 2017, the population of Minsk had reached 1,975,800 people, up from 1,964,200 in the same month of 2016**

**E**ven compared with January, the number of urbanities has increased by a thousand. As of April, 2017, there were 1,976,000 people, which makes it appear that Minsk's population fell for the first time. However, experts believe that such conclusions don't take into account the structure of the city's student population.

At a certain time of year in summer, graduates travel to other regions (or return home) to take up their mandatory first job placements and the term of their temporary registration finishes, so they aren't taken into account. Of course, the new term brings a rush of new first-year students, and numbers are again boosted.

The capital is also seeing growth in the number of marriages: since the beginning of the year, there have been 6,364 marriages (against 3,721 divorces).



ARTUR PRUPAS



# July meetings in Kiev

## President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko paid an official visit to Ukraine

In the business dimension, Alexander Lukashenko and Petro Poroshenko have agreed to aim for a revived annual trade turnover of \$8bn (double the current figure). Judging by the intensity of contacts at the Belarusian-Ukrainian Business Forum, which took place in Kiev simultaneously

with the meeting of the presidents, the target is feasible.

By the time the heads of state sat at the negotiation table the sum of the signed contracts already exceeded \$45m. Economic issues were high on the agenda during the meeting between Mr. Lukashenko and Mr. Poroshenko, with the President of Belarus

noting, “Belarus and Ukraine are interested in expanding exports, and developing industrial cooperation, while launching joint projects to modernise road transport infrastructure and introduce innovative technologies. In the past, Belarusian-Ukrainian annual trade reached nearly \$8bn and we have every possibility to raise our volumes.

Alexander Lukashenko:

***Minsk and Kiev are keen to develop production cooperation, jointly manufacturing goods for sale on international markets...***

The co-chairmen of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission have assured us that we can reach this level within two years, or even surpass it.”

Minsk and Kiev are keen to develop production cooperation, jointly manufacturing goods for sale on international markets. Mr. Lukashenko emphasises that thousands of goods could be made this way. Last year, more than 2,500 Belarusian tractors were assembled in Ukraine, at joint manufacturing facilities, in addition to around 180 harvesters, 500 lifts and other equipment which the neighbouring country needs. The President of Belarus summed up, “These are good results but they’re much lower than those we’re aiming for. I believe the current meeting will bring new impetus to our economic interaction.”

Minsk also wishes to develop cooperation between the regions. Kiev has supported the idea of conducting the first inter-regional forum in Gomel, while Ukraine will host a similar event next time.

As far as political results are concerned, the atmosphere of communication was significant, with our presidents sending a clear signal that our countries are strong partners, as well as good and reliable friends. President Poroshenko spoke about Ukraine’s foreign policy, saying, “I’m convinced that the development of close relations with neighbouring states, primarily with Belarus, remains a key priority for us.”

The presidents tackled the topic of crisis in south-east Ukraine while discussing the situation in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions. Mr. Lukashenko

underlined, “First of all, we’re delivering humanitarian aid to these regions. I asked Petro Poroshenko about it. We’d like to work there without mediators and using the shortest route possible. I suggested that we should do this together if our interests match and these humanitarian convoys coincide. They are our people, with nothing dividing us. I thank the president and his colleagues, who’ve agreed to this step. We’re capable of helping our people in distress.”

Minsk will continue to facilitate in every possible way the peaceful settlement of the conflict. The President of Belarus guarantees this, saying, “You should understand that I’ve never set a goal to ‘run ahead of the locomotive’. I’ll continue to do only what I’m asked by the two presidents [V. Putin and P. Poroshenko]. Everything the two presidents ask me to do, we, Belarusians, will do. We don’t aspire to glory. What kind of glory are you talking about when people are dying?! You, Ukrainians, should know that you have near and dear people in your life, who live a bit to the north, but are no different from you. If you’re having a hard time, we’ll always help with what we can.”

Following his negotiations with the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, in Kiev, President Poroshenko praised the Minsk Agreements for their unique position in de-escalating conflict in Ukraine. The Ukrainian leader thanked Belarus for its support, in word and deed, and for its efforts to promote good working conditions for negotiations in Minsk. “As of today, the Minsk Agreements included in international documents and diplomacy

textbooks are the only document on de-escalation of the conflict in Ukraine,” underlined Mr. Poroshenko.

He said that Alexander Lukashenko has assured him that the territory of friendly Belarus will never be used for aggressive action against Ukraine and the Belarusian-Ukrainian border will never become a frontier of war. Speaking about cross-border cooperation, the President of Ukraine pointed to the need to finish border demarcation, remarking that both sides have conducted substantive negotiations on a range of topical issues of bilateral and multilateral interaction.

Advancing relations with Belarus is one of the most important priorities for Ukraine, noted President Poroshenko, during expanded-format negotiations with the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko. In his words, it’s vital to fully realise the potential of Belarus-Ukraine cooperation. Mr. Poroshenko also noted the productive nature of the previous meeting of the two heads of state, in April 2017. Agreements reached at that time are now being consistently and successfully implemented.

“As you’ve said already, the number of contracts signed during today’s business forum alone has made our visit worthwhile. This is why, although our friendship cannot be measured with money, it’s vital for our countries to see concrete results via mutually beneficial cooperation,” noted the President of Ukraine. He suggested moving forward promptly to sketch out a fundamental roadmap for advancing bilateral interaction across the board, and to set relevant goals. Mr. Poroshenko addressed Mr. Lukashenko, saying that the President of Belarus is always a welcome guest. “Ukraine knows you as a statesman who is intent on achieving the most effective and concrete results,” emphasised the President of Ukraine.

Negotiations finished with the signing of a package of documents on the development of interaction across various areas, in the presence of the heads of state.

By Vasily **Kharitonov**

# More people — stronger country

**Belarus is able to provide for twice as many people as currently reside here. This is backed up by statistics for how much food we produce, how much we consume and how much we sell. It's likely that the population of Belarus would be approaching this double figure if it were not for the huge losses during the years of the Great Patriotic War. A demographic slump is relatively easy to fall into given the right circumstances, but decades are needed to get out of it. The problem of an ageing population and a fall in the birth rate is however, common throughout Europe.**

**P**roactive measures were discussed at the President's session.

Alexander Lukashenko outlined his views, "Human capital is our main wealth. Our population has been increasing in recent years. It's essential to preserve this trend and to ensure even greater population growth. Belarus can provide for a population of 20 million people. Our main goal is to reach 15 million, and either we or our children must solve this issue. People are important for the economic security of our country; they are the strength of our country."

At the moment, we have almost achieved a demographic balance, with the fall in the population slowing. These

are the first results of the task-oriented state policy aimed at strengthening the institution of the family and stimulating birth rates. Allowances paid to families with children are being increased and, since 2015, a programme of family capital has been introduced, with young families granted preferences during housing construction. Other measures have also been adopted and it's necessary to continue work in these areas.

Another issue is the need to provide people with worthwhile jobs and much has been done for economic modernisation. However, by launching stimulating mechanisms, it's vital to avoid a reverse effect — a welfare mentality. This is the aim of the Presidential Decree #3. Its implementation raised many questions and the operation of the document was suspended while the Government im-

proved the plans. The draft was also scheduled for discussion at a meeting and the President underlined the main principle, "Society should know that Decree #3 won't be abolished. I have already raised this issue: we have at least 500,000 unemployed. About 200,000 of them are people with many children, ill or disabled people, those who want to work but cannot due to certain life circumstances. But what are 300,000 people doing? Decree #3 is meant for those 300,000 people who do not work. This is the ideology. There is nothing to conceal from our people."

The aims of the document haven't changed but the approaches towards its achievement are under review. For example, on the wishes of the President, the major emphasis has shifted to local level, also involving the Coun-



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cil of deputies. Local authorities work directly with people, are aware of the situation in each family and can most accurately determine who can't work because of objective reasons and who simply doesn't want to work.

After the session, the Minister of Labour and Social Protection, Irina Kostevich, told journalists how relations will be built between the state and this category of citizens. It's most likely that they will have to pay for services which are now offered to everyone free and partially free, since these are financed from the budget. What kind of services? The answer to this question will be given later. The Government is now working to compile an exhaustive list while the implementation of the mechanism will be connected with the launch of ID cards to the population. These are

Alexander Lukashenko:

***Human capital is our main wealth. Our population has been increasing in recent years. It's essential to preserve this trend and to ensure even greater population growth***

an electronic passport in the form of a plastic card which will contain diverse information about its owner, including whether they are employed or not. The relations between and state and such people will be built in a similar way.

The President instructed to finish all preparatory work by October

1st, alongside a number of documents which are of great socio-economic importance and are widely discussed in society. In particular, these are regulatory acts aiming at stimulation of entrepreneurship activity and emancipation of business.

By Dmitry Kryat



# Professional approach

## 19th World Congress of Russian Press held in Minsk

**S**ince 1999, this forum has been hosted by New York, Tel Aviv, Paris, Berlin, Moscow and other large cities worldwide. Minsk has now welcomed delegates twice, with participants noting the comfort of the venue. They were unanimous in their impressions of the speech of the

President of Belarus, who took part in the plenary session of the Congress, which set the tone of discussion. Responsibility was the central topic: a theme especially relevant in our rapidly changing world.

Change is seen not only in our technological progress but in our moral values. It seems that justice, virtue, public service and our ability to unite before common troubles are out of favour, leading to global ten-

sion, escalation of conflict and bloodshed. We're seeing a shift in the geopolitical structure of the world.

President Lukashenko stressed the role of the media in influencing these processes and shared his vision of the problem, being convinced that journalists influence the public mood to no lesser degree than politicians. He feels that they should be held to the same level of accountability, since they must convey a realistic picture of the world. Despite the pressures of a competitive market, and the need to ensure commercial success, the media must bear in mind its social responsibility. In the war for circulation figures, facts must not be set aside in favour of sensationalism and the desire for advertising revenue.

The perception of what it means to be a journalist is changing, since every citizen has access to technology and online platforms for sharing news. However, where are the borders of responsibility and professional ethics for such 'civil journalism'? The President told delegates, "In these

circumstances, moral and civic principles are with our professional, experienced journalists: the traditional press of today. You must make wise choices. Will you pursue ratings or the dissemination of the truth, objectivity or personal interests?”

Information is a weapon in modern conflict, noted the President, urging the press to encourage unification rather than division. He added, “Belarus has become a major venue for hosting peace talks. Our country has always been open to new contacts and information exchanges. Let’s consider arranging a major international forum in Minsk: a Helsinki-2.” Mr. Lukashenko called on journalists to join forces in the pursuit of truth.

Two panel sections saw hot debate, with Alexey Venediktov, Editor-in-Chief of Ekho Moskvy (Echo of Moscow) radio station, noting, “Alexander Lukashenko has set the tone of our meeting and correctly diagnosed the threats that we’re facing. With the digital revolution and the development of social networks, anyone, regardless of their relation to journalism and the media, can share

information. It’s extremely difficult to control this, especially since, in some ways, this can ‘surpass’ the reach of professional journalism.”

“Challenges, risks and changes are happening in the information space,” noted political analyst Piotr Petrovsky. “These include virtualisation, the tendency towards depersonalisation of journalism, and hiding before pseudonyms.”

New mechanisms of journalistic responsibility are clearly necessary, as is a mechanism of protection for the media space.

There were also some pleasant surprises at the Congress, including the presentation of traditionally bestowed awards. After reading a greeting from Vladimir Putin, the Aide to the Russian President, Igor Shchegolev, admitted, “My career as a journalist began in Belarus. As a young TASS journalist, I arrived for an internship with BELTA. My first publication was written in the language of the brotherly republic — Belarusian. I learnt much from working with experienced BELTA staff, and view Belarus as my creative homeland.”

### In the meantime

**O**n the sidelines of the 19th World Congress of Russian Press, Alexander Lukashenko met UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador and President of the World Association of Russian Press (WARP), Vitaly Ignatenko, and WARP Executive Secretary and First Deputy Director General of TASS News Agency, Mikhail Gusman.

The meeting discussed initiatives proposed by Minsk during the recent session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, on organising a new large-scale international forum — similar to the Helsinki Process. Mr. Ignatenko praised this idea, which

aims to strengthen stability and security in the region and worldwide. “Everyone is tired of misunderstandings. We are now aiming for mutual understanding. It’s no accident that the PA OSCE session took place in Belarus,” he asserted.

Mr. Lukashenko also gave a short interview to the TASS News Agency, speaking of the session of the Supreme State Council of the Union State in Moscow, the development of Belarusian-Russian relations across key areas and prospects and problems facing the Union State. Issues in tune with the topic of the World Congress of the Russian Press were also high on the agenda.

### Word-for-word

## Participants of the Congress speak

**Mikhail Gusman, TASS First Deputy Director General:**



It’s important for journalists to honestly reflect what’s happening. It’s vital for them to be

honest in their profession, to be faithful to their Homeland and to have an objective view. Circumstances create additional tension. However, I’m an optimist, believing that, sooner or later, all conflict ends.

**Valery Tretyakov, Editor-in-Chief of ‘Litovskiy Kurier’ newspaper:**



I still remember the first Minsk Congress, held in 2013, on June 22nd.

In homage to Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union, some forum events took place in Brest. I still remember the impression of that Congress. From a professional point of view, we spoke about the press’ future, its financial survival, and how to make the Russian-language press abroad independent, unaffected by political situations. We discussed its importance within the world media space. The same issues remain important today.



MADEZHDA PONKRATOVA

# Reaching WTO, or time to trade on a grand scale

**At the beginning of this year, negotiations on our country's joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO) began to truly move forward. The eighth session of the working party in Geneva finished with a proposal from the organisation's leadership, to activate this process. Experts predicted our membership by late 2017.**

**Membership of the WTO is not a goal in itself, but an instrument to enhance the competitiveness of our national economy. We continue to focus on integration into the world economic space but our tactics during the final stage of joining the WTO may considerably change. Our expert ponders whether it's necessary to accelerate this process.**

**J**oining the WTO is a fully ripe issue for our country. Belarus is developing rather dynamically and is becoming more high-tech, with advanced education and medicine. Alongside 'enterprise-stayers' we have our own 'company-sprinters'. Their number is much more than we know but many haven't come into the spotlight yet. The most important thing is that the country has achieved 100-percent food independence; this should be preserved and built upon.

The situation in joining the WTO is like a Biblical parable: the last shall be the first and the first, last. After more than twenty-three years of difficult talks and agreements on tariffs, quotes and customs duties, our country has changed its status from 'acceptable' to 'extremely desirable' in the eyes of the WTO. Employees at the WTO headquarters say that Belarus has always been an historically and strategically important state in Europe. Why is this?

There are three reasons for this increased interest from world businesses. Firstly, Belarus is a 'window' to the EAEU space, with its 180 million consumers. Secondly, our steady image, as a stable state — responsible for its obligations before foreign partners — is worth a great deal. The third reason is connected with our country becoming a powerful regional centre of production, exporting highly-intellectual services. These are connected with the High-Tech Park, the Great Stone Industrial Park and many other projects regarding the manufacture of high-tech goods and services. We're attracting interest from the West and East in their struggle to master new, not yet established but very promising, markets relating to the global economy of knowledge.

We should make use of this new circumstance, gaining the most beneficial terms from our WTO membership. As they say, it's nothing personal, it's just

business. We shouldn't behave like an old maid desperate to wed, but like a capricious and desirable bride setting her own terms. Perhaps there's no need to waste time on trifles both what concerns terms of intruding WTO norms in various branches and what concerns the protection of national producers and preservation of jobs. As they say of marriages, only the first twenty years are difficult! Many countries are disappointed in their expectations from membership of this global organisation. In Moscow, members of the Communist Party have initiated their departure from this 'unequal marriage'.

The World Trade Organisation was established in 1995 and has been since developing as a model of globalisation,

***After more than twenty-three years of difficult talks and agreements on tariffs, quotes and customs duties, our country has changed its status from 'acceptable' to 'extremely desirable' in the eyes of the WTO. Employees at the WTO headquarters say that Belarus has always been an historically and strategically important state in Europe***

aiming to remove barriers, helping promote transnational companies to world markets. Developed countries have been in the vanguard but the model of globalisation is sharply changing. Prices are at their lowest of the last fifty years, while services are growing, especially highly-intellectual services. As a result, national economies are spurting into the lead, harnessing the technological wave. Think of Ireland, Singapore, Denmark and South Korea. Their systems of education have re-oriented towards training hundreds of thousands of specialists with the necessary knowledge and skills for the digital world.

It's no accident that the requirement of the President to activate negotiations with the WTO coincided with his instructions on the speedy development of information technologies and on the transformation of Belarus into an IT country. In this sphere, we have been able to move immediately in to the vanguard of the innovation revolution, occupying a worthy place on the markets for high-tech goods and services. Alongside computer services, these include artificial intelligence, materials science, automatic-control systems, biomedicine, security technologies and other spheres with major export potential.

The markets for high-tech goods and services are growing rapidly, being

worth trillions of US Dollars while traditional markets (even for food products) reach 'mere' hundreds of millions of US Dollars. Such is our modern desire for knowledge. The digital economy is significantly changing the global system of labour division. Therefore, during the final stage of joining the WTO, we must proceed carefully, taking into account that more than 60 percent of the efficiency of execution of any agreement depends on its correct formulation, with conditions prepared by professionally-knowledgeable staff.

