



Belarus Headlines

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*Office for a Democratic
Belarus*

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Kupalle

We on the Web

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*Dear Readers,
The Office for a Democratic Belarus Wishes You
Happy Summer Holidays!*

Photo by Yulia Darashkevich



EU and Belarus

France Denounces New Belarus Opposition Conviction



France on Thursday (ODB: 09/07/2009) denounced the jailing of a Belarusian

opposition activist, saying the action ran counter to efforts by the country to improve its human rights record and move closer to the West.

Ambassador Mireille Musso was commenting on a one-year jail term handed down by a provincial court to Artyom Dubsky on the grounds that he had violated the terms of his probation. "This was an unpleasant surprise for all of us. It is completely at odds with the steps taken previously and with statements that have been made," Musso told a news conference.

Musso told reporters she understood the ruling was "in accordance with the criminal code now in place". But Belarus had to change its legal practices if it wanted to press on with its bid for acceptance by Western countries, she said.

10/07/2009

Source: Reuters

European Commission Voices Conditions to Return Trade Preferences to Belarus

The EU will restore its GSP trade preferences for Belarus if the country complies with the two conventions of the International Labour Organisation, 'On the freedom of associations and the protection of the right for an organization' and 'On applying the principles of the right for an organization and for holding collective negotiations'," Lutz



Guelner, a spokesman for EU trade commissioner said in a statement.

Guelner said that the European Commission had studied the conclusion of the International Labour Organization which says that the Belarusian government should continue its efforts to meet the recommendations. The European Commission calls on Belarus to boost efforts in the

areas of concern to the International Labour Organisation.

It is worth noting that Belarus was excluded from the EU's General System of Preferences in 2007 for violating the rights of trade unions.

13/07/2009

Source: BelaPAN, ERB

Politics and Society

US Congressmen Visit Belarus, Lukashenka Pardons Zeltser



Alyaksandr Lukashenka at the meeting with US Congressmen

US Congressmen paid a one-day visit to Belarus.

US legislators' visit was a step towards a thaw in relations between Minsk and Washington, which until recently enforced wide-ranging sanctions against Belarus for Lukashenka's poor human rights record.

Senator Benjamin Cardin (Democrat, Maryland), one of the US legislature's leading human rights activists, headed up the American group during the one-day visit.

Representative Christopher Smith (Republican, New Jersey), an author of legislation promoting the development of democracy in Belarus and mandating sanctions if democratic activities are repressed by the Belarusian regime, was also a member of the US delegation.

In past years, during rock-bottom relations with the US government, Belarus blocked entrance visas for then-US Senators Hillary Clinton and John McCain.

The US among other measures banned Lukashenka and most of the Belarusian leadership from travelling to US

territory, and froze Belarusian company accounts in US banks.

The US embassy in Belarus has been currently working with a minimum staff of five diplomats - a reduction from more than 30 personnel because of expulsions ordered by Lukashenka.

"We are prepared to return to a dialogue," Lukashenka told journalists in Minsk. "We need to reject old fears and stereotypes and look at our relations anew."

The US should cancel Smith's Act for Belarusian Democracy mandating sanctions for allegedly undemocratic acts by the Belarusian government, he added.

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Politics and Society

US Congressmen Visit Belarus, Lukashenka Pardons Zeltser (Continuation)



Shortly after the visit, the U.S. lawyer Emanuel Zeltser, jailed for industrial espionage, was released.

"The president has signed a decree par-

doning Zeltser," a presidential spokesman Pavel Lyogky told journalist.

A Russian-born U.S. citizen, Zeltser was arrested on landing at Minsk airport in March last year and, in August, was sentenced to three years in prison on charges of industrial espionage and using forged documents.

Earlier in June, he went on hunger strike to protest his situation, a move his lawyers feared could worsen his already poor health.

