



More than 80  
Belarusian food  
producers  
took part in the  
*Prodexpo-2026*  
exhibition

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Health without  
borders: citizens  
from 158 countries  
come to Belarus  
for recovery  
and treatment

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INTERNATIONAL

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Svetlana Kanash, the *Glorious Women, Mothers* museum director

## Museum of women's fates



The year 2026 has been chosen as the Year of the Belarusian Woman, but a gymnasium in the town of Kalinkovichi acted ahead of the curve. The idea of dedicating a separate museum to representatives of the beautiful half of humanity who contributed to the development of the district arose twenty years ago. The *Glorious Women, Mothers* museum features more than 200 intricate and vivid life stories of hard-working women, mothers, veterans, inspirers and role models. The display includes portraits of mothers of prominent public figures and Olympic champions, renowned poets and writers, partisans and doctors. Each figure has influenced the district's development. They defended this land, restored it, treated people, taught children, built houses and baked bread. The museum also has a hall where they recreated a simple house from the last century as an example. Every exhibit here relates to women's fates: embroidered shirts, grain graters, coal-fired irons, buckets used to soak laundry in ash, an oven with a shard of a mirror — women have loved grooming themselves in any era and in any settlement, despite hard work or difficult pages of history. The museum continues to grow, welcoming new faces. The tour guides are usually the gymnasium students themselves.



# Belarus will strengthen its defence capabilities



**President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko convened a meeting to discuss the armament of the Armed Forces and the development of the country's military-industrial sector. The main topic on the agenda was the establishment of domestic production of ammunition for artillery systems in Belarus.**

Aleksandr Lukashenko emphasised that in the current situation, only a self-sufficient state can function effectively, “Unfortunately, when we talk about self-sufficiency today, we mainly refer to the military sector. *Whether we like it or not (I have long warned the Belarusian people about this, and you know it even better), we must strengthen our defence capabilities. The buildup of military forces near our borders, especially from Poland, not only raises concerns but also makes it clear that this is not without reason. People do not spend money on tanks and ammunition without purpose. Therefore, considering the Russian Federation's special military operation, I decided to significantly enhance our defence capabilities.*”

The Belarusian leader pointed out that while missiles and drones are effective, they do not determine the outcome of a single battle or even an entire war. The course of military actions in Ukraine demonstrates that conventional weapons, including multiple rocket launcher systems like the Grad (successors to the famous Katyusha rocket

launchers that proved effective during the Great Patriotic War), still play a crucial role.

*“Those systems were very helpful to us back then, and today, systems like Grad continue to be vital on the battlefield. That's why the decision was made to supply our artillery systems with ammunition,”* Aleksandr Lukashenko said.

“It was also decided to establish the necessary production facilities here to manufacture enough ammunition. This is no secret; I am not hiding it. Just look at what is happening in Western Europe. Rheinmetall [the largest German arms manufacturer] and other major European companies are producing increasing amounts of ammunition.”

The Head of State noted that many confidential issues needed to be discussed, “But the main question is: how is the production capacity for ammunition progressing? By next year, or even by the end of this year, we must have our own ammunition [for artillery systems].”

The President reminded that the issue of producing our own cartridges had

been addressed previously and resolved.

*“Grenade launchers will always play a role in any combat situation, particularly in our country due to the natural conditions we have. Therefore, it is necessary to have domestically manufactured ammunition for these systems,”* Aleksandr Lukashenko added.

“It should be understood that all the ammunition I mentioned can be stored well, and we are capable of producing and stockpiling them in sufficient quantities,” the Head of State emphasised. “This is not like drones, which cannot be stored in large numbers and require many warehouses for different types of UAVs.”

Aleksandr Lukashenko asked how the relevant production is being organised in line with his directive, warning, “I want to caution everyone: God forbid you miss the deadlines for this project.”

The President added that all issues related to the organisation and oversight of this task should be assigned to the State Secretariat of the Security Council and the State Control Committee.

## DETAILS

In 2026, two projects are planned to be implemented for the production of domestic artillery ammunition — as stated by Dmitry Pantus, Chairman of the State Authority for Military Industry, after the meeting.

Mr. Pantus highlighted that the Head of State consistently shows keen interest in major investment projects related to defence capabilities, “We reported on a number of directions and projects currently under development and implementation.”

During the meeting, Aleksandr Lukashenko recalled that a decision had been made to manufacture domestic ammunition for artillery guns and Grad multiple rocket launchers.

Commenting on the implementation of these projects, the Chairman of the State Authority for Military Industry said that the goal is to complete them by the end of the year, “We are doing everything possible and impossible to finish both projects on schedule by the end of the year. One project will be completed sooner: I expect we will share information about it during the summer. The other is also planned for completion by the end of the year, with all necessary steps currently underway.”

Mr. Pantus added that these projects primarily focus on fulfilling the needs of Belarus' own Armed Forces, while also taking export potential into account during their implementation, “We are not such a large country that we ignore export opportunities. By the end of 2025, we expanded our export reach: currently, we supply our products to 65 countries, plus seven more. Work in this area continues.”

## NO FORCE CAN SEPARATE BELARUS AND RUSSIA FROM EACH OTHER



A meeting of the Supreme State Council of the Union State of Belarus and Russia will be held on February 26th, the President declared during the meeting.

Aleksandr Lukashenko said, “I have received a report: in Russia some say that someone is trying to separate Belarus from Russia. I am not even going to comment on that. I will say only one thing: there is no force capable of separating Belarus from Russia and Russia

from Belarus. Due to the circumstances we are united into a single whole for many decades and centuries to come, I guess. We have always been aligned towards Russia.”

The President mentioned Belarus' negotiations with the USA. “We are managing to resolve our problems in these negotiations. But under no circumstances do we resolve these problems at the expense of the brotherly and kindred country of Russia,” he said.

**Belarus' President Aleksandr Lukashenko made the statement as he met with State Secretary of the Union State of Belarus and Russia Sergei Glazyev**

### Russia and China are vitally important states for Belarus

Russia and China are vitally important states for Belarus' existence, Aleksandr Lukashenko said.

The Head of State pointed out that the West, including the United States, closed the door on Belarus and ‘did not even offer the window as a way in.’ “The Chinese and Russians have always kept their doors open,” he added. The President said that it was only at the first meeting with the U.S. delegation that the issue of Russia was raised on his initiative. “I immediately asked the Americans not to discuss this topic. I put it exactly like this: we made our choice regarding Russia long ago,

everyone knows about it, and we will act together, so do not try to drive a wedge between us or somehow tear us apart. To which the Americans replied: ‘We did not even have such a topic on the agenda, we perfectly understand what Russia means to Belarus and Belarus means to Russia.’ And China too, for that matter.”

### Belarus is committed to working in Board of Peace

Belarus intends to participate in the Board of Peace and its events at the level of the head of state in the future, Aleksandr Lukashenko noted. “We are committed to working in the Board of Peace and we

are utterly serious about it. Our goal is not to flatter anyone or fall in line behind others, but to assert our own position, a sovereign position,” the Head of State underscored.

Aleksandr Lukashenko noted that Belarus does not intend to deviate from its decision to participate in the Board of Peace. At the same time, being an ally of Russia, it is ready to co-operate together on this matter. “Naturally, this position, of both Russia and Belarus, will be unified. We will develop this position because we have the same points of view,” the President explained.

Participation in the Board of Peace will be on the agenda of the upcoming

# President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko personally inspected the combat readiness of the Armed Forces. As part of a snap inspection, the Head of State arrived at the 227th combined arms training ground in Borisov District.

Upon arrival, the Head of State heard a report on the progress of the inspection. Details were provided by Defence Minister Viktor Khrenin, who was informed of the President's unexpected visit only at 7am.

Aleksandr Lukashenko inquired about the preliminary results of the inspection. "The army is capable of fighting. All marches were completed, no personnel or equipment were lost along the way," State Secretary of the Security Council Aleksandr Volfovich said.

Aleksandr Lukashenko visited the battalion's command observation post in the assembly area, where he spoke with military personnel and observed the inspection activities. Among other things, the discussion touched on how the soldiers' living conditions are arranged.

The President emphasised the importance of conducting such inspections to maintain a high level of troop training. "Everyone is being tested. Even the Defence Minister and the State Secretary," noted President Aleksandr Lukashenko. "This winter, we will put everyone to the test."