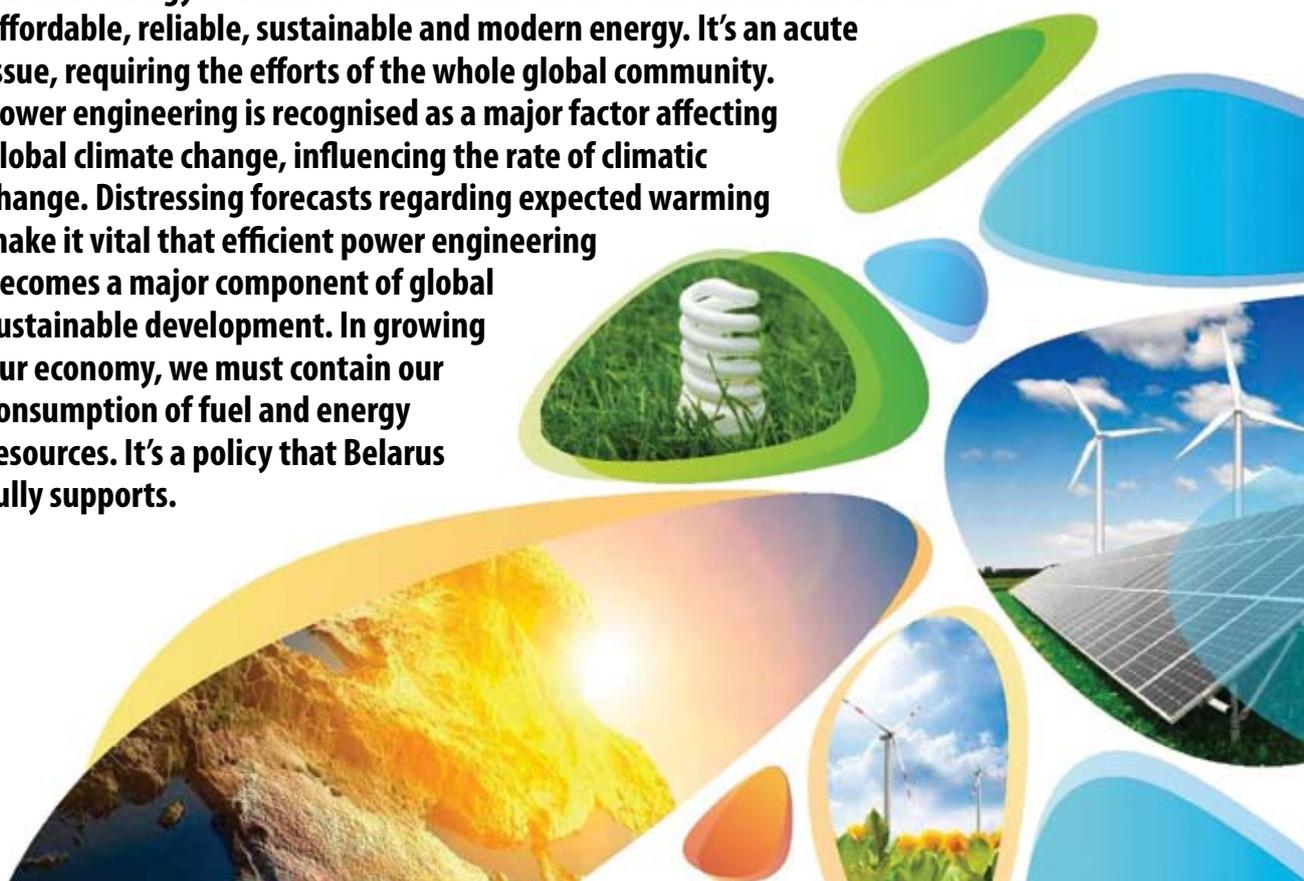
By Boris Panshin,

Professor at BSU's Faculty of Economics



# Comfortable life and efficient economy

One of the most important global Goals of Sustainable Development, adopted at a session of the United Nations Organisation by the heads of 193 states, is the provision of accessible and efficient energy worldwide. Goal #7 calls on us to ensure universal access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy. It's an acute issue, requiring the efforts of the whole global community. Power engineering is recognised as a major factor affecting global climate change, influencing the rate of climatic change. Distressing forecasts regarding expected warming make it vital that efficient power engineering becomes a major component of global sustainable development. In growing our economy, we must contain our consumption of fuel and energy resources. It's a policy that Belarus fully supports.



**A**ccording to the International Energy Agency (IEA), energy consumption (measured within Belarus' GDP) has more than halved in the last 15 years, rivalling that of countries with similar climatic conditions, such as Canada and Finland. This is one of Europe's highest rates of movement to reach parameters of low-carbon development. However, much still needs to be done; the modern economy of Belarus consumes about 30 percent more energy per GDP capita than other countries within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

An affordable way to implement these plans is to reduce the energy consumption of the housing sector. At present, more than 1.5 million residential buildings (with a total area of around 250 million sq.m) are in use, consuming more than 20 percent of total electricity and around half of all heat energy generated in the Republic.

Residential buildings are the largest consumers of energy resources. Taking into account that more than 85 percent of Belarus' gross energy consumption comes from imported fuels, the state is paying special attention to the construction of energy efficient housing. Comparison with other European countries shows that Belarus has major potential to reduce residential energy consumption.

The UN Development Programme, together with the Republic of Belarus and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), is helping the country realise this potential via an international project. 'Improving the Energy Efficiency of Residential Buildings in the Republic of Belarus' has \$5 billion of funding. International experts from Germany, Austria, Italy, the Netherlands and Lithuania are making their professional contribution, as are national experts. Meanwhile, the Department of Energy Efficiency of the State

Committee on Standardisation (the national executive agency) is partnering the project, alongside the Ministry of Architecture and Construction, and the Institute of Housing (NIPTIS named after S.S. Ataev). Other partners include MAPID JSC, Grodnograzhdanproekt Institute, Grodnozhilstroy JSC, and Mogilev's Department for Capital Construction.

The most important goal of the project, which has been running since 2013 and which should be finished in mid-2018, is to create conditions to reduce energy consumption in the housing sector, while aiming to improve the quality of housing. To achieve significant progress in this sphere, it's necessary to launch new design solutions and contemporary energy-saving engineering equipment. It's essential to assess efficiency, and find ways to improve legislation, while enhancing the quality of construction and maintenance. In this respect, the project aims to at least halve residential consumption of heating and hot water. To achieve this, experts have analysed advanced foreign experience and best domestic practice: to reduce energy loss for heating and hot water supply in high-rise buildings; and to promote the use of secondary and renewable energy sources in such buildings.

Research has been conducted as part of the project, in fifty-five high-rise buildings of

They live in a new energy-efficient house in Minsk



various ages and design, in four Belarusian cities, across three heating seasons. This has shown that modern domestic high-rise housing built after 2000 tends to be well insulated, thanks to new materials, with thermal properties in line with modern European standards. The consumption of heating per square meter in such housing is, on average, half that of housing constructed before 2000. However, even old buildings can be brought close to this level by having modern insulation elements added.

Research also shows that buildings require some degree of natural ventilation, to avoid mildew appearing. As such, they should not be 'hermetically insulated'. What tends to happen is that residents open a window to bring in fresh air and, in so doing, allow the cold into their flat, significantly reducing the efficiency of measures to reduce heat loss. A decade ago, when MAPID JSC was liaising with the Institute of Housing, it was suggested that such buildings incorporate a combined extract-and-input system of ventilation, with heat recuperation of the air.

Adding this experience to their armoury, UNDP-GEF experts have suggested a whole range of technical solutions. These encompass the reduction of energy loss via hot water supply and the production of energy from secondary and renewable sources. However, to promote the speedy implementation of these measures, we need to do more than copy foreign experience. To eliminate existing infrastructural, educational and investment barriers to enhanced energy efficiency, we must demonstrate successful design, construction and exploitation of high-rise residential buildings, with specific indicators for energy consumption rivaling the best abroad.

As part of the project, partners have constructed three second generation energy-efficient high-rise residential buildings, with a thermally-insulated 'envelope' and contemporary energy-saving engineering systems of ventilation, heating and hot water supply:



***The UN Development Programme, together with the Republic of Belarus and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), is helping the country realise its potential via an international project. 'Improving the Energy Efficiency of Residential Buildings in the Republic of Belarus' has \$5 billion of funding***

- **in Minsk:** a single-entrance 19-storey 133-apartment large-panel residential building;
- **in Grodno:** a three-entrance 10-storey 120-apartment residential building constructed from brick partition crosswalls, with the outer walls made of foam concrete blocks;
- **in Mogilev:** a four-entrance 10-storey 180-apartment semi-frame panel residential building, with sandwich panels.

These buildings, now occupied, are a model for nationwide use, enhancing thermal resistance and optimising use of space, while recording

consumption of electrical and heat energy. To save on annual energy consumption by up to 82 percent, the following measures are in place:

- reduction of heat energy loss via air renewal, shifting towards a combined extract-and-input system of ventilation with heat recuperation of vent emissions (in all three buildings);
- reduction of heat energy loss via residential wastewater, with heat recovery from water drained from bathrooms (in all three buildings);
- utilisation of ground heat potential via thermal foundation piles and from urban sewage drains,



through a special heat-exchange insertion, using heat pumps (the building in Grodno);

- use of solar-cell panels (the building in Grodno);
- use of solar-heat collectors or helio-collectors (the building in Mogilev).

All the above-mentioned systems have been installed and successfully put into operation, with their efficiency — energy and economic — being assessed over the coming heating season. Using estimated data from design documents, the new systems could reduce heat energy loss by 2.5-fold, with more than 2-fold saving on energy for hot water supply. A three-sectional 10-storey house with similar systems will save between 3,500 and 5,000 tonnes of equivalent fuel over a period of fifty years of operation, with air change, temperature of rooms and temperature of hot water remaining within the nominal range.

If 5 million sq.m of housing is annually put into exploitation, with the application of technical solutions similar to those used in the pilot building in Mogilev, fuel and energy resources equating to 70,000 tonnes

can be saved. If such houses come into use countrywide, the state could save \$17 million on imported fuel.

Residents will enjoy improved sanitary-hygienic conditions and be able to regulate them to suit their own habits. According to our assessments, the price of building, per square metre, will increase by just 15-20 percent. At the same time, specific heat consumption in such houses will halve (compared to that of existing new houses) and could fall four-fold compared to older buildings. This will reduce utility bills, while maintaining reasonable per unit tariffs for heating. Residents could save Br200-300 per year on their bills, with innovations paying for themselves within around eight years.

The benefits are obvious, especially when all equipment is supplied by domestic enterprises and assembled by local specialists. Of course, the market will require the expansion of infrastructure, including the enhancement of design, construction and assembly. Operating organisations and residents will need to understand how systems work, to ensure best results. Residents are ‘investors’ in this respect.

Naturally, there are obstacles to overcome. The new code on ‘Energy Efficiency of Buildings’ (a similar act to that used by the EU) is awaiting approval, as is a bloc of connecting normative documents. We must establish legislation to govern the energy characteristics of buildings, setting out the specific consumption of energy for heating, ventilation, hot water supply, electricity supply and air conditioning, as well as confirming procedures of assessment (certification and energy audit).

Existing cross-subsidisation and current tariff policy is doing little to motivate developers, builders, or those running housing and public utilities, or those dwelling in high-rise buildings. At present, tariffs cover just 63-88 percent of the true cost of electricity, and just 17 percent of the cost of heating. With such disproportion, there’s little to inspire the launch of engineering solutions (as trialled as part of the UNDP-GEF project), such as energy-efficient heat pumps and combined extract-and-input systems of ventilation (with heat recuperation of vent emissions). It should be also mentioned that the internal rate of return of heat utilisation system of sullage and even the system of solar collectors considerably reduces.

Design and construction entities lack experience in using the latest energy-efficient engineering systems for residential housing. Moreover, we lack sufficient domestic manufacturers of necessary components and a monitoring system for energy-efficiency in residential buildings, to ensure an effective audit. Maintenance of buildings is also essential, yet we lack personnel with experience or correct training. Last, but not least, residents need to be made aware of how to play their part in saving energy, using the new systems.

However, where desire exists to improve, results will surely be seen. The project continues to work towards eliminating these barriers.

By Vladimir **Mikhailov**



# Blowing our trumpet worldwide

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**Innovative approach needed to attract tourists**

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**B**

elarus is open to the world. We want tourists to visit us, talk about us and return over and again. This is well-proven by the introduction of a five-day

visa-free regime for citizens of eighty countries. Of course, this initiative has contributed to more tourists arriving but greater results are needed. The Secretary General of World Tourism Organisation, Taleb Rifai, believes our country could receive 2-4 times more tourists, by promoting the Belarus

brand, so that more people are aware of what we have to offer.

Developing a Belarusian brand was a key topic at the International Conference on Tourism: Branding Destinations: Innovative Ideas to Attract Tourists. This was held recently in Minsk, gathering over 300 participants from thirty countries. Belarus remains relatively unknown to world travellers, with many having preconceived ideas.

The challenge is to create a clear portrait of ourselves. Belarus is friendly, beautiful and sporting... but what stands out most? Tourists tend to surf online, looking not for a specific country but for the at-

***To occupy a place on the tourist market, we need to expand our vision, using creative methods to attract tourists***

tractions it offers — such as ‘best beaches’, ‘ancient architecture’ or ‘outdoor activities’. It’s vital that we declare our advantages loudly and clearly, to attract attention.

For the past decade, Slovenia has positioned itself as a green country, being environmentally friendly, with an active lifestyle and healthy outlook. The brand is recognised domestically and globally, with much time and money spent. Efforts are yielding fruit: last year, 42 million people wished to visit the country.

Creating a brand has helped increase tourist flow to many countries: Georgia, Malaysia, India and Colombia, among others. Belarus can offer many attractions: beautiful landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and well-developed sports infrastructure... However, all must combine in a single concept — such as ‘beautiful’. The Secretary General of the World Tourism Organisation, Taleb Rifai, says, “A brand should reflect your values: what’s important to you. ‘Beauty’ can

be a key word in creating the country’s brand. The Italian word ‘bello’ — which means ‘beautiful’ — is consonant with the name of Belarus.”

It was also proposed at the conference that Belarus be marketed as a romantic country, having a strong connection with history, traditions and legends.

Brand development is only a small part of the great work conducted to attract tourists. Paths of promotion are also important. Standard billboards, posters at airports, embassy brochures and, even, TV ads are obsolete. Rather, online marketing, using such popular platforms as Tripadvisor and Expedia, are essential.

Belarus is demonstrating certain progress, having launched its own portal a few months ago. Similar to booking.com, it’s called VETLIVA, and provides information on our country, while allowing the booking of travel services at any time and from anywhere. At present, the site is visited by over 4 thousand people daily.

Social networks play a major role in popularising the brand, conveying its essence and aiding business dialogue between companies. Many countries attract celebrities — singers, actors or sportsmen — to promote their national brand. Belarus’ Belavia national airline has been used to help promote Belarusian Wargaming’s world-famous World of Tanks game. As Wargaming PR Manager, Ivan Zhivitsa, admits, their joint ‘tank-aircraft’ works well in promoting the country’s image. “A Boeing bearing the inscription: ‘The Game from Belarus Played Globally’ services twenty-eight countries and has already transported hundreds of thousands of passengers. Millions of people have seen it. No billboard could rival this,” he explains.

Every year, the number of travellers grows and, in 2016, over 1.2 billion people were in search of new experiences. By 2030, this figure may reach 1.8 billion. As the number of tourists rises, competition between destinations grows. To occupy a place on the tourist market, we need to expand our vision, using creative methods to attract tourists.

By Lyudmila **Minakova**

## Opinions

### Janez Sirse, Head of Support to Sustainable Tourism Development in Belarus project:



Belarus arouses interest. People who come for the first time are delighted by what they see and by the people they talk to. The country needs its own brand and logo. However, Belarusians should be aware that, while presenting the country on the world tourist market, they also need high quality tourist products, to meet customers’ expectations.

### Sandra Carvão, Chief of Communications and Publications at the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO):



A brand is an image in minds of potential customers. This is how we appear to others, and presents our true essence. It’s not enough simply to talk about the brand. It is important to illustrate it with action.

### Tornike Zirakishvili, Head of International Relations for the Georgian National Tourism Administration:



The main lesson I’ve learnt from my marketing experience is that you can’t sell what you don’t believe in. Many destinations fall into this trap, pushing an illusion. It’s important to show who you are, to demonstrate your authenticity and present what you really love.



A section of Minsk-Slutsk-Mikashевичi highway after reconstruction

BELTA

## Secondary roads come to the fore

**In December 2016, the development of local highways was discussed as part of the opening of Minsk's second ring road. Their total length around the country is 70 thousand kilometres...**

**A**nd around half of these roads have not been repaired for 20-30 years. Alexander Lukashenko requested a clear plan for the reconstruction

of highways of local importance. A working group was established to develop the proposals. Its participants listened to all interested parties, studied the experience of similar countries, calculated the financial cost and — armed with their figures — came to the meeting with the President.

In recent years, the country has had considerable dealings with the construction, reconstruction and repair of the Republic's highways. This is justified as a transit state can't have poor roads. The primary task was to connect Minsk with regional centres using first class roads. This goal has been mostly achieved, with only

the Minsk-Grodno highway remaining under construction. In a short time, the road builders have constructed a wonderful second ring road.

While the leading transport arteries have been improving, the regional road network has been left behind; this has understandably led to criticism. According to the experts, about six thousand kilometres of regional roads require urgent repairs but local authorities usually cite lack of funding as an excuse. This argument did not convince the President. Firstly, to postpone solving the problems means even greater expenses in the future. Experts have calculated that if we don't repair roads promptly,

square metre. After all, reducing costs allows the opportunity to repair an extra thousand kilometres of road.

Minister Anatoly Sivak knows how to solve this problem, "Effective use of funds is possible only through competent technical approaches. The Ministry has developed standard solutions for various types of roads and different types of repair. This document will also be legalised through the state programme."

We take high quality main highways for granted now, local roads will soon enjoy the same condition. After all, they are the 'showcase' of our country: foreigners notice them and the state should be keen

***We now have the necessary resources for road construction: high-performance machinery, professional personnel, cement factories and ever upgrading technologies. Experts have calculated that if we don't repair roads promptly, it costs almost three times as much later***

ly, it costs almost three times as much later. Secondly, money was always scarce — even in Soviet times, but we now have the necessary resources for road construction: high-performance machinery, professional personnel, cement factories and ever upgrading technologies. Not so long ago, scientists of the National Academy of Sciences developed new materials for the construction and repair of highways — including import-substituting emulsifiers and bitumen modifiers.

Mr. Lukashenko set down the basic objective that, in three to four years, local roads must be put in order. "By the end of the five-year plan, we must complete the repair and restoration of roads. We have enough technology to do it," he said.