30/06/2009

Source: Earthtimes, AFP, ODB

Belarus Marks Anniversary of Liberation from Nazi



On July 3, Belarus marked the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Minsk from Nazi forces with a Soviet-style military parade and a rousing speech by President Lukashenka.

Some 160 tanks, armoured vehicles and artillery pieces rolled through the centre of the Belarusian capital in a two-and-a-half hour parade that also included warplanes and soldiers in World War II-era uniforms.

The parade was meant to honour the liberation of Minsk on July 3, 1944, which Belarus now commemorates with the annual Independence Day holiday.

It is not that the celebrations happen with such fanfare every year. Last time Belarusians saw similar festivities with super jets and fireworks was 5 years ago. And nobody expected to have anything special this year. Among the Minsk authorities and military commanders, there were talks about giving up the idea of bringing any armoured vehicles to the event. However, in the end, Belarus has shown everything it could.

People in the streets wondered why the country should commit to such spending amid a very difficult economic situation. Add to the expenses the huge sums of money to be paid for restoring Minsk's roads, heavily damaged by the truck-type vehicles. Another peculiarity of the 2009 Belarus Independence Day is the unprecedented security measures - the echo of an explosion on the same day a year ago, which took place some 50 meters from President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. However, the large scale of the celebrations and the impressive

media campaign that preceded the event - all at a time when the country faces serious financial problems - shows that the Belarusian leadership did not regard it as something to skimp on.

Lukashenka, who has ruled Belarus for the past 15 years, and his six-year-old son Kolya, who accompanies his father to many official events, both attended the ceremonies dressed in military uniform.

In his speech Lukashenka stressed that Belarus had a tight bond with Russia despite recent tensions between the two allies.

"Belarus will not sell its friendship with Russia. We are brotherly people, we are one people, and our joint contribution to the liberation from fascist enslavement outweighs grievances against each other," he said.

04/07/2009

Source: ADP, Russia Today
Photo by nn.by

Two More People Arrested in Connection with the Mikalai Autuhovich Case

On July 7, the police arrested Ludmila Parenskaya, director of the Vaukavysk-based Nika Taxi 22222 company. Parenskaya is the director of the company where Mikalai Autukhovich used to work as a driver.

Autukhovich's lawyer, Aleh Vouchak, suggested the entrepreneurs from Vaukavysk could face new accusations, this time, of illegal entrepreneurship. Earlier, the police repeatedly summoned Parenskaya to testify against Mikalai Autukhovich and Uladzimir Asipenka. On the same day, Kanstantsin Ulanau, one of the co-founders of the Afghan war veterans association "Motherland Defenders", was detained by officers of the Chief Directorate for Organised Crime of the Interior Ministry of Belarus.

Continued on p. 4

Politics and Society

Two More People Arrested in Connection with the Mikalai Autuhovich Case (Continuation)



In 2005, Kanstantsin Ulanau joined Mikalai Autukhovich on hunger strike protesting against destruction of his organisation.

The police conducted search in his apartment and seized a sporting gun, though Mr. Ulanau had permission for it. Ulanau was told he was suspected of preparing blasts together with Mikalai Autukhovich.

The investigator has apparently confirmed this information to Ulanau's wife.

The former political prisoner Mikalai Autuhovich was arrested together with his colleagues Yury Liavonau and Uladzimir Asipenka on February 8, 2009.

First, Autuhovich and Liavonau were suspected of committing a crime under Article 218 (2) (i.e. intentionally destroying or causing serious damage to a property). This article carries a punishment of up to 5 years of limitation of freedom or 3 to 10 years of imprisonment.

Mr. Autuhovich layer explained that, in 2005, a house of a police officer (Katsuba) from Vaukavysk was set on fire. Two people have already been found guilty of committing this crime and imprisoned.

The aggrieved party is reported to have no claims, and Autuhovich and Liavonau's lawyers believe there are no legal grounds to restart the case. They think Autuhovich and Liavonau will either be released or charged with other "crimes".