"I am not saying it will happen tomorrow. I cannot say it will not happen at all, either," the Belarusian leader stated, speaking about the need to



## Combat readiness under the spotlight

be prepared for any course of events.

The Head of State also visited a dugout where personnel are housed. The conditions, while spartan in a military sense, are more than acceptable for wartime. "This is a resort for you," Aleksandr Lukashenko observed, recalling that during his

own service years, he had to endure far harsher conditions.

The President stressed that soldiers must be provided with everything necessary to carry out their missions. "Learn, keep learning. Learn just in case. If you know how to do everything, you will stay alive," the Head of State told the servicemen.

At the training ground, the President also visited the firing range, where training shoots were conducted with grenade launchers and automatic weapons. There were also plans to conduct training fires from armoured personnel carrier weapons, but the thick fog made its own adjustments. However,

even in wartime, using this equipment under such conditions would have been impractical, as the targets were not visible.

"Then we will have to wait. Wait, and proceed according to plan. Why should we just shoot blindly into the fog?" the Head of State said.

Summing up, Aleksandr Lukashenko noted that he wanted to see firsthand how prepared the troops are for combat operations. "To be honest, there is not a lot to get excited about. They are shooting, they are hitting targets. Let's just call it average," the President said. "Of course they are nervous — the President is watching over their shoulder. I get that there is some tension. But overall, some hits, some misses."

It is important to note that the shooting drills did not involve a specially selected team, but rather servicemen taken in order from the roster, regardless of length of service or experience.

"Let them keep working. We will see how we can make your life more complicated. We are going to make it harder for you now. So don't get too comfortable. As for the battalion commanders, we will push them to the limit," the President added, addressing the Defence Minister.



talks between Aleksandr Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin. "We will certainly discuss this matter with President Putin, perhaps during the Supreme State Council meeting. After that, we have an entire day of negotiations scheduled, so we will definitely address it," the Belarusian leader stated.

### On resolving Venezuela situation

I have a proposal for the United States on how to resolve the situation regarding Venezuela, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko said during the meeting. "They carried out some kind of operation, grabbed a person. So what? They showed the whole world who is who. But the main thing is what comes next. So this is a topic for my discussion with the leadership of the United States of America. I have a proposal for resolving this situation. If they want to exit

this situation with dignity and do it gracefully, we are ready to work with Donald on that," the Belarusian leader stated. "He is a pragmatic person. So am I. So, I think we will discuss this matter. I am not saying I am the chief advisor here and that I can just solve some problem with him. No. But I can state my point of view." Aleksandr Lukashenko called the way the USA treated Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro foolish and believes that he cannot realistically be accused of involvement in drug trafficking. The Head of State stated that the main reason for U.S. actions in Venezuela was not Maduro, but oil. "This issue could have been resolved calmly. Especially since the oil that Venezuela extracts is heavy, sulfuric, thick oil. And the refining capacity is only in the United States of America. Couldn't this issue have been resolved? It could have been," the Belarusian leader is convinced.

### ALEKSANDR LUKASHENKO RECEIVED INVITATION TO ATTEND FIRST BOARD OF PEACE MEETING

President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko has received an invitation to attend the first meeting of leaders for the Board of Peace — as noted by Head of State's Press Secretary Natalya Eismont



"Yes, the President of Belarus has been invited to the first leaders' meeting within the Board of Peace framework. Unfortunately, we received the invitation too late, and the President's schedule for that period was already planned. We would have been happy to visit the United States, but there are issues that cannot be postponed," the Press Secretary stated. "Moreover, we are also taking into account possible logistical

challenges caused by unlawful sanctions, mainly from the European Union, especially since EU airspace is closed."

"In this regard, despite our willingness, the President will be unable to attend the event. However, I want to emphasise that we fully support the U.S. President and the Board of Peace's goal of peacefully resolving all global conflicts," Ms. Eismont pointed out.

She also noted that the country will be represented in Washington by the Foreign Minister, who is actively involved with Belarus' participation in the Board of Peace as well as other issues related to regional situation and Belarus-U.S. bilateral relations.

"The American side has already been notified of this decision," the Press Secretary of the Belarusian leader added.

As reported, the USA plans to hold the Board of Peace meeting in Washington on February 19th.

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## More than 80 Belarusian food producers took part in the *Prodexpo-2026* exhibition



Maksim Korotkin



*Prodexpo* is Russia's major food exhibition for business. This year, it was held in Moscow for the 33rd time. For Belarusian food manufacturers, this forum is one of the key events of the year, along with similar events in the United Arab Emirates and the People's Republic of China. Belarusian companies traditionally use *Prodexpo* as a platform to showcase new products and negotiate with potential partners. As always, the geographical reach of the forum is impressive: it was attended by food and beverage producers and distributors from Asia, Africa, Europe and South America.



Maksim Korotkin

# Time for unconventional solutions

By Maksim Korotkin

## From health food to halal products

The exhibition was truly massive: in 2026, it occupied all three huge pavilions of the Crocus Expo Centre, two dozen halls. The forum is segmented by industry: dairy products, meat processing, alcohol, non-alcoholic beverages, bakery and confectionery, frozen foods and much more. Over eighty Belarusian food manufacturers took part in the exhibition. Leading domestic companies still consider the Russian market to be primary for them: firstly, due to convenient logistical connectivity, and secondly, due to significant demand. At the same time, working in Russia has undergone changes in recent years. On the one hand, the market is becoming segmented, opening up new opportunities for business development, and on the other hand, it is intensifying competition within product groups, as noted by exhibition participants.

"Naturally, to be competitive in the market, we must be in the niche of consumer demand," Belarus' Ambassador to Russia Yuri Seliverstov told reporters. "Accordingly, this implies new products and a different quality. Previously, there were more foreign products, and people got used to certain tastes. Now our task is to fill this niche and respond to the requests of citizens. Over 80 Belarusian organisations are represented at the exhibition, and everyone is trying to bring some new product here, to surprise with something. Yet, it is clear that the product must be not only interesting and not only of high quality, but also competitive in terms of price."

Companies from our country are represented in all thematic sections of the exhibition. In recent years, new niches

have opened up in the market, related to consumer needs: from health and wellness products to halal products. Therefore, this is a time for Belarusian enterprises to search for new ways of working in the premium market.

According to the head of the Belarusian diplomatic mission, a forecast has been determined for the export of Belarusian food to the Russian market, and plans have been allocated across all sectors. Key areas of domestic supplies to the Russian market — such as dairy and meat products — will retain their importance in 2026.

## Gallery of tastes

The *Belarus. The Taste of Nature* exposition brought together well-known domestic brands and industry leaders.

The Kommunarika confectionery factory exhibited confectionery, handmade products, chocolate, sweets and gift sets while Spartak showcased *IMPRESSO* milk and white chocolate with fillings, as well as *Kroshka-osminozhka* (*Tiny Octopus*) glazed sweets with yoghurt and cocoa. The Glubokoye Meat Processing Plant presented a wide product line, including sausages, sausage links, pork, beef and offal products, minced meat, natural meat and meat-bone semi-finished products, quick-cooking semi-finished products, lard products, meat sets and offal sets.

The Oshmyany Meat Processing Plant unveiled a broad assortment of meat products such as cooked sausage products, sausages, sausage links, cooked-smoked and semi-smoked sausage products, smoked-cooked pork products.

For several years now, *Prodexpo* has been segmented following market needs. Naturally, the usual mass demand

has not gone away: milk, cheeses, sausage products are still in demand in Russia. At the same time, enterprises are actively expanding product lines that were simply unknown a few years ago.

The Rogachev Milk Canning Plant displayed a line of lactose-free dairy products at the exhibition, as the trend dictates the expansion of the production of such goods.

Dairy products with a high protein content are another trending thing. These products are gaining popularity on the wave of interest in a healthy lifestyle. The *Prodexpo* presentations were full of advertising slogans promoting high-protein cottage cheese, yoghurt and sports drinks.

There were also some rather bold solutions: the Belarusian brand, Milk Republic, featured ice cream with the taste of potato pancakes with onions at *Prodexpo*. Wheat germ flakes by Gomelkhlboprodukt are a superfood produced from the valuable part of the wheat grain, rich in proteins and vitamins. They contain up to 30 percent protein, similar to proteins of animal origin. This is a product for supporters of healthy eating and those who seek to increase the amount of protein in their diet, which is so necessary for the body.