To achieve the goal, the state programme for road development until 2020 will be amended, including the needs of non-central roads. The President asked for the issue to be approached in a business-like way, scrupulously calculating every

to spend money on the road network, but this money does not come from thin air. These are taxes, including the state vehicle duty. It's necessary to pay for comfort and convenience.

The figures were confirmed by the Minister of Finance — Vladimir Amarin, "From 2017-2020, about Br900 million will be allocated for capital repairs of local highways. These are budgetary funds, including money from the Republican road fund. Of this 900 million, about 40 percent is money from levying the state duty." At the moment, the latter is distributed as follows: 61 percent goes to the Republican budget and 39 percent to the local budget. From 2018 to 2020, this ratio will be 50 / 50.

All road repair works will undergo independent examination. In addition, Mr. Lukashenko promised to personally assess the efforts of local authorities in bringing the road network to a good condition in the autumn.

By Alexander **Pimenov**

## ▶ As part of partnership strategy

**World Bank plans to allocate \$60m to Belarus for the development of small and medium-sized entrepreneurship**

"Over the last four years, as part of our strategy for Belarus, we have increased the amount of credit resources allocated to the country, from \$375m to \$973 at present. Within the next 2-3 months we plan to give another \$60m worth of credit resources for the development of small and medium-sized entrepreneurship in the Republic of Belarus," noted the World Bank Country Manager for Belarus, Young Chul Kim.



As far as the reconstruction of M6 highway is concerned, this is the largest project of the WB in Belarus in terms of volume of financing. In total, 9 projects are being implemented in Belarus in various spheres with the participation of the WB. Alongside road construction we also finance projects dealing with energy efficiency, the construction of a waste sorting facility, as well as education and healthcare. "Cost-cutting has been reached in each project and the results are very impressive," underlined Young Chul Kim.

During the second stage, reconstruction will be made on the 67th kilometre of the M6 highway (Minsk-Grodno-border with the Republic of Poland) from 130.4km to 197.7km. Works are being conducted according to the first stage of the plan during which sections of the highway are being worked on simultaneously from both the Minsk and Shchuchin sides. The expected end date of the work is 2019; however, there are plans to complete works along the highway in 2018. The 272km-long road will meet European standards.

## Medicine for health

**The development of modern, convenient and effective forms of medicine will determine the progress of Belarusian pharmaceuticals**

**L**ast year, the Belarusian pharmaceutical market exceeded \$630m, with the share of locally produced medicines standing at over 50 percent. Overall, more than 4,500 medicines are registered in the country. Tatiana Tumelya — the Head of the Board on Organisation of Production and Long-Term Development in the Pharmaceutical Industry Department at the Ministry of Health — outlined the focus of the industry, “The production of generic drugs — equal in quality and efficiency to the original medicines — is an important area for development. Our own products are more moderately priced, as they reduce the country’s dependence on imports. In the next five years, we will focus on the development of modern and effective medicines in solid dosage forms with modified release, as well as in convenient packaging in cartridges and prefilled syringes. In addi-

tion, we will produce drugs for targeted, or molecular-targeted, therapy.”

In 2016, 116 new domestically produced medicines were registered in the



Head of the Board on Organisation of Production and Long-Term Development in the Pharmaceutical Industry Department at the Health Ministry, Tatiana Tumelya

country. “We are working in two directions,” Ms. Tumelya comments. “The first is connected with the localisation of production of transnational companies. At the initial stage, we organise the packing of foreign medicines domestically — including original preparations. We then develop full cycle production of our own medicines, using both our own and imported substances.”

Last year, the country faced a serious problem with hepatitis C drugs. Foreign companies offered new drugs in solid form. They are effective and well accepted by patients but extremely expensive, at \$16,000 per package. It was difficult to provide patients with treatment at such rates. Specialists found a way out, as Yelena Kalinichenko, Deputy Director for Scientific and Innovative Work at the Institute of Bioorganic Chemistry of the National Academy of Sciences, explains, “We organised the re-packaging of an Egyptian company’s drug. It will be packed and controlled by us. However, we are interested in full cycle production, to enable us to track all stages independently. Specialists at a Belarusian company have proposed the development of a technology to produce a drug against hepatitis from purchased ingredients. Tests were carried out and positive results obtained on the efficacy and safety of the drug. Documents for the registration of our



TATIANA STOLYAROVA

Manufacturing of anti-tumour medications at Belmedpreparaty enterprise

own preparation are being prepared. In addition, we will work to produce combined modern medicines against hepatitis C this year.”

According to the Republican Scientific and Practical Centre of Oncology and Medical Radiology, 45,000 new cancer patients were registered in 2016. Each year, their number rises by 3 percent and the entire world is in search of new drugs against various forms of cancer.

“It is important to provide as many patients as possible with modern effective medicines, because state medicine is at the expense of taxpayers,” says Ms. Kalinichenko. “We produce anti-tumour drugs — including those produced domestically.” This approach makes it possible to save state funds and patients’ money, while still receiving modern treatment.

*In 2016,  
**116** new  
domestically  
produced medicines  
were registered  
in the country*

The modern market now offers a domestic generic drug for treatment of lung cancer. One bottle of the original chemotherapy drug cost \$2,600, with 5-7 bottles needed for a single course. At present, Belarusian pharmacists make both a chemical and a ready-made dosage form; the medicine is half the cost of the imported original. It is being

registered in Russia and Kazakhstan and costs of treatment are expected to reduce even further.

Modern pharmaceutical development is also focusing on targeted therapy drugs. This newest development is being successfully applied in oncology practice. Target drugs affect the tumour itself, without affecting healthy cells. Leukaemia is well treated at present while liver and kidney cancer is more difficult to cure. Specialists are developing a new medicine for neoplasm in these organs. “The chemical and the finished dosage form are being registered now,” said Ms. Kalinichenko. “This treatment will be cheaper than the original. Some patients don’t believe that a cheap domestic drug can be as effective as an overseas one, but this is certainly the case.”

By Olga **Kosyakova**



SERGEY LOZUIK

# Warm-hearted treatment

**Minsk's Regional Clinical Hospital is using new method of osteoarthritis therapy. Over seventy patients have been already successfully treated with joint fluid medication, injected while monitored by ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus. This is making it possible to delay or even avoid surgery for joint replacement. The Head Doctor of the Clinical Hospital, Andrey Korolko, tells us in which cases this type of treatment can be used and about other achievements in aiding seriously-ill patients.**

## Alternative to joint replacement

Over 10 percent of the population suffer from severe forms of degenerative changes in joints. The disease primarily affects large joints: the knee, hip, shoulder and ankle.

“Previously, we treated conservatively, through tablets, capsules, physiotherapy and exercise therapy,” the doctor explains. “Where medical therapy failed and the disease progressed, so that the patient was unable to walk without assistance and suffered from severe pain, they underwent joint replacement.”

This year, the hospital has introduced high-tech treatment of joint diseases, with no hospitalisation required. A patient undergoes medical examination before receiving the injection of the drug into the inter-articular space (without anaesthesia, or the need to stay overnight). Ultrasound is used to track how the medicine distributes and pathological joint changes are assessed. “The method is quite effective,” the doctor

says. “We clearly see that the preparation is in the joint. Improvement is registered in over 80 percent of patients. The procedure is prescribed in the second stage of the disease and the medicine relieves pain, signs of inflammation and makes it possible to delay a joint replacement. The course usually envisages two injections, with a break between them of two weeks. Re-treatment is offered no earlier than 6-9 months later, since the drug is effective for a long time. Some patients have no need for surgery at all.”

Both domestically produced and foreign drugs are used for the procedure, with an average price of Br170.

## At centre of medical science

Minsk Regional Clinical Hospital is one of the leaders in our medical field. The multidisciplinary institution not only treats patients but devotes energy to research and teaching. Four national centres operate at the hospital, covering andrology, reconstructive surgery, gastroenterology and coloproctology,

plastic surgery and microsurgery, hyperbaric oxygenation and hypobaric adaptation. In addition, seven departments of the Belarusian Medical Academy of Postgraduate Education operate there. Specialists use the most advanced treatment methods, while conducting high-tech operations and investigating cutting-edge medical science.

The hospital has signed an agreement with the Republican Scientific-Medical Centre for Cell Technologies, treating venous ulcers with stem cells. “Adipose tissue is collected and bio-materials are sent to the centre,” explains the Head of the Department for Out-of-Budget Activity, Tatiana Ivanova. “Cells are grown there and we then transplant them to patients.”

Exports of medical services are the basis of the hospital's out-of-budget activity. At present, citizens of fifteen countries are undergoing treatment there for a fee. Foreigners admit to feeling satisfied that they're gaining 'value for money', despite sometimes facing a language barrier. The hospital liaises

with some travel agencies in the field of medical tourism.

## Saving patient Stephen

Stephen, a lecturer from the United States, was taken to Borovlyany for surgery, having fallen ill in January, while in Novopolotsk. He was taken to the local hospital, where he underwent emergency bowel surgery and, six months later, was sent to the Republican Centre for Reconstructive Gastroenterology and Colorectal Surgery, at Minsk Regional Clinical Hospital. This second stage of intervention aims for the complete recovery of his intestine.

Stephen notes, "In America, a patient goes home three days after an operation. Meanwhile, in Belarus, they're observed and not allowed to leave until they're in complete recovery. In winter, I stayed at this hospital for a month, covered by insurance case. I'm now being treated on a paid basis. Interestingly, surgery is three times cheaper in Belarus than in my country."

Of course, it's not just about money. Stephen has come to believe in Belarusian surgical skill, having been saved from a potentially fatal situation. "I was told that I was at the best clinic in Belarus," smiles the American, proudly demonstrating his surgical scar, which looks like a zipper. "When I showed the

scar to my sister, she was shocked, saying it was tight and clean. My mother underwent similar surgery in the USA and her scar is less neat. Moreover, my father had an enlarged kidney (weighing around 5kg); American doctors missed his defect and it was discovered only later, in Brazil!" Stephen says. He's in great spirits, demonstrating no sign of ill health, such as is only possible when you feel yourself out of danger.

"We let our patients go home only after being confirmed as recovered," explains proctologist Victor Korotysh. "We have many patients with complicated diseases, from Russia, Georgia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, and Turkmenistan. They find out about us

## Citizens

of **15** countries  
undergo medical  
treatment  
in hospital for a fee.  
Advanced methods  
of diagnosis  
are applied here

through word of mouth and the Internet. Borovlyany is a brand. Leading experts work at the Centre and people come to receive consultation by particular doctors.

"I told my friends I'd been saved here," adds Stephen. "Americans tend to go to Mexico for medical treatment, since it's situated closer. Belarus is farther but your doctors can truly perform miracles."

## Heart rescue

Not long ago, a new branch launched at Minsk Regional Clinical Hospital, offering treatment for those suffering from acute coronary syndrome (heart attack). Head Doctor Andrey Korolko says, "We receive patients from surrounding areas, so we begin treatment while they're in the ambulance. On arrival, they're immediately examined by specialists and, if necessary, operated upon. After resuscitation, we move them to intensive care, before they go for rehabilitation."

Last November, the hospital launched its second unit for magnetic resonance imaging. It's now possible to perform an MRI under general anaesthesia. The new technology makes it possible to more reliably and more effectively examine patients.

The hospital has twenty-five inpatient departments and twenty-four para-clinic departments. The admission room is newly renovated. "This month, we plan to add three beds to our resuscitation department," says Dr. Korolko. "We're already performing clinical tests, closely cooperating with Russia — as part of Union State programmes. We're also negotiating with colleagues from Poland and Lithuania to jointly launch European Union programmes. We're considering building a new wing for the polyclinic, as well as a cardio-centre, at the hospital. We'd like our clinic to join the joint project of the Health Ministry and the World Bank on informatisation development. This will further improve the availability and quality of medical assistance."

By Olga Kosyakova



SERGEY LOZIUK

# Immediate 3D printing

**Minsk's 9-grade pupil Danila Yeliseev has assembled a 3D printer which costs four times less than the most inexpensive foreign analogue**



## Master Danila

The young man virtually grew up with a soldering iron in his hand. As a pupil, he spent every summer outside the city in the cottage where he assembled and disassembled old appliances. While his peers were staring at computer screens and smart phones, he tried to understand how these gadgets are made inside. His parents have always encouraged his hobby and even presented him with an electronic 'Znatok' set for designers. It only took minutes for Danila to find out how it worked. After toys, he turned to 'adult' appliances and over the course of time, he built an electronic clock and a thermometer.

"Without a case, they were more like a tangle of wires and chips rather than useful appliances. I then tried to make a case independently in my handicraft lessons. I spent hours cutting plywood and it looked terrible and was time-consuming. One day

I saw a 3D printer at my father's office where he works as programmer. This awesome device could print anything, and I needed cases for my electronic devices," Danila explains.

The idea of buying a home printer was tempting but the schoolboy had no idea where to get \$2,000. The sum required seemed enormous so he decided to make a printer himself. "During the summer after finishing year eight, I developed my 3D printer — working on it day and night.

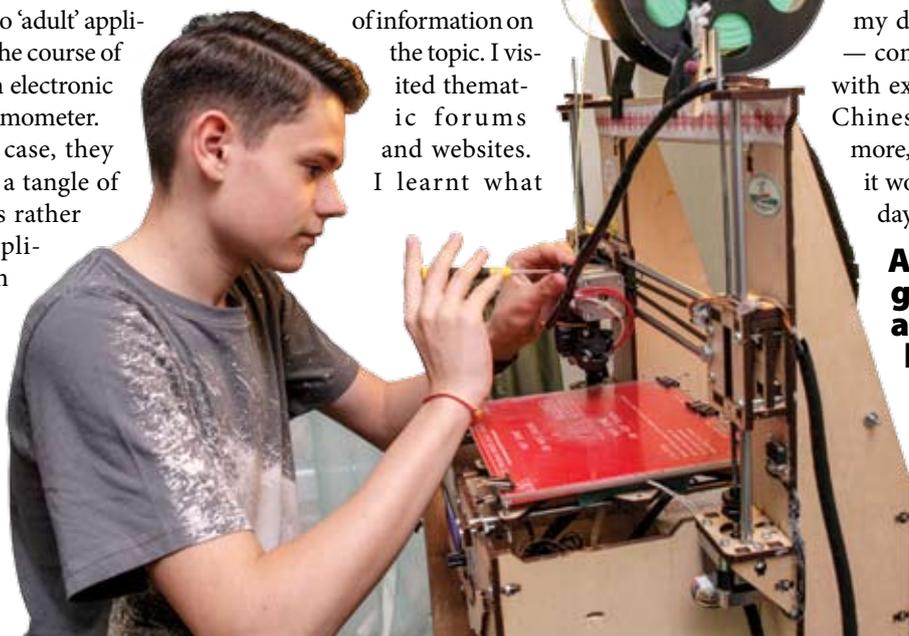
The Internet has a lot of information on the topic. I visited thematic forums and websites. I learnt what

senior college students study. I ordered some parts via the internet and took details from old appliances. A 3D-printer is a complicated device: it's necessary to ensure agreement on the movement of all the axes, to calibrate each of them, make them move to the required distances — which sometimes is one-tenth or one hundredth of a millimetre! To ensure successful operation, it's

not enough to simply make a printer: special software is a must; I've written it personally. To do this, I had to master 3D modelling and, as a result, my device costs about \$250 — competing in print quality with expensive American and Chinese products. Furthermore, it does not sit on a shelf: it works up to seven hours a day," he added.

## Amazing his grandmother and pleasing his brother

The Minsk schoolboy's printer is unique as its printing element can be replaced by milling or laser cutting. As a result, a detail can be processed or an en-



VLADIMIR SHLAPAK

graving can be made on it. While Danila is demonstrating his 'treasure', his grandmother joins us.

"I was not happy to see my grandson was sitting at home with a soldering iron: I advised him to go out and have fun. He showed me his device but I didn't understand the idea. Sometime later however, I lost a teapot lid and my grandson printed it! Then I appreciated Danila's work. The printer is also extremely useful for his younger brother: Danila prints toys, broken or lost parts for him," she explains.

Before meeting Alexander Lukashenko, Danila thought carefully about a present which could be printed using his invention. As a result, he made an auroch — a powerful animal from Belarus' reserve. His present proved to be symbolic, significant and beautiful.

### I'd like to study in Minsk

"At international contests I was invited to study in Moscow; however, I have already decided to study in Minsk," the young boy shares his plans for the future.

In the past academic year alone, Danila has participated in eight contests for young inventors, winning seven diplomas and receiving the Grand Prix of the '21st Century Talents' competition of the Union State — ahead of almost three hundred participants from Russia and Belarus.

He is now developing two more models of his 3D-printer: a more powerful version can be used in businesses to make pre-production prototypes and a 3D-mini-printer can be taken in a bag by anyone — being able to operate without electricity.

In the future, Danila plans to launch a fully-fledged production of the Belarusian 3D-printers based on these three models. He is already receiving business proposals as this niche is almost empty in the Belarusian market: so far, only one company produces 3D-printers to order and they are four times more expensive than our young man's.

By Anna Kurak

# Talented beyond his years

**A**t just fourteen years old, you could already make a movie about the life of Timur Sushko. The talented boy could talk at nine months and knew the alphabet at the age of two. He then quickly learned to read and at the age of five entered Minsk's gymnasium #22. Within the first two weeks however, it became clear that Timur knew the syllabus already and so he joined the second-year pupils. His remarkable progress resulted in him omitting the sixth year, moving straight from year five to seven, after which he undertook an individual study programme before entering the Medical University's Faculty of General Medicine.

Timur wanted to prove to everyone that a talented person can excel in any field. He became interesting in swimming and had won approximately 200 awards by his fourteenth birthday, also becoming a candidate of the master of sports and debuting in the national championships in the adult category. This was only the beginning: a year ago, he took a sabbatical from Belarus' leading university and, with more time to train, he plans to become an Olympic champion at the 2020 Tokyo Games.

It's too early to predict whether he could win an Olympic gold, but it's evident that his intentions are serious. The young man spends up to five hours a day in the water. He is inspired by the success of Michael Phelps, who won 23 gold medals at the Games and Russian swimmer Vladimir Morozov, an 8-time world champion in 'short' distances.

