

# US-BELARUS

June-July 2016

OBSERVER

**BELARUS AND  
THE NEW GENERATION:  
SHAPING  
THE FUTURE**

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**WORLD OF TANKS:  
BELARUS'  
ONLINE  
REVOLUTION**

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**BELARUS' TOP 5  
TOURIST  
ATTRACTIONS**

The  
Almanac:  
preserving  
Belarus  
p.20



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# *Publisher's Note*



Readers of the premier *US-Belarus Observer* magazine: From the previous issues, you have likely understood that this is not a typical publication, as it opens up the unusual world of an unknown country, of special people, as well as the unparalleled nature in which they live.

Humans are unable to visit all of the places that they like within their lifetimes, but they are able to learn about them, and to virtually immerse themselves within them.

On our planet Earth, there are many secrets, and it is impossible to learn of all of them. However, one wonderful secret, Belarus, is shared through this magazine. Knowing this secret will help everyone including politicians, businessmen, cultural people, and really any person who is interested in finding out about the wonders of our Earth and Life.

Understanding this secret certainly makes us better and wiser, and this is exactly what is missing in our world today. So, let's open up the pages of this *US-Belarus Observer* and, in doing so, open up the secret of Belarus.

With continuous respect,  
Mikhail Morgulis

## **We often get phone calls, and among these conversations, a few comments stand out:**

Bill, *Veteran NBA Trainer:*

"I was in Belarus for a week, and only saw one percent of the country. But your magazine has opened up one hundred percent of this beautiful, peaceful land!"

Frank, *Lawyer:*

"Your magazine is a *Belarusian National Geographic*. I really want to open up a business in Belarus."

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*Youth from the Belarusian church in North Port:*

"Thanks for the magazine. Our parents are from Belarus, but we were born in the United States. You definitely make the land of our ancestors interesting. We start to really love Belarus!"

Sarah, *Actress:*

"My husband is Belarusian, and you have opened up this country to me."

Brittney, *College Student:*

"I would like to do an exchange semester in Belarus. Am reading the magazine, and I really like it."

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# Editors' Letter

We live in a time that celebrates the individual and a culture that worships the self. While this isn't a terrible thing all the time, you won't get far in this world all by yourself. Working with others together, everyone achieves more is a common phrase here in the U.S., but it's not just a phrase for some people – it's their motto.

It was President Franklin D. Roosevelt who said, "If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships – the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together in the same world at peace."

Here at the *US-Belarus Observer*, our mission is to increase Americans' general knowledge about Belarus and its people. Knowing a people and how they operate is key to mutual understanding. And this mutual understanding leads to opportunities to work together. And working together is becoming the norm, not the exception, even in America. For example, many companies in the United States now interview by team matching. If you can't work with others, you just aren't desirable to bosses anymore.

In this issue, we will read about individuals who have dedicated their time, and for some, their lives to make the world a better place by building relationships and working together.

In an article on Belarus's plan for long-term development, Mikhail Morgulis opines that the future depends on youth and their ability to harness the powerful energy of their generation in order to make the world a better place to live. Although this is true for Belarus, this is also true for many countries including the United States.

You'll also read from a special report from Florida that the state has successfully set up bilateral opportunities for both countries, including a new relationship between the cities of Gomel in Belarus and Fort Myers in the Sunshine State. While focused mainly on economic topics, Fort Myers' Mayor Randy Henderson highlighted the importance of relationship building stating that even with all the bad things happening throughout the world, it's important to continue "reaching out, and creating a sense of love and camaraderie around the globe."

In a similar shade, we are sharing the story of Lt. Nikolai Kiselev, who helped save hundreds of Jewish people from the Nazis. At great danger to himself, Kiselev risked his life to lead this exodus through the forests to safety. Although not well known throughout his life, we honor his heroism and share his story with readers, in the hopes that it inspires every single reader to make a difference.

Finally, you will read about American professional basketball player, Lindsey Harding, and how she answered Belarus's call to join their team. Working together, this group of amazing athletes are aiming for Olympic gold next month in Rio de Janeiro. Stay tuned, because we here at the *US-Belarus Observer* certainly will!

If at the end of this issue, you ponder what working together means in your life, consider that we are all in this together and we can all work together to change the world for the better.

Editorial Team  
*US-Belarus Observer*

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! CORRECTIONS. In the three previous issues, the following photo credits were inadvertently omitted:

December 2015 – January 2016 issue

In the inside of the front cover, the photographer of the girl in national costume is Alexander Filiukov and all the other photographs are the intellectual property of the Belarusian Telegraph Agency

February – March 2016 issue

In the inside of the front cover, the photographer of all of the photographs is Oleg Kleschuk; on page 30 – 31, the photographs in the article "A City Brought From the Underground" are by photographer Oleg Kleschuk

April – May 2016 issue

In the inside of the front cover, all of the photographs are the intellectual property of the Belarusian Telegraph Agency; on page 44 – 47, the photographs in the article "Belarus in the Ice Hockey Rink" are by photographer Andrei Zamzhitsky



Meeting with children from Belarusian orphanages



Mikhail Morgulis and Vladimir Makei, the Belarusian minister of foreign affairs



Mikhail Morgulis with children in Belarusian orphanage

# BELARUS and the NEW GENERATION

By Mikhail Morgulis

**D**uring my recent trip, I went to three countries: Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, places where everyone used to understand each other, regardless of the language they spoke. However, between Russia and Ukraine that

common language was lost, the language of love. In Belarus, everything was peaceful and pleasant. I was greeted by the beautiful, modern capital, Minsk. I have a soft spot for Belarus, for the humility of its people,

for their kindness. Of course, I also sympathize for the particular suffering of Belarusians that occurred because of World War II. Accompanying me was Rev. Mark Bazalev, vice-president, Spiritual Diplomacy

Foundation. With the bloody events of neighboring Ukraine in its background, Belarus seemed like a peaceful oasis. We attended the 5th All-Belarusian People's Assembly, in which 2,500 people from 50 different countries participated. In other words, it was a large meeting, comprised of both Belarusians and friends from all over the world. I was invited to represent the United States. The keynote speaker was President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko, who introduced participants to the nation's five-year development plan. It sounded almost audacious and sometimes almost fantastical. There were plans to make extensive use of the latest technological advances in order to change various areas of life and to dramatically lift the standard of living. In

my televised interview, I stated that this plan would not be realized unless there was a conscious effort by the new generation of Belarusians. I cited the example of the Belarusian Hi Tech Park, where there are currently 22,000 young people employed, some working within computer programming. In 2015, they had already earned the nation billions of dollars. I add to this that I was absolutely convinced that there is a birth of a new, previously unknown energy within the world. The source of this energy is the new generation. This energy is being transformed into a modern, global power. This energy and power will sweep away all previous ways of life, including the hardened forms of communication and habitual lies, to which we have long stopped reacting

negatively and no longer perceive as sinful. I add to this previous sentiment that many criticize the new generation for its lack of rationalization and practicality, but this is actually unfair, as it is based on fear that they will break through the stereotypical ways of life. To me, it seems that this new generation is purer than us, but no less talented. I think that the process of global transformation with the help of the novel energy from the new generation will occur in all countries of the world. I also think that only by using this new force will Lukashenko be able to accomplish the goals of his bold five-year plan. ■

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Gomel Delegation in Fort Myers



Signing of Bilateral Business Partnership Agreement in Fort Myers

# FROM BELARUS WITH LOVE

A report of the visit by a delegation from the Gomel region in Belarus to the State of Florida on June 13 – 17, 2016.

**L**ocated in the southeastern corner of Belarus, the city of Gomel is home to approximately 500,000. Gomel is the second largest city in the nation and one of six administrative centers. The visit by the Belarusian delegation was aimed to develop mutually beneficial cooperation and was facilitated by Mikhail Morgulis, honorary consul to the Republic of Belarus.

The Belarusian delegation was headed by Boleslav Pirshtuk, deputy chair of the Gomel Regional Executive Committee, and included Oleg Kravchenko, director of Americas Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pavel Shidlovsky, charge d'affaires of the Embassy of Belarus to the USA, and Henadz Chorny, representing the Mogilev Branch of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The Belarusian delegation also included the directors of the leading enterprises within Gomel, specifically in metal production, dairy products, alcoholic beverages, wood products, as well as a representative of the Gomel-Raton Free Economic Zone. There are six free economic zones spread throughout all major Belarusian cities, which provide benefits in taxes, customs and registration.

Within Miami, a series of events on doing business in the United States and in the State of Florida were organized jointly with The Beacon Council, Miami-Dade County's Official Economic Partnership and with the Belarus-USA Business Cooperation Council. The delegation visited several sites including the Port of Miami and the Miami Free Zone.

In the cities of Coral Gables, Fort Myers, North Port and Venice, the delegation held meetings with administrations of cities and counties, as well as with representatives of business associations and companies. Sarasota County's Chamber of Commerce hosted the presentation of economic cooperation opportunities with Belarus and the Gomel Region.

In the City of Fort Myers specifically, Randy Henderson and Pirshtuk, acting on behalf of the City of Gomel, signed the Bilateral Business Partnership Agreement between the two cities. Ita Neymotin, regional conflict counsel in the Office of Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsel in Fort Myers was a critical

component in fostering the sister city pact. Hand-picked by Mayor Henderson and the Belarus delegation, Neymotin was selected to be the intermediary for the sister city agreement. Neymotin was assisted by Leo Kremenchuker, a licensed patent attorney in southwest Florida.

More than 50 public officials attended and participated in the event.

In regards to the Bilateral Business Partnership Agreement, Gomel was chosen by Fort Myers for its size and because it is part of a free economic zone. Belarus's exports to the United States include metal, fabric and lumber, Neymotin said, while the U.S. is a major supplier of internal combustion engines, automobiles, medical equipment and medicine to Belarus.

"The symbolic significance of this meeting was never more important than it is today, while we're experiencing global challenges with the recent events in Orlando," Henderson said. "Those kinds of activities are not going to stop us from reaching out, and creating a sense of love and camaraderie around the globe."

The visit by the Belarusian delegation concluded in Orlando. A forum on doing business in Belarus was held at the Orange County's National Entrepreneur Center. The delegation also visited the University of Central Florida's Business Incubator prior to returning to Belarus.

This visit by a Belarusian delegation to the United States was just one more step in building a better relationship between Florida and Belarus. Prior to this, the Belarusian State Chamber Orchestra, directed by virtuoso conductor Evgeny Bushkov, had several incredible performances in Florida in May, including at an international festival, consisting of the best orchestras from all around the world. The Office of the Honorary Consul also organized a performance in North Port, Florida, which was attended by the Mayor Jacqueline Moore. ■

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Alexander Moshensky



# Belarus's fish king

By Yuri Tarasevich

It's unlikely that Alexander Moshensky, a young mathematician from Brest, ever conceived that following his graduation from the university he wouldn't be applying to graduate school and writing his thesis, but instead will spend his days in the neighboring Poland, processing herring at a factory.

You would perhaps agree that at the age of twenty, even mathematicians with logic-based thinking dream of other things. Did he anticipate back then that this experience would propel him into the top five of the country's most influential businessmen and help him to establish a produce empire with more than 10,000 employees and capitalization of almost \$1 billion? Probably not.

But in 1990s Belarus, like other new countries from the recently dissolved Soviet Union, these were one-of-a-kind times. And decisions that were dictated by then present needs had some far-reaching consequences.

Some of the business people were raised by these consequences to the pinnacle of fleeting success, but ultimately brought crashing down. Others were taken on a slow road to long-term success. Moshensky still believes that proper business education would've helped him more, but he had strategic vision and business acumen from the very beginning. Plus, he had his father — his anchor, advisor and business partner.

One of the streets in Brest is named in honor of his father, Mikhail Moshensky, the founder of Santa Impex Brest, which includes the now famous Santa Bremor. Altogether, there are only two streets in Belarus named after businesspeople, and there's a good reason for this.

If back in 1993, somebody would claim that landlocked Belarus would become one of eastern Europe's largest producers and exporters of fish products, that person would've been ridiculed. But the former head of the engineering design bureau of the Brest Electromechanical Plant, the elder Moshensky did something that seemed impossible. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Belarus experienced serious

problems with deliveries of fish products, and Mikhail jumped at the chance. In 1993 he founded Nila company, which began importing frozen fish from other places in Europe.