## We are entering Russia with 'villages'

Perhaps the major trend is the changing structure of Belarusian product supplies to Russia. Last year saw the launch of the *Belarusian Village* project — a new 'shop-in-shop' format for Belarusian manufacturers.

In accordance with the instructions of the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, manufacturers in the country face the task of moving away from in-

termediary schemes when working in the Russian market. A decisive step was taken in this direction: agreements on close co-operation were concluded with the largest retailers in Russia, Auchan and X5 Group. The first outcomes of these agreements were the opening of three trading spaces under the *Belarusian Village* brand in major shopping centres in St Petersburg and Moscow. The 'shop-in-shop' format makes it possible to concentrate a group of goods in one place, without diluting Belarusian products among thousands of foreign brands. The idea of implementing the 'shop-in-shop' format belongs to the Minsk Dairy Plant No. 1 trading house.

Irina Novikova, Director General at the enterprise, recounted that this ambitious format of co-operation had taken off in Russia. Therefore, in February 2026, the trading house intends to open another similar shop in a home goods supermarket in the northern capital of Russia. Three similar structures are preparing to open in Moscow. Responses to this idea are also coming from the regions of Russia; they are ready to launch such shops in Severodvinsk, Ulan-Ude and Yekaterinburg.

Along with that, it is important that many Belarusian enterprises are showing exceptional interest in the project.

The concept of combining household and everyday goods with food products may have an impact on the Russian market.

This approach is expected to shape the direction of Belarusian food exports in the future as well.

It seems that in the current environment, ordinary (albeit high-quality) rebranding is not enough. Manufacturers now need to surprise both consumers and counterparties. Apparently, this is the main trend in the food sector.



Maksim Korotkin

# Ambitious tasks ahead



Kristina Fanchenko

**Digitalisation of services and 270 residents — Great Stone outlines its plans for the current five-year period**

The Great Stone China–Belarus Industrial Park occupies a central place in the relations between the two countries. After all, technological and investment co-operation with China is a priority and the backbone of Belarus' economic policy. This was emphasised by Belarus' First Deputy Prime Minister Nikolai Snopkov during the presentation of the new head, Tatiana Kharlap, to the park administration team. He stressed that the demands on the project are increasing today. Among the key directions of the park's development, he mentioned assistance in the speedy launch and reaching the planned capacity of all participating companies. It is also essential to improve the comprehensive service for residents on the 'one-stop-shop' principle and to ensure maximum digitalisation of all procedures.

By Ilya Kryzhevich

## Competition for investors

Tatiana Kharlap, Head of the Administration of the Great Stone Industrial Park, is convinced that the tasks set for the park's administration are fully consistent with its status. "Moreover, I want to say that the park is developing. The faster this happens, the more residents there are here, the more ambitious the tasks we receive. The park's administration is primarily designed to serve residents. We are a bridge for them to government bodies that provide a complete list of administrative procedures and public services. Our function is to assist in the speedy implementation of residents' projects, so that the economy benefits. This is what our President was talking about."

Speaking about the task of digitising the procedures for comprehensive resident services based on the 'one-stop-shop' principle, Tatiana Kharlap drew attention to China's active transition to digital technology. "Today, any consumer can download an application, log in and receive a service online. This is a simplified, but very illustrative example of what we should strive for in serving the residents. We have been set a task, and this is one of our priority areas now," she emphasised.

Tatiana Kharlap particularly noted that there is currently fierce competition for investors throughout the world. "Many countries, and even other sites within our country, offer investors various conditions so that they can choose the most optimal option for implementing their project. For our part, we must monitor these conditions and the business environment and, if necessary, submit proposals to the Head of State and the Government to improve our investment climate and create the most comfortable working conditions."

*According to her, there are currently over 170 residents in the Great Stone Industrial Park. Several new companies have been registered in 2026, and their number is expected to reach 190 by the end of the year. According to the park's development strategy, the number of residents is planned to reach 270 by 2030.*

"This is an ambitious figure. Yet, we are not striving for quantity. Our priority is quality parameters: the work of residents, how many projects have already been implemented, and who has reached their project capaci-



Yegor Yermilitskiy

ty," the head of the park administration also noted that the current development strategy of the Great Stone remains relevant and achievable. "Today, it contains truly realistic indicators. It implies very painstaking work at all levels, including our partners. We will carry out work to inventory the project implementation schedules and see what needs to be accelerated."

In addition, speaking about amendments to the decree on the operating conditions of the Great Stone Industrial Park, its head underscored that they should appear this year. At the same time, the timing depends on detailed study with interested parties.

## Creating special engineering conditions

In turn, Kirill Koroteyev, First Deputy Director General of SZA O Industrial Park Development Company, shared that work would be carried out to strengthen co-ordination of interaction between the park administration and the development company, "The main task that the development company will focus on is to continue building infrastructure and creating the engineering and technical conditions for the arrival of residents and their de-

velopment. In addition, emphasis will also be placed on attracting residents and investors. We have representative offices in Beijing and Shenzhen, and all these elements should be involved. The administration helps to select and evaluate the projects brought in by the company. This is the initial formula, simple and commercially sound. The company invests money in infrastructure and looks for resident clients to recoup the costs. This is how our two-way mechanism with a commercial incentive works."

According to him, interaction with the park administration will be strengthened through representation in management bodies, "The Head of the Park Administration, Tatiana Kharlap, will soon join the Board of Directors. Its meeting will be held very soon — strategic decisions on the company's development and increased capitalisation will be taken there. We plan to expand the authorised capital to \$250m. It currently stands at \$195m. These are significant assets — few banks have such an amount. The company contin-



Tatiana Kharlap

ues to develop and ramp up its financial power."

Furthermore, according to Kirill Koroteyev, one of the major tasks for the park is the launch of a railway terminal, which is planned to be put into operation in 2026. It is equally important to saturate it with cargo traffic from Belarus and China. "During my recent visit to China, there were several meetings on this topic with the China–SCO pilot zone. We agreed on support for exports and imports to Belarus, in order to reach third countries through us. We will use our customs zone regime and terminal to maximise capacity utilisation."

He also reported that a series of meetings were held in Xi'an with the international land port — the largest in China — during the visit, "They possess colossal expertise in cargo handling and working with post-Soviet countries. We agreed on a formula for interaction:

after the Chinese New Year, we will exchange documents and begin practical work. This will intensify the role of our port, making it a significant element of the Silk Road in practice, not just in words."

At the start of the project, the capacity of the railway terminal in the Great Stone will be 180,000 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) per year, with an increase to 500,000. "Integrated logistics is one of the priority areas. We are building it, and companies that have come with the construction of the terminal in mind will complement each other. All this is an element of our strategy, embedded in the master plan from the very beginning," Kirill Koroteyev summarised.



Aleksandr Kulevskiy



CO-OPERATION

**The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko,**

*"In five, ten or perhaps even twenty years you will proudly show your children what you created. I am confident that the tradition will continue. After all, the work of student brigades is not only about bridges, roads or buildings. It is, above all, about people, their relationships and interactions. Do not lose the spirit of industriousness. Remember that your ideas and inexhaustible energy are the engine that drives Belarus forward. I believe in you, in your strength and your talents."*

**At the solemn closing of the third labour semester, on December 13th, 2024**



**Anton Kozeka and Aleksandra Ivanyuk**

**NUMBERS**

Since the revival of the student brigade movement, the number of participants has grown many times over. Thus, in 2003 there were about 22,000 members, including volunteers, and by 2025, this figure had risen to over 64,000. Across sovereign Belarus, over 921,000 young people have passed through the student brigades.

**By Valeria Kurnevich**

**Trust in the young**

Active revival of the student brigade movement in Belarus began in 2003. The list of projects entrusted to the youth included the reconstruction of the Khatyn and Mound of Glory memorial complexes. For the work accomplished, the student brigades were honoured with the President's letter of gratitude. In 2005, the first youth construction project in sovereign Belarus was launched. The President's decree assigned the corresponding status to the project to reconstruct part of the Avgustovskiy Canal, which gathered around 400 participants from across the country, in four combined student brigades.

The construction of the Belarusian nuclear power plant (BelNPP) occupies a special place in the movement's chronicle. Activists from the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM) approached the Head of State with a proposal to declare the strategically important facility an All-Belarusian youth construction site. The large-scale project was dubbed the 'Town of Youth'. Over eleven years, the efforts of young people produced a multi-functional sports complex, a covered ice rink, a school, a hospital, a kindergarten and a bus station.

