

# Belarus Headlines

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*Office for a Democratic  
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## **Aliaksandr Lukashenka Talks to Grybauskaite in Vilnius. Belarusian Police Break up Opposition Demonstration in Minsk**



*Aliaksandr Lukashenka with Daila Grybauskaite*

Belarusian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka said Wednesday (September 16) he was not about to change his authoritarian ways just to gain favour with Europe, stressing that his country would remain a strategic ally of Russia.

"Europeans must understand they can't make us do something that we do not want," he told an economic forum in Lithuanian capital. "We know what are the best interests of our nation. We are not going to tear down the constitutional order."

Lukashenka made a rare visit to neighbouring Lithuania the first in 12 years and the second trip to a European Union and NATO member since an EU travel ban on top Belarusian officials had been lifted earlier this year.

EU officials have hinted that Belarus needs to implement more democratic and political reforms by November if it wants closer ties and aid from the 27-nation bloc.

Lukashenka held talks with President Dalia Grybauskaite and other senior government officials as both countries seek ways to improve bilateral relations, including trade. Though wary of closer ties with the Lukashenka regime, foreign policy experts hope the Baltic state can gain economic benefits - such as handling transit of Belarusian exports - and encourage reforms of Belarus' authoritarian system.

"This visit provides us a chance to find new ways of solving old problems," Laurynas Jonavicius, economic adviser to Lithuania's President, said. "We need progress after 10 years of mutual silence."

Lukashenka's visit also took place during a souring of relations with Russia, leading some to speculate that the Belarusian dictator is trying to reach out to the West. But Lukashenka told the forum his country had "old and close ties with Russia. Why should we sacrifice it? Who would benefit from it?" Many Lithuanians were critical of the decision to invite Lukashenka. A dozen protesters jeered him near the presidential palace by waving signs and calling for an end to political repression in Belarus.

Lithuania and Belarus were expected to sign an agreement that would allow residents near the border to travel to the other country without a visa. However the sides failed to do it.

Belarusian officials claim that the cost of visas to the EU are too expensive and that Brussels should reduce them, a complaint that Lukashenka echoed during his visit.

Meanwhile, the police violently broke up an unauthorized protest in the Belarusian capital and arrested more than 30 opposition demonstrators.

The protesters had gathered on a central Minsk square and held portraits of two opposition politicians and a TV journalist who went missing a decade ago.

Riot police quickly quashed the protest, beating people with truncheons and throwing them to the ground before dragging them to waiting buses. Police also blocked journalists from taking photographs and violently grabbed their cameras. Police officials refused to comment on the action.

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**We on the Web**

[www.democraticbelarus.eu](http://www.democraticbelarus.eu)

## EU and Belarus

### Aliaksandr Lukashenka Talks to Grybauskaite in Vilnius. Belarusian Police Break up Opposition Demonstration in Minsk (continuation)



The office of the EU presidency, currently held by Sweden, said Thursday that it was concerned about the crackdown by Belarusian authorities on peaceful demonstrations in Minsk.

It urges authorities to stop using force on demonstrators and ensure that independent journalists can work without interference.

16-17/09/2009

Source: The Associated Press

### Belarus Tightens Security of Border with EU due to Georgian Illegal Migrants

The Belarusian State Border Committee will tighten the security of the Belarus-EU borders because of the massive illegal migration attempts by Georgian citizens, the Border Committee's acting spokesman Ihar Shchastinin told Interfax.

"We are tightening security. There are no additional border forces but we have

a plan of cooperation with the police and other law enforcers," he said. Residents of border areas and local authorities have been notified, Shchastinin said, adding, "Volunteer units have been formed [to help the police]."

More than 60 Georgian illegal migrants were seized in Belarusian forests adjoining

the border in August, and the number continued to mount. Two Georgians were seized on September 2 and five on September 3, he said.

03/09/2009

Source: Interfax

### Slovak Foreign Minister Lajcak Visits Belarus

On September 6-7, Slovak Foreign Affairs Minister Miroslav Lajcak visited Belarus to discuss the state of reforms in Belarus and the role of Slovakia in determining the EU's stance towards Minsk.