Timur is not neglecting his education and plans to return to the University in September. "It's not difficult to study for me. The lecturers take no notice of my age: they behave with me



as strictly as with the other students," he explains. "The most challenging thing is to combine studies and swimming competitions. My sports progress stopped at times when I entered the university. I've grown up now and think it will be easier to combine sports and studies."

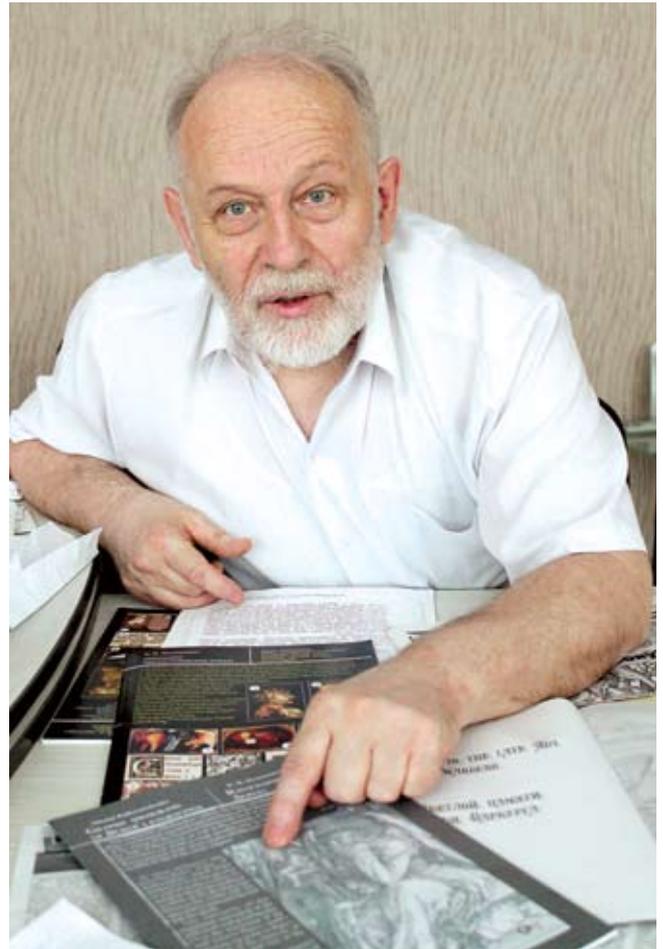
Timur has decided to completely devote his life to medicine, becoming a neurosurgeon. He also dreams of inventing a medicine against all incurable diseases. "Since childhood I have wanted to help sick people — conducting surgery on the brain. This is a difficult and delicate profession, but the challenge is exactly why it has always appealed to me" he said.

By Alexey Fedosov



# Skaryna's mysterious engravings

In August, the country celebrates the 500th anniversary of printing, with the name of Francysk Skaryna at the centre of attention. His writings and thoughts initiated this great innovation in the Eastern Slavonic world. The re-edited encyclopaedic reference book 'Francysk Skaryna and His Time' is dedicated to the jubilee, featuring the first book printer's famous engravings. Many remain a mystery, as Gomel artist-critic Nikolay Polkovnichenko admits, despite spending two decades endeavouring to decrypt Skaryna book's illustrations.



*Is there really so much we don't know about Skaryna's engravings?*

There's so much to learn from the art of the Middle Ages and from the illustrations in Francysk Skaryna's books. Happily, we're now reassessing many facts we previously took for granted.

Let's start with a well-known fact: the landmark Bible — published by Skaryna in Prague in Old Belarusian language — comprises 23 books, accompanied by the author's thoughts in the foreword and afterword, in addition to illustrations. These include self-portraits of

Skaryna: unprecedented in church literature. What yet remains unclear?

To watch and to see are two different activities. Skaryna's books — like his engravings — should be read not simply to feel the spirit and thinking of the age but to understand the author's



*Skaryna's books — like his engravings — should be read not simply to feel the spirit and thinking of the age but to understand the author's perspective*

perspective. We can read his scientific views in the foreword and afterword but his publications were aimed at ordinary people — focusing mostly on everyday morality. Meanwhile, many of his illustrations shed light on Skaryna's scientific outlook.

**Can you explain?**

During the Renaissance, paintings used symbolism and references to literary works, as well as non-canonical interpretations of sacred texts, metaphors and comparisons from philosophical works. To decipher these layers, we need to understand the level of scientific knowledge in the Middle Ages, as well as their lifestyle, literature and traditions. When I plunged into medieval studies, I became convinced that everything wasn't as simple as it seemed. We can take a famous self-portrait of Skaryna (created during his lifetime) in the Jesus of Sirach book as an example: the abundance of symbolism there is obvious.

**Doesn't everyone have their own subtext?**

It's true. Skaryna is depicted as the Old Testament's Enoch: a righteous man considered to be the first genius of human civilisation, as testified by the Calvary pictogram (a cross with two spears on the top of a trapeze) placed above the upper section (the future) of the hourglass (a symbol of eternity in the indissoluble trinity of past, present and future). His right leg is placed forward, indicating righteousness. As Sirach said: 'My foot went the right way (righteous)'. The turn of his head to the right echoes this symbolism. Sirach also said: 'I incline my ear (to wisdom)'. A candle is an

old symbol of life, while baskets, footwear and a pole symbolise our journey through life. If these objects are placed in a row, we receive the earthly path of Francysk Skaryna. A bee symbolises the educator's second life: in the memory of people. It also stands for devotion to the general good...

**This is a true puzzle...**



Just look at Skaryna's other self-portrait, placed in the centre of the initial letter 'onŭ'. The Cyrillic symbol indicates the Creator and the crown of his creation. In turn, a circular shape (representing the universe and humanity) stands for traditional Latin abbreviations for the words *optimus* and *omnis* (all-embracing and all-seeing).

Skaryna's famous emblem as a 'young sun' symbolises (in the context of the philosophical teachings of that time) the awakening of the mind, which makes man distinct from the animals. As Renaissance humanist Marsilio Ficino said: 'An inquisitive mind is like the moon, which always refers to the sun.'

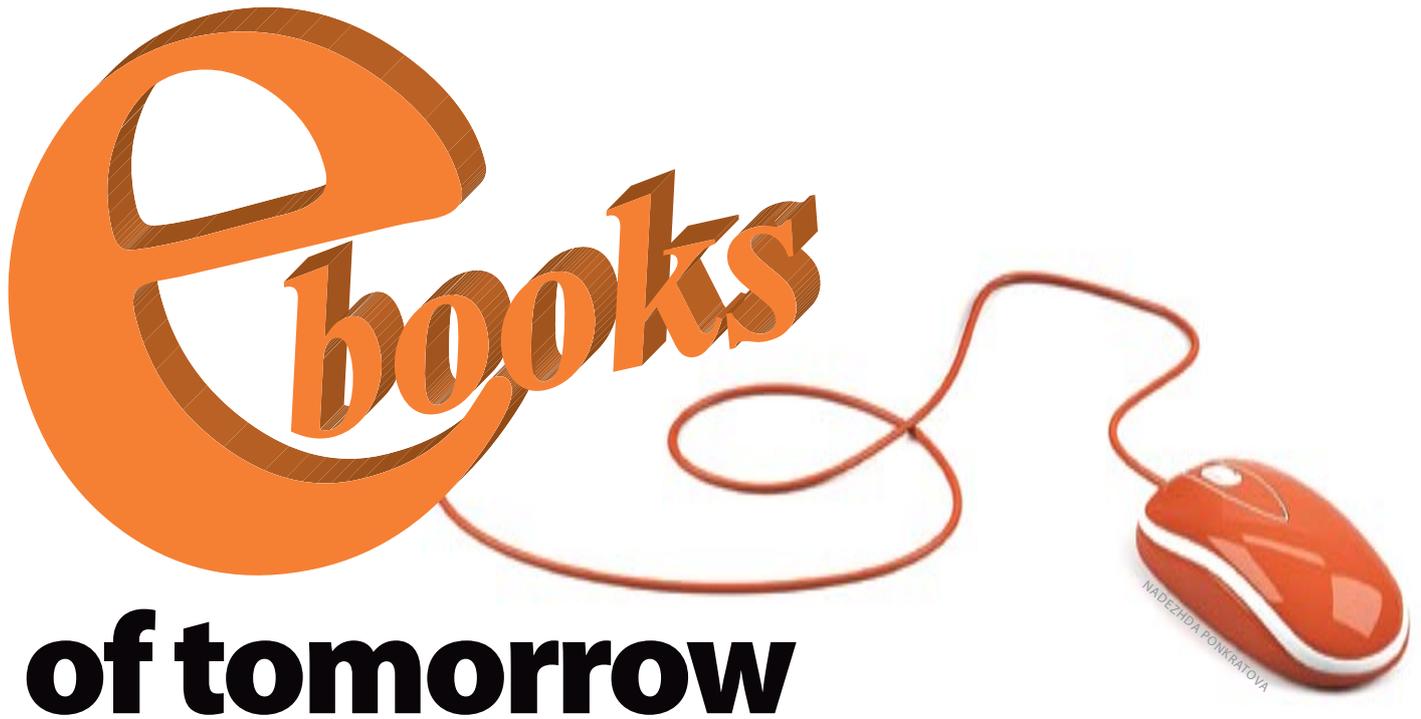
**Does this interpretation of Skaryna engravings' help us understand the works of medieval authors, and vice versa?**

Exactly. While interpreting the first Belarusian printer's engravings, I looked at many mysterious works by Western European artists from the Renaissance. While exploring Skaryna's Prague editions, I was lucky to discover Dürer's famous engraving 'Melancholia', published in English. It is the briefest of all interpretations. In his preface to 'Lamentations', Skaryna 'cited' the esoteric 'Book of Letters', which is popular among humanists. It states that one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet symbolises the nail. The depiction of pincers and four old, pulled nails in 'Melancholia' represent the idea that we detach from our bodily senses at the time of intellectual insight. It's related to his statements: 'Only philosophical thinking brings inspiration' and 'The wings of the human soul, striving for knowledge, grow stronger'.

**No doubt, there are more unsolved 'puzzles' from Francysk Skaryna's time?**

World-famous historian Mikhail Alpatov said, "Major discoveries await the modern art historian not in the attic or the pantry, but in museum halls, which exhibit widely known yet undervalued masterpieces."

By Violetta **Dralyuk**



# of tomorrow

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## Belarusian IT specialists create talking textbooks for Belarusian students

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**T**his year, in Belarus and abroad, we see the celebration of the 500th anniversary of Belarusian book printing, as noted by UNESCO. On August 6th, 1517, enlightener Francysk Skaryna, the first printer, published the first book, The Psalter in Old Belarusian, in Czech Prague.

During the Renaissance and Enlightenment, new technologies were required to spread knowledge across and beyond Europe. The Polotsk resident (then a major trade and industrial centre of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) was a graduate from the Krakow Academy (now the Jagiellonian University of Poland), holding a Bachelor's degree. He became a Doc-

tor of Medicine, having studied at the University of Padua in Italy (documented in 1510) but felt the persistent 'demand of the time'.

He adopted and translated holy books into a language understandable to his countrymen and started to print his works. In the epilogue of The Apostle, published in March 1525, in Vilno, he wrote 'made and printed with great work and care by Doctor Francysk Skaryna of Polotsk, in the name of the One God of the Trinity, His Most Holy Mother and all saints honoured, for all good people to become educated'.

The best way to honour our great ancestors is, probably, to continue their glorious deeds and traditions. It's impossible to enter the same river twice, and impossible to 'copy' someone's life or achievements. Nor is it

necessary. 'New time, new songs' as folks say. In 'continuing' we build upon past idea, like grain growing, writing a new page of history.

'Multimedia School Library' software (SP MSL for short) is an innovative project, developed by Sakrament IT to support school education, keeping it up-to-date and exciting. In fact, it's a revolutionary breakthrough in the field of studying and teaching. So far, nowhere else in the world rivals Belarus for use of school textbooks online, in electronic format. They can be used anywhere, since the Internet has no boundaries. Belarusians in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States, and even Argentina, the USA and other countries are showing interest in the Internet resource, which features hundreds of classics of Russian and Belarusian literature.

In our previous article, 'From Skaryna to SKARYNA', Valery Yegorov, the Director of Sakrament IT, told us that 'Multimedia School Library' may come to be named 'SKARYNA'. Speaking of plans for the future, he commented, "Our company has not just specialists but patriots of Belarus. So, we'd like to make the project name recognisably Belarusian. Francysk Skaryna was the first printer, enabling books to spread among cultural and educated people. We view the 'Multimedia School Library' as a continuation of Skaryna's traditions, in our IT era. It's a new step in the direction of enlightenment, as taken by our great predecessor 500 years ago. In our opinion, SKARYNA is a very appropriate name." ('Golas Radzimy', June 8th, 2017)

***Mr. Yegorov, tell us about your IT company and its fields of activity.***

The company was founded in 1994 and named Sakrament. We were engaged in the construction industry. In 2000, we focused on IT, and the company was renamed. Actually, the redirection was logical. I'm a certified programmer. In 1979, I graduated from the Faculty of Applied Mathematics of the BSU and, for 15 years, worked at scientific institutions. My interest in speech synthesis and recognition systems originates from there; Belarusian scientists were engaged in these in the Soviet period. We tried to implement some of these practices under new circumstances, becoming one of the first residents of the High-Tech Park: we registered in 2006.

We've developed synthesis for Russian, Belarusian, English, Lithuanian and Georgian. For the record, at present, the 3rd version of the Belarusian synthesis system has been released: the 'Mark' synthesis, which is a new direction. We've mastered it and the technology is more convenient and compact than before. It enables high-quality operation, with minimum technical requirements.

***You use your previous experience in new projects, don't you?***

Of course! We used our previous experience to develop the 'Multimedia School Library', operating online under the name Megabook. Thanks to our work, the volume of information out there is huge: 150 school textbooks for forms 5 to 11 at secondary school, in Russian and Belarusian, together with additional multimedia materials.

We had a period of transition when we developed audio textbooks for schools attended by visually challenged students. These books are in demand, featuring Russian and Belarusian speech synthesis. Initially, we developed an experimental version for biology, which was praised. The plan is to make all books used at secondary schools accessible on various platforms and devices: on any smartphone, tablet or computer running Android, iOS or Windows. We have more than thirty audio textbooks available. Schools used to face the

***'Multimedia School Library' software is an innovative project, developed by Sakrament IT to support school education, keeping it up-to-date and exciting***



problem of where to find ‘speaking’ books. At last, they’ve been developed and put together: you pay, download and study.

***How big is demand? Have they paid for themselves?***

Not as much as we’d like, but the process continues. Major money has been invested, and the company began in 2012, without sponsors or customers. Partially, the work has been financed — on a return basis — by the Belarusian Innovation Fund of the State Committee for Science and Technology. The state customer is the Ministry of Education of Belarus. A year has passed since we launched the project online. SP MSL sales take place via MBOOK.BY and through a network of dealers, together with MTS mobile operator, for the online version of Megabook. As soon as we settle with creditors and stabilise financially, with a ‘technological breakthrough’, our progress will speed up: we’ll be able to clear, expand and deepen certain aspects.

***What advantages does ‘Multimedia School Library’ software offer?***

It’s no secret that, over years of study, students use many books and additional materials. Now, students, teachers and parents have everything to hand. You can study in any place and at any time, using any mobile application or computer. Another advantage is continuous updating and expansion of our library and additional materials. We add the best school books released previously and develop modern multimedia materials at the same time. This feature can be described in three words: completeness, traditions and modernity.

***Do parents worry that using electronic books can impair children’s vision?***

We’ve worked hard to prevent this. The whole SP MSL has successfully passed detailed deep testing and has been approved by the interdepartmental committee; it complies with sanitary norms and rules, as well as hygienic standards. School teachers



say that children learn more thoroughly from ‘Multimedia School Library’ materials than from printed books. Modern school students are good with gadgets. The size of our images and pages is easily reduced or increased (scaling) and navigation is supported, making it easy to search the text for words. To make a thematic report or study something more deeply, additional materials are provided. Finally, speech synthesis is integrated, so school books can be listened to, and the voice can be selected. It really makes studying a pleasure.

***Have you used only your own technologies, or have you borrowed from somewhere?***

No one lets you ‘borrow’ anything without payment, even in the name of education and extension of knowledge. I don’t believe Francysk Skaryna would have received donations for his projects; it was only his wealthy merchant father, from Polotsk, and his brother who funded him. As an aside, online, I’ve read that researchers think that the Polotsk Skarynas

were quite an old family and, by the time Francysk started printing books, quite a wealthy one. His parents and his brother, Ivan, traded in fur and leather. To my mind, the enlightener was, to a certain extent, an entrepreneur... He considered a business strategy, studied the market for printed products and calculated the costs and possible revenue from the activity. He didn’t live in a fairy tale but in the harsh Middle Ages. However, let’s return to our time. In implementing the project, we’ve developed unique technology, especially for the project! Based on this technology, we’ve created the ‘Multimedia School Library’, to include digital versions of school books, complete with various multimedia materials and a number of extra educational resources. We’ve put together software for easy generation and distribution of digital versions of school books and aids, models, algorithms and access interfaces for users worldwide, as well as technologies able to integrate with educational resources and third-party services.

*From time to time, I find PDF files of interesting books online. You offer adjustment of font size, margins and line spacing...*

This is called dynamic layout and allows people to work more easily with electronic textbooks. I'd like to note that we keep the original page numbering of school textbooks, so the user's smartphone or tablet can be of any screen size.

*In one interview, you said that the Belarusian project developed by Sakrament IT had no direct analogues anywhere in the world. The project is called revolutionary and innovative... How is this achieved?*

We've managed to take into account many minor considerations and combine a number of important characteristics within SP MSL. In particular, it can be used with almost all mobile and stationary devices: smartphones, tablets and computers running Android, iOS or Windows. The software is multiplatform and you can work with resources online (using web and mobile applications) or offline (by downloading them).