However, the three entrepreneurs were not released under the recognisance not to leave, neither their case has been sent to the court.

Mikalai Autuhovich went on hunger strike to protest his demanding to

change his pre-trial detention or send the case to the court. Nonetheless, on July 7, the investigation on his case was prolonged for another 3 months.

By July 13, the arrested entrepreneur has been on hunger strike for 90 days already.

In July 2006, Mikalai Autuhovich and Yury Liavonau have already been sentenced to three and a half years of imprisonment and were internationally recognised as political prisoners.

In January 2008, as a result of the pressure from the international community the imprisonment sentence was replaced with corrective labour for both of them.

On July 14, it has become known that Mrs. Parenskaya was released.

07-14/07/2009

**Source: ERB, nn.by, BelaPAN, ODB
Photos by nn.by**

Kazakhstan, Belarus Discuss Prospects of Military Cooperation in Astana



The Kazakh Defence Minister Adilbek Dzhaksibekov met with representatives of Belarus Military Industrial Committee headed by chairman of Mikalai Azamatau at Kazakhstan's Defence Ministry on July 10.

The meeting focused on development prospects of Kazakh- Belarus military

cooperation, as well as elaboration of concrete proposals on military technological cooperation projects. This was Dzhaksibekov's one of first meetings at the helm of the Kazakh Defence Ministry.

Extending the service and modernization of existing weapons and military equipment could be an important area of cooperation with the possible involvement of both countries defence industries, Dzhaksybekov said at a meeting with his Belarusian counterparts.

The current military cooperation between Kazakhstan and Belarus is well developed. The dynamics of mutual

visits and a large number of treaties and agreements of different nature testify for it, reads the statement.

Training of military personnel and military-technical cooperation are prospective and relevant directions of bilateral military cooperation. The Kazakh Defence Ministry signed several contracts with the Belarus aircraft refurbishment plant to upgrade and overhaul of aircraft.

10/07/2009

Source: Trend News

Finance and Economics

Russia to Keep Cheap Energy Supplies to Belarus



Russia will continue to maintain cheap energy supplies to Belarus in the near future to support its

economy, said Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

"For the near future we intend to continue this, while bearing in mind the tendency toward switching to world price levels for hydrocarbons," Putin reportedly told leaders of political

groups in the State Duma, the lower house of parliament.

Belarus buys Russian oil and gas at the lowest prices in the Commonwealth of Independent States, said Putin.

Recently, Russia and Belarus have been locked in several economic and trade disputes.

On Friday, Russia's gas giant Gazprom demanded that Belarus pays 244 million U.S. dollars within July for the gas supplied since the start of this year.

Gazprom chief Alexei Miller said the company may "take legal actions or

even reduce supplies," the Interfax news agency reported.

The debt is due to differences between contract and average prices, said the RIA Novosti news agency.

Earlier, Russia's short-lived controversial ban on Belarusian dairy products triggered Minsk's boycott of a summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organization that took place in Moscow on June 14.

28/06/2009

Source: Xinhua

S&P Affirms Belarus Ratings, Outlook Negative

Standard & Poor's Ratings Services has affirmed its 'B+/B' foreign currency and 'BB/B' local currency long-term and short-term sovereign credit ratings on the Republic of Belarus.

"The ratings are constrained by the economy's structural rigidities, including its reliance upon Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) trading partners," said Standard & Poor's credit analyst Kai Stukenbrock. "They are also constrained by deteriorating external liquidity, and by Belarus' limited access to external financing. The International Monetary Fund standby-agreement (IMF SBA), concluded in January 2009, has helped to relieve what would otherwise be intense pressure on international reserves." The ratings on Belarus are underpinned by the country's moderate external debt position and the government's low debt burden.