Minister Lajcak criticised reforms enacted so far by Belarus' authoritarian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka as "cosmetic". Lajcak made the remarks after meetings with leaders of the Belarusian opposition. A thawing of relations between Lukashenka and the European Union, initiated by Brussels in May in hopes of developing democracy in Belarus was not showing sufficient results, he said.

"The dialogue (between Lukashenka and the EU) right now is taking place on Lukashenka's terms," suggested Lajcak adding that he "supports the start of irreversible reforms in Belarus."

During his visit, the Slovak Foreign Minister also met with President Luka-

shenka and Belarusian Foreign Minister Syarhei Martynau.

Top issues brought up by Brussels in discussions with the Belarusian officials were migration, human trafficking, and economic cooperation, according to a BELPAN news agency report. Lukashenka reportedly said Belarus was open to foreign investment and would create "the very best conditions" for Slovak businesses willing to develop operations in the former Soviet republic. The Belarusian leader noted that his country was "not going to impose any conditions (on foreign business) ... but create an ideal climate".

Lajcak, for his part, suggested that Belarusian industries that are most likely to benefit from Slovak investment include machine building, transportation, agriculture, energy and tourism.



*Miroslav Lajcak*

The Slovak delegation included a group of 20 entrepreneurs, with Lajcak due to open a Slovak-Belarus trade forum aimed at boosting economic cooperation between the two countries.

07/09/2009

Source: Earthtimes, TASR, ODB

## Politics and Society

### Minsk Sees No Reason for OSCE's Presence in Belarus



The Belarusian side has to give a serious thought to the prospects for the further operation of the OSCE Office in

Minsk, including the appointment of a new head of the Office, because there are no objective reasons for the OSCE's presence in Belarus, head of the Presidential Administration Uladzimir Makey told Hans Jochen Schmidt, the outgoing head

of the Office, on Wednesday, 16 September 2009.

"Belarus hopes that this approach would be viewed adequately and met with understanding by its key European partners, with whom Belarus is ready to continue a trusted and open dialogue on all important issues," Belarusian TV Channel One quoted Mr. Makey as saying at the meeting.

"The Belarusian side has a clear understanding of the point and causes of the

criticism directed against the head of the Office by certain OSCE member countries and representatives of the radical opposition and regards them as unacceptable, unfounded and aimed at putting pressure on the nature of the Office's activities in general and undermine the trust that the Belarusian authorities have in it," Mr. Makey said, according to Belarusian Television.

03/09/2009

Source: BelaPAN

### Belarusian Popular Front Elects New Chairman

Alyaksey Yanukevich, 33, was elected new chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) at a convention that the opposition party held in Minsk on September 5.

Mr. Yanukevich received 174 out of 318 votes cast. His rival, Lyavon Barshchewski who chaired the BPF since December 2007, got 144 votes.

For the last 5 years Mr. Yanukevich served as deputy chairman of the party. Speaking before the vote, he said: "I am a real, not technical candidate for the post of the BPF chair and I will not restrict my functions to those of a technical leader. I am sure that the party can become a real force that will be able to struggle for power and come to power. We should not trail behind various groups where the BPF took only a back seat."

Mr. Yanukevich criticised the current leadership for its disapproval of BPF members' involvement in activities that are carried out by other opposition groups. "It is the time to stop separating ourselves from our members and turning our friends into foes," he stressed.

Mr. Barshchewski noted that "95 percent of work to be done by a new chair of the party should focus on promoting its presidential candidate."

When the outcome of the vote was announced, Mr. Barshchewski called on the party to stay united, urging his supporters to refrain from ill-considered moves and stick to the party's programme. "I will not withdraw my application for nomination as the BPF's presidential candidate," stressed Mr. Barshchewski. "I do realise I should lean on various groups and a majority of BPF members. If there is the majority, I am ready to become the BPF's presidential candidate."

It is worth noting that earlier Mr. Barshchewski said he would not stand for re-election but would concentrate on preparations for the forthcoming presidential election instead.