Some time later, the two Moshenskys decided to expand the business. The result of this decision was the establishment, in 1995, of the Belarusian-Dutch joint venture Santa Impex Brest, which was founded by Nila and one of its Dutch suppliers. Money flowed into the company's accounts, but the two men realized that their monopoly on Belarus's fresh-frozen fish market would be short-lived. Plus, they believed that remaining a reseller could be a dead-end road.

The idea to turn his trading business into production one came during a visit to one of the suppliers, the German company, Abellman. Mikhail was surprised to discover that for decades the Germans have been packaging herring fillets in glass jars and selling them, so the Belarusian businessman decided to try a similar product in Belarus.

Why similar and not precisely the same? Because Belarusians weren't used to the marinated herring that became a staple in

western Europe: their tastes deviated towards barrel-salted herring and spicy herring from Iceland, which in the past, Soviet authorities bartered for timber.

"We were in charge of processing and marketing of fish products, and the Germans provided us with technologies adapted to our Slavic tastes," said Alexander Moshensky in one of his interviews.

The duo became top sellers thanks to the innovative ideas of herring fillets in oil, herring rolls and capelin caviar in sauce. No such products had been available before either in Belarus or globally.

"Mom would often buy barrel-salted herring. She would put it under the running water to soak, and on the next day the herring would be cleaned, cut, and dis-boweled. It was a rather lengthy process," Alexander remembers.

Everyone was doing that, and not just because they've gotten used to this, but because the ready-made fillets in glass jars were more expensive and the taste wasn't to everyone's liking.

The company's technicians had to deal with many challenges. They had to find the packaging that was cheaper than glass jars. And they had to make sure that the herring

taste was the same one that the consumers were used to.

Their old partners, the Abellman company, became the suppliers of unprocessed raw fillets. Several months went into developing the right taste formulas. Marinade was replaced with vegetable oil. By combining salt and spices in different proportions, the Belarusian specialists finally developed a product line under the Matias brand: herring fillets with garlic, spices and olive oil. One of the principal components of their commercial success was the fact that Moshenskys decided to make the new herring products as affordable as possible, without sacrificing the high quality.

The herring was packaged in plastic and polyethylene. The resulting product had a retail price of slightly more than one euro, which was much cheaper than herring fillets in glass jars.

The launch of Matias brand didn't require a lot of investment. Father and son spent the equivalent to several hundred thousand dollars, earned from frozen fish deliveries, to buy the fillet filling line, which was installed at a leased facility in Brest.

But however good the final product, it still had to be sold and it took a lot of



At Seafood Expo Global, Brussels, Belgium

marketing efforts to make the consumers appreciate Belarusian fish.

"We would open the packages up, hold tastings in stores and at the open-air markets — anywhere we could, really. We tried to convince people that it's cost-efficient to buy fillet instead of the whole fish, and that our fillets are tastier," Alexander remembers. After several years of hard work, the company lived to see its hour of triumph. By mid-1998, the volume of Matias herring annual sales reached 4,000 tons.

When crisis hit Russia and Belarus, father and son made a counterintuitive decision — instead of slowing down production, they geared up for expansion.

"We remembered America's example, where crises were always followed by years of explosive economic growth," Alexander explains.

They decided to open their own seafood-processing plant. This required investments of \$6 million, but the businessmen only had \$750 thousand. To raise the necessary sum, they established a new joint venture with the German partners and this was the birth of Santa Bremor.

Plant construction began in 1999. The owners envisioned it as both a domestic

player, and the supplier to the markets of Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and other Commonwealth of Independent States countries. That was the least-value objective. The best-scenario goal for their business was to introduce their products to the European and global markets. With this in mind, Santa Bremor was registered in the Brest free trade zone.

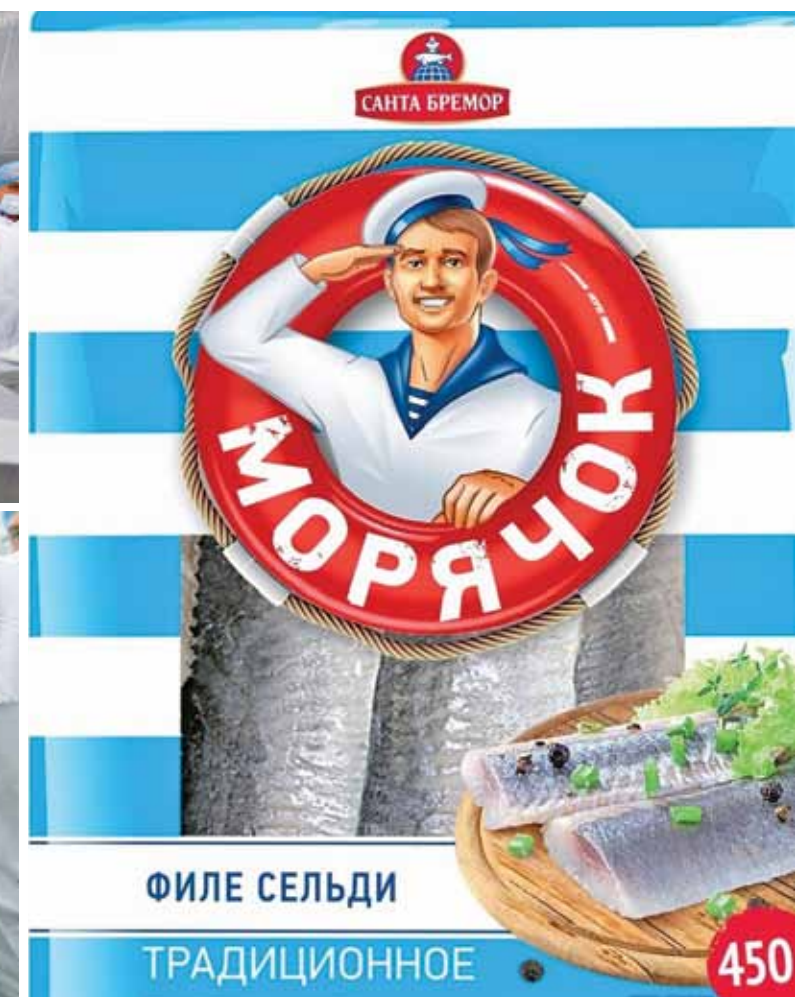
At the turn of the new millennium, the new production plant was finally operational. But the joy of its launch was mixed with grief. Mikhail died following two heart attacks, and the large-scale operations passed on to Alexander.

It so happened that soon after this turn of events, I visited Brest together with an American delegation. As our minibus was driving through the old city and we passed through city outskirts, our guide said: "This is the free trade zone." To tell you the truth, the views outside the bus window were not particularly breathtaking as we continued to drive past the quiet Belarusian countryside. But everything changed when we were invited into the workshops of Santa Bremor. This didn't look like a herring-processing facility; it looked like a sterile operating theater or a spaceship manufacturing facility.

Alexander Moshensky greeted us with a welcoming smile, and he didn't look like your typical respectable businessman in a suit — instead he was young, athletic and wearing jeans. But watching his inward-looking eyes, you could see that despite his smiling face his heart was grieving, but the young businessman warmed up and began telling us about his plans, which, after all those years, have fully come to fruition.

After that, we were invited to have a taste of the Belarusian herring. But instead of traditional boiled potatoes, the herring was accompanied by some tasty-looking ice-cream — a strange combination, to say the least. It turned out that the ice-cream was also produced by Santa Bremor as part of the owner's diversification efforts. Every year, the summertime slump in demand for the fish products forced the company to consider the question of its dealership network that struggled to sell the herring products.

Belarus, however, was experiencing a shortage of ice cream, and so Moshensky bought Italian technology, combining Belarusian milk with Polish jam, chocolate, and other natural ingredients, and successfully conquered another market niche.



Although ice-cream production accounts for five percent of the overall production volumes, it allows the enterprise to keep its working rhythm all year round.

The story of Moshensky's further success is not about chasing fast money, but about building the edifice of a large business holding. Over the year, he'd created the second part of his foodstuff empire — the dairy company Savushkin Product, then he bought the Russian Sea company from Gennady Timchenko, entrenching himself on the Russian market.

Finally he had built in Brest a new plant for production of herring fillet products. The plant is unique and has no analogues in Western Europe. It is equipped with the newest Dutch and Icelandic specialty equipment made to order.

"In order to succeed, even in times of crisis, you have to decrease the production costs and create innovative products that allow you to fight for the consumers and collect additional added value through know-how, technology, trademark, and diversification of sales markets," said Moshensky. "What's the best way to swim — with the current or against it? Well, the best way to swim is in the direction that you need."

This is why he believes that to be successful, any company has to look beyond the domestic market and strive to export. It's no coincidence that Santa Bremor delivers its products to the U.S., Israel, Canada, Germany, New Zealand and others.

Iceland has paid its respect to Alexander Moshensky's creativity by making him the country's honorary consul in Belarus. He has become something of a national hero for the descendants of the Vikings, when he came up with the idea to utilize capelin caviar. Some time ago, the Japanese bought some of this caviar, but the rest found no demand. It was Moshensky who created a whole product line using capelin caviar, and now this delicacy sells very well in Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and elsewhere. It seems that soon the consumers will come to fully appreciate another of company's inventions — krill paste. Altogether, this food empire has a portfolio of more than 900 original products.

Nonetheless, Alexander himself is very modest about his achievements, because he measures them on a scale greater than Belarus.

"Today I am assisted by a good classical education along with lucky genetics and

some lucky breaks," he said. "But tomorrow that's not going to be enough. With many things, it's as if we're reinventing the wheel. Many victories are secured because we are like the 300 Spartans, we are at home, we know how things work here. This is why we should try and adopt western methodological and technological know-hows as soon as possible."

Being a true businessman, Moshensky dreams of creating a system that will outlive its creator. He's not afraid of unfair competition or economic crises. Ultimately, he says, success is all about character.

"If you decide to become a businessman, you shouldn't expect anything," he said. "That's the strategy in a nutshell. If you're an expert in your field and you see that you can monetize it yourself — go for it. If you're an expert in your field, but you don't see how to make a business out of it — look for partners. But if you put the lifetime project on the back burner — that's like putting your whole life there." ■

For more information go to [www.en.santa-bremor.com](http://www.en.santa-bremor.com)



# The World of Tanks

By Yuri Maximov





The small European country of Belarus, located between Russia, Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania, occupies an area with no access to the sea. Yet, the Belarusian lands are washed by all the seas and oceans of the world. How can this be? If you talk to the fans of the game *World of Warships*, you will understand why. All over the world, in America, Europe and even Africa, gamers enjoy this enterprise, but the most important part of this ocean armada happens to be a land vehicle – the armored tank. A tank?! Yes, because that is exactly how it started, and it all started in Belarus.

A long time ago, some of the toughest tank battles of the last world war took place on the long-suffering Belarusian lands. After defeating the Nazis, the war machines were sent to the smelter or turned into monuments, but the memory of the war remains. When a young programmer, Victor Kisliy, from Minsk, the capital of Belarus, decided to create his own virtual war game, he had no doubts what type of fighting vehicle he would choose to feature.

“The games that our company, *Wargaming*, creates are smart games,” Victor says. “They are not bloody and full of garbage. We design strategic, tactical teamwork. Before tanks, our most famous title was *Operation Bagration*, which was a World War II offensive named after a Russian general who won the battle against Napoleon. We

constructed a compelling story about the liberation of Belarus from the Nazis. The next game was for American players, and it was renamed *Order of War*. In it, we talked about Normandy, where the American troops landed and liberated France. And so, step by step, we came up with the idea of *World of Tanks*. You can find plenty of games where players running around shooting each other. We decided, ‘Let’s deal with tanks! Let the machines fight.’ We had no idea how it would take off!”

Victor became familiar with computers at the end of high school. He remembers, “In the science lab where my dad worked, there were computers... old and paunchy. And they had the very first simplistic games, the type where a king rules his kingdom. Then, computer clubs appeared and they had video games; someone runs somewhere, shoots, and flies off in a spaceship somewhere. We boys adored these games; they enthralled an entire generation!”

Interest in these games led Victor to the idea of creating his own games.

The father of Belarus’s first billionaire played a large role in helping his son learn to think both logically and creatively at the same time. At a young age, he enrolled Victor in chess school, and later helped Victor choose an education in the technical sector. At university, Victor found like-minded friends.

“There were five or six of us who lived together in one room on a small stipend,” he said. “My father helped with a bit of pocket money. At that time in Belarus, in the 90s, a programmer made about \$25 a month. We worked and made what we could, just to keep from starving. We dreamed of making a game for everyone that would capture the world. However, it was really just enthusiasm because we lacked a technical education.”

