

Belarus Headlines

Issue XLVII

November 12, 2009



*Office for a Democratic
Belarus*

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We on the Web

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Regional Cooperation in the Field of Energy Security: Challenges and Perspectives for Belarus



Energy Club first session in Minsk

Energy security of Belarus, or any other country in the region, can neither be dealt with at the national level alone nor in a zero sum manner. This was the predominant view among participants of the first meeting of the Energy Club that took place in Minsk on 29 October 2009. The Energy Club is a joint initiative of the Office for Democratic Belarus (Brussels, Belgium), the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (Vilnius, Lithuania), and the Foundation for Legal Technologies Development (Kyiv, Ukraine), carried out under the patronage of the European Commission delegation in Belarus with support of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). The mission of the Energy Club is to establish a platform for dialogue between representatives of the government, national and regional expert community on key issues pertaining to the development

of the energy sector in Belarus and regional cooperation in this sphere, including issues of energy efficiency and security.

The first meeting of the Energy Club gathered a diverse audience and attracted prominent domestic and international experts in the field of energy-policies, representatives of the Belarusian ministries, foreign diplomats, journalists and independent analysts. A full day was dedicated to debates on most controversial energy-related issues. The range of topics included: the problems of energy security in Belarus (i.e. components, challenges and threats); the perspectives and the risks of involving Belarus in the regionalization of energy systems and “lessons learned” from regional ‘gas wars’. The discussion has demonstrated the significance of having a well-organized dialogue between representatives of different countries, organizations and positions.



The Energy Club organizers are looking forward to continuing this dialogue with the aim of achieving a broader consensus on energy-related issues and policies. The next seating of the club is scheduled to take place in the beginning of February 2010. A policy paper summarizing findings of the debate will be released in early 2010. The presentations of the speakers in Russian are available on the web site of ODB, BISS and Nashe Mneniye.

The Conference was held in cooperation with the Nashe Mnenie portal and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

The Office for a Democratic Belarus extends its gratitude all the partners that helped make this project possible.

30/10/2009

Source: ODB

EU and Belarus

Foreign Minister of Latvia Pays Visit to Belarus

On 3 November, Foreign Minister of Latvia Maris Riekstins arrived in Belarus with a working visit. His programme included meetings with the representatives of non-governmental organisation 'The Helsinki Committee of Belarus', Belarusian Foreign Minister Syarhey Martynau, Prime Minister Syarhei Sidorski, and President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

During his meeting with Lukashenka, Riekstins expressed his hopes for the European Union Council to make the

decision to reduce Schengen visa fees for Belarusian citizens. The Latvian Foreign Minister mentioned that the EU Council would discuss the EU's dialogue with Belarus and its subsequent measures in Brussels in November. "I am convinced that the discussion will lead to new steps in developing the dialogue. The decision to facilitate visa regulations for Belarus' citizens is most likely to be taken," he said.

Minister Riekstins's visit to Belarus is the first one by a Latvian Foreign Minis-

ter since the restoration of the country's independence. This, however, was the second meeting between Latvian and Belarusian Foreign Ministers, which is perhaps a proof of a successful dialogue between both countries. The two officials met on 22 April this year, during the Belarusian Foreign Minister's visit to Latvia.

03/11/2009

Source: ISRIA, BelTA, ODB

Minsk Forum Raises New Questions



Head of Presidential Administration Uladzimir Makei and German Ambassador to Belarus Gebhardt Weiss

The Minsk Forum has become a regular feature of the late fall in the Belarusian capital. Each November, an increasingly large gathering - including diplomats, politicians, academics, and business people from more than 20 countries this year - assembles to discuss a variety of issues, with its focus on the EU relations with Belarus and the prospects for democratisation in the country. For the second year in succession, the head of the Presidential Administration, Uladzimir Makei, attended the proceedings. In 2008 he was bombarded with questions, but this year he seems to have had a warmer reception.

Speaking at the forum, Makei stated that Belarus' participation in the Eastern Partnership Project does not signify a change in foreign policy. Similarly, Uladzimir Ulakhovich, the Director of the Centre for International Research at

the Belarusian State University, commented that the Belarusians favour pragmatism and the lifting of barriers and restrictions to trade between Belarus and the countries of the E.U. (Narodnaya Hazeta, November 9). He also reported (November 4) that the Belarusian parliament will consider recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia. On the following day, the legislature formed a working group that is to travel to these regions to examine the situation at first hand. The move seems illogical, if Belarus is really paying attention to the comments made at the Minsk Forum.