One more deputy chair of the BPF, Viktor Ivashkevich, submitted his bid to run in the party chairmanship election, but he withdrew his candidature at the beginning of the convention in favour of Mr. Barshchewski.



Alyaksey Yanukevich was born in Minsk on 30 June 1976. He graduated from the Belarusian State Economic University with a degree in International Economics and Management in 1997. He joined the party in 1996 and was elected to its board in 1999. Mr. Yanukevich ran in the 2003 and 2007 local elections and the 2004 and 2008 parliamentary elections. During the 2006 presidential campaign, he was a member of opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich's team.

07/09/2009

Source: naviny.by, nn.by, ODB  
Photo by nn.by



## Politics and Society

### Venezuela Eyes Belarusian Weapons Systems



Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez visited Belarus as part of his 11-day world tour, which also included Libya, Algeria, Syria, Iran, Spain and Russia.

President Chavez is in talks with Belarus on developing military cooperation leading to joint projects and Belarus's help with modernizing Venezuela's anti-aircraft defence systems.

The official Venezuelan ABN news agency said Chavez also visited Belarusian manufacturers of heavy vehicles deployed in the exploration and production sectors of Venezuela's oil industry. Chavez began building bridges to Belarus in 2006 after the two sides signed agreements identifying areas of mutual interest. Belarus has been looking to diversify its fuel supplies and reduce near total dependence on Russia. It is also anxious to increase its country-to-

country exports of weapons to add to inventories sold on the "open market" by official or unofficial groups.

U.S. intelligence reports have cited evidence that some Belarusian arms deliveries may have been destined for groups blacklisted for suspect activities.

As a landlocked country sharing borders with Russia, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine, Belarus depends on manufacturing as its chief mainstay after agriculture. Belarus faced an industrial collapse after the fall of the Soviet Union because it depended on technology and heavy industry manufacturing for the bulk of its revenue. In subsequent years, according to security sources, hundreds of millions of dollars of Belarusian weapons and equipment changed hands in suspect deals.

A comprehensive economic and military cooperation agreement between Belarus and Venezuela will give the Belarusian economy a much-needed inroad into the global defence industry.

Venezuela has embarked on a major military renewal programme and is interested in purchasing an anti-aircraft defence system suitable to its needs. The Ministry of Defence is also

looking to either upgrade or replace a Belgian-made portable missile system already deployed in the Venezuelan armed forces.

However, according to industry sources, some of the equipment available in Belarus is similar to items on the Russian inventory, which may see the two allies competing for the Venezuelan market.

The Venezuela-Belarus accord is wide-ranging and provides for "production, updating, servicing, repair, purchase and sale of supplies and techniques for aviation, anti-aircraft equipment and land troops." The two countries have also discussed joint design and manufacture of new military and technological equipment and for transfer of technology.

Industry sources said Belarus appeared interested in offering technology transfer, which could entail dispatch of its experts to Venezuela over a long term, as that prospect offered new openings for business opportunities in South America's defence industry market.

09/09/2009

Source: UPI, RIA Novosti, ODB

### Russia Moves Its Military to Belarus



Russia is moving troops and military equipment to Belarus as part of a large-scale

joint military exercise. More than 12,000 military men and hundreds of military pieces are participating.

The drills, called "Zapad 2009" - Russian for "West 2009" - began a week ago and involve 5,000 servicemen from Russia and more than 7,000 from Belarus. Over 220 tanks, hundreds of armoured

fighting vehicles and aircraft are taking part in the drills.

"These will be significant drills; for a long time we haven't been conducting any of this kind," said the head of the Russian military's Joint Staff, General Nikolay Makarov. "We are planning to work on not only general control systems, but also on systems that control military units that are being created under Russia's military forces' reform."

The exercise will run through 29 September.

Earlier, on September 9, the police in

the capital of Belarus have broken up a rally of opposition activists protesting joint military manoeuvres with Russia.

Several dozen demonstrators rallied to oppose the exercise, which they saw as part of Russian plans to annex Belarus.