**Thanks to the President's backing, Belarus has revived the tradition of youth construction projects, which have become a school of life for hundreds of thousands of Belarusians**

# Glorious line in a biography

**The student brigade movement is one of the most significant chapters in the history of the Komsomol. In most former Soviet republics, the tradition gradually faded whereas in Belarus it has not wavered for a single year. The guys continued to work on construction sites both within the country and abroad. In the early 2000s, with the Head of State's support, the movement received a new impulse: the number of participants started to grow rapidly as the practice of youth construction projects was revived. Over this period, more than 921,000 young men and girls passed through the student brigade school.**



Yelizaveta Kobetskaya



Yelizaveta Kobetskaya

**THIS RESOUNDS LOUDLY**

Student brigades have contributed to the construction and reconstruction of dozens of socially significant facilities and memorial complexes across the country. These include the Yanka Kupala National Academic Theatre, the Minsk-Arena sports complex, the Nesvizh and Kosovo castles, the National Library, the headquarters of Belarus' National Olympic Committee, the Palace of Independence, and many others.

**IN TOTAL**

**Over 3,500 young people worked on the construction sites of the BelNPP and the social infrastructure in Ostrovets.**



**Sixty-six guys were involved in the major repairs and reconstruction of the Khatyn memorial complex, with around 1,500 more as part of volunteer squads.**



**The Republican Centre for Patriotic Education of Youth at the Brest Fortress Kobrin fortification site saw the participation of 308 young people, and over 2,500 joined as part of volunteer squads.**



**Sixty-five members of student brigades worked to erect Belarus' National Historical Museum in 2025.**



**Town for future growth**

For 26-year-old Dmitry Shcherbenok, the town of Belarusian nuclear workers became a destiny defining place. After four labour semesters on the All-Belarusian youth construction site in Ostrovets, the native of Orsha stayed there to live and work as a ventilation engineer at Atomtechenergo. "After my first year at university, I did practical training while my friends went to the site. They returned in high spirits and with good earnings. I decided firmly to join them next year," Dmitry recalls. "In 2018, I first joined the BelNPP site as a regular worker within the *Evrika* squad. The tasks were straightforward — improving the surroundings, ancillary work — but it is that summer that floods back into my memory most often."

In 2021, Dmitry graduated from university, yet the romance of the student brigades did not let him go. He returned to the *Town of Youth* project as a commander and soon settled in Ostrovets for good. The lad explains his choice, "Here I experienced my best student years. Ostrovets is a young, beautiful, welcoming town. We built everything necessary for a comfortable life. When I walk past some building, I feel pride that a piece of my work is in it."

**Fateful project**

By the 80th anniversary of the tragedy at the village of Khatyn, in 2022 the memorial complex received the status of an All-Belarusian youth construction site.

Belarusian youth construction site for major repairs and reconstruction. In a year, another site joined the list — the Republican Centre for Patriotic Education of Youth at the Brest Fortress Kobrin fortification. In summer 2025, command of this grand project was entrusted to Anton Kozeka, a fourth-year student at the Brest State Technical University. "A simple side job and a student brigade are two different things," Anton reflects. "Before your eyes, the face of iconic places changes; you make a real contribution to the country's development. In return you gain invaluable things: you learn to communicate, lead, make decisions, work in a team and acquire practical skills. It is a unique opportunity that the state affords to young people."

Perhaps the most precious gift the student brigade movement has given is love. Aleksandra Ivanyuk, now a graduate of A.S. Pushkin Brest State University, served as commissioner on the same site in 2025. A few tense weeks, which the future couple spent shoulder to shoulder, did their work.

**History is made together**

The youngest All-Belarusian youth construction project is the National Historical Museum. On April 12th, 2025, Aleksandr Lukashenko laid a capsule with a message to descendants beside the museum's future site, and the first student brigades took to the site on the same day. One of the participants was Vladislav Yermakovich, commander of the *Doblest (Valour)* squad named after Hero of the Soviet Union I. P. Kazinets from the Academy of Public Administration under the aegis of the President of Belarus. For future managers, it was their first hands-on construction experience, Vladislav explains, "The trust the President places in the youth to undertake the construction of such an ideologically important facility is a great honour. Even as a student, I can contribute to preserving historical memory. In my view, that is the main task of our generation — to honour, safeguard and amplify."

Today, the youth brigade movement, in breadth and scale, matches the experience of the Soviet era, as noted by Nadezhda Shakhovskaya, commander at the Republican Headquarters of Student Brigades, "We get orders from employers and observe interest from enterprises and organisations in employing young workers. For young people, experience in a student brigade is a substantial advantage at the start of a career. They gain hands-on experience of their future profession. Young people adapt to labour and learn to value what has been created by their own hands."

**'Substantial advantage at the start of a career'**

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Andrei Sazonov

**TO THE POINT**

Last year, around 300 young people gained work experience outside the country. Some participants were involved in the reconstruction of the Amur-Yakutsk Mainline. Medical brigades operated in Russia's Perm and Irkutsk, while in Krasnodar Region, teams worked as kitchen and medical staff at the Morskaya Volna (Sea Wave) camp, and in the Orlyonok (Young Eagle) Russian Children's Centre, they served as camp counsellors and kitchen workers. A teaching brigade worked at the Leto (Summer) centre to organise health improvement, recreation and leisure for children and adolescents in Tatarstan.

# Health without borders

## Citizens from 158 countries of the world come to Belarus for recovery and treatment

Tourism is an important and relevant sector for Belarus. This is confirmed by the fact that the realisation of tourism potential is one of the seven priorities in the Socio-Economic Development Programme for 2026–2030. This is not surprising: from 2021 to 2024, many indicators in this area increased many times over.

The number of organised foreign tourists and excursionists visiting Belarus soared from 71,400 to almost 367,000 people during this period. At the same time, tourism is not only about visiting iconic and historical sites, but also a number of other essential areas, including health and medical tourism. This was discussed by Candidate of Economic Sciences, Associate Professor Yelena Milashevich, Head of Social and Consumer Services Sector of Service Economy Department at the Institute of Economics under Belarus' National Academy of Sciences.

eration, as sanctions have indeed affected the industry. In total, people from 105 countries around the world come to Belarus for health improvement.

### Highly effective treatment

If we consider the medical services provided to foreign patients coming to the country's medical institutions, then in 2025, according to the Healthcare Ministry, the number of such tourists exceeded 160,000. They came to Belarus from 158 countries around the world, with citizens of the CIS accounting for more than 60 percent. In 2025, compared to 2020, the export of medical services grew 1.6 times, reaching \$51.8m. Incidentally, the capital is the leader in terms of the medical services export volume. It must be said that truly unique surgeries are performed in Minsk. The fact that people come to Belarus means that we have highly qualified doctors, unique surgeries, while the price corresponds to the quality of the service. We also have the appropriate technologies and domestic developments that allow us to perform such top-notch surgical interventions.

### Removing inhibiting factors

How can we improve export performance for health resort and medical services? A number of problems need to be addressed — for example, establishing a system for recording foreign patients.

The lack of international accreditation for Belarusian medical organisations also hinders the development of specialised tourism. After all, there are a number of internationally recognised systems for accrediting healthcare organisations. This procedure will allow us to promote our country on the international stage and will help attract additional foreign patients.

Another inhibiting factor is the absence of a unified search system for treatment and rehabilitation options within Belarus. It is crucial that this be a single national website listing all organisations that provide healthcare services to foreign patients, and operating on the principle of well-known international travel aggregators.

It goes without saying, if we are talking about developing the export of medical services, the existence of a language barrier remains an inhibiting factor, as does the lack of marketing specialists in the field of medical tourism. Unfortunately, only a few doctors speak foreign languages, let alone specialists in registration offices, whose telephone numbers are specified on the websites of specialised research and practical centres, hospitals and clinics. In most cases, foreigners are not understood and are offered the English version of the website to read.

Notably, another promising export direction could be a more active introduction of information and communication technologies — in particular, the development of a telemedicine consultation system, which can also be provided to foreign patients. It would be good to use this practice in Belarus as well, where doctors are highly qualified. After all, over time, an online patient may become an offline one.

Overall, the national healthcare system can become a growth driver for the Belarusian economy and its export potential. We will get a high-quality and advanced export product if we combine the efforts of the production sector, namely manufacturers of medicines and medical equipment; agriculture coupled with the production of ecologically clean products; construction, including new medical centres; science, including the development of new medicines and treatments; and information and communication technologies, which encompass modern communication systems, medical information systems, data transmission and processing.