At first, the young Belarusian designers followed the trodden path. They set out to create a game universe where elves would fight orcs and other mythical creatures. They even got so far as to make the first sketches with the help of Australian consultants. The elves would shoot a bow and a giant would run at them swinging a club. Preparing this work took ten months, but instead of making a fantasy world, the designers put together a small video, which quickly went viral. In the video, a powerful orc triumphs over his opponent, but then a tank appears and flattens the orc into a pancake.

The amusing teaser became the first step to a new game, but the path to development turned out to be far from easy. Victor traveled all over the world, trying to find a publisher for his game. However, the idea of any tanks within the game didn’t sit well with prospective investors. Players, the businessmen felt, could emotionally

identify with mystical characters, but not with a hunk of iron.

Fortunately, the evolution of the web helped. Games that previously were sold boxed now could be purchased online, and therefore, one could get around utilizing a traditional publisher. However, exactly a month before the launch of the game, the Belarusian programmers who were ready to conquer the world ran out of money. \$10 million had been invested in the project, but as it happens, it wasn’t quite enough. Victor borrowed from anyone he could – family and friends. Finally, he remembers, “At midnight, on August 13th, 2010, we pulled the switch and the tanks were rolling.”

The model of marketing, thought up by Victor and his colleagues, started earning money. As for those “hunks of iron...?”

“I don’t know,” Victor states, “if there was magic in the tanks or if we just managed to make a really good product. Now more than 80 million people around the world play: In China, in the Czech Republic, in Russia, in Japan and in many other countries – people emotionally identify with the tanks. It is projected that there will soon be 100 million players. We are proud that we made it into the *Guinness Book of World Records*.”

The game is designed so that the player can simply have fun and enjoy the process without spending any actual money. The company encompasses soft monetization, and 70 - 75 percent of gamers will never pay anything for the game. Victor notes that that is considered normal by the company. The unobtrusive monetization and, of course, the appeal of the game itself, have led to great success. Money, which at first trickled in, is now flowing in, but the team wasn’t able to rest on their laurels. The game needed continued support and nourishment and refreshing, new content. The growing popularity meant that the company had to enter markets in many different countries. The headquarters of *Wargaming* are now in Cyprus, and Victor now owns 16 offices around the world, including in San Francisco, Chicago, Baltimore, Seattle and Austin. 4,000 people work for the company, of which his father holds position as one of the co-owners.

“In Cyprus, the sea is 30 minutes away in any direction by car. According to history, Aphrodite emerged from the foam not far from us,” jokes Victor. Despite the proximity of the sea and the fact that warships have become part of his gaming universe, Victor’s brand remains centered on the tank. “We were able to make the adventure game of tanks a phenomenon,” Victor says. “It’s

even more than a brand; it’s public property now. The tank itself became an entity, something separate and independent – the existence makes the heart beat faster. It’s like soccer. It’s like hockey or American football.”

Understanding that the development of market success requires constantly strengthening your position in the face of competition, and most importantly keeping millions of users interested in the game, *Wargaming* did not lose momentum and did everything so that people, rather than growing bored with the tanks, grew to delight in them even more. The company took part in an exhibition at the British Museum of Tanks. Not too long ago, partnering with the Tank Museum in Kubinka, Russia, the group began restoration on the giant German tank *Maus*. Additionally, *Wargaming* contributes to many restorations of art and



Victor Kisliy

monuments from World War II, calling the project, *So That We Remember*. “We hold almost all of our meetings with our supporters in museums,” Victor Kisliy tells us. “Museums get the revenue, and we get the opportunity to hold tournaments, chat about tanks, look at them, and sometimes even ride in one. In Belarus, we even restored the famous Soviet T-34 tank, and it took part in the Victory Parade.”

In one interview, Victor Kisliy calls the *Wargaming* company “cosmopolitan.” However, for all its transnational nature, the company, like its founder, remains closely tied to the Belarusian lands. It’s noteworthy that not only the creators of *World of Tanks*, but other major gaming companies in the industry, have strong Belarusian roots. Victor clarifies, “I am inclined to explain this

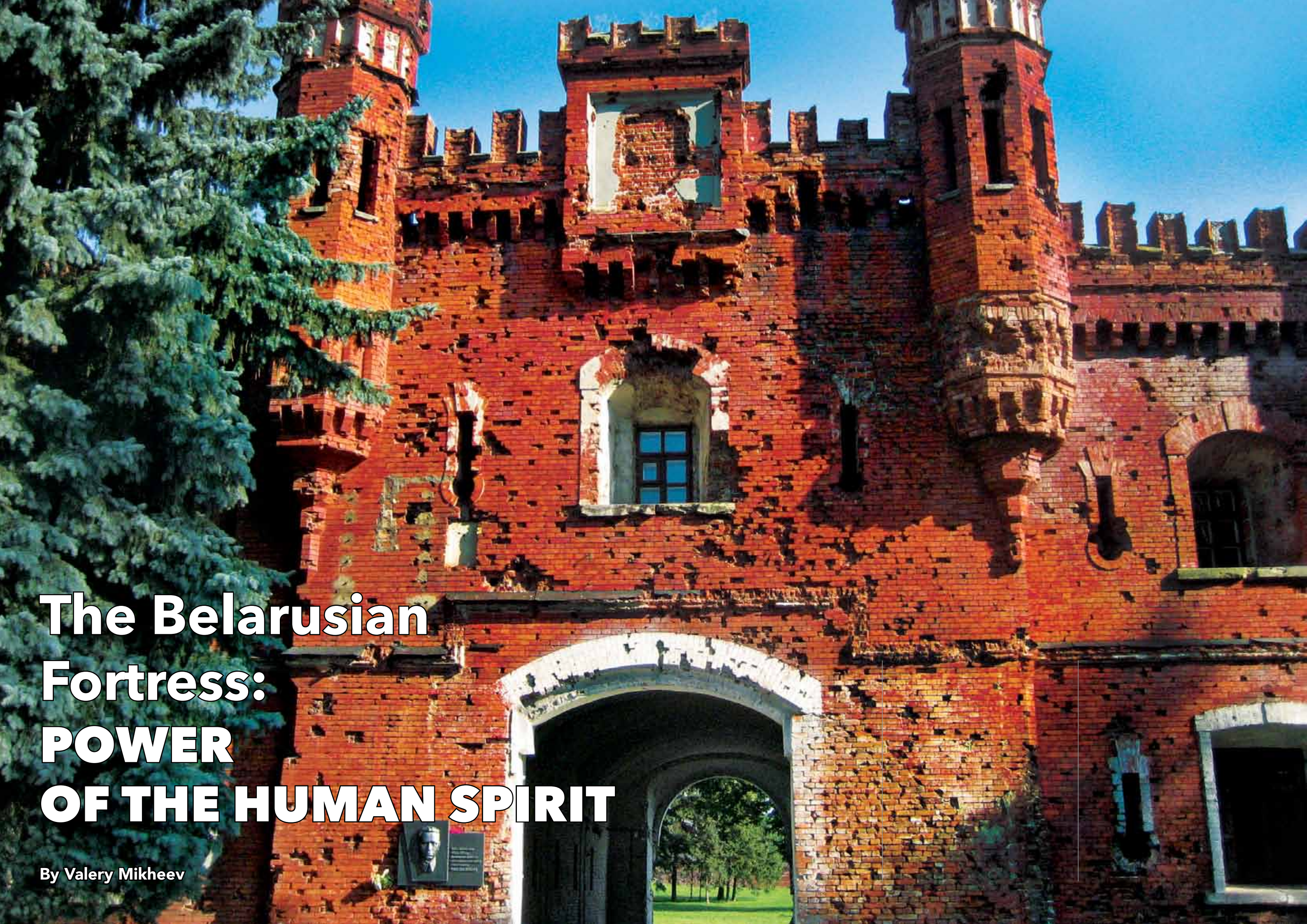
fact in that firstly, Belarusians are a modest people. We understand the balance in this fragile world: Today there is peace, but tomorrow a war might start. We can also see this in our literature and in our history. Go to Minsk and ask people how they feel. We value a peaceful life and do not waste time. Secondly, after World War II, the country lay in ruins and many technological enterprises had to be started up in Belarus. Electronics also became an industry, as did the production of the renowned heavy trucks, military factories and much more. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Belarus already possessed serious technical, engineering, and scientific potential. This ensured that the country had strong universities, technical colleges, and even a strong school system.”

Kisliy also discusses Belarus’s potential. “Take my father, for example – he is a man of science,” Kisliy said. “I also enrolled in a college physics course, and I personally know that we have a wonderful foundation. Belarusian teams of new programmers consistently rank among the best and are awarded prizes. As it happens, my brother studied applied mathematics and was friends with a bunch of mathematicians and a lot of them have come to work for us. You can joke that because there are no special resources in Belarus – well, except the forest – we have to use our brains. Like our President said, just because you poke a stick in the ground does not mean oil will flow out.”

There are games that teach violence. The tank, sea and air battles in Victor Kisliy’s games teach the user to think strategically and to be detail-oriented. Moreover, the player understands that cooperation is important and that winning on one’s own is very difficult.

“Other games acquaint the younger generation with unreal virtual war, but our goal is for kids who play the game to remember that real war is different, that there is blood, tears, and death. We want to make sure that no one forgets that war is real and that the costs are terrible,” Victor states.

Belarus offers immense business prospects, for those who can comprehensively view the gaming industry and its evolution. The compound talents of Belarusian creators and programmers who work with foreign management comprise a huge synergy. Who knows, maybe in the near future, Belarus will become not only a country of risen tanks, but also the first country in the world whose gaming space fleet will defend the planet from invaders from deep space. ■



# The Belarusian Fortress: **POWER OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT**

By Valery Mikheev



Sculpture called "Thirst"



340 feet obelisk, symbolizing victory



The ruins of the fortress, preserved as a memorial



Inside the museum



In the history of every country, there are events that will never be forgotten. For example, in American history, important events include the Civil War, the moon landing and 9/11. There are similar milestones in Belarus. One such event, which is memorialized, is the defense of Brest Fortress against Hitler's army.

The fortress was historically used to protect Belarus from invaders, following its construction in the early 19th century. Even so, the most famous battle in the history of Brest Fortress occurred on June 22nd, 1941. This was the day Hitler waged war against the Soviet Union.

With no warning, Nazi troops attacked at the border of Brest, in southwestern Belarus. This began, arguably, the most ambitious and unbelievably cruel war in human history, World War II, lasting about six years.

The garrison in Brest Fortress only numbered 7,000 – 8,000 defenders, who entered into an unequal battle with the enemy. The Nazis brought 30,000 troops with tanks, artillery and aircraft. The invaders expected to implement their surprise attack in the early morning hours, which would allow them to capture the fortress with lightning speed.

The fortress inhabitants fought with unwavering dignity. They commanded the defense through difficult conditions, with no support or assistance from the outside. These guardians of the fortress suffered from limited supplies of food, ammunition, medical supplies and water. The soldiers and officers displayed remarkable courage, bravery and determination.

Shoulder to shoulder, representatives of more than 30 nationalities fought: Belarusians, Russians, Ukrainians, Kalmyks, Georgians, Moldovans and many others. After having marched victoriously through most of Europe, the German army met extreme resistance for the first time, when it faced this unprecedented self-sacrifice of soldiers defending their homeland. Besieged in the castle, the men stayed in underground dungeons to resist the attacks, day after day. The Germans suffered heavy losses during this outset of war.

With impotent rage, Hitler's men used up an entire arsenal, attempting to destroy the defenders and then began to use fire. They used napalm, gasoline and flamethrowers, reducing many of their opponents to ashes. It was an absolutely hellish battle. Even now

you can see that every brick of the garrison and fortification remains charred from fire and riddled with scars from shells, bullets and bombs. The fighting continued until the final bullet and the last drop of blood.

The walls of the underground encasements still show farewell inscriptions from the combatants: "We will die, but we will not run," "I'm dying, but I will not give up. Goodbye homeland! Goodbye Belarus!" "There are only three of us left. We know that we are dying, but we will not lose our spirit, and we will die heroes."

The castle lay in ruins after being shelled for more than a month. To ensure the complete destruction of its warriors, the German soldiers flooded the cellars of the fortress with water from the neighboring river.

Overall, the fortress was heroically defended for an entire month. More than a thousand of its defenders were killed during the fight with the Nazi army. On November 8th, 1956, the Museum of the Defense of Brest Fortress was opened, in order to memorialize these events.

The main focus of the museum centers on condemning aggression and violence.