Police agents dispersed the rally, tearing placards saying "Russian army go home!" and beating several demonstrators before bussing them away. About 20 protesters were detained.

09-16/09/2009

Source: The Associated Press, Russia Today

## Finance and Economics

### Belarus Cuts 2009 GDP Growth Forecast to 1-2% while It Falls by 0.5% in First Eight Months



Belarus sharply lowered its 2009 Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

growth forecast, projecting an increase of between 1 and 2 percent, down from the previous 2 to 5 percent growth forecast.

In recent years, the country's economy has grown between 7.5 and 10 percent.

But Belarus - like many of the post-Soviet republics with economies powered mainly by exports - has been battered badly by deteriorating demand for goods in Russia and Europe, its chief exports markets. In the first seven months of the year,

the economy grew by 0.4 percent.

The government's new forecast came on the last day of the visit of the International Monetary Fund mission, which has returned to Minsk to discuss the disbursement of a third tranche of a promised \$3.5 billion standby loan.

The IMF set a series of conditions for Belarus to follow to receive the loan in full, limiting, for example, the central bank's spending of its reserves. The Fund has also recommended banking privatisation as a way to generate much needed cash for the government.

The economy, which is still largely in government hands, has nonetheless fared better than many other ex-Soviet states during the recent crisis. It has decisively outperformed Russia, which saw its economy shrink by 10.1 percent in the first half of the year.

But while Russia has a massive oil windfall revenue savings it can draw

from, as well as the world's third largest currency reserves, the resources of Belarus are limited. Its central bank's reserves, at \$3.6 billion as of Aug. 1, are less than a hundredth of Russia's stash, and they are shrinking.

On September 14, the National Statistics Committee reported that Belarus' Gross Domestic Product decreased by 0.5 percent year-on-year from January through August, which is the first fall in the country's GDP since 1995.

According to the National Statistics Committee, industrial output shrank by 4.6 percent, while agricultural production rose by 3.3 percent in the first eight months

02-14/09/2009

Source: Reuters, BelaPAN

### Atomstroyexport, Belarus Sign Agreement for Feasibility Study of NPP Project

Atomstroyexport and Belnippenergoatom have signed an agreement for conducting a feasibility study of the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) project. The agreement is part of the plan of action 2009 to build a nuclear power plant in the Republic of Belarus. Thus, the parties have taken one more step towards the construction of the first Belarusian NPP.



Presently, Russia and Belarus are negotiating a draft agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Belarus for joint construction of a nuclear power plant in the territory of Belarus. The

negotiations are near completion. The agreement is supposed to be signed in October 2009. The parties are also draft-

ing the contract to be signed in December 2009.

Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant will have two 1,200MW reactors based on St.Petersburg Atomenergoproekt's NPP-2006 project. The 1st unit is supposed to be launched in 2016, the 2nd one in 2018. The plant will be situated in As-travets, Hrodna region.

03/09/2009

Source: Energy Business Review

### Belarus Owes \$200 Million to Gazprom



Alexei Miller

Gazprom Chief Executive Officer Alexei Miller said Belarus owes about \$200 million

for supplies this year, Interfax reported.

Gazprom received some payment in August for supplies and hopes the country will pay off the debt this year, Miller said at a meeting with President

Dmitry Medvedev, according to Interfax.

07/09/2009

Source: Bloomberg

## Finance and Economics

### Oil Majors Share Belarus

TNK-BP and Gazprom neft have split Slavneft commodity streams. TNK-BP and Gazprom neft, parity partners in Slavneft, are about to complete the split of Slavneft commodity streams, a project which lasted for almost seven years. The last decision in this area was to change the scheme used to deliver crude to Belarus. Now Slavneft shareholders will switch to direct crude exports which will enable them to grow their own cash flows. As a source at TNK-BP commented yesterday, the company plans to change the scheme used to deliver crude to Belarus Mazyr Refinery where Slavneft is a major shareholder (Gazprom neft and TNK-BP each hold 49% in the company).