We're continuously updating our content and offer a flexible system of payment. We also have a system of hyperlinks, interdisciplinary glossaries and a search engine shared by all SP MSL resources. It's based on a formed semantic matrix, to provide users with an integral system of knowledge about the world, our place within it and our inner world.

Ours is easily integrated with other educational resource platforms, such as the system of online education and training, and the electronic school diary. I'd also like to emphasise that SP MSL has convenient tools, enabling quick generation of digital books and aids. This allows parents, teachers and senior school students to view SP MSL content without calling upon us, its developers. Finally, there is synthesised voicing, and audio files can be stored for listening to at a later time. It's a real treasure

for teachers. There are great opportunities for global use of SP MSL by mentally and physically challenged children and adults.

*Let's focus on your electronic school textbooks' multimedia nature. How does it work?*

Our major peculiarity is that we have managed to make textbooks multimedia. Look at this Russian Literature book [Valery Nikolayevich opens the book online on his smartphone]. Previously, it was a common school book. We've added voicing, photos and pictures... Particularly, we've completed the part dedicated to Ancient Greek myths, adding works by famous artists through the ages, to illustrate mythological stories. You can listen to poems, with voicing by professional actors. Let's select the works of poet Apollon Maikov [a contemporary of M. Lermontov]. Books are becoming an exciting toy, spreading knowledge. We have audio and video, and everything is integrated.

*There are lots of materials for Russian literature. What about Belarusian?*

A few clicks, and here is 'To My Father', by Rygor Borodulin, on the school programme. Belarusians all over the world must remember these lines, '...It's unbelievable: not once/ Will you attend the house we live in./ And any time I have the chance,/ I bow at graves with names not given.'

We've created many audio records ourselves. Here's the poet, and here are the poet's works, with photos added. When the People's Poet of Belarus died, we placed the information in the book, and it immediately updated on users' gadgets. You don't have to wait until a new edition is published. Now, you can take any school book for forms 5 to 11 on any device and read, listen and watch video...

*There's no 'Borodulin' video yet...*

We plan to add it! It's a dynamic platform, not PDF, so, all information can be added and adjusted. We've been effective in offering huge

volumes of Russian literature. Our educational specialists have found many interesting materials at the National Library, with each recorded by actors. The works are classical, and sound like listening to a play. School students get excited on hearing such dramatic reading.

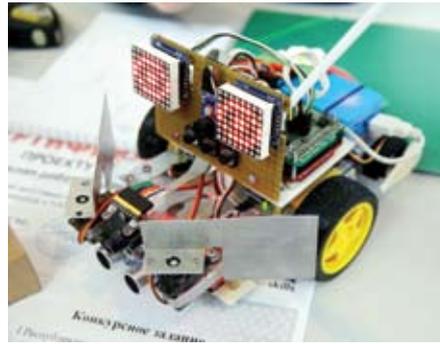
Here's some additional literature for the mega-library. For biology, we have high-resolution photos of plants and animals. We started with biology, offering many interesting features. You can see illustrations of cranberries, strawberries, lingonberries and blueberries, each clearly distinguishable: with the plant in flower and bearing fruit. Here is a photo of how people gather cranberries from the marshes, and on a commercial plantation, with the flooding technique applied. All pictures can be displayed on screens in classrooms, so teachers need no additional visual aids or slides.

*This is really interesting! What else are you planning?*

In coming years, we plan to complete the MSL with a voice assistant, using an integrated voice recognition system. This will facilitate search queries. We're also planning to introduce a smart system for searching for information. We plan a function to support abstracts within school textbooks, as well as an interactive consultant for complex sections. We'll keep adding to our bookshelves, with one bookshelf for editions used by students, teachers and parents and others targeting audiences: parents (materials on raising a healthy child and early detection of deviations) and teachers (teaching aids and lesson plans).

We're interested in developing special content for financial, environmental and computer literacy. Our technology could become the basis for a national platform of electronic libraries, for use in secondary and higher education and other fields and areas where regular training and retraining of specialists is required.

By Ivan **Zhdanovich**



▼ 11-grade pupil of Vitebsk's secondary school #15, Ilya Karpov, demonstrates a hand-made refracting telescope



# Good yield from a hundred ideas

## Most popular youth start-up in the country: '100 Ideas for Belarus'

### Crazy hands

The '100 Ideas for Belarus' national competition is held annually, featuring such exhibits as biodegradable tableware, a 3D-printer, a machine for free meals and a glove-trainer for helping rehabilitation after a stroke.

First organised five years ago, as a minor contest, by the Belarusian Republican Youth Union, the competition is now prestigious, encouraging modern-day Edisons and Kulibins. To date, around nine thousand young scientists,

inventors and innovators have presented their ideas at the forum, including Belarusians living in Russia, Moldova, Canada and even Argentina.

An expert council, uniting representatives of the Presidential Administration, the Academy of Sciences, the Economic Ministry and the State Committee for Science and Technology, chooses the ten best projects. These receive substantial grants from the Belarusian Innovation Fund and one lucky winner takes the Grand Prix, with prize money of Br11.500 (presented by sponsors).

This year, 120 (out of 2,000 ideas) reached the finals. The developments covered diverse spheres, including IT and space. The Chairman of the Council of the Republic, Mikhail Myasnikovich, follows the success of young people with great attention. He tells us, "The competition reveals our 'golden nuggets' but this is not enough. We need to encourage young people to enter graduate schools and go into science. As many ideas as possible should be transformed into competitive products, that can be sold domestically and exported."

## Glove-simulator and hand-made telescope

Maxim Kiryanov is a third-year student at Gomel's State Machine Building College. The young man has developed a glove-simulator which helps patients recover their motor skills in their fingers after a stroke.

He comments, "While visiting the Cardiology Centre, I saw how painstaking it is for patients to recover. They suffer from impaired motor co-ordination and have bad motor skills in their fingers. Massage helps restore these functions. There are devices for rehabilitation but they are expensive and bulky. I consulted doctors and then spent three months producing my glove-simulator. Patients can now independently — without external assistance or leaving home — do their exercises." Maxim is now collecting material to patent his development and launch its mass production.

11-grade pupil Ilya Karpov failed to reach the finals but his resourcefulness amazed the jury: the young man assembled a telescope from an ordinary plumbing pipe and inexpensive lens. "How is it possible to learn astronomy if schools have no more than a couple of telescopes? I spent just Br45 on developing my device; industrially produced telescopes are at least ten times more expensive," the schoolboy adds. His

innovation boasts a guidance system for tracking celestial bodies. It's possible to connect a webcam or a USB-cable to the telescope and the image can then be displayed on a large screen. As a result, all children in a classroom can simultaneously observe the stars.

## Caring for cows and receiving money

Demonstrating a development and launching its industrial production are two different tasks. Natalia Shchemelova, a researcher at Vysheslesky Institute of Experimental Veterinary Medicine, under the National Academy of Sciences, won the prestigious competition two years ago. She presented a medicine capable of excreting parasites from cows, without poisoning the animals.

The unique drug is now produced by the Minsk Plant of Veterinary Medicines and is four times cheaper than foreign analogues. It has already paid for itself, within the first year, with Br3 million raised.

The competition organised by the Belarusian Republican Youth Union has reached a new orbit. Last year, the National Library hosted the finals of the '100 Ideas for the CIS' — attracting talented young people from Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

By Kristina **Khilko**

## ▶ Device that will feel heart pain

### Mobile electrocardiograph developed in Belarus

The device registers major types of heart beat disorders which are forerunners of serious heart disease. A fully-fledged cardiogram can be made by putting fingers on the device, without need for special mounts, making it simple to use. A cardiogram can be recorded quickly at home or, even, on the road.

The portable device registers disorders while a mobile application extracts data.

The device can be used whenever a person feels discomfort in the area of their heart. Afterwards, a red flare indicates the need to call for an ambulance, by pressing the SOS button. If all is well, the screen will be green, and recommendations are given.

The development has already passed the research stage and a trial industrial version is now being prepared, for testing with a focus group. The Belarusian Innovation Fund has also shown interest in the device.

Doctors note the promising character of the development, being satisfied with the quality of the resulting cardiogram and the processing of the signal. They're ready to use it and to analyse data received.

The mobile electrocardiograph is to be sold both in Belarus and abroad. It may be offered in Belarus free of charge, enabling Belarusians to monitor their hearts, and meet national goals for public health.



Maxim Kiryanov — a third-year student at Gomel's State Machine Building College — and his glove-simulator

# Peng Dongmen: **'We unite cultures of different nations..'**

## **Belarusian and Chinese book publishers develop new format of relations**



In recent years, contacts between Belarusian and Chinese book publishers have expanded, with delegations from Belarus taking part in book exhibitions in China. Chinese book publishers and writers are regular guests at the traditional Book Trade Fair, held in February in Minsk. We talk with Mr. Peng Dongmen, Director of the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Publishing, about the format of relations in the sphere of books, and possible prospects.

*Mr. Peng, you recently visited Belarus. What do you think of Belarus-China cooperation in the sphere of book publishing?*

In February 2017, I arrived in Belarus as part of a delegation of Chinese publishers, to take part in the 24th Minsk International Book Fair. I'm glad that I managed to hold a number of meetings, with Belarusian publishers, representatives of higher educational establishments and employees of academic institutes. We had very fruitful conversation with the Information Ministry of the Republic of Belarus. Deputy Information Minister Alexander Karly-

ukevich and the Director General and Editor-in-Chief of Zvyazda Publishing House took part in the conversation, alongside a number of writers and Belarusian media heads. We discussed plans of cooperation: translating books and novels into Chinese from Belarusian and vice versa, as well as the release of joint editions. Our collaboration in the sphere of book publishing is only just launching, although the impulse began in 2005, when China took part in the February book trade fair as an honorary guest.

*Which book publishing projects do you view as most promising?*

I believe that we should focus on translating classical literature, while organising joint book publishing projects for contemporary, public-political and socio-economic topics. China and Belarus both actively support the preservation of historical cultural traditions, and respect and honour classical literature. People in Belarus are studying classical Chinese literature, as I know.

In 2015, the governments of our countries signed a memorandum re-

**Peng Dongmen:**  
*I try to open new books by Belarusian authors. Our publishing house is trying to promote Belarusian writers to the Chinese people, aiding their understanding of Belarus via its amazing literature*

garding the development of ‘Translation and Publication of Classical Literary Works of China and Belarus’. Now, this memorandum is being implemented. Belarusians are keen to read about modern China, learning about our characteristics and achievements, such as our policy of openness and reform.

At the exhibitions of 2015, 2016 and 2017, special attention was paid to Chinese books covering these themes, allowing Belarusian readers to view articles, and addresses made by the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, ‘On State Management’. We brought this

book to Minsk in Russian and Chinese. Of course, visitors are keen on books about the national customs and traditions of the Chinese people. Moreover, children’s literature is popular.

***I know that your publishing house is ready to open a branch in Belarus. What needs to yet be done?***

Primarily, we aim to expand Chinese language learning, to help Belarusians learn about Chinese culture. Belarus may become a venue for other countries to receive ideas about China, especially in the CIS, where Russian is spoken and where people expect books in Russian language.

We’re going to open a branch of our publishing house in Minsk, to organise closer cooperation with local publishing houses and Belarusian universities. The distance between our countries is huge, and it’s difficult to organise high-quality services for work with Belarus remotely, due to logistics and some peculiarities of production. We need to study your book market, to understand what readers want. We need to know our customer.

Our branch can help activate the ‘Translation and Publication of Classical Literary Works of China and Belarus’ project, working with Belarus on joint publishing. We could open a Department of Chinese Language and Culture at one of the Belarusian state publishing houses. This would bring joint benefits and mutually beneficial collaboration.

***Which Chinese novels do you think need to be translated into the Belarusian?***

China boasts five-thousand-years of civilisation, and rich literary traditions. China’s poetry and drama is known all over the world. It’s difficult to choose but we need to start somewhere, so I’d advise the ‘Shi Jing’ collection, the ‘Lun Yu’ book and poetry from the time of the Tang dynasty, as well as works from the Song epoch, created in the genre of rhythmic prose.

***Probably, people in China aren’t greatly aware of Belarusian litera-***

***ture. Is it a good idea to publish Belarusian novels in Chinese, or is it better to start with cross-cultural literature about Belarus?***

Chinese readers are aware of Russian-language literature and that of the Soviet period, although those familiar with Belarusian literature tend to be specialists. However, works by Belarusian authors have been released in China: works by Yanka Kupala, Yakub Kolas, Yanka Mavr, Vasil Bykov, Kondrat Krapiva, Arkady Kuleshov, Maxim Tank, Ales Adamovich, Vladimir Kolesnik, and Yanka Bryl... We have almost all of Belarusian writer and Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Alexievich’s works in publication. I think that translation of novels and the publication of cross-cultural literature should go hand in hand, to allow Chinese people to learn about Belarus and its people.

***Tell us a little about your publishing house...***

The publishing house promotes teaching and research into foreign languages in China. It was established in 1979 and was founded by the Beijing Foreign Studies University. We release books in more than forty languages and employ over 2,800 staff. Each year, we release more than 5,000 titles. Ours is the largest university publishing house in China and the largest publishing organisation involved in the publication of books in foreign languages.

***Which other countries’ literature do you publish?***

We’ve established good relations with more than 300 publishing houses, in the UK, France, Germany, Russia, Canada and dozens of other countries. We publish classical literature at the recommendation of our foreign colleagues. For example, last year, we released a collection by famous Albanian poet Dritëro Agolli, called ‘Mother Albania’. Verse was translated into Chinese by Mr. Zheng Enbo. The collection includes a hundred verses and five poems. This book was released a part of the ‘Translation and Publication of Classical Literary Works of China and

Book publishers from China eagerly represent their books at international annual book fairs in Minsk



Albania' project. We hope that, soon, we'll release new translations of classical Belarusian literature.

***How interested are the Chinese in foreign literature? Do they still prefer their national literature?***

Chinese readers enjoy foreign literature to the same degree as they do

the centuries, without which we can't progress.

Our predecessors advised us not to waste precious time on what's senseless. The only useful occupation is reading. Respect for reading has been an integral part of Chinese life for several thousands of years.

a publishing house is 'to record human civilisation and to connect cultures of various nations into a single world culture'. We try to break language barriers and reinforce literary and cultural ties between China and other countries. To achieve this, we're shaping a favourable environment. The structure of our publishing house enables us to do this efficiently, benefiting China and other partner-states.

***Mr. Peng, let me ask you several rapid-fire questions... Who is your favourite writer among Chinese authors?***

My most favourite was a prose writer, publicist and literary expert: Lu Xun. He was born in 1881 and died in 1936.

***Many decades ago, Belarusian sculptor Zair Azgur made a bust of Lu Xun...***

I didn't know that. Lu Xun lived in a difficult and most important period of Chinese history: a time of transformation. He was a great literary expert and a founder of modern Chinese literature. As a great thinker, he dedicated his life to studying the social problems of China. As a great revolutionary, he had the courage to struggle against oppression, and encouraged many initiatives for the younger generation.

***Works by Belarusian authors have been released in China: those by Yanka Kupala, Yakub Kolas, Yanka Mavr, Vasil Bykov... We have almost all of Belarusian writer and Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Alexievich's works in publication***

Chinese literature. Our readers and our publishing houses understand that these works bring important artistic and public ideas, regardless of the language in which they were originally written. True art works reflect our humanity, and relations between society and art. These books have accumulated experience of human life through

There was a time when foreign books were viewed with suspicion. In recent years, the Chinese have been demonstrating more tolerance towards foreign literature and acceptance of foreign writers. Of course, there are enough problems and sometimes literatures are 'on the outside' of Chinese attention, but our mission as



## ▶ Notarised friendship

**Notary officers of Belarus and China meet in Minsk, agreeing to conduct joint seminars and training**

Chinese lawyers have held working meetings with the Presidential Administration and the Justice Ministry, discussing legislation which regulates notarial activity of our two countries, as well as a range of items from Chinese legislation of interest to representatives of the Belarusian notarial society. The Chinese have also agreed with the leadership of the Notary Chamber of Belarus to strengthen cooperation between the notariates of our two states.

According to participants of the meeting, efficient interaction requires us to study the conditions and



peculiarities of notary work in both systems, via joint conferences and training seminars. The guests visited the multi-functional centre of the Notary Chamber of Belarus, where notary officers are trained, and saw the work of notary archivists from the Minsk regional and Minsk city notary districts. The Chinese delegation also visited the 1st Minsk City Notary Office, where they looked at how Belarusian colleagues organise their work.

### ***Who is your favourite foreign writer?***

France's Romain Rolland. I received my university education in French language so I know much French literature, from various centuries. Romain Rolland stands out for me amongst many great writers, living in the time shadowed by both world wars. However, this didn't prevent him from glorifying the ideals of humanism and pursuits of humanity towards something kind and beautiful. He tried to restore public morale and understood how much the preservation of life on our planet depends on it. Romain Rolland said: 'There's only one heroism in the world: to see the world as it is, and to love it'. This phrase is my life motto.

### ***Which book have you read several times?***

Whether the book is worth reading again is a very important criterion for assessment. I believe that many such books exist. Probably, everyone has their own, in line with their world outlook. As we accumulate life experience, we receive various impressions, and read differently at different ages. Returning to a book, we tend to see something new. For me, such books

are 'A Dream in Red Mansions' and 'War and Peace'.

### ***With whom would you compare Alexander Pushkin in Chinese poetry?***

Li Bai and Pushkin are the most famous romantic poets in the world. We call Li Bai 'the genius of poetry'. Sometimes people say the same about Pushkin, that he was the 'sun' of Russian literature. They were divided by centuries but have much in common; the magnificence of their talents unites them. Their verse is filled with attractive fantasies, focusing on glorious freedom and aspirations. Both lived uneasy lives but filled with magnificent experiences.

### ***Which book by a foreign author would you advise each Chinese person to read?***

I think that we should all read 'The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel'; it's full of courage and wisdom, as well as grief and trouble.

Our publishing house is trying to promote Belarusian writers to the Chinese people, aiding their understanding of Belarus via its amazing literature.