One stand displays a document, known as the Memo of a German Soldier. German Nazis believed that no one in the world could stand up to their army, as evident by the words found in this document: "We will force the entire world to its knees. We will decide the fate of England, Russia, and America... according to how they benefit Germany. Destroy every resistant living thing in our path. Tomorrow the whole world will kneel before us."

Such bitter truths of history should never be forgotten. The Nazi invaders, with their plans of world domination, eventually encountered their own destruction at the hands of the people of America, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. Even so, the beginning of Hitler's

defeat actually occurred at Brest Fortress in Belarus.

As is often said in Belarus: No one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten! It has been almost 75 years since the beginning of those tragic events.

The city of Brest also created a memorial and a monument to the defenders of Brest Fortress. Tourists and visitors from 130 countries attended the opening of the memorial. Each year the Museum of the Defense of Brest Fortress is visited by about one million people. Restoration of the territory of the fortress continues. More than 170 acres of the area will gradually be turned into a memorial park.

In the center of the fortress, a Christian church stands. Here, services are

conducted with liturgies and worshippers make exalted calls for peace and harmony. The church is constantly lit with candles, reminding people of the tragedy and also connecting people together. These candles are always burning, in order to awaken in human hearts, reminders of the past and of duty, of the love of God, the homeland, and of their relatives and friends.

Of course, it is really to remind us all that there is not only the memory of the mind, but also that of the heart. ■

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# The Almanac:

## A Unique Belarusian Anthology

By Alex Zinkevich

**A**mong the many currently published works in Belarus, an anthology of local lore entitled the “Ostromechevskaya Manuscript,” or the *Almanac*, attracted great attention in its fourth year of quarterly issuance. The *Almanac* hailed from a small region in Brest located on the southwestern border of Belarus, an area also called Western Polesie.

This ancient land teems with forests and wetlands, rivers and lakes, legends and myths. Even the names of places in the

region, such as Belovezhskaya Forest, which borders the Western Bug River and legendary swamps of Pripyat River, evoke pride and delight in every person who hears about them.

On the banks of large rivers and the hills of unspoiled nature mostly encompassed of lakes and lowland swamps, medieval castles, ancient manor houses and parks stand preserved. The area aptly carries the names of “The Lungs of Europe” or “The Sea of Herodotus”.

Moreover, to this day in the villages and towns the locals communicate in a unique Polesian way, which is also a transitional dialect of the Eastern Slavic languages. The dialect adds color to ancient and authentic regional songs and ceremonies.

Scientists believe that archaic Slavic songs of Polesie predate the Egyptian pyramids, and the folk customs and traditions of the area reveal strong pagan roots.

Here, side by side, dwell forgotten Christian churches and active parishes



– Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and even Jewish temples and Islamic mosques.

In the Brest region lie the roots of the great Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky, artist and musician, Napoleon Orda, and freedom fighter, Tadeusz Kosciuszko. Poet Alexander Blok and writer Aleksandr Kuprin also nurtured their creativity for some time in this alcove.

The confined corner of Polesie, saturated with myths and legends, talented indigents, provincial songs, music, beliefs and cultural history, is particularly unique.

But let's return to the *Almanac*. What makes it unequalled?

The theme of the published material centers most particularly on Western Polesie, and while some works are written

in the official government languages of Belarusian and Russian, the Polesian dialect is predominant and the one that is mostly used. The *Almanac* appears similar to a textbook, according to the editor, Alexander Volkovich of Brest Produced. Volkovich has himself authored many articles and books on Belarusian Polesie.

The *Almanac* actually has a longer history than its current issuance, as it is named after an archival document which dates back to 1640 – 1670 A.D. This document was a compilation of Belarusian Cyrillic songs, chants, instrumental works and dance music of the time period. This 17th century collection is also known as “Manuscript 127/56” and can currently be found in the Jagiellonian Library at

Krakov University in Poland. Professor Adam Maldis, who has a doctorate in philology, discovered the document in 1964.

Maldis showed that the historical roots, or birthplace of the manuscript, lie in the village Ostromechevo of the current Brest district (hence its name “Ostromechevskaya Manuscript”). This discovery was highlighted in a number of publications in the national and foreign press.

“For the concept of a local historical almanac,” said Volkovich, “we employed a very broad meaning. The themes of the journal center on historical events, provincial culture, folklore, and ethnography. Works can be about music, spoken word poetry, choreography and arts or the literary heritage of Polesie. Each summer,



Editor Alexander Volkovich



Inna Swede, a professor, A.S. Pushkin Brest State University



Expedition with philology students



Expedition to uncover folklore

together with philology students from A.S. Pushkin Brest State University, we go on an expedition to uncover folklore of the region. We take notes on songs and legends of the area and keep logs of memories from the elderly. We then print these in the local dialect, the same language of our ancestors, which we are trying to preserve. We craft antiquated folk arts, and talk about regional poets, folk artists and musicians. We write down the words and music of local artists. In reviewing these historical experiences, we discover not only the forgotten names of famous countrymen, but also the stories of bygone ordinary citizens. Their fates tell the true story of our country. We reconstruct the history of ravaged churches

and other cultural and historical buildings along with archaic objects.”

In 2014, the *Almanac* received several accolades on the Day of Belarusian Written Language, a holiday which is intended to demonstrate the unity of the Belarusian written word and the history and culture of the Belarusian people. The *Almanac* received the award of Best in Regional Works, and Alexander Volkovich earned a first-place award for his series of articles in the anthology.

The founders of the *Almanac* include the Brest Regional Executive Committee, comprised of the Department of Ideological Cultural and Youth Affairs of Brest, and the Brest District House of the Arts. The project managers of the *Almanac* include

Maldis and Inna Swede, a professor at the Belarusian Literary Department of A.S. Pushkin Brest State University.

The *Almanac* not only stands as a unique historical collection, but represents the national cultural heritage of Belarus. It is also certainly one of the main historical and cultural symbols of the entire Brest region, along with such representative landmarks as the Holocaust Museum, the Museum Complex of Napoleon Orda, and the domicile of world famous writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky located in the Ivanovo district of the Brest region. ■

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Belarusian summer festival

# Festivals in Belarus

By Andrei Karpovich

**B**elarusian culture occupies a special place among its Eastern European siblings. For centuries, the people of Belarus have held sacred the traditions of their ancestors. To this day, they observe ancient pagan rituals, such as Maslenitsa (winter send-off), Kupalye (midsummer celebration), Kolyady (Christmas Eve trick-or-treating), Dozhinki (celebration of harvested crops), and many others.

The country is proud to have preserved its historical folklore. National songs, dances, legends, games, proverbs and sayings have all made it to modernity, and found a new life through the regular folk festivals.

The staging of the festivals is tied to the traditions of the country's different regions, and they usually take place among architectural and historical attractions, for example, in the town of

Nesvizh, in the old estate of the Radziwill family, or near the ancient castles in the towns of Polotsk, Zaslavl, Mir and Turov.

In recent years, the government has gotten closely involved in festival activities. Organization of republican festivals, such as the folk dance festival (in the town of Chechersk in Gomel region), folk music festival (in the town of Postavy in Vitebsk region), folk humor



festival (in the village of Avtyuki in Gomel region), and folk art festival (in the Oktyabrsky district of Gomel region), has become an important component of the program for revival of small Belorussian towns.

The annual July celebration Kupalye - Alexandria Brings Friends Together, which traditionally takes place in the Alexandria agricultural settlement in Mogilev region, serves as a meeting ground for the fraternal peoples of Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and the Baltic countries.

The historical knightly festivals (Knight Fest at Mstislavl, international festival Our Grunwald, as well as Medieval Minsk and Golshansk Castle) are well-liked by the locals and draw large crowds from the near and far abroad.

What Belarusian doesn't dream of becoming a cowboy? In 2016, Belarus hosted its sixth celebration of cowboy culture known as the Golden Spur Rodeo. Anyone could have some real fun in the saloon, "bash" the sheriff's face, ogle the saloon owner's daughter, and go off to fight the Indians before the sheriff came to his senses and took away their Colt gun...

Larger cities also play active part in the country's cultural life. There is a choreography festival at Gomel, an Orthodox chants and Christian music festival in Minsk, theater festivals in Brest and Minsk. The capital also hosts the Minsk International Film Festival and Children and Youth Film Festival, as well as many other artistic and poetic events.

But the trademark of modern Belarus is definitely the Slavianski Bazar, or international festival, which marked its 25th anniversary this year. In the quarter century of its existence, the celebration became a favorite summer tradition, and each year great musicians and performers from all over the world gather in Vitebsk.

Belarusian government believes festivals play an important role in the promotion of national culture and international cultural cooperation. Speaking at the opening ceremony of the jubilee Slavianski Bazaar on July 14, 2016, President Alexander Lukashenko noted: "We pay special attention to the promotion of national art, conservation of folk traditions and creative achievements of our ancestors. This is why we have every right to say that our country is the citadel of traditional culture." ■



Knight Fest at Mstislavl



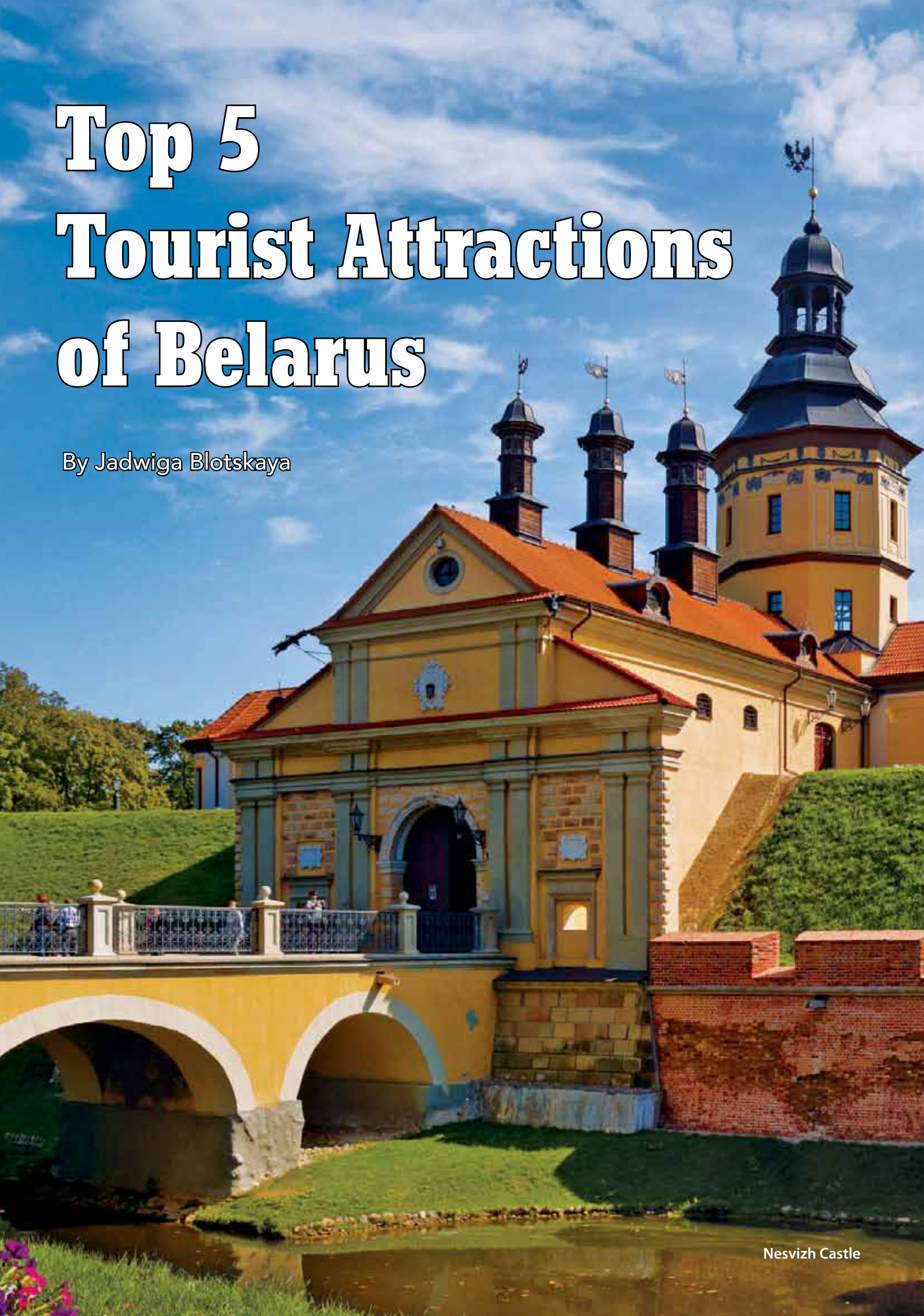
Golden Spur Rodeo



Concert at summer festival

# Top 5 Tourist Attractions of Belarus

By Jadwiga Blotskaya



Nesvizh Castle



Belovezhskaya Forest

It's a common misconception that Belarus, located in the very heart of Europe, is not a large country. However, its area is actually greater than that of Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Belgium or the Netherlands. Belarus is not just one of Europe's oldest regions, it's also one of the few that managed to preserve their pristine nature.