The forum, which was initiated and is still chaired by German scholar Rainer Lindner, mirrors the efforts of the Eastern Partnership Project to develop closer ties with Belarus. On the horizon - before the end of November - is the prospect that the Council of the EU will remove all formerly imposed sanctions on Belarus, which are currently suspended. Speakers at the Forum were insistent that Europeans have not compromised any principles in the new policy of engagement with the Lukashenka regime. Thus, German MP Mariluisse Beck, in a speech at the forum, emphasized the significance of freedom of the media, open work with informal associations, and freedom for political parties in Belarus. Charge d'affaires of the Delegation of the European Commission to Belarus, Jean-Eric Holzapfel, stressed that the Europeans have not forgotten the original 12

principles they elaborated in order for full working relations to be established with the Minsk government. One question raised by the forum was the issue of Belarus' recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the breakaway regions of Georgia. Only three countries to date have recognized their independence, namely Russia, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Swedish ambassador Stefan Eriksson praised the Belarusian government for its stance to date, despite pressure from Russia to take such a step (Belapan, November 6).

On November 4, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka stated that the EU and other international organizations, as well as European governments, were beginning to recognize that it was necessary to treat Belarus as an equal partner (Belarusian Telegraph Agency, November 4). From his perspective, that status signifies that it is not the place of the E.U. or the EPP to impose any conditions on his country. It seems evident that the position of Belarus is to maintain relations with both Russia and the E.U., using the former as a major political partner and the latter as a source of trade and extra income. [...]

10/11/2009

Source: By David Marples,
Jamestown Foundation
Photo by nn.by

Politics and Society

Belarusian Parliamentarians to Visit South Ossetia, Abkhazia



A group of Belarusian lawmakers will travel to Georgia and its break-away regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to decide if they should have parliamentary discussions about the recognizing the regions as independent states, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports.

Syarhey Matskevich, the chairman of the parliamentary International Affairs Commission, told journalists on November 5 that the group will meet with Georgian officials in Tbilisi and visit its breakaway regions from November 17-20. He said the parliamentary group will also hold talks on the

issue with members of the Russian State Duma in Moscow. Matskevich said that after the visit the commission will decide if it is necessary to hold a debate in parliament over the possible recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. Russia recognized the two Georgian regions after a five-day war with Georgian forces

in August 2008.

Nicaragua and Venezuela have in recent months also recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Moscow has pressured Minsk to also recognize the regions as independent, though the European Union has sought to keep Belarus from taking such a move.

The EU is scheduled to discuss lifting sanctions against Belarus on November 16, one day before the Belarusian delegation travels to Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

05/11/2009

Source: Radio Free Belarus

Ukrainian, Belarusian Leaders Wow to Strengthen Ties



On 5-6 November, Belarusian president Alyaksandr Lukashenka paid an official visit to Ukraine. This was his first official visit to Kyiv since 1997.

In 2004, Lukashenka visited Ukrainian capital together with Vladimir Putin to support Viktor Yanukovich during the presidential race.

At a joint press conference after the meeting with the two leaders, Yushchenko said there were no obstacles between Ukraine and Belarus to develop friendly relations.

Yushchenko said that Minsk had agreed to submit the border treaty signed by the two sides in 1997 to Belarusian Parliament for approval as soon as possible. He stressed that Ukraine would support Belarus' bid for membership in the Council of Europe.

Lukashenka in turn praised Ukraine's effort in stabilizing the relations between Belarus and the West.

Lukashenka stressed that the enhancement of comprehensive cooperation between Belarus and Ukraine is not directed against any third country, i.e. Russia.

A memorandum of Ukrainian-Belarusian cooperation in carrying out projects within the framework of the European Union's Eastern Partnership programme was signed in Kyiv on November 5 as a result of a meeting between Viktor Yushchenko and Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

The meeting also resulted in the signing of a protocol of exchanging the instruments of ratification for a Belarusian-

Ukrainian consular convention; an agreement on trade, economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation between the Minsk City Executive Committee and the Lviv Provincial Administration; an interstate agreement on the sale of domestic products through fairs in border areas and an agreement on the establishment of sister city ties between Homel and Chernihiv.

Apart from Yushchenko, Lukashenka met with Ukrainian Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko and Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian parliament) Volodymyr Lytvyn.

Lukashenka also participated in the opening ceremony for a Belarusian Language and Culture Centre at the National University of Kyiv and a stone-laying ceremony for a monument to Belarusian writer Uladzimir Karatkevich.