Currently, we simply register all incoming tourists on tourist visas, or even without them. However, we do not know if they have come for treatment, and if so, to which medical facility and of what specialisation. All of this makes it difficult to develop further measures to promote the export of health resort and medical services.



By Vera Arteaga

### Regions attractive for health improvement

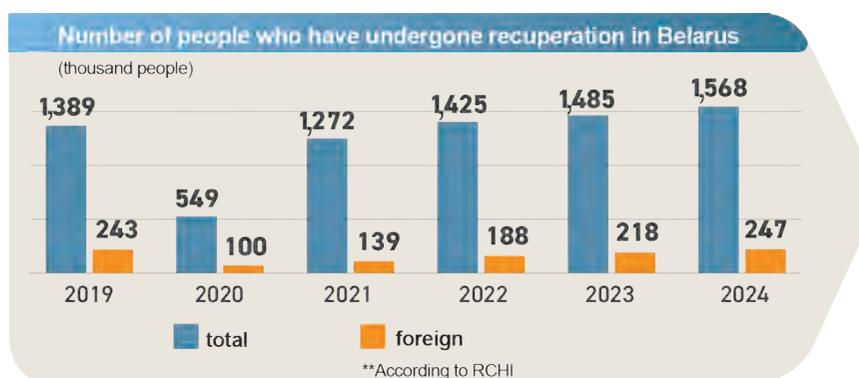
Overall, tourism makes a significant contribution to the country's economy. The maximum indicator — 2.5 percent of GDP — was reached in 2018. The *Tourism* state programme for 2026–2030 sets an ambitious goal to increase the industry's contribution to GDP to 4.5 percent by 2030.

A key statistical factor is the structure of the tourist flow, where inbound tourism accounted for a fifth, or 21.4 percent, which, you will agree, is considerable. In 2024 alone, there were more than 6.6 million trips. Minsk is the leader in organised inbound tourism, accounting for more than 50 percent of the total organised inbound flow. That is, regional tourist services are uneven. Minsk is followed by Brest, Grodno, Gomel and Vitebsk.

Along with that, it is the regions that attract tourists with their health and wellness services, as well as historical, cultural and agro-ecological potential. In the future, the development of the medical and wellness segment could potentially increase the flow of tourists to the regions.

It is worth mentioning that this has become even more feasible today, as Belarusian banks have prepared their own credit products to support the tourism sector. Thus, the Development Bank's debut financing instrument is the *Tourist Potential* credit product, which envisages the provision of resources to investment projects for the construction and modernisation of sanatorium and health resorts, hotels, campsites and other facilities. Another such product is primarily aimed at small and medium-sized businesses. Representatives of this segment of the economy can receive financing for projects in the field of hotel and restaurant business, healthcare (activities of medical centres, sanatorium and resort organisations with medical services), sports, entertainment and recreation, passenger transportation, building and site maintenance.

Indeed, today the contribution of sanatorium and health resort services to Belarus' exports is quite significant, accounting for over 30 percent of all tourist services. **According to the Republican Centre for Health Improvement and Sanatorium-Resort Treatment of the Population (RCHI), the number of people who received health treatment in Belarus in 2024 exceeded 1.5 million, with 247,000 of them coming from abroad.** The increase in tourists is reflected in the revenue of our domestic health resorts. In 2024, it rose by more than 21 percent compared to the previous year, amounting to Br1.63bn. Over 95 percent of foreign citizens who choose our Belarusian sanatoriums are, certainly, citizens of the Russian Fed-



Name of service	Growth over five-year period (2020-2025), %
obstetrics & gynaecology	by 82.6
neurology & neurosurgery	by 71.9
traumatology	by 32.7
oncology	by 15.6
ophthalmology	by 6.1

The recent report by the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service regarding the West's plans for Belarus has had a significant informational impact. Let's put it bluntly, the plans are aggressive and aimed at overthrowing the constitutional order, or 'democratisation', as it sounds in Aesopian language familiar to Europeans. Notably, the President of Belarus and our country's special services have repeatedly reported about such intentions of the European Union leaders and certain representatives of the American ruling circles. And they did not merely report — a lot has been done to disrupt anti-Belarusian plans.

By Vadim Gigin, deputy of the House of Representatives of Belarus' National Assembly, Candidate of Historical Sciences

**People fought back**

The material by the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) refers to a reset of those structures working on Belarus from the side of Western intelligence agencies and a concentration of resources for a decisive showdown in 2030, when the Presidential election will be held in our country. At the same time, external forces are aiming to try and find liberal passionaries in modern Belarusian society. They want to achieve this through the imposition of a so-called 'dialogue'. In other words, they are going to use 'soft power' again.

It is clear what has caused such a reset. All attempts at coercive pressure on Belarus have completely failed. The riot in 2020, on which huge bets were placed and colossal funds were spent, was met with the determination of the authorities and was fought off by the people. Sanctions blackmail has not brought the desired results, either.

Threats of armed aggression from both NATO and Ukraine have led to the opposite effect. Belarus has deployed Russian tactical nuclear weapons on its territory and received Iskander-M and Oreshnik missile systems, as well as S-400 surface-to-air missile (SAM) system. Belarus now possesses such military technical capabilities to ensure its military security that no other state comparable to it in population and territory has.

The saga of setting up foreign subversive centres has also been unsuccessful. Americans and Europeans — the immediate masterminds of this far from cheap operetta — had to admit that themselves.

*It is noteworthy that the failures of fugitive extremists did not happen by themselves. The domestic special services, which have repeatedly demonstrated high professionalism, had a hand in them. One of the key factors in this regard is the unity of our people.*

All this has led the ruling circles of the EU and the USA to deep disappointment and even irritation. Since 2020, they have changed the teams of curators of the 'Belarusian projects' several times. The White House administration, led by Donald Trump, even engaged in direct dialogue with Minsk. This is because Belarus has proved its strength, its right to be independent and sovereign.

# Deny enemies their smallest chance

**Belarus has learned to defend its sovereignty and resist colour revolutions**

**Factors of stability**

In principle, from the very beginning of the state building of sovereign Belarus in 1994, the domestic political system has possessed the necessary factors of stability and viability. These include, among other things, a strong presidential power, forms of direct democracy, such as referendums, a systemic youth policy, and some others. The only thing is that sometimes not all the potential of our development model was fully realised. The challenges of 2020 led to civil mobilisation and made it possible to significantly strengthen Belarusian statehood.

The introduction of amendments to the Constitution coupled with a serious improvement of legislation created a solid legal framework for effective interaction between the authorities and society, and a prompt and flexible response to emerging threats. Giving constitutional status to the Belarusian People's Congress contributed to the institutionalisation of public dialogue. The phenomenon of 'collective Lukashenko' — a broad patriotic consensus — has materialised in the form of the highest representative body of popular power.

The socio-political life of Belarus follows the 'four plus five' formula, which refers to four political parties and five leading public associations.

*Even now, we can observe sufficient effectiveness of this model. It allows us to consider different points of view*

*existing in society, to balance possible and inevitable discontents, to provide a timely response to them, and to conduct political struggle in a civilised manner.*

It is unlikely that anyone will argue that there has been a qualitative growth of the Belarusian media in recent years. Projects beloved by the people have appeared, and Belarusian journalists are known and trusted. This is also related to the formation of an authoritative expert community. As a result, the information initiative is fully retained by the state, giving the adversary no serious chance of a breakthrough. Abroad, they only admit with dismay that they have no leverage to influence Belarusian society.

The state ideological policy is distinguished by its thoroughness and systematic nature. The best achievements from practical work were summarised in Directive No. 12 of the President of Belarus, *On Implementing Fundamental Principles of the Ideology of the Belarusian State*. Part of this process is the promotion of state symbols, the achievements of Belarus and a focused historical policy.

**Cornerstone for successful future development**

Our enemies make no secret of the fact that the main battleground for hearts and minds is the youth. The struggle for the future is ongoing. Yet, we are again ahead of our foreign detractors. The Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM) has begun to work in a new, proactive way, and political parties have begun to establish their

own youth wings, giving young people with leadership qualities the opportunity to prove themselves. A particular source of pride is the movement of military patriotic clubs. This is a real young guard of patriots devoted to their Motherland. It is clear that not all of them will become officers, yet they receive training and build stamina, including ideological and political awareness, which forms the basis of their worldview, and shapes a stable system of ideas, views and beliefs.