Interviewed by Ales **Karlyukevich**  
Beijing—Minsk



The first marriage takes place on a 360-tonne truck, with promises that the next will be even more spectacular, on a 450-tonne Belarusian giant (a Guinness Book of Records record-breaker)

## Powerful BelAZ uniting hearts

Newlyweds celebrate wedding on board of one of world's biggest heavy duty dump trucks

**N**ow a kiss! the guests were shouting. However, the bride and groom could hardly hear them, so high up were they, upon the huge vehicle. Residents of Zhodino are used to the unusual: wheels taller than a man, trucks as big as a house, and performances by stuntmen who come to take advantage of the size of these amazing vehicles. However,

this was the first time that a heavy-duty dump truck, in the near 70-year history of BelAZ, has been used to celebrate nuptials.

"We like the idea that our joint life begins with such a surprise," note newlyweds Artem and Kristina Talashko. "We're convinced that many of our friends will want to emulate our experience."

Why didn't they get married at an ordinary civil registry office? Every-

thing is simple. They both work at the Belarusian Automobile Works (BelAZ) as engineers in the chief technology department. It seemed a great idea to celebrate their wedding on a 360-tonne heavy-duty dump truck.

The new husband and wife met at the factory. "I was still a student and needed assistance in preparing for exams, so my friends advised me to consult a young engineer from BelAZ, which was Artem," recalls Kristina. "After university, I found my way to Zhodino and Artem took me under his wing at work. Our colleagues joke that he 'raised' a bride for himself."

Actually, many families work at the factory, forming 'labour dynasties'; traditions are cherished there.

"So, we now have another popular place for conducting marriages in Zhodino," notes Marina Kukhto, the Head of the Civil Registry Office at the Zhodino City Executive Committee. "There's already a tradition to propose with a ring on board a multi-tonne heavy-duty dump truck."

By Tatiana **Borisova**

### Reference

#### What can you do at the factory?

- See the world's biggest heavy-duty dump truck, with a load capacity of 450 tonnes, registered in the Guinness Book of Records;
- Drive a 130-tonne vehicle along the test track, receiving a certificate (this is one of the most popular activities);
- Meet BelAZ's Father Frost during New Year celebrations;
- On St. Valentine's Day, propose marriage on board a heavy-duty dump truck and, then, conduct your wedding ceremony here.

## ▶ Along Milky Way of Zarfin and Soutine

**Ulei Arts Centre in Smilovichi is inspiring example of public private partnership**

A year ago, Belgazprombank — a connoisseur and admirer of academic painting (famous in business circles) — took under its auspice the local children's pictorial studio. The project was entitled Ulei (Beehive) — similar to the famous Paris art environment — and became a space for children without restriction in creative technique or artistic genre. The training method was developed by specialists from the National Art Museum, with Belgazprombank facilitating tours and master classes. The results are impressive, with twenty-eight watercolour and cold batik works now permanently on display at Minsk's Palace of Arts. Victor Babariko, the Chairman of Belgazprombank's Board, notes that



mature and professional artists can also exhibit their pieces. He tells us, "When we took on this project, we understood the responsibility; these youngsters will glorify our country in future. It's symbolic that the Ulei Art Project originated in Smilovichi: the homeland of Chaim Soutine and Schraga Zarfin. Today's young talents in Smilovichi have the opportunity to follow in those footsteps."



# Star path of Piotr Klimuk

## First Belarusian cosmonaut celebrates 75th birthday

**A**s a child, he dreamt of conquering space and, unlike most boys, succeeded. Mr. Klimuk conducted three flights, spending 78 days, 18 hours, 18 minutes and 42 seconds in space. Recently, the legendary hero received congratulations in the crowded hall of the Brest City Executive Committee. Welcomed with applause, the hero couldn't hide his emotions: that returning to his homeland is the most precious gift. "I've met my relatives and friends, which brings the greatest happiness to me," he said.

Mr. Klimuk was born in 1942. His father was drafted into the army some time later and he failed to return, being killed in action near Polish Radom. A plaque on a mass grave reads 'Ilya Klimuk — the cosmonaut's father' — among so many other names.

Mr. Klimuk made his first flight in 1973, on board Soyuz-13. This was followed in 1975 by the Soyuz-18-2 flight.

The cosmonaut's third flight took place in 1978, and he acted as the international crew commander on board Soyuz-30.

The hero now lives in Moscow but has never forgotten his native land. On behalf of residents of the Brest Region, Anatoly Lis — the Chairman of the Regional Executive Committee — thanked the cosmonaut, saying, "We're proud that the first Belarusian cosmonaut was born in the Brest Region. Thanks to you, not only people of the USSR but foreigners learnt of the existence of the small village of Komarovka. We're delighted that you're celebrating your anniversary at home, among close friends."

Hero of Belarus Piotr Prokopovich also congratulated his friend during the official ceremony, saying, "Piotr Klimuk's life is an example for all our young people: an example of how much can be achieved if we have a dream, and do not give up or succumb to difficulties."

By Pavel **Losich**



# Blue skin for potato

**Belarusian specialists breed purple, blue and red potatoes**

## Better than broccoli and spinach

Work is in full swing in the laboratory of the Scientific-Practical Centre for Potato, Vegetable and Fruit Growing at the National Academy of Sciences. Staff carefully cut potatoes and throw them into the fryer with boiling oil. A few minutes later, there appears a plate full of multi-coloured crunchy chips: purple, blue, red and yellow...

We watch an experiment; a purple potato is thrown into a saucepan to be put on a slow heat. Thirty minutes later, the amazing multi-coloured product is cooked. The colour has not disappeared and this means that no artificial colourants have been used. The laboratory assistants disclose the secret, “In order not to lose any colour, the water should be salted at the start of cooking.” The new ‘exotic’ potato is no different in taste from an ordinary potato but it’s much more useful. As far as nutrients are concerned, it rivals broccoli, brussel sprouts, spinach and peppers. Moreover, its juice is a natural food dye which could replace artificial colourants in the food industry.

“These colour varieties are a true ‘find’ for both our stomachs and wallets. They would be much cheaper than imported food,” explained the Doctor of Agricultural Sciences and a chief researcher at the Centre — Georgy Piskun. “This is a serious benefit to Belarusians as around 30 percent of all lo-

cal dishes use potato. Unsurprisingly, we are called ‘bulbashi’ [from the Belarusian ‘bulba’ which stands for the Russian ‘potato’]. According to the statistics, almost 600kg of potatoes are grown annually per capita in the country, while we consume around 180kg a year. These are the highest rates in the world. Russians in contrast, eat around 100kg of potatoes annually.”

## A single variety from 150,000 samples

Varieties with red, blue or pink skin and flesh are already known in potato breeding. Experiments are now in full swing in Japan, China and the United States. Our scientists are keeping up with the global trend.

These varied colours appear when ordinary tubers are coloured with special pigments: anthocyanins. After penetrating the organism, these substances can block the development of serious diseases: atherosclerosis, cardiovascular disease or cataracts. Belarusian specialists have mixed wild coloured potatoes growing in tropical South America with the cultivated varieties. Colleagues from

St. Petersburg’s All-Russian Vavilov Research Institute of Plant Growing have shared their stock of exotic tubers.

“After flowering, berries appear on a potato; small seeds — resembling linen — are hidden inside them,” says Mr. Piskun. “We collect them, wash and thoroughly dry them to then plant them in greenhouses. In autumn, we collect

*Coloured potatoes can be used to cook the same meals as ordinary potatoes: however, these will be more useful*

# New standards lead to progress

Farmers of Minsk and Grodno regions shift to organic farming, in line with European standards

**F**arms and agricultural enterprises in the Grodno Region's Smorgon and Oshmyany districts and in the Minsk Region's Volozhin District are shifting to European standards in organic farming, thanks to a pilot initiative with the major 'Supporting the Transition to a Green Economy in the Republic of Belarus' project. Financed by the European Union and implemented by the UN Development Programme, in partnership with the Ministry for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus, the project is encouraging farms to gain organic certification, to comply with EU standards.

Vermi Ecoproduct farm is a key participant, gaining agricultural equipment purchased with EU funds. It has now expanded its production of liquid humic fertilisers for organic farming, from 500 to 2,000 litres per season. Nineteen of its goods have successfully passed organic certification.

The shift to organic farming has ecological, economic and social effects, as the project has been teaching farmers, at a range of training seminars. Foreign experts in organic farming have been working with three farms — Rodnik-Pro, Agro-Vastara and Amager. Each has been testing humic fertilisers produced by Vermo Ecoproduct, in line with EU standards. Farms are also reclaiming lands previously used for traditional farming, preparing them for more progressive methods.

Liquid humic fertilisers are suitable for organic farming, replacing expensive imported fertilisers. Organic crops are part of a move towards 'green farming' and the creation of corresponding jobs.

By Alexander **Pimenov**



ALEXANDER KUSHNER

and store the harvest and, in spring, plant them anew. To receive a single variety, we need to work with around 150 thousand seedlings. Only the best remain. The process is long, taking approximately nine years. Each plant is unique not only in its form but also in colour, taste and resistance to pests and diseases. It takes about twelve years from the moment of mixing until a variety is included on the state register.”

## The devil is in the detail

Over the past five years, Belarusian scientists have developed over a dozen new varieties of potatoes — each named with the national colour: i.e. 'Zhuravinka', 'Uladar', 'Volat'. “This is done so that the varieties can be easily recognised abroad,” explained Mr. Piskun. “One of the most popular of them is 'Skarb'; around thirty percent of our fields are planted with it. Russians also prefer it. This variety stores well in warm cellars and will not germinate for a long time. Cooks know that beautiful potato pancakes can be cooked with it.”

Potato is among the most profitable exports in Belarus: last year, around 300,000 were sold abroad. “In Moldova, the red-skinned potato is especially popular, while Belarusians see it as fodder and think it tasteless. In turn, 'Zdabytak' is popular in the European Union; starch is made from it there. This variety has almost twice as much starch as any other.”

Belarusian producers of chips, French fries and dry mashed potatoes are waiting impatiently for the day when the new bright varieties can be grown on an industrial scale. Individuals are also eager to start planting them in their gardens. However, they will all need to wait for a while longer as the experimental potatoes will only appear nationwide in two years' time.

By Kristina **Khilko**

# Tourist route with historical implication

The Varangians-Vikings from Scandinavia followed a legendary trading route in the 10-12th centuries, reaching Constantinople from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, via the Zapadnaya Dvina and Dnieper rivers. Fans of cruising and water travel love to follow in the path of our brave ancestors, even if only part of the way, often by kayak. Not everyone is suited to the water, but it is possible to travel by car along the Zapadnaya Dvina (starting from Valдай), going via Verkhnedvinsk, Disna, Polotsk and Vitebsk. Belarusian roads allow travel in comfort.



Verkhnedvinsk

## 1 Resting in natural reserves

The north of Belarus is a surprising place, mostly covered by woods, in which game roams freely. Many beautiful lakes are rich in fish and fans of hunting and fishing usually return home with trophies. Meanwhile,

Miory



40 km

Disna



Novopolotsk

Polotsk

53 km



Belarusian part of the Great Road

— — Highway

— Zapadnaya Dvina River

those who like to pick mushrooms and berries are kept very busy.

In Verkhnedvinsk, as in other places, you can take a room in a comfortable hotel or at one of numerous agro-estates. The tranquillity of the Zapadnaya Dvina and wonderful Lake Osveya always recharges the batteries. Those interested in history are fascinated by its beautiful churches, including the majestic Neo-Gothic Catholic church in Sarie. The Catholic church in Rositsa still causes dispute as to whether it is Neo-Gothic or Romanesque Revival in style.

Monuments and obelisks are found at each crossroads, telling much about the events of the Great Patriotic War in Belarus. The Osveya tragedy of February 1943, saw German Fascists burn over 250 villages within a single frozen week, many burnt with residents locked inside.

## 2 Return to the homeland of the author of 'Scarlet Sails'

Along the route is the smallest of Belarus' cities, Disna, with barely 1,500 residents. However, it has a rich history, since ancient people settled on the island located where the River Disna runs into the Zapadnaya Dvina. At the time of Ivan the Terrible, the castle was built there, surrounded by water, erected by Stephen Báthory. Only its defensive ramparts remain.

In Soviet times, such well-known films as 'State Border', 'People of the Marshes' and 'Black

Birch', were filmed at Disna. The city was a centre of trade, being fortuitously located on the bank of a navigable river, making it prosperous. Its brick buildings and stone-paved roads remind us of its history of wealth. Famous writer Alexander Grin lived there, and the city brought forth the first railway bridge, across the river. Ten years ago, local authorities announced tourism as a priority for the regions, and Disna has been working to do its part.

## 3 Become a Neanderthal for a short time

Simply take a walk into the wilderness of Yelnya Reserve, the largest upland bog in Europe, and you'll see nature as it existed thousands of years ago. Such places are the lungs of Europe, being home to diverse plant and animal life, including the rare black stork and white-tailed eagle. Ornithologists can teach you to distinguish between a sandpiper and a woodcock, while amateur fishing and hunting are also permitted, with equipment for hire.

## 4 City-museum of Polotsk

It would be a great shame to visit the Vitebsk Region and fail to see Polotsk: the most ancient city of Belarus. The city-museum is well-known for its Convent of the Saviour and St. Yevfrosiniya, founded almost a thousand years ago by Saint Yevfrosiniya Polotskaya. You may visit the cell in which the saint lived, and the silver shrine holding her relics, which has a special, sacred atmosphere. Visiting the monastery church assuages your sorrow, bringing emotional comfort. It is impossible to see all of magnificent Saint Sophia Cathedral in a single day. Like a

white bird, it soars over the Zapadnaya Dvina. The city has more than ten museums, many located in notable buildings.

Polotsk's Museum of Local History is located in an ancient Lutheran church, while the Museum of Publishing and the Museum-Library of Simeon Polotsky, who taught the children of Tsar Alexey Mikhailovich, is inside the former theology monastery. The Museum of Nature is within the former water tower.

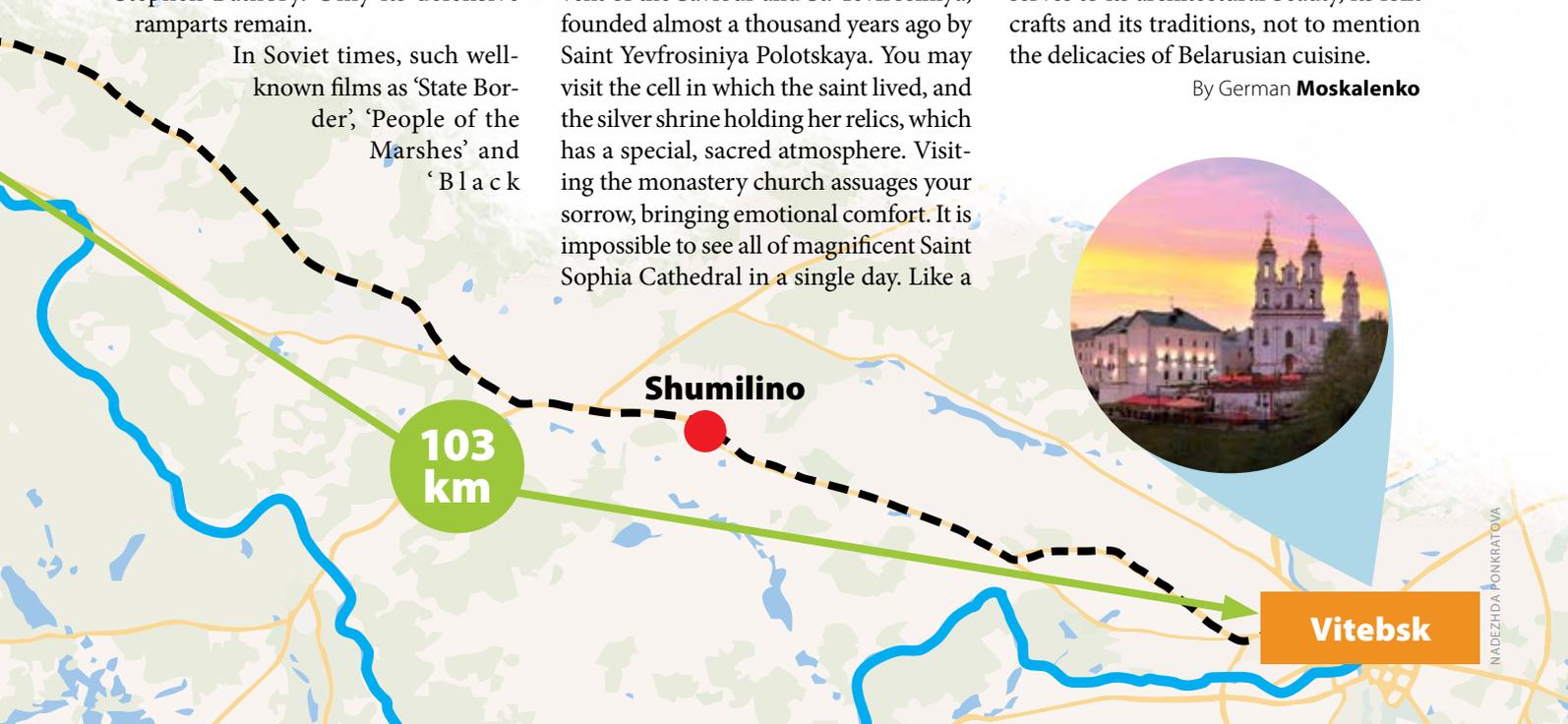
The city has monuments from various time periods, including that to the letter 'ŷ' ('short y'), which, like 'i', does not exist in Russian. It is especially popular among Russian tourists and is much photographed, in the city square, as a site indicating the centre of Europe. You can even receive a certificate of your presence there.

## 5 Celebrations in Vitebsk

Vitebsk is the informal cultural capital of Belarus, and home to the well-known 'Slavianski Bazaar'. The festival begins in three weeks' time but hotels book up well in advance. The grand, five-day festival features concerts day and night, featuring famous stars, competitions, exhibitions, a holiday of street art, and a city of craftsmen, showing their hand-made articles and selling souvenirs.