06/11/2009

Source: unian.net, ODB

Politics and Society

Investigation on Autuhovich Case Extended by Another Month



The investigation of the criminal case against Mikalai Autuhovich and Uladzimir Asipenka, held in custody since February 2009, has been extended by another month.

“We expected that the term would be prolonged,” human rights activist Aleh Volchak said. “I think that the decision means that Autuhovich may be formally charged under Article 359 of the Criminal Code that penalizes terrorist acts.

But the extension of the investigation term may also show that there are no evidences against him.”

Former business partners Mikalay Autukhovich and Yury Lyavonau and their associate Uladzimir Asipenka were arrested by personnel of the Almaz anti-terror police unit in armed raids in their hometown of Vaukavysk, the Hrodna region, on the morning of February 8 and brought to a detention centre in Minsk. Police said that they were suspected of perpetrating a series of arson and explosions targeting the property of local officials and of illegal possession of explosives and firearms.

On February 18, they were formally charged with “deliberate destruction of or damage to property caused in a way dangerous to the public or the intentional infliction of large-scale

damage.”

The interior ministry announced in July that, on June 23, Autuhovich was charged with making preparations a few years ago for murdering Uladzimir Sauchanka, Chairman of the Hrodna Regional Executive Committee, and Deputy Minister for Taxation Vasil Kamyanko.

Lyavonau was released on his own recognizance in early August; and, on September 24, he was notified of the termination of his criminal case.

Awtukhovich staged a lengthy hunger strike earlier this year to protest his detention and demanded that the case should be either referred to court or all those under investigation in this case be released on their own recognizance.

09/11/2009

Source: **BelaPAN**

Belarus Opens Door to Liberal Election Reforms



Lidziya Yarmoshyna, Chair of the Central Election Commission of Belarus

Alyaksandr Lukashenka is promising to lower barriers for opposition candi-

dates seeking office.

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on November 10 that parliament should pass legislation relaxing strict registration requirements for candidates before local elections next year and a presidential vote in 2011. He also suggested allowing candidates self-financing and permitting opposition groups to monitor voting.

The promises appear aimed to please the European Union, which has slapped

travel sanctions on top Belarusian officials and called for democratic reforms. Lukashenka has been seeking to improve ties with the West without losing the support of neighbouring Russia.

He says Belarus is willing to carry out other reforms urged by the EU but needs time to do so.

10/11/2009

Source: **Kyivpost**

Azerbaijan's President Arrives in Minsk on Official Visit

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev arrived in Minsk on an official visit in the evening of 11 November.

During this visit the two sides are going to discuss the strengthening of bilateral cooperation. Ilham Aliyev is set to deliver a speech before the professors and students of the Belarusian State University and lay wreaths at the

Victory Monument in Minsk.

The trade between Belarus and Azerbaijan has increased by more than ten times for the last five years. It was over US\$100 million in 2008. The Belarusian export to Azerbaijan has surged up by twelve times over the same period.

In 2008, Belarus-Azerbaijan trade to-

taled \$117.7 million, up 25.9% from 2007. Belarus exported \$105.4 million worth of commodities to Azerbaijan (up 22%) and imported \$6.2 million worth of commodities (90.9% up). Belarus had a \$99.2 million surplus in trade with Azerbaijan. In 2008 the export of services

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Politics and Society

Azerbaijan's President Arrives in Minsk on Official Visit (continuation)

amounted to \$4.4 million (80.9% up), import — \$1.6 million (20.4% up). Belarus had a trade surplus of \$2.8 million in trade with Azerbaijan.

In January-August 2009, the bilateral trade amounted to \$71.5 million (up 90.4% as against the same period of

last year). Belarus' export totaled \$68.861 million (91.4%), import — \$2.6 million (70.1%)

Belarus and Azerbaijan cooperate not only in trade and economy. The two countries have been developing industrial interaction too. Azerbaijani companies

assemble Belarusian tractors, trucks and optical equipment; the assembly production of elevators and agricultural machinery is being negotiated at the moment.

12/11/2009

Source: BelTA

European Radio for Belarus May Get Accreditation from Minsk

European Radio for Belarus (ERB) may obtain accreditation from the Belarusian foreign ministry for a bureau in the country.

On Thursday, an official of the Belarusian foreign ministry during told a representative of the Warsaw-based network that the ministry decided to grant the accreditation to the ERB. Its terms were not immediately known.