Indeed, a lot has been done. However, we should not bask in our own achievements. The adversary is just waiting for us to relax and become complacent. And then, confident in the unshakable strength of our positions, we would make some concessions, show weakness.

*Therefore, there must be no slackness or self-admiration. We must deny the enemy the slightest chance of success. Any manifestations of disloyalty to our state must be nipped in the bud.*

Vigilance and intolerance towards any hostile attacks or attempts to sow discord in society is the cornerstone for further successful development. Undoubtedly, it is imperative to further improve our state and public institutions, and bolster the national security system. In that case, the next anti-Belarusian plan will end up where its predecessors did — on the scrapheap of history.



# Not shrinking, but growing

The world is now facing new challenges. On the one hand, technologies in the fields of robotics, energy and transport are radically changing the mode of production. On the other hand, politics sometimes dictates decisions to the economy that are not well-considered in the long term, while mistakes ruin businesses and banks. A prime example of such recklessness is the European Union and its former economic flagship — the Federal Republic of Germany.

**Why Germany is facing a growing crisis, and the effect of economy mode**



## WHERE LOSSES ARE ACCELERATING

Due to a series of crises since 2020, the German economy has suffered losses of around €940bn in the form of lost added value. The COVID-19 pandemic, the energy crisis caused by the conflict in Ukraine, and the trade policy of U.S. President Donald Trump have led to economic losses in the amount of more than €20,000 per employed person over these years, according to a study by the Cologne Institute for Economic Research (IW), Germany. A quarter of the sum falls on 2025.

By **Aleksei Avdonin**,  
Chairman of the Board of the national public association the **Belarusian Znanie [Knowledge] Society**

## ON BUSINESS CLIMATE

**Berlin's rejection of relatively cheap energy and raw materials from the Union State of Belarus and Russia, coupled with its withdrawal from these markets, has led Germany and the EU to a profound financial and economic crisis.**

At the end of last December, the Munich-based Ifo Institute for Economic Research, following a survey of the business community, indicated that about 26 percent of companies in Germany expect their business to worsen in 2026. At the same time, 59 percent expect neither growth nor decline and assume that the current, already rather weak, economic situation will remain. Only 14.9 percent of respondents express hope for an improvement in the situation, which in itself indicates an extremely low level of business optimism. In effect, German business is adapting not to growth but to prolonged stagnation and shrinkage. The current level of business activity is already rated as unsatisfactory. Companies do not

## MANUFACTURERS ARE PREPARING TO RELOCATE

According to a joint survey by Deloitte and the Federation of German Industries (BDI), 68 percent of industrial enterprises are considering relocating production, either completely or partially, to the United States in the next two to three years. BDI President Peter Leibinger stated that the German economy is in a deep crisis and is in free fall, but the federal government is not responding decisively enough to the critical situation. According to him, the country is experiencing the most difficult times since the formation of the Federal Republic of Germany.

believe in an improving investment climate, do not expect any significant reduction in costs, and see no incentives to expand production. Germany, remaining in a state of weak growth or recession, is losing ground in the global arena.

## SLOWDOWN IN GERMAN AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

**Traditionally, the West is seeking the way out of a recession through mass redundancies. Thus, every second industrial company is focusing on staff optimisation. The German Engineering Federation (VDMA) notes that since 2018, production has decreased by approximately 20 percent, while the number of jobs — by more than 200,000. The fall in production this year could be up to five percent.**

In the past year, 120,300 jobs were cut in the entire German industrial sector, and since 2019 — 271,700. The most difficult situation has developed in the automotive industry, where the number of employees has decreased by 6.3 percent in a year, and by 13 percent, or 112,000 jobs, in six years. Volkswagen and Bosch have already announced large-scale staff reduction programmes. The metallurgical and electrical engineering industries, in turn, could lose up to 150,000 workers this year. The leading petrochemical concern BASF is closing individual lines at its historical plant in Ludwigshafen (adipic acid production) and moving production outside Germany to the United States and China. This is a serious blow for the Rhineland-Palatinate region.

## BETTING ON INVESTMENT PROJECTS

As many countries enter recession, it is important for Belarus to maintain the progressive development of its economic potential and increase the level of efficiency, including in economy mode. President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko, during a meeting with the leadership of the Council of Ministers, cited the situation with street lighting as one example of resource management. Its economical use on a national scale yields impressive results: 10–15 minutes per day over a year equates to three dairy complexes or seven preventive care facilities for calves in terms of cost. Therefore, it is necessary to seek reserves everywhere.

**Belarus' Socio-Economic Development Programme for 2026–2030, approved at the meeting of the 7th Belarusian People's Congress, also aims to grow the economy. One of its priorities is to increase competitiveness, accelerate technological development and digital transformation. These plans can only be implemented in a mode of economy, efficiency, thrifty and creative attitude to business.**

While Europe is shrinking, Belarus is focused on the implementation of large investment projects in advanced industries.

The global economy presents both challenges and opportunities. It is crucial to be able to quickly assess the situation, identify growth drivers, implement new projects and carefully manage existing resources. All this allows us to improve the well-being of citizens and shape the future of the national economy of Belarus.

## FOR REFERENCE

**Belarus' Socio-Economic Development Programme for 2026–2030 envisages the following key areas for implementing investment projects:**

in microelectronics and optics — providing the automotive industry, machine tool industry and instrument engineering with the necessary microchips



DC-DC converters, high-voltage LED drivers for industrial, automotive, household lighting systems, etc., through the modernisation of production lines at INTEGRAL, implementation of a number of projects for the production of lithographic equipment by the Planar Holding Company



in mechanical engineering and machine tool industry — implementation of approximately 10 projects, involving the renewal and creation of new production facilities to manufacture equipment for agriculture, forestry, road construction, construction and automotive industries, machine tools and their components (BELAZ, MTZ, Gomselmash and more)



in woodworking and wood chemistry — construction of a second pulp and paper mill and technologically related production of various types of paper, fibres, products of tall oil processing, setting up a new production of wood boards at Ivatsevichdrev, creation of related petrochemical production of sodium chlorate and hydrogen peroxide (Mogilevkhimvolokno)



in the petrochemical sector — construction of new production complexes to diversify output, including the construction of a new ethylene propylene unit at Polymir Plant of Naftan OJSC to expand the production of ethylene and propylene. It also concerns the establishment of new polypropylene production based at Mozyr Oil Refinery, the organisation of oil production (Naftan OJSC), the construction of a new mining and processing complex (Nedra Nezhin) and much more.



Her creative journey began almost sixteen years ago when, during her second maternity leave, she picked up a needle and thread. Since then, dolls created by Irina Sazanovich, who previously worked in the forensic medical examination service, have been exhibited in Malta, France and Russia. For four years in a row, her solo exhibitions have been held in our country — and for each one, Irina creates new beauties. Recently, she tried her hand as a writer, and the illustrations in her book *Tales of the Doll Maker* are photographs of her creations.

*Irina Sazanovich's dolls 'live' in 60 countries worldwide*

By Taisiya Azanovich

**'Not a speck of dust should be there'**

Irina Sazanovich opens a packet with small beige-coloured briquettes — this is bakeable polymer clay. “Before starting work, you need to wash your hands and dry them thoroughly — not a speck of dust should be there. The material is similar to plasticine,” the master squeezes a piece in her palms, warming it. “I make hands, legs and a head out of it.”

She took up creativity during her maternity leave — crafting textile dolls for her daughter. “Many women start getting creative after the birth of a child,” says Irina, and in her hands, a slender, graceful hand with long fingers appears from the shapeless mass. “Hormones sharpen inner feelings, you begin to perceive beauty differently, and at a certain moment you want to share this vision.”

It takes about a month to create one doll. Its cost exceeds the average salary in the capital, and the waiting list for new pieces is a year in advance. It is mostly collectors who buy them. There are also those who see such a purchase as a profitable investment — art is always valuable.

Irina reflects,

*“Someone is bound to sigh: ‘That’s a lot of money!’ I do not judge, on the contrary, I understand. Only the artist knows the true cost of their work. This tiny hand, which I sculpted before your very eyes, now needs to be baked in the oven at 130 degrees Celsius, and then thoroughly polished — so that it becomes like porcelain, and that means putting in considerable effort.*”

The ability to value yourself does not come immediately or on its own. It is just that after 40, you realise that your health is not made of iron, although, I could work non-stop, tirelessly for 10 hours. I only ‘woke up’ when my husband came home and touched my shoulder. It is a bad habit, I try to restrain myself.”