In the Middle Ages, the lands populated by the ancestors of modern-day Belarusians were known as a Land of castles. Today, Belarus is most often called the blue-eyed land of thousands of lakes. Thanks to the forests that cover one third of its territory and unique swamps, Belarus is known as Europe's lungs.

Its nature draws the fans of environmental tourism from all over the world, and if you choose Belarus as your next vacation destination, you'll be sure to have a great time. Let's talk about five of the top attractions of this amazing land.

## 1. BELOVEZHSKAYA FOREST

These are the remains of the huge primordial forest, which once stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Bug River, and from Oder River to the Dnieper. The first written mentions of Belovezhskaya Forest are dated A.D. 983. It's the largest forest in Central Europe. At a distance of twelve miles from the forest, stands the town of Kamienyets with its 100-foot

white stone watchtower Bielaja Wieza that was built in the 13th century. It's believed that this tower gave name to the whole forest.

By the way, if you think that humanity began to worry about environmental protection just recently, you are, in fact, wrong. Back in the 14th century, Jogaila, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, declared the forest under protection and forbade hunting there.

Belovezhskaya Forest National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site with a status of biosphere reserve. It's home to more than 900 species of plants, including endangered ones, and dozens of species of rare mammals and birds.

Forest is especially famous for its ancient named oaks, which are more than 500 years old. And don't forget about Europe's largest population of European wood bison, the relatives of American ones, this relic species, which was saved from extinction on the premises of the forest.

## 2. POLOTSK

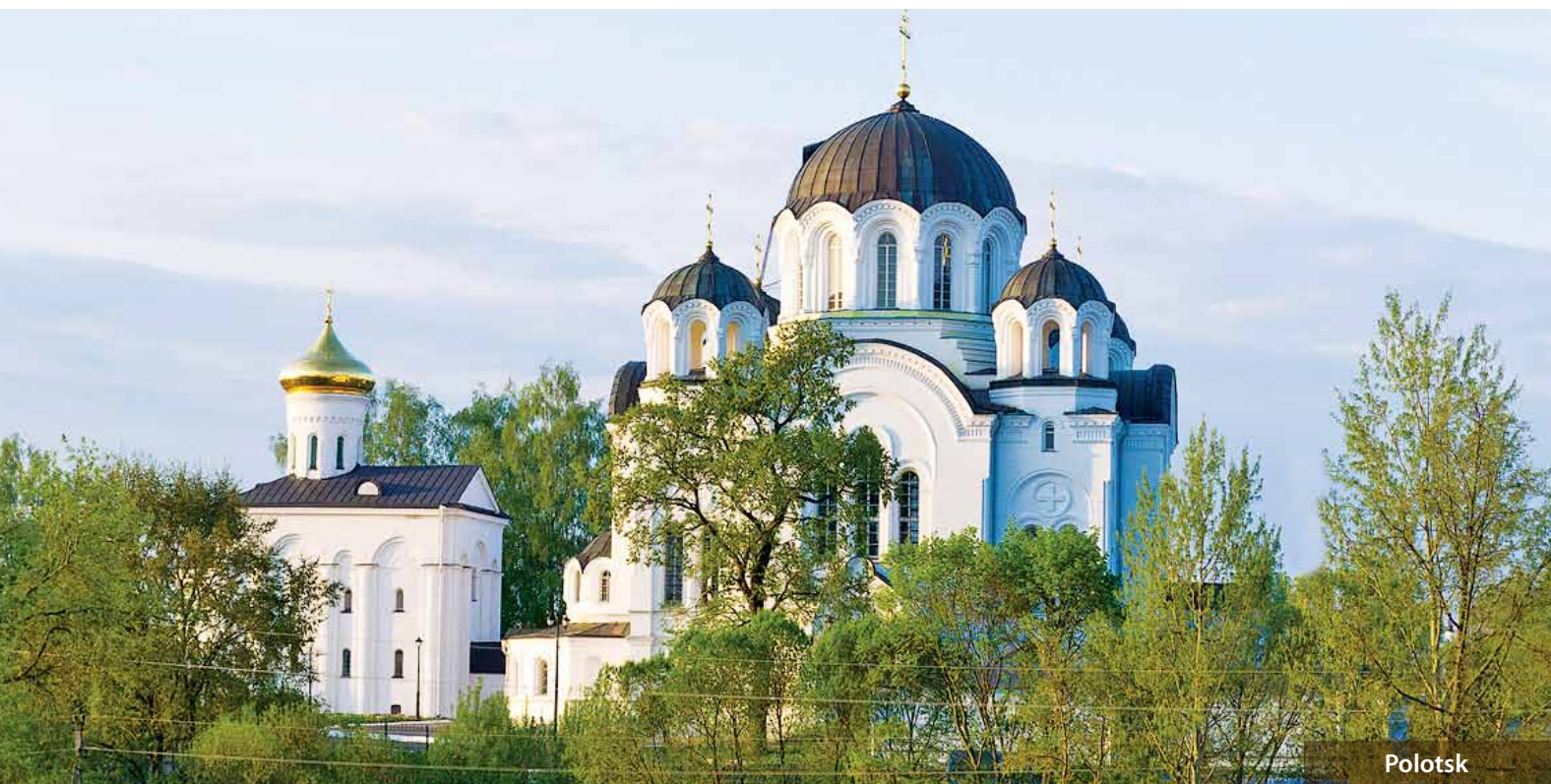
This is the eldest of the five Belarusian towns with a 1000-year history. Polotsk was first mentioned in A.D. 862 in the *Primary Chronicle* (The Tale of Bygone Years). In close to twelve centuries of its existence, the town survived numerous invasions from a diverse array of

conquerors, including the Vikings, Napoleon and Nazis.

Polotsk is one of the historic Christianity centers of the Eastern Slavic lands. It was the birthplace of the eminent enlighteners of the Belarusian people — Euphrosyne of Polotsk, the first Belarusian woman to be canonized, and the first Belarusian printer Francysk Skaryna.

The town is located in a picturesque spot, where Polota River flows into Western Dvina. Overlooking the town stands the Cathedral of Saint Sophia, built in the 11th century. Such majestic cathedrals were only found in ancient Kiev and Novgorod. In the course of its almost millennial history, the cathedral had been ruined in the course of numerous wars, but was always rebuilt.

In the years of the Great Northern War (1700-1721), Russian Emperor used the cathedral as gunpowder warehouse, and when the warehouse exploded, the cathedral spent almost twenty years in ruins. During the war of 1812, Napoleon's army used the church as horse stables. Modern-day visitors to the cathedral will find themselves face to face with restored ancient frescoes that adorn its walls. The cathedral is just one of Polotsk's multiple attractions. Oh, and the scientists say that the town stands in the geographical center of Europe.



Polotsk

**3. BRASLAW LAKES**

The largest lake region of Belarus, located in the Braslaw district, is famous for its scenery and terrain. Twenty thousand years ago, this area was covered by an ancient glacier, hundreds of feet in depth. But with time the glacier retreated north, leaving behind it dozens of lakes — all of them different in shape,

area, depth, composition and clarity of water.

For their unusual beauty, these lakes are called the “blue necklace” of Belarus. 74 lakes are located within the borders of the national park. Their total area is 50 square miles, and the deepest of the lakes has a depth of over 130 feet. The lakes are interconnected by picturesque rivers, springs and watercourses. The glacier had also

left behind a lot of stones, some of which are great big boulders. The largest of them weighs more than 40 tons!

The lake shores are covered with furtrees and pines, century-old oaks and birch-tree groves. The park is also home to many animal and bird species. The visitors can spot moose and boars, badgers and bobcats, and sometimes even the brown bears listed in the Red List of



Braslaw Lakes National Park



Marc Chagall Museum

first paintings, personal belongings of the artist and his family. Vitebsk is also home to Marc Chagall Art Center, located in the old building that was depicted in the internationally acclaimed painting “Over the Town.” The museum is home to an extensive collection of Chagall’s drawings.

**5. NESVIZH CASTLE**

Nesvizh Castle is complex with varied architecture and is one of Europe’s largest parks; with its decorative lakes and shadowy alleys, it’s one of the most beautiful places in all of Belarus. The first stone was laid in 1583. Back then, the town of Nesvizh was owned by the wealthy and important clan of Radziwill.

The castle, surrounded by the high, almost 70-foot bulwark, has undergone numerous reconstructions, and the result was a palace that combines the features of different architectural styles — Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, Neo-Classicism, the Gothic revival, and even some Modernist notes.

The castle was used to store the archives of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and its library had about 20,000 books by 1770.

Today, the architectural ensemble of the Nesvizh Castle is one of UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites and a historic-and-cultural reserve. Nesvizh is also home to the famed Corpus Christi Church. The church, built in the very beginning of the 17th century, houses the crypt of the Radziwill dynasty, and with 72 members of the family buried there it’s Europe’s third largest crypt after those of Habsburgs and Bourbons. ■

Endangered Species. Among the great variety of birds, the black stork, the mute swan and the beautiful great egret especially stand out. The Braslaw lakes are famous for their great variety of fish. The national park offers special tour packages for hunters and fishermen, who can leave the Braslaw district with some very unique trophies.

Since the dawn of time, the ancestors of modern-day Belarusians had lived in harmony with the surrounding nature, but, through their residence at the crossroads of commercial routes, were open to the influence from other culture. It is quite probable that this dual nature had helped to make Belarusians especially hospitable. One only has to come here to appreciate the geniality of the local people, and the nature of Belarus will, no doubt, forever enchant you with its beauty.

**4. MARC CHAGALL MUSEUM**

Rushing across a garden square in downtown Chicago past the famous “Four Seasons” mosaic, with its flying people and fish, the passers by often have no idea that these are the images from the far-away Vitebsk, brought to life by the world-famous artist Marc Chagall, who was born in this Belarusian town. Church cupolas and ancient streets, miniature houses and shop signs, the ribbons of wooden fences and carriage drivers have all been

immortalized in Chagall’s paintings along with his famous levitating angels and lovers.

To understand why Vitebsk had remained the inexhaustible source of inspiration throughout the artist’s life, you should visit the Marc Chagall house museum located there. It exhibits the everyday objects from the turn of 19th and 20th centuries, as well as the real “witnesses” of Chagall’s life — archival documents and



Nesvizh Castle



# Look into the Future By Learning the Past

By Irina Webster





**A** marvelous river, with a beautiful name, runs through Belarus where birds tweet and clamor, sing and trill. Bird River winds majestically between emerald and colorful meadows, coniferous and deciduous forests, and the misty plains of the wetlands. On this river, located 20 miles south of the capital of Belarus, Minsk, stands an awe-inspiring museum complex called *Dudutki* which houses folk crafts and technologies.

The modern *Dudutki* stands on the territory of a historic 17th century estate in Dudichi. In the 1600s, Dudichi became known as a center for crafts, trades and fairs. Beginning in October 1994 with the founding of the new museum, guests visited this collection of folk crafts and technology, which not only carefully and lovingly promotes Belarusian folk crafts, but also displays the unique life of the

historic estate. Encompassing all sorts of folk crafts and trades of the past, guests can see a variety of works, one of which features a potter's workshop where a master artisan works the potter's wheel. The museum includes an exhibit of ceramics, an antiquated operating smithy dating to the 19th century, workshops that display carpentry and share the secrets of skilled craftsmen, weaving arts, wood crafts, and the felting of wool.

Stunning is a word you might hear from even a well-traveled tourist versed in ethnic arts. Needless to say, Belarusians were not the first to institute this kind of museum. Innovations seen in the construction of the museum date to 1891, and first appeared on the island of Skansen near Stockholm, Sweden. In the beginning of the 20th century in Europe, more than 20 such open-air museums existed. In our century, open-air museums

are no longer a rarity, and they can be found worldwide.

But the Belarusian *Dudutki* remains unique. According to *Forbes*, *Dudutki* numbers among the 12 best ethnographic museums within the category of open-air museums.