Gazprom neft has similar intentions. "Gazprom neft plans to revise the contractual arrangements for Belarus crude deliveries," a company source said. Until this time, both companies delivered crude to Belarus Mazyr Refinery (in which Slavneft holds 42.5%) via a Slavneft's subsidiary, without maintaining direct presence on the market. This shift to new arrangements evidences that Gazprom neft and TNK-BP have completed the split of commodity streams in this country, a source at TNK-BP comments.

Vadim Yakovlev, Gazprom neft's Deputy Management Board Chairman, announced Wednesday that Slavneft owners have also completed the split of the company's retail network in Belarus

which comprises 75 retail sites and 12 oil depots. "Whereas previously Slavneft shareholders directed their marketing activities in Belarus via the company, they now do it themselves," the top manager said, "We have split the retail sites, oil depots and personnel in approximately equal halves." New owners will take the assets under their control by mid-October. Until present, Slavneft refined the crude at the Mazyr Refinery in Belarus on processing terms, then marketing the oil products via retail sites. Now Slavneft shareholders will do the processing themselves.

13/09/2009

Source: Kommersant

### Belarus to Impose Unofficial Ban on Russian Dairy Imports

The Russian dairy importers for the past three weeks can not supply their milk and dairy products to the Belarusian market due to an unofficial ban imposed by the Belarusian government, Russian media reports.

It is clear that, despite the absence of customs borders, dairy products can be supplied to Belarus only with the permission of the Ministry of Agricultural of the country. According to sources close to the Ministry, Belarus still receives applications for Russian imports but without any further action. All the applications are simply put aside by the Belarusian authorities without any official explanation. Officials also did not

report how long such practice will take place.

In fact, there is no official ban, but the importers can not deliver milk and dairy products and there is no any explanation from the Belarusian side. Moreover, the problem probably is not related to the poor quality of the Russian products.

Currently, none of the Russian importers does not link such situation with the recent "milk war" between the countries and did not consider it as a revenge of Minsk. However, they continue to bear huge losses asking the governments for immediate negotiations.

Recently Russia has already initiated a "milk war" with Belarus (later continued

with Lithuania), which resulted in complete halt of the Belarusian dairy exports to Russia. The main reason of this was that the Belarusian producers and suppliers were not extended a licensing documentation in accordance with the Russian technical requirements for milk and dairy products, but, according to officials, the reasons were political.

More than 1,2 thousand of dairy items were banned at that time. As a result of negotiations, the parties agreed that Belarusian producers and suppliers would gradually adjust the documentation for the products supplied to Russia.

15/09/2009

Source: Food.Biz.Daily

### World Bank Ready to Consider Extra 400 Million for Belarus

The World Bank is ready to look at increasing its financial support to Belarus by an additional \$400 million in the next two years, the bank's senior official in the region said on Wednesday, September 16, 2009.

The bank might offer the ex-Soviet republic two more development loans worth \$200 million each, said Martin Raiser, World Bank country director for Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova.

This would be an extension of the \$200 million development credit the bank is mulling dispensing to Belarus this year.

16/09/2009

Source: Reuters



## Culture

### Barys Zaborau: The Long Return



*Barys Zaborau*

If rookie art-ignorant burglars attempted to rob the National Art Museum in Minsk, they would hardly be tempted by this painting. For them, “Humno” (‘Barn’) by Barys Zaborau would be no more eye-catching than a piece of old faded wall-paper. However, to the robbers’ utter surprise, the work turns out to be one of the most valuable recent acquisitions of the main Belarusian art museum.

Paintings by Barys Zaborau can be found in galleries and museums around the world. However, it took Belarus, Zaborau’s homeland, almost 30 years to recognise his talent. In February 2009 “Humno” received its place in the main exposition of the National Art Museum. “The ceremony was organized well and rather pompously”, says Barys Zaborau half-jokingly. “30 years ago I was showed the country’s door with almost the same degree of pomposity”, adds the artist.