Sometimes a doll is bought not just because someone likes it. Irina recalls how once, a girl came to her exhibition and looked at the dolls with interest, until she stopped dead in her tracks in front of one and burst into tears. She was looking at Dimka — the only boy in the collection. This toy had not sold for a year, and Irina could not understand why. It turns out it was fate: the girl saw the image of her deceased brother in the doll. That day, Dimka found a home.



**Fairy tale at your fingertips**

**Belarusian linen, Chinese silk**

For her creations, Irina Sazanovich chooses the best materials from around the world — Belarusian linen, Chinese silk, German cotton, Italian lace, Belgian clay and paints, Japanese glass eyes. The craftswoman runs her hand over the long hair of the Alice doll: flowing locks — natural wool from a young goat. If a more structured texture is required, sheep wool is taken, Irina explains. Sometimes, she uses bioprotein hair in her work, which hairdressers use for extensions. And her dolls are always exquisitely dressed.

*“My hand does not lift to sew a plastic bead onto a dress made of natural velvet or batiste. My dolls’ outfits are born spontaneously, which is why I always have dozens of rolls of lace and beautiful fabrics in stock. Yet, it is important not to overdo it. I train my visual awareness by watching historical films. If I see a beautiful shot where the heroine’s stocking peeps out playfully, or a ribbon around her neck is tied in an interesting manner, I memorise it,” shared the craftswoman.*

Irina Sazanovich also likes creating extravagant outfits for herself. Moreover, she does not wait for a reason — she might just go for a walk in them.

Another source of inspiration for

her is nature: combine shades as the supreme mind does, and there is no need to invent anything. Notably, in any business you need to be able to distract yourself, ground yourself, so that new ideas appear. That is why Irina is fond of working at her dacha.

**'I do not make clones'**

The craftswoman never repeats her work and does not make ‘portrait’ dolls that completely duplicate the features of people, “A person should not have their exact doll copy nearby — there is something frightening about that. Although I am often told that my dolls look like me, this is more likely a coincidence in terms of worldview. I like to reflect and be alone with myself. I

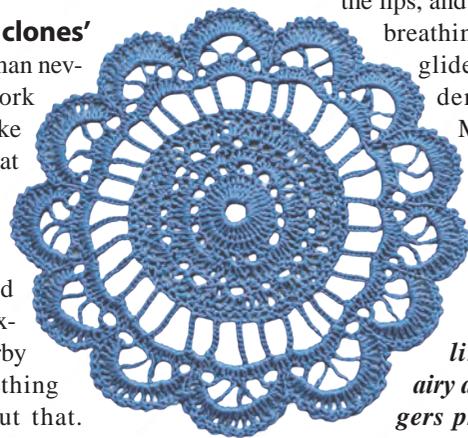
am absolutely comfortable in this small world beside my family. And my works are the same. I do not like making dolls with laughing faces — they are usually calm, absorbed in themselves, and thoughtful.”

Every year Irina creates collections. Last year, she embodied the images of birds in dolls, this year — butterflies and moths.

**Rules of good form**

Once the artist has created all the parts of the doll and they

have gone through numerous stages of polishing and painting, another important stage arrives — the master tones them with pastel to visually emphasise the volume, paints the face, fingernails and toenails with acrylic paints, and fixes everything with a special varnish. “You see, I am drawing the outline of the lips, and I am practically not breathing; the hand should glide gently but confidently,” Irina noted. Meanwhile, the outline of the mouth is appearing on the porcelain face. The craftswoman added, “Behind every line, behind every airy drape, there are fingers pricked bloody, details burnt in the oven, physical fatigue... Perhaps that is why my daughters never played with my dolls — they respected my work.”



The journey to the speed skating stadium in Milan is a long one: first a bus, then a seemingly endless metro ride... The carriage gradually fills with people in brightly coloured orange clothing. Dutch fans of all genders and ages (even cute old ladies) flow from the underground in thin streams. As they pass through the endless pavilions of Fiera Milan Rho — the largest exhibition centre, which during the Olympics not only hosts speed skating and ice hockey competitions but also operates exhibitions — the orange streams turn into an orange sea. If the famous canals in Milan were to freeze over, some fans from the Netherlands would surely prefer to travel along them on skates. Yet, even without such details the picture is filled with vibrant colours. The orange is literally dazzling on the stands.

# Sea inside

Maryna Zuyeva repeated her best result at the Olympics



**Special correspondent for SB Sergei Gordiyenko reporting from 2026 Winter Olympics**

but now it is known that she will definitely take part in the mass start on February 21st as well.

— Yes, they said I was cleared to participate. They told me before the 3,000m race. I was a bit shocked. I did not believe it at first, because it had been made clear to me before the Olympic Games that I would not be allowed. I already got a ticket home. I am happy, of course! It is a chance. If they give it to you, take it. (laughing) I will stay at the Olympics for another 9–10 days. It is awesome! I will be walking around, watching and cheering for the girls I train with. I will be watching the strongest speed skaters.

— **What are your elbowing skills in mass starts?**

— I do not really like that sort of thing. It is a dirty fight. In the first mass starts, when they appeared, it was completely unclear how to act in that atmosphere. I wanted to raise my hands and say: 'Everyone please, do not touch me, just skate'. Men sort things out more by strength, after all. They accelerate, use power, not dirty tactics. I am okay with that when rollerblading, but doing that on skates restricts me for some reason. Anyway, I think that after 5,000m, where I was, honestly, pleased with my result, I should let go of pressure.

**On age and future plans**

— People have set Olympic records in our sport even at 36. As long as I still have the passion, I am not thinking about the future — I am enjoying the moment. [Maryna is 33 years old, and the 2026 Olympics is already her third. Her best result was sixth place in the mass start in Pyeongchang and now she has repeated it]. Nowadays, it is difficult to plan anything anyway. We do not know what will happen in a month. I definitely want to stay in the sport. I am burning with it and I have felt that fire since I received my neutral status. It is like a second wave of motivation. The very fact that you are competing on the international stage makes you raise the bar: training becomes more efficient, dedication is higher. The admission really helped me. I got real pleasure at the World Cups and felt the atmosphere of competition again.

## Lake: the beginning

Seventy years ago, things were completely different at the Olympics in Cortina d'Ampezzo. The races took place on the ice of Lake Misurina, at an altitude of 1,755m above sea level, and there were no Dutch in sight back then. They would come to dominate in speed skating with the advent of artificial ice rinks, and the 1956 Olympics marked the end of the era of competitions on natural ice. At that time, the Soviet athletes, who made their debut at the Olympic Games, reigned supreme. They confidently won the team event, prevailing in three distances out of four, and secured seven medals out of twelve. In the 500m event, Yevgeny Grishin set a new Olympic and world record. The most amazing thing occurred in 1,500m, when Grishin and Yury Mikhailov showed the same result, simultaneously breaking the Olympic and world record.

At the 1964 Winter Olympics in Innsbruck, the first Belarusian speed skater, Eduard Matusevich, made his debut. His sixth place at the time was considered a failure by many in the USSR. Four years later, Matusevich, who had managed to collect the entire set of medals at the European championships, tried to improve in Grenoble, but he only finished eighth in his favourite 1,500m.

By and large, the Olympics did not work out for magnificent Belarusian sprinter Igor Zhelezovsky either. At the Calgary 1988 Winter Olympics, the six-time world champion in sprint speed skating claimed bronze in the high-altitude conditions. In Albertville, he was again close to a medal in 1,000m, but six participants finished within 0.2 seconds and the Belarusian was the last of them. As part of Belarus' national team, Igor Zhelezovsky won only one Olympic medal — silver — in Lillehammer, when he lost gold in a very frustrating way to Dan Jansen of the USA.



Speed skating competitions at 1956 Cortina d'Ampezzo Olympics were held on natural ice

## There is only one chance

On February 12th, a new sporting drama unfolded in the women's 5,000m speed skating race: only 0.3 seconds separated the four strongest athletes. In the end, Italy's Francesca Lollobrigida claimed her second gold medal at the Olympics, followed by Merel Conijn of the Netherlands, who — spurred on by a sea of orange-clad fans — delivered two sensational final laps, and Norway's Ragne Wiklund took the bronze. Maryna Zuyeva of Belarus equalled her best result at the Olympics, finishing sixth.