Belarus' external position has been damaged by a sharp deterioration in its terms of trade and by reduced demand from key importers. As a result, the 12-month rolling current account deficit



widened to 13% of GDP as of March 2009, compared with 8% as of year-end 2008. The \$3.5 billion IMF SBA, complemented by further lending from official sources, has mitigated the impact of the otherwise reduced availability of external funding.

Notwithstanding an estimated \$1.9 billion of official funding inflows and privatization receipts in the first five months of 2009, currency reserves remain unchanged from year-end 2008, at a low \$2.6 billion (equal to one month cover of current account payments). The IMF's recent decision to increase its program by \$1 billion should help instill confidence.

The deterioration in the international economic environment is taking a great toll on Belarus' export-oriented economy. S&P expects the economy to shrink by 5% this year, after buoyant growth of 10% in 2008. Low net general government debt is expected to rise to 15% of GDP from 9% in 2008, due largely to the weaker currency. The negative outlook reflects Belarus' low levels of external liquidity and our

view that the country faces challenges to its centralized economic model. The proposed increase in the size of the IMF SBA reflects these challenges, while failure to agree with Russia on payment of the remaining promised \$500 million tranche of its stabilization loan makes clear the mounting difficulties Belarus faces in securing further external funding. Therefore, in our opinion potentially painful adjustment measures are unavoidable in order to narrow the current account deficit and maintain access to funding over the medium term.

"The rating could stabilize at the current level if Belarus bolstered its foreign reserves, while at the same time undertook measures to strengthen external competitiveness and reduce the import- and energy-dependency of the Belarusian economy," said Stukenbrock. "Conversely, a failure to reduce the large current account deficit, further deteriorations in external liquidity and reserves assets--potentially undermining the exchange rate regime--could lead us to lower the ratings.

01/07/2009

Source: Kyivpost

Finance and Economics

Belarus Diversifies Exports of Food Products

Belarus strives to diversify exports of food products, but still failed to diminish dependence on Russian market, declared Tamara Usachova, the deputy head of the Main department of foreign economic activity of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Belarus. In 2008, food producing enterprises of the Ministry exported own products to 40 countries of the world. In the first quarter of 2009, the enterprises exported commodities to 29 countries, as opposed to 25 during January-March of 2008.



Belarus shows the highest dynamics

of food products supplies to the countries of the CIS (except of Russia). In 2008, food producing enterprises of the Ministry supplied nearly 63.9% of exports to the countries at the sum of 72.2 million USD.

During January-March of 2009, the export volumes increased by 3.7 times, compared to the same period of the last year, to the level of 32.6 million USD.

At the same time, Belarus still failed to reduce dependence on the main foreign market - Russian market - despite the general widening of the geography of export supplies, according to experts. In 2008, food producing enterprises of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food supplied products to Russia at the sum of 1.4 bln USD, or 88.9% from the general

export volumes on foreign markets, up 5.2% compared to the previous year. During the first quarter of 2009, the share of the Russian Federation in the general export volumes of the organizations of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food totalled 86.8% (305.1 mln USD), down 6.8% compared to January-March of 2008. According to experts, Belarusian food producers should concentrate on the task of diversification of export supplies.

Belarus has low percentage of plant growing products exports, especially products with high processing level, added to the expert.

01/07/2009

Source: agrimarket.info

Belarus' Atlant to Build US\$60-70m Refrigerator Plant in Kazakhstan



Belarus' ZAO Atlant and Kazakhstan's OAO National

Company SPK Saryarka plans to start building a US\$60-70 million refrigerator plant in Astana in 2010, Prime-Tass reported.

Saryarka said in a statement on Monday the plant will cover 16 hectares

in Astana's industrial park. On 10 June, ZAO Atlant and SPK Saryarka signed the agreement to build the plant in Astana. The document was signed by SPK Saryarka Chairman of the Board Berik Kmaliev and ZAO Atlant General Director Viktor Shumila.