What variety there is in Belarus, from its wild landscapes and unique reserves to its architectural beauty, its folk crafts and its traditions, not to mention the delicacies of Belarusian cuisine.

By German **Moskalenko**





# Sweet return of Alexandra

**Belarusian cinema may lack awards, which makes recognition of 'Vera's Sweet Farewell' all the sweeter. It's been awarded in the 'Romantic Films' nomination of the Houston Festival. It may not be an Oscar or a Golden Palm but it's still a breakthrough. Director Alexandra Butor, who was viewed as the major hope of Belarusian cinema three years ago, tells us more.**

**W** *While shooting the film, you had festivals in mind. However, you failed to gain a global tour. What's the current feeling? Regret at this fact or joy that your film has been awarded by someone, even two years after being released?*

I'm delighted that my film has been watched by Americans, and am surprised that they loved it. Of course, there's some regret that Belarusfilm 'missed out' on the festival side. At that time, there was new studio leadership, which resulted in the film being lost. Nobody cared about it. Only after the marketing department was revamped was it taken from the shelf and sent to festivals. I remember the premiere, when everyone advised me to screen it at festivals. However, it's not my property and I have no rights over its promotion. If I'd been entrusted with its promotion, it would have toured far more.

*What have you been doing over the past two years?*

After shooting two films, I became tired and decided to have a change. I opened my own film school. Only now do I realise that I'm ready to return, making new films. Rather than directing, I'd love to produce. Over the past two years, working with children, I've realised that I want to try a new sphere, to maintain my interest. I'm now preparing my first producer project and I hope it'll be screened before the public in autumn.

*You were going to shoot 'Common Soldiers' — based on Alexey Dudarev's play of the same title...*

From the very beginning, I was aware that this topic would be hard to promote. Our people are fed up with the war. I addressed Germany but the topic was also neglected there. Moreover, I want to shoot this film with a proper budget. I'm still looking at options. At present, we're translating it into English; the new title will be 'The Hero'. Mr. Dudarev isn't against this; in fact, he told us that our script followed his play and had every right to use an original title. We tried out various names and changed the events, but Mr. Dudarev's characters remained.

*Might you pass the project to another director?*

I won't give 'The Hero' to someone else, as I want to shoot this film myself, independently. As regards films with small budgets, I have a dream. To be more correct, I have a goal: I want my cinema school to annually launch a small feature film. I'll produce it, while my students will shoot it.

You see, if I start shooting something, this new work must be stronger than what I've already produced. I think this will be the case with 'The Hero'.

*Was the opening of your cinema school a necessary step, as you'd failed to find another job?*

No. I'd long had that dream: I began thinking of it while making short videos. I'm freedom-loving and independent; I want to decide myself what to film and how. I've worked under all sorts of chiefs, and it wasn't always a good experience. It's difficult to deal with people who are poorly versed in my profession.

***I understand that you have some kind of grudge against Belarusfilm. However, if you received a call, asking you to return, what would you do?***

I won't receive a proposal from them regarding my 'Hero'; we've discussed this already. However, I would return, even working on someone else's script. It's silly to refuse serious cinema. Moreover, I have an advantage: I'm writing myself and, accordingly, can polish any script. One of my acquaintances refused a proposal to shoot because the script was poorly written. I can hardly understand this.

***Do you follow trends in Belarusian cinema?***

I try to visit all independent shows, as I'm interested in seeing how guys are creating an alternative to Belarusfilm. So far, the only one who's surprised me is Mitya Semenov-Aleynikov. He was one of the brightest students at the Acting Department at our Academy of Arts; he later graduated from the All-Russian State Institute of Cinematography and directed 'One Blood'.

***Why haven't you worked on these films?***

I've not yet found something to shoot. I'm simply testing the guys studying at my school. Honestly, I don't like all the festivals' red tape. Why has Mitya's film toured half the world? He addressed a special agency which has promoted his interests. I believe that directors should create rather than manage.

***What do you think of Belarusian cinema?***

There are no good scriptwriters. There's much talk at the diverse film parties I attend, saying that we lack advertising

and good promotion. However, this is wrong. It's primarily necessary to write a script, then to professionally shoot it; afterwards, the film will enjoy great demand — even without advertising. We have a problem: we're developing domestically, paying no attention to what's happening in world cinematography. We must learn and study others' experience.

American Lubezki won an Oscar using natural lighting and without special devices. Meanwhile, we bring a truckload of equipment but make poor films. We're trying to invent our own technology. Meanwhile, everything has already been invented — and not by us; we simply need to ask how everything works.

Do you know why 'Vera's Sweet Farewell' conquered American hearts? The film lacks any special creativity or technical approach. We simply shot a human story, which is interesting to everyone. Our film began experiencing problems early on, at the cheapest stage: of scriptwriting. In short, it's not a matter of money.

***What's the way forward for our cinema?***

These are simple and inexpensive stories: melodramas and romantic comedies. Adventure, science fiction and space-related films are not for us, since they're expensive. Look at what South Korea is doing to catch audiences' attention. They produce simple melodramas which are popular all over the world and which aren't expensive. Belarusfilm is introducing a new policy: instead of a million Dollar film, it's shooting five at \$200,000 each. We'll see what will happen as a result. Expensive films might use popular actors and great graphics while cheap ones need a 'trick' in their script.

By Natalia **Stepuro**

***I have worked under all sorts of chiefs, and it wasn't always a good experience. It's difficult to deal with people who are poorly versed in my profession***



Nelė Savičenko-Klimienė and Pavel Kharlančuk



Juozas Budraitis has twice appeared in Alexandra's films



# Pilipka plays first violin

**Belarusian cinematographers-animators focus on folklore motifs and collect festival awards**

**B**elarusian animators' studio resembles a true artist's workshop. Creative mess is everywhere, with cartoon images in every corner. In animated cinema, an artist doesn't simply draw: they act out the characters, choosing how they'll move and their facial expressions. People often enter their office saying, 'Is this a door to a children's fairy-tale?' In fact, it's not fairy-tale heroes who live here but those who paint them.

## Maintaining reputation

"Last year, we celebrated a jubilee: Belarusian animation turned 45! In these years, we've produced over 200 works," says Igor Galinovsky, the Director of the Animation Film Studio, with pride.

The history of Belarusian animation began in 1971 when young directors Vladimir Golikov and Marta Lubyannikova came to Minsk to make a

puppet film — 'Neznaika-Poet'. Some time later, thanks to Mr. Golikov, the first pavilion for cartoons opened at the Film Studio. Vladimir and Marta are rightfully 'parents of Belarusian animation'. In the 1970s, they shot 'Kvaka-Zadavaka' and 'Timka and Dimka': these characters performed one of the most popular children's songs of all times — 'True Friendship Cannot Break...'

## What are Belarusian animators' recent achievements?

We're trying to maintain our reputation and justify the legendary past. We're now working on the 'Stars of Seventh Sky' animated musical, whose characters are voiced by Belarusian pop celebrities. This is the first project of the kind in our country and I can already show you a fragment [colourful characters appear on the screen, singing in surprisingly familiar voices]. The film is to be full-length and, in 2019, we plan to premiere it in cinemas.

We tend to focus on educational plots, such as creating a cycle of cartoons about the history of Belarusian cities' coats of arms, called 'Tales of

Bygone Years'. Our young audience will love our 'Fish Nicknamed Not Allowed' series.

## Old and new technologies

### Do you use modern methods?

Sadly, we lack funds for 3D-animation, as we're a state-funded studio. However, our financing is steady, and we can raise funds from outside, generating income from hosting foreign companies. It may seem that we're making 'obsolete' films but the world is demonstrating declining interest in 3D animation; many eminent animators are returning to classic techniques of drawing and doll making. This is what we do well. Belarusian filmmakers work with sand, plasticine and cut paper. However, painted cartoons remain in first position. Each second has 25 scenes; this means, fifteen thousand pictures are needed for a ten-minute long cartoon.

### Wow! Do you have a large team of employees?

There are about thirty people on our staff, with most artists and com-



posers working freelance. Many joined us as young specialists or technical workers but are now known and loved in Belarus and abroad. For example, in 2013, Yelena Petkevich's film about Johann Sebastian Bach was awarded a 'Golden Eagle'. In 2014, our studio received the first three prizes at the Russian Golden Knight Festival. At the same time, Igor Volchek's 'Rondo Capriccioso' cartoon was named among the world's best animated films at the International Festival of Animated Films, in Japan.

### Western films are like chips: tasty but useless

*Don't you plan to compete with western companies?*

It's hardly possible to say that western animation competes with us. We work under different conditions, with different budgets and in different techniques. In the end, our goals differ. Western cartoons resemble chips and sweet soda: they're tasty but not useful. If consumed in large quantities, bad consequences follow. Our animation is more like buckwheat or oatmeal porridge. It's not so attractive at first glance but, over time, its benefits are evident. Our animators don't use gimmicks to attract viewers, as western animation does. In this respect, Belarusian cartoons are somewhat similar to those that were produced in Soviet times.

By Anna Kurak



VLADIMIR SHLAPAK



### ▶ Dragoons versus ulans

**Guests welcomed to first military historical festival, Mir-2017, travelling back two centuries**

The highlight of the event was the reconstruction of the first cavalry battle between the Imperial Russian Army and the great army of Napoleon, that took place in June 1812.

The 19th century battlefield was near the castle, making Mir the perfect location to gather those keen to learn more. Handsome cavaliers on magnificent horses and romantically-costumed ladies set the atmosphere, while plumes of explosion smoke created the illusion of a real battle, with clinking metal, flashes of antique guns and encouraging shouts of soldiers surrounding the crowd.

The festival was arranged with support from Grodno Regional Executive Committee, Korelichi District Executive Committee, military historical clubs and the youth public association Intelligence. Information. Progress.

### Reference



#### The Head of the Belarusian Cinema History Museum, Igor Avdeev, comments on modern Belarusian animators' tasks:

*First of all, our animation supports the status of the Belarusfilm National Film Studio. Domestic animators often turn to national themes and base their works on Belarusian history and culture. They use folklore and our literature and this is their advantage. We're engaged in popularising Belarusian cinematography. Among the best works are, definitely, many animation films. Not a single day is spent without them at the museum — especially during the school holidays.*



# Lantern above us

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**Brest revives tradition  
of kerosene lamps**

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**W**

ould you like your wish to come true? Come in the evening to Sovetskaya pedestrian street in Brest. A wizard will soon appear, dressed in ancient costume, with an iron ladder on his shoulders, ready to light the lamps. He's the only such in Belarus and it's said that if you touch his buttons, your dreams will come true.

Eight years ago, Brest revived its ancient tradition of lighting kerosene lanterns along the main pedestrian street. While lamplighters were common a century ago, it's not a job we see today, but electrician Victor Kirisyuk has stepped into the breach, becoming a hallmark of the city.

You can set your watch by the time of lamp lighting, although they're lit later in the evening during the summer, since daylight lasts longer. The kerosene lamps

are lit before the electric lamps come on, usually about 10pm in summer, followed by tourists with cameras. Mr. Kirisyuk's job follows a strict timetable.

Street lighting began in Europe in the 17th century, with the first lamps burning oil. Mr. Kirisyuk approaches the first pole and puts his ladder against it. He takes out a lighter — strapped to his belt — and rises slowly, to open the glass door of the lantern, behind which is the kerosene lamp. Once the wick is lit, he descends, finding himself surrounded by tourists.

“Mum, I forgot to make a wish!” a ten-year boy shouts. He returns, ducking between other tourists, to touch Mr. Kirisyuk's button, then runs away.

It's all in an evening's work for Mr. Kirisyuk. Around a decade ago, he could hardly imagine that he'd become a city 'sight' and a symbol of excited expectation for thousands of people. Born in the village of Zalyadynie, in the Brest Region's Ivanovo District, Victor studied at the Pinsk Marine School of DOSAAF, graduating as 'an electrician of above-water ships'. “I served three years in the navy and later moved to Brest, taking employment at Brestgorsvet. I've been in the energy sector for 39 years,” he explains.

The ritual of lamp lighting in Brest was revived in 2009, when the city celebrated its 990th birthday. Lanterns emulate those of the 18th-early 19th century, purchased from Russian company Brestgorsvet, with the ironwork forged by Brest masters. The lamps use eco-friendly oil, produced in Novopolotsk.

To exchange electric lights for kerosene, Mr. Kirisyuk had to audition. There were several candidates for the position of city lamplighter, so why was Mr. Kirisyuk chosen? Many factors played their role and experience was vital: the Brest lamplighter truly resembles a character from Andersen's fairy-tales. Moreover, Mr. Kirisyuk can easily communicate with people. He's good natured and intelligent, as befits the city's mascot. Moreover, Victor has no bad habits: he doesn't drink or smoke and has a healthy lifestyle. These help in his work, since he

has to climb his ladder over sixty times each evening.

As we chat, Mr. Kirisyuk keeps working, passing from one lantern to the next. People are a little irritated by me, as it's hard to take his photo nicely with me in the way! Mr. Kirisyuk is used to such attention and is always happy to chat with tourists and city residents. “People enjoy life, sharing their emotions. What else is needed for happiness? If people around me are happy, I'm happy as well,” he smiles.

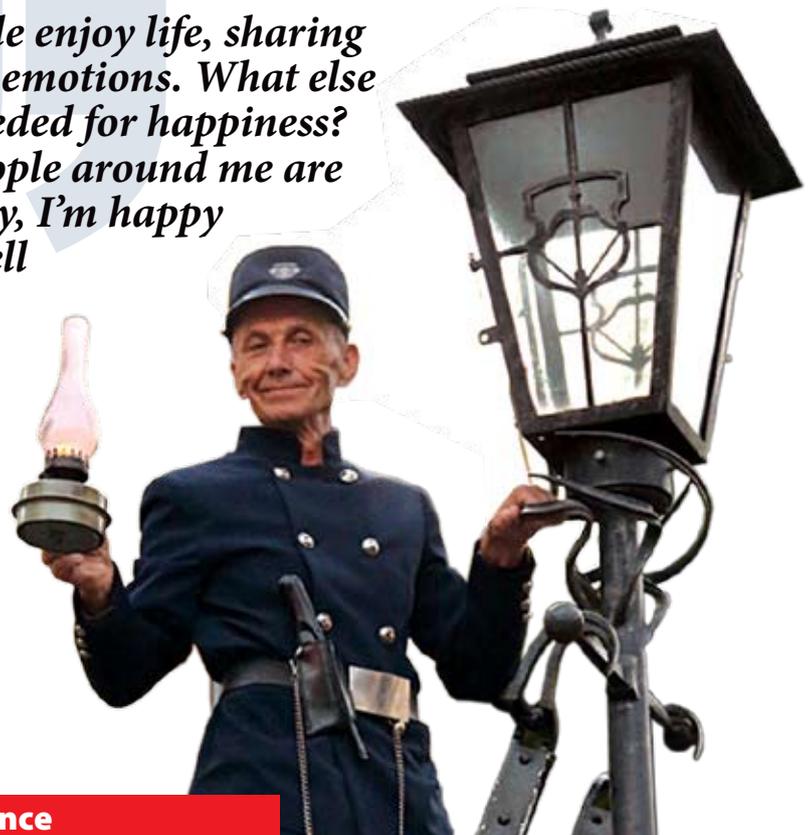
The Brest lamplighter works alone, with no respite for weekends or holidays — in any weather or season. People

know him and want to see him. Some time ago, Victor grew a moustache but Brest residents didn't appreciate his decision, so he felt obliged to shave it off!

In the evening, Victor drives himself to work and, early in the morning, he's taken to work by an official car, to extinguish the lamps. In summer, he does so at around 4am, and a little later in winter. Of course, he goes to bed late, so he doesn't gain much sleep. Meanwhile, each lantern needs to be cleaned, with dirty glass replaced and wicks cut shorter. Victor also adds kerosene, to ensure the city will be lit in the evening.

By Alexander **Mityukov**

*People enjoy life, sharing their emotions. What else is needed for happiness? If people around me are happy, I'm happy as well*



## Reference

In Minsk, the first night lights appeared in the 18th century, mostly placed over entrances and gates to central manors and other important buildings. Complex street lighting was launched at the end of the 18th and early 19th century. Brest followed suit in the 19th century, at the order of the head of the city. Over time, kerosene lamps were replaced by alcohol, but still extinguished manually. By 1851, there were over fifty across the city.

# Games in aquarium



NADEZHDA PONKRATOVA

## Underwater ballet with sharks and sea creatures gaining global popularity. Belarusian synchronised swimmer Polina Cherkasova tells us how she became involved in these dangerous dances

### Her best friends are sharks

The aquarium is as high as a two-story house. A giant ray is basking lazily when a girl appears out of nowhere. She grabs it by its side and pulls its tail. The creature could easily shock her with a burst of electricity up to 230 volts. She then approaches a shark and touches its fin. The predator opens its mouth in response, with its sharp teeth glinting in the light... After such 'fun', games with dolphins seem like childish pranks. We asked Polina to comment.

***Sharks are often called killing machines. Aren't you afraid?***

Initially, it was extremely difficult to persuade girls to dive into the aquarium: there are huge turtles, skates, dolphins and belugas as well. However, all the creatures are completely tame. We play the key roles while our 'swimming' colleagues perform as extras. We've even made friends. The shark likes to have its back scratched and dolphins love to play catch. Turtles are trouble-free: they can swim on their backs brilliantly.

***Are there never any emergencies?***

We never go into the water with scratches or wounds: sharks go mad with the smell of blood. A dogfish once didn't keep its distance and crashed into me. Like Ostap Bender with the horse, I got away with just a fright. They seem to be afraid of us actually.

***They do not always show this though...***

Not always. I was once swimming to the surface for a breath of air and collided with a metre-long ray. It was frightened so much that it produced a nasty sticky slime. I could hardly wait to wash my hair afterwards.

***Linda's popular song — 'Dance under Water' — has been sung by everyone but few could imagine the day when it could be seen live...***

It is really beautiful. We recently toured China with our show along with the Belarusians Olya Tokar, Alexandra Radkevich and the Russian Lolita Yurkina. When preparing our performance, we spent a week under water making lotus flowers, Chinese houses and even Buddha silhouettes. The audience was delighted and the oceanarium was packed.