— I really believe in myself in 5,000m, because I have worked on this distance a lot on the bike, competitive laps on my own. I have done a lot of laps — no one can take that away from me. It is recorded in my body. No matter what my readiness is, I know that I will go out and do five, seven, eight laps in 32 seconds.

— **In the 5,000m event, seven minutes is an important milestone for women. You went under it today with 6:57.70.**

— You know, during this race, the ice was a bit soft, and my foot was sinking a little. The ice was more like in Kolonna. Very warm. On the other hand, the skate was sticking well. It was easy to control. I really like that it is warm, not cold. When it is cold, I feel how much my movements are restricted. The ice is the same for everyone, so it is great. Not classic ice in Dutch Heerenveen, of course, but it is good ice.

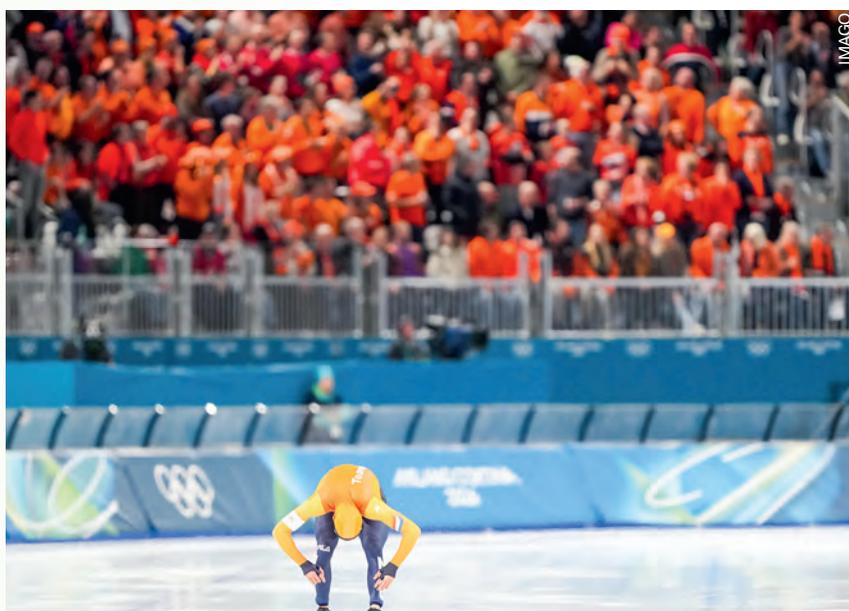
Initially, Maryna Zuyeva was not allowed to participate in the final speed skating competitions at the Olympics,

## Milanese records

The Fiera Milan Rho complex already has its own Olympic history. The ice rink was only ready at the end of last year, when it hosted the Junior World Cup as a test event. It was then that details first emerged that, specifically for the upcoming competitions for the best speed skaters, Italians had connected two exhibition pavilions into a single space with a total area of 35,000 square metres under one roof, which is equivalent to approximately five football pitches. Already during the Games, Italy's Olympic champion Enrico Fabris, who is the deputy sports manager at the speed skating venue in Rho, revealed that the Milan rink is unique as the ice level rises above the non-freezing part by about 30cm.

After the races featuring Olympic champions, Jutta Leerdam of the

Netherlands and Jordan Stolz of the USA, the Olympic rink acquired its own distinctive and memorable stories. Jutta, an Instagram star and girlfriend of kickboxer and blogger Jake Paul, snatched her gold in 1,000m in the last race literally with tears in her eyes. Furthermore, in order to confirm the victory of American Stolz, who set an Olympic record, the judges had to grant an additional race for Joep Wennemars of the Netherlands due to hindrance caused by his rival from China. It is only for the second time in the history of the Olympic Games that an athlete received the right to re-skate (the first was Soviet speed skater Andrei Bobrov in 1988). This did not help Wennemars, but thanks to what happened to him, another Chinese athlete ended up on the podium.



Neither re-skate nor fan support helped Dutch speed skater Joep Wennemars win a medal



Andrei Sazonov

## Photo of the week

**Maslenitsa is not only time of merry festivities and fragrant pancakes, but also family gatherings and ancient rites rooted in Slavic antiquity. In the photo: Tamara Khrushcheva and Natalya Yurevich from agro-town of Tekhtin in Mogilev Region.**

### DATES. EVENTS. PEOPLE.



**On February 20th, 1938**, Belgostrans received 20 new M1 automobiles for use as taxis in Minsk. Brand new M1 cars arrived from the

Gorky Automobile Plant (GAZ) and took to the streets of the Belarusian capital. In Soviet times, the first taxis in Minsk appeared in 1934. In those years, the GAZ M1 vehicle was the main Soviet taxicab. The last GAZ M1 cars with fare meters were decommissioned in 1946–1947. In the 1950s, Pobeda cars began to be used as taxis.

**On February 20th, 2002**, at the Salt Lake City Olympics, Belarus' national hockey team achieved its most famous victory. In the quarterfinals, Vladimir Krikunov's squad defeated the superstar Swedish national team, 4–3. The heirs of the Vikings seemed invincible back then but encountered a spirited, tough and extremely unpredictable game. The Swedes fought cohesively, equalising the score twice, but eventually capitulated. The media dubbed this victory 'Miracle on Ice 2', in analogy to the sensational victory of the U.S. national team over the USSR team at the 1980 Olympics.



**February 20th, 1981** marked the opening of the Polotsk Art Gallery, a branch of the National Polotsk Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve.



It is located in one of the buildings of the former Jesuit Collegium. The gallery's exposition features collections of icon painting and portrait painting of the 18th–20th centuries, fine art of Belarus of the 20th century and the stationary exhibition, *Wall Painting of the 12th–19th Centuries of the Saviour Transfiguration Church in Polotsk*, which has no analogues in the world and introduces visitors to the murals of the Transfiguration Church, preserved and passed down to us through nine centuries.

**On February 21st, 1918**, Minsk was occupied by the troops of Imperial Germany.

On February 18th, Austro-German and Turkish troops, violating the armistice concluded between the participants of the First World War, invaded Soviet Russia and launched a rapid offensive along the entire front. The enemy captured Minsk, Polotsk, Orsha and other Belarusian cities. A brutal occupation regime was established in Minsk, followed by arrests, robbery and forced export of food, raw materials and industrial products to Germany. The capital became the centre of underground struggle in the territory captured by Germans. Minsk was liberated by units of the Red Army on December 10th, 1918.



**February 21st, 1986** saw the establishment of the Mozyrskiye Ovragi (Mozyr Ravines) Republican Landscape Reserve. This is a monument of the glacial period with an area of over 1,000 hectares with a unique relief (gullies, ravines up to 40m deep, hills up to 220m) and rare old-growth forests, protecting the unique ecosystems of Polesie. The Mozyrskiye Ovragi reserve is located in Mozyr District of Gomel Region and has high recreational, aesthetic and historical significance.

**On February 21st, 1995**, President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko and President of Russia Boris Yeltsin signed the Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Co-operation between the two countries in Minsk. This was the first document concluded after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, aimed at integration between Russia and Belarus on the path towards the Union State. Later, many would call this document the beginning of integration.



**February 21st** marks International Mother Language Day — in Belarus, like the rest of the world — established by UNESCO in 1999 to preserve linguistic diversity. Aimed at

supporting the Belarusian language as the basis of national identity, this day has been celebrated in the country with cultural events since 2009. The Belarusian language is not only a means of communication but the soul of our people, the code of our culture, a treasury of history.

**February 23rd** is Day of Defenders of the Fatherland and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus — a public holiday symbolising courage, patriotism and fidelity to duty. The date honours veterans, military personnel and all men, acting as a symbol of preserving peace, historical memory and the continuity of generations. This day is a tribute to all generations of defenders of the Motherland.



**February 24th, 1935** is the date of birth of Rygor Borodulin (1935–2014) — People's Poet of Belarus, essayist and translator. He was a laureate of the Lenin Komsomol Prize of Belarus for the *Ballad of the Brest Fortress* poem, and the Yanka Kupala State Prize of the BSSR. In total, about 70 collections of his poetry were published. His poems were translated into dozens of other languages. Borodulin translated *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, works by Shakespeare, Byron and Omar Khayyam into his native language.