The joint venture will cover around 50% of the Kazakh refrigerator market and export its products to Russia, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Some 800,000 refrigerators were sold in Kazakhstan in 2007, 500,000 units in

2008 and 400,000 units in the first half of 2009.

ZAO Atlant sells around 20,000 refrigerators in Kazakhstan annually. As earlier reported, the Belarus firm was also considering launching of the plant in Uzbekistan.

07/07/2009

Source: Turkish Weekly

Belarusbank May Buy Commerzbank's Russian Unit

Belarusbank is considering purchasing the Russian unit of Germany's Commerzbank, the head of Belarus's largest bank, Nadeya Yarmakova, said.



will specialise in servicing Belarusian export operations. "Commerzbank has unofficially proposed we buy its subsidiary in Moscow," Yarmakova

told reporters.

Commerzbank declined to comment.

Belarusbank expects the price will not exceed \$10 million for the unit, which

Commerzbank also owns nearly 15 percent of Russia's PromSvyazBank, ranked among the top 30 Russian banks in terms of assets.

07/07/2009

Source: Reuters

Finance and Economics

Homelglass Wins Trade Finance's Deal of the Year Award



A financing project of the Gomel-based glassware manu-

facturer Homelglass has won Deal of the Year award of the Trade Finance Magazine, Belagraprambank representatives informed BelTA.

The €96.6 million project provides for starting up the production of polished glass sheets by Homelglass. The deal was crosslinked via Belagraprambank as part of a 98.9 million individual credit agreement signed by Belagraprambank, AKA

Ausfuhrkredit-Gesellschaft mbH and BHF-Bank Aktiengesellschaft on conditions stipulated by the national export credit insurance agency Euler Hermes (Germany).

The deal is the largest one on the Belarusian market in the area of attracting long-term financing using coverage of insurance agencies. The insurance coverage decision was made by Euler Hermes outside of Belarus' country limit. The sum of the deal itself essentially exceeds the country limit.

Both financing conditions (the loan repayment term is set at ten years) and the structure of the deal, which provides for

escrow payments, are unique. It is important that the financing is attracted without giving Belarusian government guarantees to the foreign bank.

The Trade Finance Magazine (Euromoney Group) awards companies and credit and financial institutions on an annual basis for the development and utilisation of trade financing innovative structures in several nominations.

08/07/2009

Source: Glass on Web

Belarus Preparing Draft Decree to Unify Investment Regulations

The Government is working on a draft decree to grant equal rights to investors coming to Belarus, First Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Syamashka told an annual meeting of the Confederation of Manufacturers and Entrepreneurs on 8 July. "We are developing a draft decree that envisages fundamental and unified rules regulating investment activity in Belarus," said Syamashka. He admitted that sometimes some investors are given advantages over others. It pertains to duty-free imports of equipment and parts, as well

as allocation of land plots. "We will systemize the regulations and introduce unified rules," said First Deputy Prime Minister.

In his words, the abovementioned draft decree will become another step to liberalize the economy and improve the investment climate in Belarus.

Minsk Tractor Works has started working on a new investment project estimated at .2 billion.

MTZ is now completing a technical upgrade project worth 0 million. Due to this project the company expanded its lineup of tractors up to 70 models. The

enterprise manufactures tractors having a capacity of 320 horse power; there are samples of 420 horse power machines and track-type tractors. According to Syamashka, such a strong company should emerge even stronger after the crisis is over.

He also informed about a project to produce MAZ buses. The production facilities might be located near Minsk.

09/07/2009

Source: ISRIA

Belarus Economy Grew 0.3 pct in H1 '09

The Belarusian economy grew 0.3 percent in the first half of this year against the growth of 10.4 percent in the same period last year, as exports tumbled and industrial production slowed..

Belarus has been hit by the global economic and financial crisis, but the tiny growth registered in the first six months is far better than an expected fall of 10 percent in Russia. Ukraine's GDP fell 20 percent in the first quarter. Belstat, the state statistical office, said industrial output slowed to 3.6 percent in the first half against growth of 13 percent in the same period a year ago.