### Skate, invite a lady to dance

***How did you become a synchronised swimmer?***

From childhood I went into figure skating and swimming. In the end, I chose synchronised swimming which combines acrobatics, gymnastics and choreography. I

trained twice a day. I got up at half past five, went to training, then to school and then again to training: it was a never-ending day. I realised that I did not want to devote all my time to sport so I switched to underwater demonstration performances. I'm a Fish according to the horoscope and water is my element. If I do not swim for a while, I miss it and start to feel uncomfortable. I think I'm turning into an amphibian.

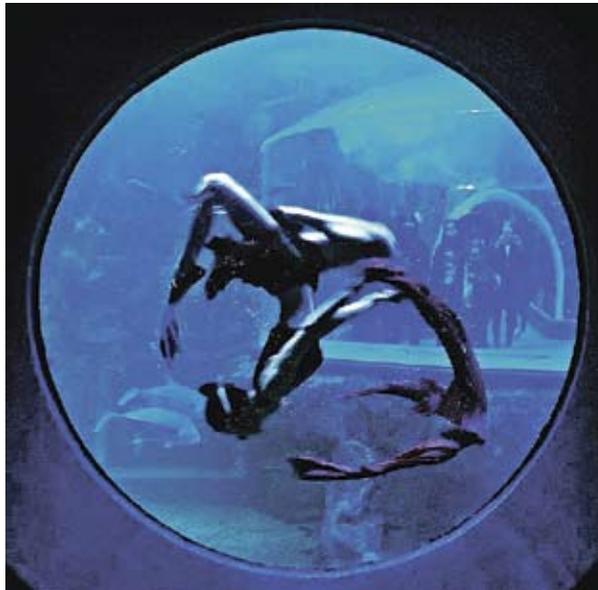
***What about the military makeup and hairstyles fixed with gelatine?***

That's in the past. We now just use some bright lipstick. We become even more beautiful when we let our hair down. It would also be great

to take off the pin from our noses! But, it's impossible to do without it.

***Is underwater ballet easy for you?***

The longer the delay in breathing — the more spectacular the figures look. So far, it's more theatre than sport. This was once also the case with synchronised swimming and artistic gymnastics.



To pirouette with sea creatures, Polina Cherkasova trains to hold her breath for several minutes

By Kristina **Khilko**



# Reality should be perceived by soul

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The beautiful canvases created by Zoya Litvinova, including her watercolour paintings, are stored at the National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus. This recognition of her work is well-deserved, and her art may be found in the Museum of Modern Fine Arts in Minsk, as well as in the Tretyakov Gallery, in the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg, and in Riga, Novosibirsk, and Bishkek. Some of her pieces are to be found in private and public collections, in Austria, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Netherlands, South Africa, Israel, the USA and Canada. In 2005, Zoya Litvinova was awarded an Order by the Ministry of Culture in France. She thinks that art should be international and is glad that hers is recognised all over the world. At the same time, she highly appreciates our national school of art.

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**Z**oya Litvinova, who is an Honoured Figure of Arts of Belarus, likes her audience to be prepared. She thinks that true works of art always represent a certain

philosophy. She tells us, “I’m quite a traditional artist: an observer, who ‘draws her inspiration’ from the real world. I don’t want to lose any connection with it and don’t see why I should abandon figurative representation, though I’m also interested in abstract forms. For me, painting is a unique way to show

this spiritual world around us, which is otherwise difficult to see.”

*What’s your attitude towards the aesthetic notion of ‘beauty’, which is often neglected by artists these days?*

It’s true that, somehow, we’ve forgotten it; somehow, it’s not present in our lives anymore. The artist should serve

beauty, and should create beauty. Beauty is harmony, and what are our lives without harmony?

In 1986, a group of artists from Minsk created an art group under the name 'Nemiga-17': a group of like-minded people who wanted to find a new language for national painting.

During the first years of perestroika, artists from across most former Soviet republics faced the problem of defining their national and cultural identity, as never before. The creative team of 'Nemiga' (despite the differences between the individuals who created it), as well as its creative concept, was formed during these years. The name of the group was chosen because of its connection with the deepest layers of national history and culture. Nemiga is not only the name of the street where the group was founded, but is the historical name of the river which does not exist anymore. Its banks saw the historic battle between Polotsk and Kiev armed forces, in 1067. The battle on the Nemiga River is described in 'The Tale of Igor's Campaign', which is considered to be the first mention of Minsk in ancient chronicles.

Nevertheless, in their search for national identity, the artists of 'Nemiga' were never guided by historical or cultural topics. They tried to achieve their goals through expressive arts. Their search for national identity was closely related to their desire to find their own artistic language; as modern as it was, this would have a genetic link to traditional Belarusian art. Members of 'Nemiga' were trying to understand national traditions and world culture, through the means of art.

'Nemiga' brought in new methods, based on unique treatment of form and colour, as well as the use of associations and metaphors. This developed interest and taste in these methods among Belarusian artists, with colour as the key component. To find new ways of expression, they experimented with colour and form, with colour as the main expressive means to achieve emotional depth and meaning.

Unlike her younger colleagues, Litvinova was already a mature artist



when she joined the group. However, at that time, her art changed radically, with good cause. Her artistic vision became extremely emotional, and her concept of colour became fully formed, with expressive and constructive solutions acquiring logical and monumental characteristics. Litvinova still paints figuratively but combines abstract elements, very naturally, to create something symbolic. Her goal is to uncover the true nature of phenomena. Litvinova is not an impressionist, trying to capture a moment, but a philosopher, trying to understand the world. This is why her interpretation of biblical concepts, including her interpretation of 'love' and 'loneliness', seems so natural and extraordinary. This is why her artistic method, used by so many artists before her, acquires new meaning, and gives new strength to the imagery of her works.

What inspires her art? She's certain that those who become artists should remember that art will always be their one and only master; an artist sacrifices a great deal.

Art's power is its source.

Born in a village, located in the Vetka District of the Gomel Region, Litvinova's childhood was difficult; these were the war and post-war years. "Anyone could die, it was terrible," shares Litvinova. "There was nothing to eat, life was very difficult... But childhood remained: life

and joy prevailed, and emotions were intense. There was something else, something very important, as if we were trying to solve some mystery."

"The place where I grew up was surrounded by fields and water," says Zoya. "Belarusian nature is symbolic for me. Everything was alive, everything was moving. Sometimes, I saw something in the shining water, or in whispering leaves: fairy creatures who were floating, emerging and disappearing right in front of me. Everything inspired me: nature, people, and fairy tales. I liked to listen to the old women who came to our house in the evening, telling stories full of wonders. They sang and told fortunes, usually arriving after work, at dusk. This time of the day has since always been very special to me. It represents a transition from one state to another, between different forms of existence. It was a time full of excitement, mystery and wonder. I opened some kind of door and I was curious to know what was behind it, as well as frightened. I wanted this to continue but sometimes ran away to hide... My fantasies were a form of clairvoyance, materialised in fairy-tales: stories with secrets. Then, I started to paint..."

Zoya Litvinova remembers her first years as an artist with pleasure, saying, "I always knew what I needed, and what I wanted, never cutting corners. That's

why, to tell you the truth, my life has always been difficult. I graduated from Minsk's Theatre and Art Institute's Monumental Department, and had plenty of offers, which helped solve everyday problems. All creative problems were solved in my studio, where I was left alone with my painting. I never spent time on things I had no interest in. My paintings aren't easy to understand, as they are part of my soul. Over time, they became filled with more light and colour. I'm interested in myths, legends and religion; Biblical stories have inspired me for the last twenty years. Painting changes, as it's a natural process. I've always tried to discover something new about myself, to overcome obstacles and find unexpected solutions."

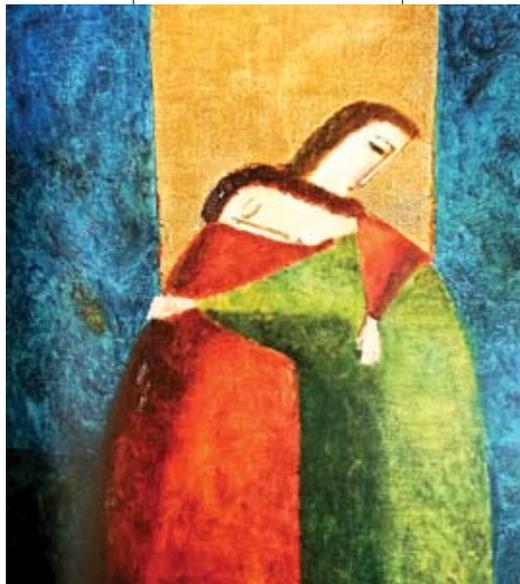
***What's your process of development as an artist?***

The artist is already formed when he starts to paint. It's important to set specific goals on graduating; you're at the very beginning of your own story, with your own artistic language. It's vital to develop your soul. Only then can you achieve something as an artist. If your personality is formed, it's distinctive, and brings originality to your paintings, telling your own story, via your own expressive means. If you aren't ready to step over boundaries of apprenticeship, your paintings will be flat and dull.

***Your works are distinctive. How did you develop your own style?***

To find his own language, the artist should be mature. You need to know a lot and read a lot, observe nature and the world, and analyse. In other words, you need to work on your soul. You can't achieve anything without it. You need to cover a great deal of material to find your path of expression! It's hard work. I grow tired of vernissages. They're difficult and boring for me.

It's good to spend time in your studio, to allow yourself to concentrate. It's a difficult time for art just now, as there are no standards. Everything is deteriorating, including moral values. Su-



perflous entertainment is everywhere, which is difficult for an artist, especially a young one. Wherever you go, you see the same clichés, and the same methods, wandering from one painting to another.

When I first visited the West, in 1991, and walked through galleries there, I asked myself why they'd invited me to have an exhibition, because I wasn't just different — I was out of place. I thought nobody would come to the opening! But there were so many people, and they were extremely interested! And then I realised that people are always attracted by what's new.

***Your artistic manner is often likened to mural painting.***

I'm interested in mural and spiritual paintings. I think that there's no higher form of art than mural paintings and icons. I have a realistic manner, portraying not only reality as I see it but as I feel it: spiritual reality. It's everywhere. We feel it inside us through our senses, but it's another matter expressing it. So, my paintings are realistic. I'm a realist.

***Perhaps, there are people who'd argue with you.***

I'm always close to real objects. Another matter is how I interpret them, what they give me, and what I can express through their nature.

***I understand that your paintings show your own vision of reality.***

And my feelings as well, because the physical aspect of what you see is similar for everyone. And it's important for me how I express this vision.

***Even if your images aren't quite realistic?***

Yes, of course. Our experience makes reality much more interesting. When we copy something, it's just a replica. It's not quite right.

***But your portraits are more realistic.***

Sure. In my portraits, I try to show the character of a person. There should be a certain resemblance to the person but it's also about my vision of this person. What do I want to emphasise, and how do I want to express this? I find an expressive solution. I've always been interested in portraits, creating a great many.

***But you're more famous for your other paintings.***

I've changed, but I'm still recognisable. I've changed because of all the new things that have come into my life: all the things I've felt. We change when we grow. My paintings are less material and more abstract now, but you can still recognise me: my forms, my colours, and my language.

***Is it true that colours have great meaning for you?***

Yes, the choice of colour is essential for the story I want to tell.

***Do colours represent your own state?***

I like light and cheerful colours. I think that our life is too complicated and we have to help people to find joy in it. This is an essential task for an artist.

***In the 1980s, people weren't ready to perceive you, or other artists. Do you think that attitudes have changed?***

Yes, sure. We aren't young anymore. If our work is recognised now, it's recognised. No means no. Before I was invited to join 'Nemiga', I was quite famous, here and abroad. We were a good team. Then,

joint exhibitions became less interesting and personal exhibitions started to gain interest.

***What's influenced your artistic manner?***

Hard work, every day. There's no trade secret. I try different methods, as I've learnt through the years; it's very difficult to explain. Art has to be your life; you need to feel it. Everyone discovers something for himself. We're all different. Everyone finds what they want.

***Is there a tendency towards individualism in your manner? Are you compelled to be different from others?***

No, it's not on purpose. This doesn't bother me. Since 2000, I've had other goals; I wanted to do something significant. I found another language. It was completely different: abstract and non-material. But it's recognisable. This is my language, which uses symbols of greater philosophical significance. Symbols are similar all over the world; people know them. That is why, probably, art has no national boundaries. Wherever you show your paintings, there are people who're interested in them; people who understand their meaning.

***Has abstract painting become your major interest?***

No. It doesn't mean that I'm not interested in human nature. I still paint portraits. Abstraction may leave you empty with time. We tend to oversimplify some things, and I don't want that. I don't want to lose touch with the real world. This is important for me, because I draw my inspiration from the reality I live in, the reality I feel. That is how the soul works, which is an important part of the concept of art. When we just copy from real objects, we become slaves, which we cannot allow.

***But abstract painting takes you to another world.***

Yes, this is very interesting.

***But you may go too far...***

As I've said, it's important for me not to lose touch with reality.

***Let's talk about traditions. Art is inspired by the places where the artist lives, by the atmosphere, by the real world.***



We're products of the time and place we live in, because we love it and we absorb it. I can't stay for more than a month abroad, as I want to return, though I like travelling. I consider myself to be a traditional, national artist. I often hear people calling me 'a traditional artist'. It means that there's something in my paintings which identifies me with Belarusian art, despite their international character. It seems to me that our national school of art is still being formed. We can talk about the Russian school of art or the French one. All those who studied in St. Petersburg or in Moscow, in the years after the war, belong to the Russian school. We are its followers. I consider myself to be a representative of the Russian school, on which basis the Belarusian school is developing.

***But there were artists who came from Belarus — Chagall, Soutine...***

We're proud to say that such outstanding artists worked here. Surely, different schools influence each other, especially now, when we're so open to the rest of the world. Belarusian artists are different, as it can be difficult to distinguish them from European artists. I don't think it's of that much importance. If the artist becomes more prominent, he becomes more national.

***What are the main characteristics of your paintings: figurative representation or abstract imagery?***



Visualisation should be in every painting. If you have a certain goal, you must achieve it through images. Additionally, you shouldn't divide the life of an artist into different periods. All tasks are different. Abstract painting also has imagery in it, but the images are different; they aren't real. In recent years, I've started to paint flowers, which seemed to me boring before. Now, they're interesting to me. This is similar to everyday piano studies; it can be done quite creatively.

I'd like to say again: I place great emphasis on colour, this code language of art. It's a different world: a different reality on canvas. It's no accident that, at the end of the 1980s, I started to use gold in



my paintings: the symbol of the sun, and the energy of the spirit. In combination with gold, you must use only strong colours, or they'll be lost. Paintings become symbolic, and more colourful. This is very important for me.

***Is there more philosophy in abstract paintings?***

Yes, they represent a certain philosophy. In one of my last paintings, I show the spiritual world — of Earth and sky. There are energy signs which circle through these two worlds, but how do you express them? How do you find a certain form? How do we feel it? Preparation and general knowledge are very important here: philosophy, education, extensive reading. All this requires the work of the soul: not only my soul, but the soul of the viewer.

***Are your paintings more about interpretation?***

Yes, I interpret. I never copy. Even when I draw landscapes from nature. I

make changes, and something may be lost; it's just the way of things. It's part of the creative process.

***You say that you don't create illustrations. Others have also stopped using illustrations in their works. Do you think that this method is being used too often?***

I think that it's wrong for an artist to use the same method all the time. The quality of my paintings is explained by the fact that I refrain from repeating the same method. I try to come up with unusual and original solutions. It's vital to avoid cliché, although others use it.

Art has developed so much over the centuries; you need to open up completely, to become recognisable. It's a difficult task. If the artist is recognisable, having found his language, and people try to interpret his art, it's an achievement.

***What can you say about the quality of Belarusian art? At what stage is it now?***

At a good level. Belarusian art is very popular. The Belarusian school is becoming more influential, but it's people who make schools. Each person brings his or her personality to the school. As long as the artist feels well, he works, and hopes he'll create something meaningful. If your soul is active and alive, you can create something.

***Why is it important to use traditional canvas?***

Leonardo Da Vinci said that painting is the most difficult form of art. To find your own language, to work out your own concepts of colour and form, to express yourself, to achieve, to feel and to create — this is a difficult path. People don't like to work hard these days.

***Will canvasses still exist in the future?***

Yes. People don't change, after all. People have their goals in life. They like to learn new things about themselves, and about the world. Real art will continue to exist. It can't disappear.

***You've seen a lot, and have worked abroad for a long time. How would you describe the state of visual arts in our country, in comparison with others?***

I think that our art is, perhaps, more interesting than that of other former So-

viet states. We have great artists. Some have left the country but I believe that they're still Belarusian, spreading the knowledge which they've gained here. Europeans treat our school very well, and our artists are in demand there. I respect them because I know how difficult it is to prove yourself. To gain recognition in Europe, you must be better than local artists. You should have your own opinion about what is happening in art.

***And what about our school? Is it deteriorating?***

Unfortunately, we are observing deterioration. There are still talented people in our country, while Europe lacks young people able to achieve something, despite having studied, for example, at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. I've visited several particular studios over the years and have failed to see any progression. They just sit there, drinking beer and sprinkling sand over glue. Once a month, a professor visits them, and he's no different from his students.

I think that a teacher should be kind and should love children, because students are basically children. I had such teachers back in my time. They had their artistic vision, and were professionals; it was interesting to listen to them. They could give detailed analysis of their students' works. I don't want to sound pretentious, but a teacher should be someone you can respect: a great artist. The best proof is his own work.

***How do you assess the quality of a painting when you visit an exhibition?***

It's hard to explain. It's about my taste and experience. If we talk about avant-garde works of art, some may be repulsive at first sight. Then, you get used to them and start to understand them. We used to have a strict selection process, and only few paintings could become part of an exhibition. Now, there's little selection criteria. It's difficult for young artists to understand it. They refuse to believe that it takes many years of hard work to understand painting, and to really learn something.

By Veniamin **Mikheev**