In almost all these museums, you can also see the local handicraft artisans which include: weavers, potters, wheelwrights and manufacturers of wooden spoons. You can watch a blacksmith shoe horses, a potter make his fragile pieces of work, an expert spin artful lace, a carver whittle a whistle, or as a crafter weave baskets. In offered masters' classes, you can learn the trades yourself. In *Dudutki*, though, you will not only be shown the crafting, but you will be taught the secrets of these arts. You will take home heartfelt souvenirs made by your own hands-true masterpieces!

In Europe, you might visit the museum in Skansen, where you can act as a baker and cheesemaker. However, in this museum you will not find there brew-tasting with special post-libation bread, served with cucumber and honey! *Dudutki* stands out as the only moonshine distiller in Belarus that is officially allowed to produce this strong alcoholic drink!

Perhaps you planned to visit Old World Wisconsin Museum in the United States. Buildings and exhibits stand just as they were when frequented many years ago. Livestock still occupy the farms, stores continue to sell merchandise from the last century, and the museum staff attends workshops dressed in costumes of an older time period. However, you won't find graceful Orlov trotter horses, ponies or donkeys. Surely you cannot take riding lessons. Nor can you ride the Belarusian carriage of a wealthy landowner. Plus,

only *Dudutki* offers a real Slavic bath, after which you must run barefoot on grass, which feels like silk and velvet, to dive into the water of Bird River!

Others might dream of seeing the open-air museum Settlement Pioneers in faraway Australia, which displays the giant paddle steamer, Queen Murray, built in 1876. The ship floats restored and moored at the pier of the museum. However in the Australian museum, you will not find vintage cars of shockingly old ages. In *Dudutki*, a collection of antique cars can be examined. These autos drove on Belarusian lands and include a ZIM, Willis, Volkswagen Beetle, Fiat Topolino, Chrysler, Horch, Ganomak and Seagull. Not only are these fine machines restored for presentation, they can actually still travel!

Fans of ethnographic tourism, or just people who are interested in history,

folklore, culture, literature, and life itself in all its abundance, can travel from the U.S. to Belarus, the heart of Europe, to see Belarus's only existing windmill. Additionally, the King's Gate also brings delight to tourists, as it is entirely made of straw! You can take in the pristine natural beauty of one of the safest countries in Europe, breathe in the purest air infused with meadow grasses, and plunge into an interactive exposition, where you can touch, taste and feel! Later, you can dive into the cool, clear Bird River, enjoying the smells of meadow and forest flowers. Then you can forge a horseshoe for yourself for good luck. ■

For more information:  
<http://www.dudutki.by/en/>  
<http://eng.belarustourism.by>  
[info@belarustourism.by](mailto:info@belarustourism.by)



Statue of Francysk Skaryna, Minsk, Belarus

# A TITAN OF HIS ERA – FRANCYSK SKARYNA OF POLOTSK

By Arina Shelashen

Every country has its hero, a person of special character and importance. In Belarus, Francysk Skaryna, the philosopher, sage, and the man largely responsible for the development of the Belarusian language and culture, is such a person.

Skaryna was born at the end of the 15th century to a merchant family in the ancient city of Polotsk in northern Belarus. An ambitious and studious young man, Skaryna earned his bachelor's degree in liberal arts from Poland's Krakow University in 1506, then went on to get a doctorate in medicine from the University of Padua in Italy in 1512, all by the time he was 20 years old.

In the years that followed his schooling, Skaryna developed an interest in book production, which was beginning to take hold as an industry in Padua and Venice. So in 1517, in the Czech capital of Prague, Skaryna set up his own printing press and published his first book, *The Psalter*, a collection of hymns and prayers.

To many, this may not seem extraordinary. But in those days, book production was far from easy. Firstly, not everyone could read and write. Secondly, printing presses scarcely existed. The process of bookmaking was considered innovative, especially the production of a book with engravings like *The Psalter*. Also, it was the first book to be printed in the Belarusian language. Because of the lengthy printing process, *The Psalter* was not widely circulated, but between 1517 and 1519, Skaryna published 22 books of the Old Testament.

Skaryna later moved his printing house from Prague back to Belarus, where he continued to publish both foreign works, which he translated, and his own writings. Most of the books he published were in Church Slavonic language, but with a large number of Belarusian words. These books were widely circulated among the people of Belarus and are largely credited with helping to develop both Belarusian language and culture.

Interestingly, besides Skaryna's translation of the Bible being the first to include language that his own native people could understand, it also was the first to contain engravings, a portrait of himself as the publisher, and his own text, which was considered unthinkable at the time.

Skaryna introduced the tradition of using prefaces and appendices in Slavic literature, in which the author could insert his own thoughts and ideas about the text. Skaryna felt that by doing this,



he could combat illiteracy while also providing the common people with a religious education. "Every man must read because reading gives a mirror to our life and medicine for the soul," he is quoted as saying.

Today, we recognize that typography successfully developed in the Belarusian lands because of Skaryna. He was a master of his craft and the best printer in the country. The memory of this selfless educator remains forever preserved in his publications and in the annals of Belarusian history. In addition to his national fame, Skaryna's portrait even hangs in the famous Hall of 40, or main assembly hall at the University of Padua in Italy, alongside portraits of other great alumni, like the astronomer Copernicus.

Skaryna might have traveled many paths in his life, but his main goal seemed to be to give people the light of spiritual knowledge and a love for their homeland. He contributed significantly to the development of Belarusian culture.

Through his books, readers learned of the vastness and richness of the world. "Love books, for they are a source of wisdom, knowledge and science," instructed the famous Belarusian to his countrymen. Undoubtedly, Skaryna rightfully sits among other Renaissance luminaries as a great educator, humanist, writer, patriot and pioneer. ■



# Theater in Belarus

By Arina Shelashen

National Academic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theater of the Republic of Belarus



Swan Lake. National Academic Great Opera and Ballet Theatre, Minsk



Inside of National Academic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theater of the Republic of Belarus

Not long ago, the National Academic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theater of the Republic of Belarus celebrated its 80th anniversary. Throughout its history, the theater has had over 20,000 performances and more than 200 premieres. However, theater arts in Belarus emerged long before the founding of this famous national theater. In fact, the history of theater in Belarus dates back centuries.

In the 16th century, a type of puppet theater called *batleyka* premiered. The Italians started using puppets for theater as early as the 13th century; however, in Belarus, artists only began to imitate life with the dolls much later. Belarusians remain fond of *batleyka*, and the folk art enjoys popularity to this day.

In the 18th century, serf theater became an integral part of cultural life. This type of theater started when the nobility began organizing their serfs to put on shows for each other. Rich Belarusian magnates sought to build chapels on their lands, where they could also hold their own orchestras and theater productions, often becoming writers and composers themselves. Initially, the theaters hosted amateur works; family members, guests and relatives performed onstage. But as time passed, the productions became more professional. Artists and actors were invited from abroad and acting schools began to thrive in Belarus.

The Radziwills rose as the wealthiest family in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and Belarus emerged from these lands in the Middle Ages. Owning some of the richest and most famous theaters in the entire territory, the Radziwill family founded acting schools based on strict discipline. Children studied for 6 to 12 hours a day. The Radziwills themselves were no less talented than their students.

The theaters hosted plays, many written by Princess Franziska Ursula Radziwill, who was also the first female writer on the territory of modern Poland and Belarus. Other famed theaters in Belarus at the time included the Oginski Theater in Slonim and the Zorich Theater in Shklov, which later became the foundation for the Saint Petersburg Imperial troupe, or theaters of the Russian tsars.

In the 19th century, acting and ballet troupes appeared and traveled across Belarus, spreading Belarusian performing arts. State theaters were established until 1933, when the Belarusian Opera and Ballet Theater opened. During the 20th century, the theater blossomed and new acts and plays took the stage.

To this day, Belarusian theater remains in demand. More than 2 million spectators visit per year. Currently, 28 theaters exist in Belarus, the National Academic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theater being the most popular. The theater's repertoire encompasses 71 performances, including *The*

*Nutcracker*, which is performed annually. Each year, the theater's productions garner various awards. The theater building itself stands as a noted architectural monument to pre-war Soviet construction.

Equally famed in the country is the National Academic Drama Theater, named after writer Maxim Gorky. This center enjoys accolades for the high caliber of acting and the originality of the directors' interpretations. In 2012, it celebrated its 80th anniversary with a stark staging of *Pan Kochanuku*, which features historical figure Prince Karol Stanislaw Radziwill as its protagonist.

The stages of Belarusian theaters present Belarusian, Russian and world classics, including works by foreign authors and Belarusian playwrights. For the youngest audiences, the Young Spectators Theater and the puppet theater perform productions, which are based on both folk tales and the fairy tales of Astrid Lindgren, Charles Perrault, Korney Chukovsky and The Brothers Grimm.

Festivals and events permeate theatrical life in Belarus. Puppet theaters celebrate with jubilees, including the participation of many different theaters from all over the world. In Minsk, a street theater forum occurs annually and includes lectures on street art, workshops and parades. In June, the residence of the Radziwill family in the city of Nesvizh in central Belarus hosts a yearly festival of opera and ballet. Like a trip in time, the affair feels as if you were

calling on the Radziwills in the 16th century. In the city of Vitebsk in northeastern Belarus, the international festival *Slavianski Bazaar* hosts theater conferences that highlight plays and ballet performances featuring preeminent artists.

Youth forums continue as an integral part of the theatrical life of Belarus. A popular theater forum *TeArt* invites foreign companies to act out recognized samples of theatrical art. Another Belarusian forum, *Teatralny Koufar*, one of the most influential in Eastern European youth theater, presents a festival of student productions. The city of Mogilev in eastern Belarus acts as a platform for the youth theater forum *M@rt Contact*, a program that includes an educational component.

Originating centuries ago, theatrical life in Belarus is constantly evolving. Many talented people in Belarus contribute to the continued development of theatrical art including the next generation of artists and writers. Due to the ongoing enthusiasm of contemporaries and theater devotees, Belarusians continue to enjoy the work of their ancestors and experience both national and international culture and history. ■

For more information:  
<http://www.belarus.by/en/about-belarus/culture/belarus-opera-ballet-theatre>



Grodno Regional Drama Theatre



Puppet theater in Grodno, Belarus

# WWII BELARUSIAN RESISTANCE FIGHTER AND HIS COURAGEOUS MISSION

By Alexei Victorov



Nikolai Kiselev

In June of 1942, 270 Belarusian Jews miraculously survived the Nazi massacres in the ghetto of the tragically well-known town of Dolginovo. By managing to escape and hide, they were able to disappear into the forests that surrounded the Belarusian villages and meet up to follow the resistance fighters, who opposed the Nazis. They did not have any other choice but to join these fighters. In the villages they were met with caution, or even persecuted, because of the orders posted and spread among villagers commanding the execution of any people who assisted Jewish people. Few people would risk their lives and those of their loved ones, for this reason.

In order to save the lives of these Jewish survivors, two commanders of the resistance units requested that Lt. Nikolai Kiselev lead them out of the occupied territory. However, a request is not, after all, a direct order, especially when it is a daunting task to pass hundreds of miles of territory occupied by Germans and survive. Nevertheless, Kiselev agreed.