Dzmitry Novikau, Chair of the ERB board, told BelaPAN that the decision was, perhaps, due to the ongoing thaw in Belarus' relations with the European Union.

"It is a gesture on the part of the Belarusian authorities stemming from some agreements reached in their talks with the EU," said Novikau.

The radio station has been providing independent news to the citizens of Belarus since February 2006. Its goal is to "deliver factual, current and trustworthy information to Belarusian listeners about events in Belarus and the world, and to provide access to the best of Belarusian and world cultures." The programs are prepared by Belarusian journalists based in Warsaw, Minsk and throughout Belarus.

"We don't yet know what terms will be offered to us. It is unclear for what period the accreditation will be granted and, more importantly, how many journalists will be accredited. But what is clear is that the process will not be easy", said Novikau.

Novikau noted that the ERB had already

attempted earlier, albeit unsuccessfully, to get accreditation for a correspondent based in Belarus. "The journalist himself applied to the foreign ministry, but he was denied accreditation under the pretext that he, allegedly, had earlier worked for the ERB without accreditation," explained Novikau adding that "the application was filed by a person who had never worked with us before."

At the beginning of this past summer, the station asked the foreign ministry to give accreditation to its bureau in Belarus.

12/11/2009

Source: BelaPAN

Finance and Economics

Obolon and Slavutich Carlsberg Group to Resume Beer Exports to Belarus



The largest Ukrainian breweries Obolon and Slavutich Carlsberg Group will resume beer exports to Belarus. Currently both companies account for nearly 90% of the total Ukrainian beer exports to Belarus. All the shipments were halted in the middle August due to problems with

the Belarusian beer distributor Aramis & K Company.

According to Obolon's corporate affairs director Sergei Kravets, the deliveries were resumed earlier this month. "We have signed a contract with another company-distributor. Now our products are returned to the shelves of the Belarusian supermarkets. However their levels are not as large as in the past," said Kravets. He also added that due to temporary absence from the Belarusian market the financial losses of Obolon may exceed US\$1 million.

At the same time, the second largest beer exporter to Belarus Slavutich Carlsberg Group intends to resume deliveries next week. "A new company will deal with the distribution of our products in the Belarusian market", explained Roman Bondar, the export manager of the company Slavutich Carlsberg Group. According to his estimates, the exports to Belarus this year will be lower by 15% than originally planned.

30/10/2009

Source: FoodBizDaily

Finance and Economics

Life:) Launches 3G Network, Claims a First for Belarus

Belarusian Telecommunications Network (BeST), which trades under the banner life:), has launched the country's first 3G network offering high speed internet connectivity at speed of up to 7.2Mbps and providing new services such as videocalling. The operator, which is 80%-owned by a

Turkish telecom company Turkcell, with the remaining 20% in the hands of the Republic of Belarus, says that its 3G/3.5G network is available to residents in the capital Minsk and other major cities. Local news portal e-Belarus.org says BeST is looking to deploy 500 3G base stations which will provide coverage in

all cities with a population of 50,000 people. 70% of Belarus' population is expected to have access to 3G life:) services by the end of this year. life:) currently has more than 600,000 subscribers

03/11/2009

Source: telegraphy.com

Decree Offering Preferences to Foreign Investors Takes Effect

A presidential decree that is said to offer preferences to foreign investors came into force on November 9.



the use of land for their construction projects, as well as from paying fees for hiring foreign workforce.

According to the presidential press office, the decree No. 10 entitles investors to import industrial equipment and spare parts needed for their project free of duty and value-added tax.

The decree allows investors to lease a land plot for their project without the need to go through an auction and reduces the amount of paperwork for them.

In addition, the decree reportedly exempts investors from paying compensation to farms or local authorities for

Under the decree, an investment agreement with a foreign company is to be signed by the Council of Ministers, if the project requires state preferences, or by state agencies, the regional executive committee or the Minsk City Executive Committee, if no such preferences are required.

Experts offered a mixed reaction to the decree. Economist Leanid Zlotnikau said that its provision that empowers the government to unilaterally terminate its agreements with investors who "fail to meet their commitments properly" outweighs all strengths of the decree. An-

other drawback, in his opinion, is that the decree does not apply to investors who entered the market earlier.

Syarhey Balykin, leader of the Association of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, predicted that the decree would not be enough to attract foreign investment. Although the decree simplifies bureaucratic procedures to some extent and reduces expenses, the country's overall business reputation is much more important, explained Balykin.