The government expects economic growth by the end of the year to reach 5 percent, though analysts say that is an optimistic forecast. The economy has grown on average 10 percent in recent years.

Separate data issued by Belstat showed inflation rose to 0.4 percent in June month-on-month, against 0.3 percent in May.

Prices rose 7.3 percent in the first six months of the year, the same as a year ago.

Inflation grew 13.3 percent last year against 12.1 percent in 2007. The government expects it to slow to 9-11 percent this year.

13/07/2009

Source: Reuters

Culture

Kupalle



Children in Belarusian traditional clothes

Photo by Yulia Darashkevich

In the very centre of Minsk there is a place where the River Svislach makes a wide curve between the October and Victory squares. This meander nests an oasis of old moss-covered maples and trembling aspens. This park is named after a famous Belarusian poet and writer Yanka Kupala. It hosts the poet's museum, his statue, and a fountain that features two nude, yet innocent-looking, bronze-cast girls throwing garlands into the water. Unlike the Gorky Park, which is right across the main avenue and is always full of young families with clouds of candy floss in their hands, the Kupala Park is a quite place, suitable for reflection and tranquillity.

The fountain is especially tempting on a hot summer day. It is also the key to the park's name. Yanka Kupala is the poet's pseudonym. His real name was Ivan Daminikavich Lutsevich. Kupala (or Kupalle) is an old folk festival celebrating the Summer solstice. Despite the Soviet authorities' attempts to eradicate folk traditions, even today most Belarusians are at least able to sing the tune of "Kupalinka" song and

recall such elements of Kupalle as jumping over fire and putting garlands into rivers.

As often happens in Belarus, the celebration of "Yan Kupala" combines both Christian and pagan traditions. This is even reflected in the holiday's name. When Christianity came to Belarusian lands, the solstice celebration (Kupalle) was timed to the birthday of John the Baptist

(Yan or Ivan as he is called here). Eventually, the two holidays fused into a single Yan Kupala celebration – praising the man who "bathed", or baptised Jesus Christ (the root of the word "Kupalle" means "bathing"). No wonder the ideal Kupalle would begin with a visit to a traditional wooden sauna. People believed it would guarantee good health for the whole next year. If there were no sauna available, people would go to a spring and wash their faces with cold water. After that they would throw a small coin into a spring in order to "bail themselves out" of poor health.

During Kupalle one had to be especially careful not to give away, lend or sell anything. It was especially forbidden to take fire or bread out of the house – this could bring poverty to the family.

Belarusians believed that on a night of Kupalle witches and evil wizards celebrated their "shabash" on a Bald-Headed Mountain (a mountain that had no forest on its top). This night served as a planning meeting for the forces of darkness. They decided which troubles they would bring people in villages during the next

year. That is why every family took special precautions in order to protect itself and its possessions on this night. A stinging nettle was laid at the house's threshold (so that witches would burn their feet), a young aspen tree was put up at the entrance to a cattleshed, and cows' horns were decorated with the garlands of herbs and birch-tree branches.

The threat of being enchanted required special vigilance on this night. The best option was not to sleep at all. Young people did so with pleasure. It gave them excuse to stay awake until morning at a fire near the river. The Kupalle fire was a very important element of the celebration. Ideally, it would be made using a flint stone or by rubbing two wooden sticks together. It was also very important to put "Piarun's Arrow" into the fire – a branch of an oak-tree that was hit by lightning. "Piarun" was Belarusian Zeus, the pagan god of thunder.

When the Kupalle fire was big enough, people sang songs and jumped across the flames. It was supposed to "purify" people of all evil for the whole year. One could also make a wish while jumping over the fire.

Another element of the celebration was burning a straw doll and rafting it down the river. A very picturesque moment was when young men put a fire to the oil-covered wooden wheels and let them roll down the hill into water.