Born in a Bashkir region of Russia, Kiselev volunteered for the front lines after graduating from the Institute of Foreign Trade in Moscow. Commanding a rifle unit, he was surrounded not far from Dolginovo in the autumn of 1941 and taken prisoner by the Germans while injured. He was held at a prisoner-of-war camp before being relocated to Germany. Courageously, at the first stop of the journey, Kiselev

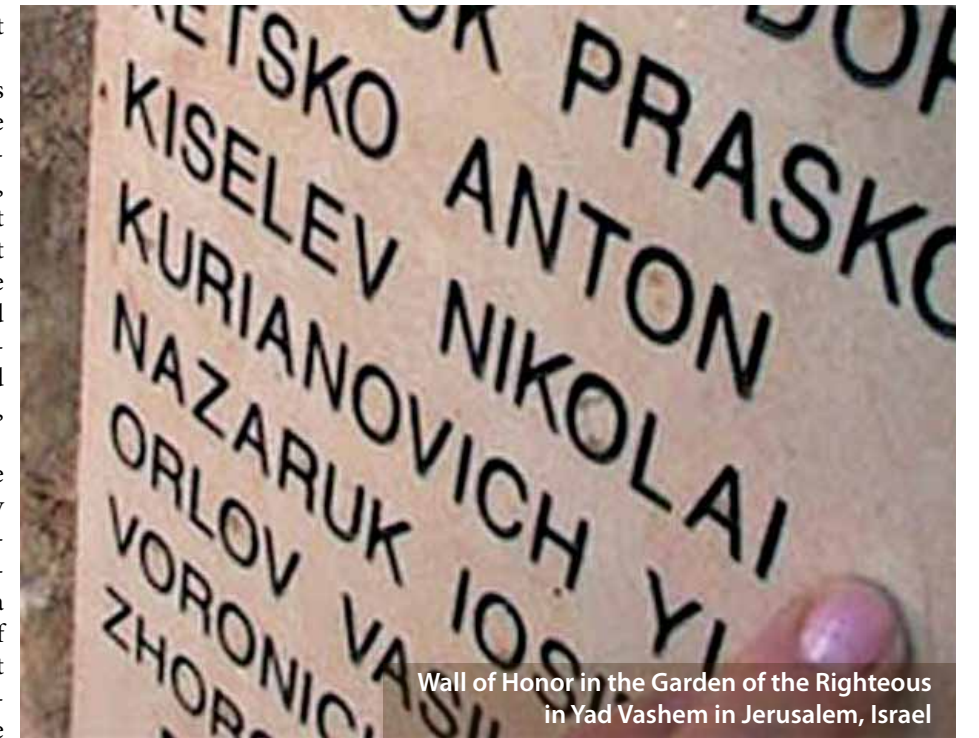
managed to escape and hide in the forest where he was able to join the resistance.

After agreeing to lead the 270 survivors beyond the front lines, he became the leader of a small unit of six accompanying resistance fighters. Marching out, they moved only at night, covering about 20 miles of road each day. Throughout the day, they hid in the thicket of the swamps while they kept guards posted and sent look-outs. While the Jewish survivors slept, the fighters also conducted reconnaissance, looked for safe routes, and gathered food.

One time when they were scouting, the resistance fighters became surrounded by Germans and had to fight off the menacing threat before retreating into the forests. Kiselev already gave his fighters a strategic order in case this occurred: if attacked by Germans, scatter in different directions, hide, and regroup at a meeting point in three days. Only 220 people gathered after three days. Many were injured and could barely travel the distance or with great difficulty. Some had to be carried, yet Kiselev never allowed that anyone be left behind. According to later accounts from survivors of the journey, each person made the difficult choice to leave a loved one behind. In an effort to save her children, one woman left her wounded mother. Another left one of her nephews, who was unconscious for many days, in order to continue the journey with the rest of the campaign.

Children, of which there were 35, had the hardest time during the demanding journey. The smallest ones could not prevent fearful screaming and crying due to hunger pains, although it was necessary to keep the utmost silence. During the difficult trek, which lasted over a month, the group had to fight Germans more than once and switch routes. However, they still moved forward with determination, not stopping even for a day. Kiselev understood that if they did not reach their destination before the start of the cold weather, they would freeze to death. By the end of October, they reached the village of Korenets, where the Soviet Army was located. In his report, Kiselev said that he led 218 people the location.

Missing from the list were 50 people, including those who did not meet at the appointed location after three days following the initial attack of the German soldiers and the two family members left behind in the forest. The fate of the 50 missing individuals is still unknown. Shockingly, the elderly woman and the



Wall of Honor in the Garden of the Righteous in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Israel

unconscious little boy who were left behind survived and were discovered by other resistance fighters.

The joy of surviving the exodus, however, was short lived and overshadowed by a German aircraft raid in Korenets. Sadly, some of the people who had survived the hardship and suffering of the dangerous journey died. In addition to this, Kiselev was also arrested for desertion due to a lack of documentation. He had lost his documents only a few days before the group left, when they stumbled upon disguised German soldiers. These soldiers demanded their papers, and then proceeded to pursue them.

Understanding that their plans were about to unravel, Kiselev's fighters engaged in battle, covering the outgoing Jewish survivors. However, Kiselev ended up leaving any documents he had in the hands of the Nazis. Learning about his arrest, each participant in the journey signed a petition requesting that the authorities immediately release and confer awards to Kiselev. He was promptly freed. There was also an order for rewards and bonuses in his memory, which came too. However, the main prize that Kiselev received was not from his superiors. The greatest thing he received was the gratitude of those he saved, and their memory of him in their hearts.

Nikolai Kiselev died in 1974 in Moscow, and during his lifetime he did not receive any publicity, nor did he seek it. The history of the exodus of Jews from

the Belarusian forests only became well known through a chance discovery. Director Inna Gerasimov of the Holocaust Museum in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, found the report that Kiselev had addressed to the leaders of the resistance following their exit from the occupied territory. There was a documentary made later called *Kiselev's List*, where the story is told by those who lived through the events.

A year after the film premiered, one of the streets in Dolginovo was named after Nikolai Kiselev. In 2015, a monument was erected for him in a park in his hometown of Blagoveshchensk in Russia.

Prior to the recognition Kiselev received at home, his name was engraved in the Wall of Honor in the Garden of the Righteous in Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem. Additionally, in Tel Aviv at the annual meeting on June 5th, a day honored in memory of the fallen after the attack and shooting of the Dolginovo ghetto, they also commemorate Nikolai Kiselev. They call him a "savior" and "an angel, not a man." One of those who remembered him said, "Moses did not lead the Jews out of Egypt, God did! God led us out too. God was above us. But Moses was with the people. And Kiselev was with us." ■

Source: jewish.ru



# THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF BELARUS

By Alexander V. Kilchevsky

**T**he first Belarusian rocket jettisoned from a launch pad in the central city of Babryusk. Make believe? Not at all. Today Belarus is a place where fantastic scientific achievements are taking place. This small nation has catapulted its first-ever satellite into

space and created a system for relaying data back to earth.

Compared to years ago, when theories outnumbered scientists in Belarus, this country now has wonderful schools in various regions to focus on laser physics, optics and spectroscopy, low-temperature

plasma, and theoretical physics. These schools are producing fantastic scientific results, leading to worldwide recognition. Examples include the creation of a new type of laser with strength that can be manipulated and a new class of infrared filters.

However, no study of today's scientific advances can be complete without a look back at how Belarusian science began. Although in 1922, civil war prevailed in Belarus, the first scientific laboratories began to operate and eventually resulted in the founding of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus in 1928. Originally, the academy had only 87 researchers, 22 of whom were among the top third of leading academics in the entire Soviet Union. The success of the academy was so great that institutes in philosophy, linguistics, history, economics, agriculture, chemistry, geology and physics, and even a central botanical garden, were added just one year later.

At that time, Belarus was essentially an appendage of the Soviet Union, which was a global leader in scientific research. During World War II, when Germany attacked the Soviet Union, much of the National Academy was damaged. The remaining scientists, along with Belarusian citizens, quickly restored the destruction caused by the war. They also provided urgent help to the front and to the national economy.

The Germans pounded their fists most strongly on Belarus. Brest Fortress, in the southwest of the country, became a stronghold of resistance to the Nazi military machine. Surprisingly, throughout this terrible period and until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the National Academy flourished. Scientists raised the nation's economy from its knees. While the industry in many Soviet republics was mostly destroyed, production in Belarus showed amazing growth.

Significantly, in a short period of time, Belarus established new high-tech spheres within the national economy: engineering, electronics, rocket science, chemistry and petrochemistry. Additionally, quick developments occurred in physics, math and technology, with implications for nuclear energy and the defense industry, as well as on the medical and agricultural fronts.

Even with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the loss of funding, the President of Belarus decreed the official reopening of the National Academy in 1997. It holds the status of the highest scientific organization, responsible for the coordination and execution of all research within the country. Science prevails as a government priority with the goal of creating a highly developed national scientific system to meet the needs of the economy. Belarus jumped ahead in almost all spheres, leaving behind other former Soviet republics.

Academics set their sights on a world-class Belarusian school dealing with differential equations, process control and physics problems, algebra, and number theory. Academic Vyacheslav S. Tanayev, famed for his work on cybernetics and computer science, established a school in the sphere of mathematical cybernetics. Automats aided in the work on foundry and in the area of testing vehicles. Cars, tractors and other technical equipment in the machine-industry complex of the republic grew into competitive units. Powder metallurgy and research into problems of thermal physics, heating and mass movement, turned into new focuses. Now, Belarus boasts highly efficient energy-saving technology and equipment.

Belarusian scientists study the unique physical and chemical properties of peat, coal and oil shale. Although Belarus lacks sufficient oil and gas, the country employs peat and oil shale as necessary raw materials for fuel. Belarusian scientists theorized about the existence of the Pripyat oil basin. Once found, the scientists discovered deposits of potassium and sodium salts, and mineral waters that now constitute a resource base for the energy and chemical industries. Noteworthy breakthroughs in high-tech energy-saving technologies include the creation of raw mineral materials which improve physical and agrochemical properties, leading to the production of potash fertilizers. These products are one of the most important strategic resources for the nation.

Belarusian scientists generated an artificial ionized soil, which can be used as a universal sod for crops. So now we can grow potatoes anywhere? Even on the moon? The answer is obvious! It's not an illusion, but complete reality. Agriculture remains phenomenal in Belarus. Not to mention, one of the most sought-after and popular brands of sausages on the market comes from Belarus.

With the help of bioorganic chemistry, Belarusians also produce new drugs and medicines for their own people as well as for other countries. The medical department of the National Academy has previously developed effective treatments for many diseases found throughout the world. Within the country, doctors administer medicines and vaccines using the latest medical equipment.

But what about the priceless and pristine nature of Belarus, her lands, forests and waters? These treasures are carefully guarded. Findings in botany and zoology protect the clean and rich flora and fauna

of Belarus. One outstanding example can be seen in the conservation of the European bison, which led to populations of the once-endangered species tripling in the past 20 years.

Today, the National Academy, the leading public research organization in the country, includes 113 departments, including physics, math, computer science, engineering science, chemistry and earth science, biology, health, humanities and arts, and agricultural science. The academy works together with 90 foreign academies and science centers and holds export contracts with 59 governments (the largest of which are with Russia, China, Ukraine, Germany, and India). It also houses 16 international centers and laboratories.

Most importantly, the National Academy works fairly closely with scientists from the United States. Much of their shared focus centers on physics and chemistry. One example of joint work is when the physics institute sent colleagues to the U.S. to deliver special diode lasers. The American partners valued this cooperation in the IT sphere. In addition to these relationships, the Central Botanical Gardens and the Practical Science Center of Belarus keep in close contact with Americans regarding animal husbandry.

In 2014 and 2015, an international delegation visited the National Academy. The group was headed the Director of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine of the United States, Glenn Schweitzer. Additionally, the former Executive Director of the Office of International Affairs of the National Academy of Sciences, William Colglazier, was a part of the fantastic visit.

With U.S. initiatives, a delegation from the U.S. House of Representatives visited the National Academy in August 2015. According to U.S. Congressman Dana Rohrabacher of California, a representative of the Science, Space and Technology Committee, the countries of the former Soviet Union, including Belarus, exhibit great potential in the field of scientific research.

Negotiations are underway to produce Belarusian-American cooperation in aerospace technology and energy-saving fields. In combining efforts, the two nations hope to centralize scientific work, to solve not only problems that interest them, but affairs of the world as a whole. ■

For more information:  
<http://nas.gov.by/eng/>



# CHILDREN AND ATHLETICS IN BELARUS: THE NEXT GENERATION

By Sergei Zhukovich

**M**odern-day Belarus occupies a well-deserved position in the global athletic hierarchy, due to the fact that a lot of people work to promote physical fitness and sports. This is shown by the record-setting achievements of Belarusian athletes and the presence of world-class sports facilities. As a result, Belarus is one of the world's top 20 sports nations.

Belarusians can be justifiably proud of their compatriots' achievements at such large-scale events as the Olympic Games, where their athletes' names are forever entered into the annals of the world sport.

Belarusians first took part in the Olympics in 1952, at Helsinki, where they were a part of the Soviet Union team. After gaining independence, Belarusian represented themselves, at the 1994 Winter Olympic Games in Lillehammer. Since then, more than 70 Belarusians have become Olympic champions.

At the recent 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Belarusian athletes earned six medals, five golds and one bronze, with the biggest contribution was made by the queen of biathlon, Daria Domracheva.

Today, the most popular sports in Belarus are track and field, soccer, gymnastics, cross-country skiing, hockey, tennis, fencing, wrestling, volleyball, handball and swimming.

Promotion of sport and physical fitness remains one of the state's top priorities, and healthy living aspirations are the trademark of the country's population.