"It's very important to bring tax, customs, labour and price regulations in line with what is commonly accepted in civilized countries," the expert said.

10/11/2009

Source: BelaPAN

National Bank Introduces New Restrictions on Currency Use

Belarus has introduced new restrictions on transactions with foreign currency. In the framework of the de-dollarisation policy, on November 7, the National Bank of Belarus passed Resolution No 138.

The Central Bank has banned residents from using foreign currencies

when receiving loans by wiring a foreign currency to the bank account of a borrower as well when repaying loans and interest fees. A similar ban applies to the residents of free economic zones.

The issue of bonds in foreign currencies for legal entities is also banned.

In the view of analysts, this measure of the Belarusian authorities aims to minimize demand for foreign currencies in the condition of the crisis. In the first half of 2009, a high demand for foreign currencies significantly reduced Belarus' gold and currency reserves.

10/11/2009

Source: ERB

Belarus Sees 0.4% Inflation in October, 8.3% in Ten Months

According to the Belarusian statistics office, Belstat, in October 2009, the inflation in the country stood at 0.4%, compared with 0.3% in September and deflation of 0.2% in August 2009.

Consumer prices grew 8.3% in January-October, averaging up 0.83% per month. Annual inflation to October 31 was 11.1%. It was 13.3% in 2008, compared to 12.1% in 2007. The government is forecasting 9%-11% for 2009, but the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects it to be at 11.5%.

11/11/2009

Source: Interfax

Culture

Flea Market Treasure. Photography by Benedykt Tyshkevich

It was an early morning in 1993. Two people were having a leisurely time in a café near a flea market in Paris. Over their cups of Café Crème they watched stall owners setting up for work. Most flea markets usually open at 8am, but antique dealers rarely begin their trade before nine.

Serious shoppers avoid visiting flea markets after lunch, as they become too crowded to have a good look at displays; also, it also gets more difficult to bargain for a lower price. Judging by their early arrival, the people observing the market were indeed serious shoppers.

They were not simple antique-fanciers but professional scouts fishing for original old photo prints. Working at Musée Maison Nicéphore Niépce, situated in a town of Chalon sur Saône, France, they had a task to expand the collection of one the most renowned photo museums in Europe named after the French photography pioneer.

The scouts went from one stall to another flipping through random collections of photos and postcards with a vague hope of stumbling upon something truly valuable. This time their efforts were not in vain. One of the dealers handed them a big faded photo album. The scouts looked inside and could barely conceal their astonishment. It was neither an assortment of dull studio photos nor a banal postcard set. The album contained a splendid collection of highly artistic prints, all of them at least a century old. They showed scenes of rural life somewhere in Eastern Europe. Beautiful peasant girls wearing traditional gowns; fellows in caps, fishing or having fun with friends; earnest-looking bearded old men; merry laundresses; a village feast on a lawn in front of a log cabin... All the photos were meticulously signed in Polish with the name of their author, *Benedykt Tyshkiewicz*. Most of the pictures were taken around 1890 at a place called *Wiala*. This name did not say much to photo scouts.

One of the things that stroke them most was the air of naturalness and ease which the photos emanated. The technique of photography was still at its early stages in 1890s. The models had to spend about a minute in front of the camera with as little movement as possible. However, the photos did not make an impression of being set up and tense. Instead, they were more like spontaneous or even reportage-like photo portraits.

The museum acquired the entire collection of 86 photos without a second thought. Its author turned out to be Count Benedykt Tyshkevich (1852-1935), rich and somewhat eccentric aristocrat, who spent his last years of life in his estate near Paris experimenting with photography.

However, getting the information about his models was a bit more complicated. After all, Benedykt Tyshkevich was a keen traveler, who had seen many countries, from China to America. Fortunately, the author gave a hint by signing some pictures with titles such as “a Lithuanian peasant girl”. It was a logical step for the specialists of the museum to turn to their colleagues in Vilnius. “Sure, this is our cultural heritage!” they replied. As a result, the photos went on display at an exhibition in Vilnius in 2000.

Siarhey Chareuski, prominent expert of Belarusian culture, happened to be in Vilnius at that time. He couldn't miss the occasion to see the old Lithuanian photos by Benedykt Tyshkevich. After all, many members of this aristocratic family, well known since the 16th century, contributed a lot to the development of Belarusian culture.

When Mr. Chareuski noticed the name *Wiala*, he couldn't help smiling into his mustache. *Wialava* (*Wiala* in Polish) was a place in Belarus, where Benedykt Tyshkevich had one of his several estates. It was situated about 70 km from Minsk, in a large virgin wood called Naliboki Forest.