Writing about paintings is a miserable task. It is even more difficult with Zaborau’s works. Studying them is not only a visual, but also sensual experience. The colours of “Humno” are hushed and modest. In fact, glancing at this rectangular piece of canvas for the first time you

will barely recognise any specific object at all. All you see is a shape of an old wooden gate in the centre, drowned in the mist of an early summer morning. But don’t walk away shrugging your shoulders, and don’t try to press your nose against the painting. Instead, make a couple of steps back. There, you will find a small soft bench. Sit down and wait until your eyes get adjusted to the colour palette.

You will soon discover that studying paintings by Zaborau is like watching photos being developed in a photographer’s dark room. Slowly, ever more details begin to fade in. The space of the painting becomes deeper and more visible. After a couple of quiet seconds you begin to discern a small lawn in front of the gate. It is grown with something like old grass – or bushes – or faded flowers. There is a dark shape of something that could be an old rusty bucket, or a moss-covered stone. And these two pointed lines sticking out of the grass: are they the horns of a goat which lost its way in the abandoned yard? Gradually, the space of the picture stretches itself, expands in all directions. You begin to make out a grove of trees nearby, and a darker stripe of woods on the horizon. Far away there is a bright spot: it must be the mirroring surface of a lake or river with vague shapes of a town or village on its bank. And even further, above all of it, you see the clouds which let sunrays fall down on the vast landscape. The light travels across gently sloped, wood-covered hills. The details become so numerous that the wooden gate, which previously appeared as a lonesome wrack, is now holding the whole universe like the buckle of a belt. But what is hidden behind the gate, *inside* the barn? Maybe, there is a wholly different world, which not even the painter himself is able to see?

Parallels between Zaborau’s paintings and photos are not groundless. In fact, it was an old photo album which inspired the artist to adopt this painting style. It happened shortly after Zaborau emigrated from Minsk to Paris. But what made one of the most prominent book illustrators of Soviet Belarus leave the

country? And why did he have to wait twenty-eight long years to see his painting exhibited in his native city? After all, there had been personal exhibitions of Zaborau in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, in the Manezh Gallery in St. Petersburg, as well as numerous galleries around the world, from Paris to Tokyo. Why had Zaborau, whose works can be found in the collections of the Albertina Museum in Vienna, the Pushkin Museum in Moscow and the Uffizi Gallery of Florence, and who created scenery and costumes for the famous Comédie-Française theatre in Paris, been ignored in Belarus for so long?

Barys Zaborau was born in 1935 in Minsk. In the 1950s-60s he studied art in Minsk and, after that, at the renowned Repin Institute in Leningrad and the Surikov Institute in Moscow. However, he did not remain in Russia, but returned to Belarus.

During the Soviet time anyone who wanted to pursue a career of an artist seriously had to join the state union of artists. Otherwise, you would neither get a studio, nor participate in exhibitions, nor be able to live from your work. Most of the commissions for artists were distributed centrally, according to the ideological plan. In his dreams, Barys Zaborau always wanted to be a painter, but he chose to become a book illustrator. He knew that painting was one of the most fiercely regulated fields of art in the Soviet Union. As a book graphic artist, Zaborau remained relatively free in what he did, because he always stayed in the protective shadow of the text he illustrated.

Barys Zaborau soon developed his own distinctive style of illustration. Compared with the old-school Soviet graphics, it was truly innovative. He earned multiple awards for his illustrations, in the Soviet Union and abroad. The recognition brought Zaborau a privilege of choice. “I could pick any book from the plan and illustrate it”, he says. However, the freedom was not ultimate. Those in charge of the Belarusian union of artists observed Zaborau with suspicion and envy.

## Culture

### Barys Zaborau: The Long Return

For a very long time the artist was denied a studio of his own. And when he finally received a place where he could work, the pressure became even higher. Finally, the KGB searched his studio on the New Year's Eve. Zaborau's father, an artist himself, went to the KGB demanding an explanation. A KGB officer confessed that they did not have any evidence of Barys Zaborau's anti-Soviet activity. However, the KGB was flooded with anonymous letters from Zaborau's colleagues denouncing the artist, and the security service felt obliged to react.