Girls made garlands and tried to tell their fortunes by putting them into water. If the garland swam a long distance, the girl's future husband would come from far away; if the garland stuck to the riverbank, the husband would be a local guy; the sinking garland was a bad omen.

Culture

Kupalle



When Kupalle was over, the celebration of Yan Kupala, John the Baptist began with a prayer and a bath in a nearby lake or river.

In the multi-confessional Belarus the difference of church

fun. However, for the sake of justice one should admit that these jokes almost never turn nasty.

In 1958 the Soviet Belarusian newspaper "LiM" published a letter written by the members of the Academy of Sciences. They suggested that Kupalle should be updated to "modern conditions" by introducing such elements as sport games, carnivals, and torch marches. "By com-

When the night grew dark, the most daring participants of the fest went into the wood in order to search for a magic "Paparats-kvetka" (fern flower). The one who found this beautiful flower gleaming in the dark would become a visionary, able to understand the language of animals and birds, and would also be able to see treasures buried under ground. By all counts, Paparats-kvetka was the flower of happiness. The irony of the legend is that the fern does not produce flowers. However, this never prevented young people from looking for Paparats-kvetka. Or, perhaps, they were simply looking for a romance? It was not unusual for a young man who went to look for the flower to meet that girl from a nearby village he liked so much. Often, the search continued until morning... Perhaps, this is the reason why Belarusians say that storks bring children to parents. After all, storks return home from south around March, some nine months after Kupalle...

Watching the sun rise was also a very special part of the celebration. If one has been awake the whole night and watched the sun without blinking, he would be able to see it "playing", dancing in the morning air.

calendars resulted into Kupalle being celebrated two times – in the night of June 23 and 24 (according to the modern Gregorian calendar) and in the night of July 6 and 7, according to the Julian calendar, used by the Orthodox church.

One could think that the holiday is only alive at folklore departments of the University of Culture, but Kupalle is still celebrated in Belarusian villages. However, there are some deviations from the tradition. For example, there are much less songs being sung and much more beer and vodka being consumed. The Kupalle fire remains an absolute must, although ever more often it is made of old tires. Girls still like to make garlands, but protecting the house from evil forces by symbolic items is not as effective as it used to be. When the morning comes, masters of village houses often see that their gates have been switched with their neighbour's. The least lucky ones find their street benches gone, their horse carts hoisted on the rooftops of their houses, and their wooden garden toilets standing on a crossroads in the village centre. There are all reasons to believe that this is not the result of a witches' "shabash", but of the local village youth looking for

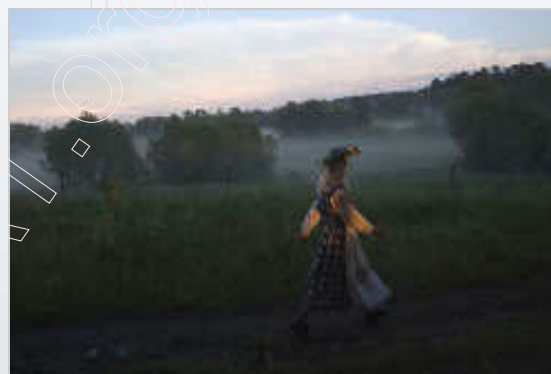


Photo by Andrei Liankevich

Kupalle in the Belarusian town of Rakau

binning the old and new forms of the Kupalle celebration, it would receive the shape of a merry holiday, celebrating socialist labour and the fight for peace". These efforts were never successful. However, this is not ideology, but urbanisation and mass culture, which threaten the tradition of Kupalle. Indeed, with more and more Belarusians moving into big cities, there is simply no place for them to make the traditional fire. And surely you are not allowed to do that in Yanka Kupala park.

07/07/2009

By Ales Kudrytski

Photos by nn.by

More photos can be found on our website at "Cultural review" section.