Duke Benedykt Tyshkevich

One shouldn't blame the French museum specialists for being perfunctory by addressing their inquiries to Vilnius instead of Minsk. Benedykt Tyshkevich took his photos in the centre of what we today know as Belarus; at that time, however, it was part of the Russian Empire. Still, he signed the pictures in the Polish language. Moreover, he called the people he photographed “Lithuanians”. Such a jumble of national definitions will make even the most highbrow researcher scratch his bald patch in bewilderment.

Why did Benedykt Tyshkevich call the people on his photos “Lithianians”?

As it often happens, something important was lost in translation. Today, the same word “Lithuania” is used to describe two different phenomena – the modern Lithuanian state (Republic of Lithuania, first founded in 1918) on one hand, and, on the other, the legendary area of Litva as well the historic legacy of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Culture

Flea Market Treasure. Photography by Benedykt Tyshkevich

In the 1890s neither Lithuania nor Belarus was independent. Both lands were part of the Russian Empire. When Tyshkevich described his models as “Lithuanian” he referred to the people who lived on the former lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This large state consisted almost entirely of lands of present-day Belarus. The majority of the Duchy’s population was Slavonic. These people spoke the Ruthenian language (Belarusian researchers prefer to call it Old Belarusian). It was completely different from the Baltic family of languages that modern Lithuanian belongs to. The people on the photos by Benedykt Tyshkevich were forefathers of present-day Belarusians that lived westwards from Minsk.

Calling Belarusians “Litvins” (‘Lithuanians’) was not unusual. In a similar manner the prominent poet Adam Mickiewicz wrote “Litva, the motherland of mine” about his native Navahrada region. Navahrada, a town in western Belarus, was the first capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. By the way, it is situated some 80 kilometers to the south of Tyshkevich’s estate in Vialava.

Siarhey Chareuski told about the exhibition to his friends and colleagues. As a result, in 2009 the exhibition was officially displayed at the National Museum of History in Minsk.

Benedykt Tyshkevich was a rich aristocrat, who inherited various real estate objects and capital. However, instead of wasting his wealth on balls and entertainments, he became one of the first masters of photography in the world. Tyshkevich rented ships in order to travel to India, China, and Japan. He had estates all over the world, but the one in Naliboki Forest was one of his favourite. There he built a studio with large windows and a photo laboratory. People from nearby villages, who worked at his estate, became his fa-

vourite models. It was a good time in the count’s life, and the pictures show it very well.

Benedykt Tyshkevich exhibited his best pictures in 1876 in Philadelphia, USA. There he received his first medal for the photos.

After the death of his wife in 1883, Benedykt Tyshkevich left for France with his three children. There he settled in a respectable suburb of Paris and completely dedicated himself to photography.

The archive of Benedykt Tyshkevich that included his Vialava collection of art and photos was destroyed during World War I. The mansion is now a ruin. Only majestic oak trees and a small river, which one also recognizes on the count’s pictures, remind us about the life that was once in full swing here.

The album from the Paris flea market is probably the last surviving piece of that legacy. This is a real miracle that the photos by Benedykt Tyshkevich returned to Belarus after more than a century, even if for a short period of time.

“None of his pictures is incidental”, says Siarhey Chareuski. “He made every photo with a feeling of responsibility. The pictures by Benedykt Tyshkevich are true masterpieces of Belarusian photography. The photos of peasant beauties tell a lot about the open world-view and attentive eye of the master. Photographers of his time preferred to disguise their models with clothes which were not typical for their time and social background. Benedykt Tyshkevich, on the contrary, captured the most important characteristics of Belarus and Belarusians of his time”.

The exhibition became a great self-discovery for the people who visited it in Minsk. The ideologists of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union tried their best to propagate the image of Belarusians as an oppressed and dull peasant nation “with elf-locks in dirty hair”.

The people on the duke’s photos from Vialava were, undoubtedly, usual Belaru-

sians. Skeptics may argue that the rich landlord attempted to make them appear nicer on the photos. However, the look of dignity and calmness in their eyes is something one could not possibly fake. These people radiate peacefulness and are not plagued by constant fear. This is something we rarely encounter in Belarus today.

12/11/2009

By Ales Kudrytski for the ODB

Photos by Benedykt Tyshkevich



More pictures by Benedykt Tyshkevich can be found at our web-site in “Culture Review” section