As of today, Belarus has over 25,000 athletic facilities. There are 144 stadiums, 332 swimming pools, 4,588 gymnasiums, 52 riding halls and 32 ice rinks.

Thanks to these modern athletic facilities, the Belarus can host prestigious competitions and international championships. One of such events was the

2014 International Ice Hockey Federation World Championship.

The country's authorities pay special attention to promotion of youth sport. All over Belarus, children and teenagers join athletic clubs and teams. Belarus also has training facilities for professional athletes, including the Belarusian State University of Physical Training, 11 Olympic reserve academies, 165 specialized Olympic reserve schools, and more than 250 youth sports schools.

Every year, sporting youth take part in nation-wide athletic meets in more than 20 Olympic events. In addition to state-wide meets, entry-level competitions are held at the city level.

Each sport has its fans, great moments in history, and outstanding figures, offering the younger generation of Belarusian athletes plenty of people to look up to and to learn from. And this is a cause for great optimism for Belarus's sporting future. ■





Basketball player Lindsey Harding plays for Belarusian national team

# American shoots for Olympic glory with Belarusian basketball team

By A.M. LaVey

**L**indsey Harding, a guard with the U.S. WNBA's Phoenix Mercury, along with the rest of the Belarusian women's national basketball team, has qualified for the Olympic Games to be held in Rio de Janeiro in August 2016.

Harding, who was born in Mobile, Ala., but grew up in Houston, Texas. She attended Duke University in Durham, N.C., where she played basketball and graduated in 2007 with a degree in sociology. While she was at Duke, she was named a Naismith College Player of the Year and holds many Duke and NCAA records. She became the first

Duke player to be picked No. 1 in the WNBA draft. She is also the Duke's first female basketball player to qualify for the Olympics.

After university, Harding went to go play for many teams with the WNBA, including the New York Liberty and the Los Angeles Sparks.

Though having no Belarusian heritage, Harding is now a naturalized, dual US-Belarusian citizen. In 2015 she was invited to join the Belarusian team and helped them secure a spot for the 2016 International Basketball Federation's World Olympic Qualifying Tournament, which they came in fifth place, after

coming in fourth place at the 2015 European Women Basketball Championship.

"I'm so excited to be able to play in the Olympics," said Harding in a press release. "This was a lifelong goal of mine and to be able to achieve it is a wonderful feeling. We worked so hard to get here and it has paid off. Rio here we come!"

Belarus and the United States are not presently scheduled to compete against each other, but if does happen, Harding will find herself playing against two of her Phoenix Mercury teammates, Diana Taurasi and Brittney Griner.

Belarus's first game is scheduled for Saturday, Aug. 6th, against Japan. ■

# A Comedian's Journey in Belarus

By Mikhail Zadornov

**S**ome time ago I decided to take a long weekend off to spend some time in... you would never believe it, but it wasn't Paris or Cannes — it was Minsk!

A five-star hotel, fit for Rome, but much cheaper. Museum and galleries. Theater buildings restored by the state. In the opera and ballet theater, the choir alone is 100 people strong! The symphonic orchestra is one of the best in Europe. The ballet company also has more than 100 dancers. And all of them get their salaries from the state!

In the evening, I was dining at a restaurant and noticed a group of men at the nearby table. They were middle-aged, but dressed like young men, and their hairdos reminded me of Indian tomahawks. The waiter proudly whispered to me: "Those are The Scorpions!" But I was more surprised by the fact that these men kept looking at me much more often than I was looking at them. Finally, one of them left the table and came over: "Are you a famed Russian actor?" It turned out that several of the musicians are married to Russians, and they got jealous of their young wives who kept shooting glances in my direction.

Naturally, they decided to find out who I was and they invited me to their table. We had quite a few topics to discuss: both myself, and the musicians travel a lot. We shared our impressions of Peru, Kilimanjaro, Popocatepetl, but we agreed that the place we all liked best was Belarus!

Russian newspapers and television reporters like to sneer at [President] Lukashenko and the fact that Belarusians supposedly have nothing but potatoes. In truth, modern-day Russia could take some lessons from its neighbour. Each of the cities that I visited had a new stadium, and each school, a good athletic field. The sidewalks are so clean that you don't have to take your shoes off when you get home.

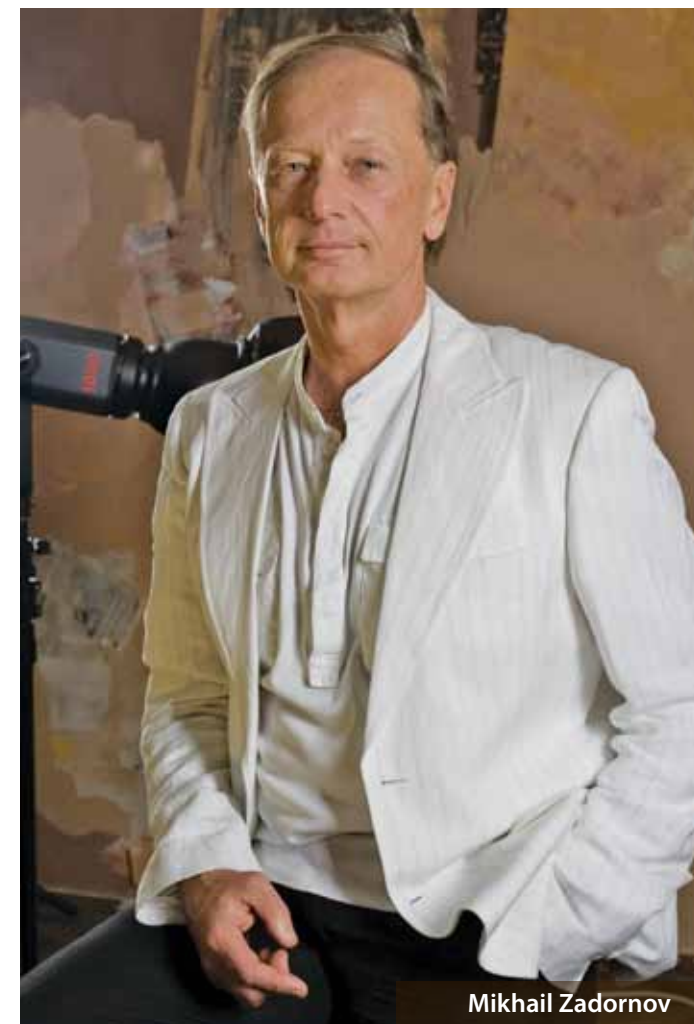
There are no terrorist attacks in Belarus. The number of young drug addicts is much smaller than in Russia. There are no oligarchs who hold sway over the government. There are no godfathers keeping the provinces under reign of terror.

Sometimes it seems to me that Belarus is the only country untouched by the global economic crisis. Free education! Free healthcare! Somebody could object, of course, saying that this free healthcare is worthless. Well, it's not like it's worth much in Russia, except that we have to pay for it too.

I am not joking — you can walk at night through the streets of Minsk and other cities, and not have to worry about anything and there are no traffic jams during the day!

We should all take lessons from Lukashenko! You know what else he came up with recently? He took his officials on a prison tour, and showed them plenty of unoccupied cells.

Belarus is a remake of everything good that Russians once had. And it was a distinct pleasure to me that my new brothers, The Scorpions, completely agreed with me. When we talked, I tried to explain to them what "hard rock" means in the Old Slavic, since the word rock/pok stands for fate. So hard rock is "hard fate." I suggested that musicians write a "lucky-rock" song. Their producer was very excited about this idea.



Mikhail Zadornov

I'm at the hotel and filling out the check-in list. A hotshot Moscow businessman comes over, one of the people corrupted by the idea of the all-inclusive resort. "Do you have a health club here," he asks the receptionist. "And masseuses, do they provide an erotic massage?"

The receptionist turns red. I can see that nothing would make her happier than to punch him in the face, but the five-star establishment prohibits this. Still, she just can't keep it cool and replies rather harshly, risking a dismissal: "Here [she stresses 'here' especially] we have no such things." In her reply I can hear her pride in the country.

The businessman sniffs arrogantly, saying, "You guys are so bottom-of-the-barrel! When are you going to become modern?"

I can no longer keep to myself and interrupt their conversation: "You know who does an excellent erotic massage in Belarus? The police! I can give you their number!"

The hotshot doesn't appreciate the joke and turns bright red, unable to come up with a retort. The grateful receptionist gives me a smile, the likes of which you won't find in any six-star resort or erotic massage parlor. ■



# THOUGHTS ON BELARUSIANS

By Timothy Buryak



## WEATHER

The climate in Belarus resembles that of Moscow, or maybe it's a bit better. There's little enough sun, about 100 days a year. In Europe, they say there are 200 days of sun, which is why fewer Europeans suffer from seasonal depression. In Belarus, there is clean air. Unspoiled nature. In one Belarussian village, a deer and a rabbit came within six feet of me. I was shocked. What beauty!

## TOURISM

Unfortunately, there is not a lot to offer tourists to Belarus. There are just five smart museums in Minsk, parks where you can walk, a couple of castles, ski resorts, and the ice palace all at good prices. And there's the delicious cuisine and European cleanliness, and, of course, the people. You need to find a smart trip planner, as there is much to see. If you take an official tour, you will see some, but not enough.

At night, the city sleeps. Tomorrow there's work. In general though, there are plenty of youth on the streets in Minsk. However, in comparison to the rest of Europe, there are very few loiterers in Belarus.

## ARCHITECTURE

The city of Minsk during World War II was almost completely destroyed, and therefore it was rebuilt. According to the visitors, the buildings are elite. Substandard projects do not exist. New areas are also elite. Catholic and Orthodox Churches particularly stand out.

## SAFETY

The scene: A dad parks a stroller with a baby at the door of a store and goes inside to shop. The baby is left out on the sidewalk alone. I can't believe my eyes! I look at the people walking by for a reaction and

there is none. People tie up their dog, leave their bike and even leave a baby on the street. It's hard to believe it is like this in Belarus. But the subway isn't packed with crowds, and moms sit around playing with their kids. The streets remain uncrowded.

Misbehaving and trying to escape from responsibilities doesn't cut it here. Those who know the place know that even if there is no evidence, there will be an inquisition. Those who think differently will be sorely disappointed. Belarusians will tell the truth and the police will believe them and check on the situation.

## SHOPPING

Shopping warms the soul. Anywhere you go in the country, goods will cost about the same. There's no sense in trying to seek out cheaper products. That makes shopping very, very convenient. It takes away the worry of where you can get stuff without the hassle and haggling. And the prices are at the same level, as if you found the cheapest place.

In a Minsk department store, on the first floor, they sell nails, locks, buckets, herring, bananas, light bulbs and refrigerators, bread and *everything* for the home. I can't remember a time in my life when I did not find what I needed. On the second floor, there is a cafeteria, with delicious draniki, or potato pancakes. Products and more products all the way to the fifth floor. There are no off-limit fancy areas; everything is available to Belarussian people and also to visitors.

## BELARUSIAN LANGUAGE

I really wanted to learn the language and converse in it, but when I asked one young guy about it, he said that the Belarussian language is a "farmer language" and "out of style." I told him that I really loved it and after that he changed his answer. "I like it

too", he said, "And if you want to speak it, I will too!" So much for being out of style!

Bilingual Belarusians, naively believe that Russians can understand them. But really, a Russian can hardly understand spoken Belarussian.

## STUDIES

On the whole, the methods of teaching in Belarus are the same as in America: memorization for tests. Teachers chant the lessons until the students know them by heart, then they write the lessons again and again. The same rotten scenario, "If you want to learn – memorize!"

## MIGRATION

Belarusians who leave for a better life often return, realizing that the stories of fabulous profits are greatly exaggerated and that you can stay at home after all. They are not desperate to leave everything and embark into the unknown.

## STORKS

The busel, or stork, remains one of the symbols of Belarus. Indeed there are a lot of storks and I noticed them. The stork's voice is not loud, but more often they hiss or make clicking sounds. And the chicks squeal like kittens. The first female to the nest is claimed by the male as his mate. If a second female flies into the nest, a fight breaks out between them to see who will be the mother. The male stays out of the fight. Smart guy.

## MY ADMIRATION

Some people have told me that because I have truly experienced the Belarussian way of life, my admiration for the country would change. They were wrong. Some things I see differently, but the essence has not changed. It's an amazing country because there are amazing people in it! ■



# Belarus The place to live

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ST. NICHOLAS GARRISON CHURCH  
BREST, BELARUS

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