There was another problem, which frustrated Zaborau even more. As a book illustrator he knew that his work would always be of secondary importance, with the text being the primary masterpiece. But he wanted to be an independent creator. At the same time, he realised that if he stayed in Belarus, he would keep on producing books one after another, with the main dream of his life remaining unfulfilled.

In 1980, shortly after his father left for Israel, Barys Zaborau also decided to head abroad, taking his family along. "It was scary, but I like it when it is scary", he admits. However, when Jewish repatriation organisations began to approach the artist in Vienna, he refused to follow his father's footsteps. Zaborau strived for Paris. With the help of the Tolstoy Foundation he managed to settle in the French capital. "The Tolstoy Foundation is an organisation of a special kind. It scrutinizes the backgrounds of people it supports. They must be people of art. In this regard, we fitted their conditions. I was an artist, and my wife was a daughter of a repressed Russian poet Boris Korneev", explains Zaborau in one of his interviews.

Zaborau came to Paris and immediately realised that he was just one of the thousands of artists who tried to find their fortune in this city. "It was

a masochistic pleasure watching Paris out of my window in the night. There was a sea of lights before my eyes and not a single person in these windows who was aware of my existence".

Disillusioned and desperate, Barys Zaborau was looking for a key to his future life and for the solution for supporting his family. He admits that this almost brought him to the verge of suicide. One day, idly sifting through his luggage, Zaborau stumbled upon an old photo album. It was a small collection of photos he brought from Minsk. "These old albums mesmerize me. I always want to invent these people's lives", he says. The artist promised himself to abandon his previous life and never return to book graphics. Instead, he decided to recreate the people from old photos on canvas.

Some day, shortly after he first came to Paris, Zaborau was strolling down a street in the Latin quarter of Paris with his friend Aleh Tsalkou, another Belarusian artist who has already been in the French capital for a couple of years.

Aleh pointed at the window of the Galerie Claude Bernard and said "If you see you picture in this gallery by the end of your life, be sure that your coming to Paris was not in vain".

Three months went by, and Barys Zaborau's paintings went on display at the Galerie Claude Bernard. One of the co-owners of the gallery died, and the mighty Bernard family clan decided to introduce his young daughter into the gallery life. They bought her additional exhibition space, hired an experienced art manager as an assistant and suggested that she expanded the gallery activities by looking for unknown artists and selling them at prices, which would be affordable for an average European collector. In the beginning, the gallery was looking for about seven or eight new artists, in all European countries. When the manager of the gallery visited Zaborau in Paris, the artist only had three or four paintings ready. All of them were purchased without much bargaining. Moreover, the gallery offered Zaborau to sign a long-term contract. At

45 years, it was the start of Zaborau's career in Paris, or better to say, the start of his new life.

However, Zaborau left Minsk not only with bitter experiences. Some memories have inspired him throughout all these years. Every year after coming to Paris he created a painting of a Belarusian barn, 'humno'. There are now 28 "Humno" pictures all over the world. Zaborau drew inspiration for them from his travels in Belarus. "I am not so much interested in the barn construction itself, which is rather unpretentious, but in its surrounding. I used to travel a lot in Belarus, and often spend nights in barns, in the hayloft. The odour of hay, the breath of cows arouses very pleasant memories. When I grow tired of dialogues with the numerous characters of my paintings, I turn to this motive. When I paint the barn, I take a stroll around it and see much more – the Narach Lake, where I spent my childhood, somewhere to the right – the road to the town of Pastavy... This is how it happens", explains Barys Zaborau.

During the ceremony of "Humno" presentation at the National Art Museum in Minsk Zaborau said that he had three motherlands. First one is Belarus, where he was born and spent his childhood, where his relatives are buried and many good friends live. Russia is the land where he spent his youth and studied, the country which shaped him professionally as an artist. And France is the country which gave him the opportunity to fulfil the sacred dream of being a painter. Zaborau is a citizen of the world with intermingled cultural backgrounds. It took a while for him to receive recognition in the country where he was born. But this is also something which is typically Belarusian.

16/09/2009

By Ales Kudrytski

*Some reproductions of the paintings by Zaborau can be found on our web-site at "Cultural review" section.*