

Belarus Headlines

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Blast at Concert in Minsk



several minutes".

The second, unexploded bomb had been found near the blast site almost two hours before the explosion, first deputy interior minister Aliaksandr Shchurko told in his interview to kp.by. Police said its discovery should help their investigation.

Lukashenka said he did not consider the blast, which injured over 50 people but did not harm him, as an assassination attempt. But on Monday he strongly criticized Security Council chief Viktor Sheiman for failing to prevent the incident.

"I don't think that you should remain in your position after this incident," Lukashenka

told Sheiman, according to state news agency BelTA.

"You are the first to be guilty," he added.

Meanwhile there have been searches in the Belarusian opposition activists' apartments. At least 6 people were detained in connection with the investigation while one of them is a 25-year old Belarusian who posted a message on a Russian web-site about a possible explosion in Minsk. Security Council chief Viktor Sheiman and the Head of presidential administration Genadz' Niavyglas were dismissed from their posts Tuesday July 8.

09/07/2008

Source: Reuters, ERB,
kp.by

For your attention we offer the translation of the article by a Russian analyst A. Suzdaltsev which was originally posted on politoboz.com

Any opinions, findings, or conclusions expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the view of the editorial team!

A terrorist act in a small European state [Belarus] in the beginning of the twenty-first century can only be the sign of the last stage of political and social disorganisation of society...

In this particular case, it does not really matter who directly set up the explosive device and what ideas they professed. What is more important is that in modern Belarus it became

possible to express a political will through an attempt on the life of tens of innocent people...

Initial assessments of the incident may have suggested that it is not impossible to compare a 'tolerant' and, as a rule, politically uneducated and, at the same time, politically indifferent Belarusian to a Chechen, an Arab, a Basque or an Irish extremist, who constantly uses terrorism for political goals. However, this

somewhat dubious reasoning may hardly be applied to the territory of modern Belarus, which has a rich, 150-year history of terrorism, partisan struggle, and activism of underground movements and saboteurs... It is worth remembering that 'caring for peoples' lives' in this part of the world was welcome neither in the 1930s nor in the bloody 1940s nor indeed during the rest of the Soviet

We on the Web

www.democraticbelarus.eu

Analysis

period (one should remember the 1st of May demonstration in 1986 took place only a few days after the Chernobyl catastrophe). People, particularly clever ones, irritate modern political regimes.

Let us go back to the terrorist act. It should be pointed out that the explosive device (and, according to the Ministry for Internal Affairs, there were two of them) was constructed by a professional and aimed to injure legs but not to kill people. The device was taken to territory controlled by the police. Consequently, the goal of the terrorist act was either to demonstrate to those in power that the organisers should be taken seriously or to provoke panic and disorder that could lead to the second 'Nemiga' with hundreds of victims. What could follow were political destabilisation and a Belarusian Orange revolution. We shall now consider these scenarios.

First of all,...the authorities' attempts to call the terrorist act 'hooliganism' and an 'incident' should be rejected. Two professionally-constructed explosive devices, which were carried through the security chain by at least two 'specialists in mine-laying', could hardly be taken for hooliganism. The difference between a terrorist attack and criminal terror is that the former has an author, i.e. it is always followed by political statements (or demands) or by certain political groups' claims of responsibility for the perpetrated terrorist act. The place of the terrorist act – a concert devoted to Independence Day and attended by the President of the country – has a political resonance. 'Hooligans' would have chosen a stadium or a night club. But the authorities' attempts to diminish the public's attention to the terrorist act are rather interesting.

Second, the authorities knew that there would be only one explosion and no continuation. In any case, there would have been no second blast at the concert. Otherwise, they would have made some unbelievable mistakes: the concert was not interrupted and the people were not evacuated. And, most importantly, the main person in the audience – the Head of State – was not taken to a secure place...

If the organisers of the terrorist act anticipated that the result of the blast would be hundreds of people being trampled down with tens of thousands of outraged inhabitants of Minsk filling up the October Square the next day, they had no reason not to add 'dynamite', in order to have a more definite effect... This specific terrorist act does not seem to fit into this scenario.

The blast was organised in order to show political will, to demonstrate that these people might be capable of something more serious. Lukashenka received a warning: there might be a continuation. The question that remains unanswered is who are the organisers?

It is unlikely that the authorities themselves would perpetrate a terrorist act in a 'stable and safe Belarus'. 'As long as there is no war', is a fundamental slogan of many of Lukashenka's campaigns. It has to be admitted that the state mass media of the Republic are in some ways right to say that apart from pure PR and the demonstration of 'courageousness', the appearance of Lukashenka at the site of the explosion has answered another very important task, i.e. to demonstrate that everything is under control in the country and that 'stability and safety' would be provided. The republic's authorities do not need a terrorist attack.

Nor does the opposition need it. And it, thank God, is incapable of doing something of this kind. Belarusian mass media made an attempt to blame the opponents of the regime, which is logical, considering that the two wings formed within the Belarusian administration in the autumn of 2007 tend to seek responsible for the act among the political opposition. A pro-Western group within the country's chief administration anticipates that, as a result of Lukashenka's tough reaction, the Belarusian opposition should be ready for accusations of extremism and [its own] destruction. This will strengthen the pro-Western group's monopoly on contacts with the West. As a matter of fact, the Belarusian opposition often insisted on its participation in a dialogue between the West and officials

in Minsk and created rivalry for the pro-Western group. A bloc representing power ministries is also interested in accusing the opposition of connections to the terrorist act, due to the latter's pro-Western orientation. Having a negative attitude towards a dialogue with Brussels (or Washington), the *siloviki* consider the opposition a 'fifth column' of the West and hope that with its elimination from the political scene of Belarus there would be no Belarusian-Western dialogue. Nonetheless, this author believes that there are no negative consequences for the opposition. Moreover, the Belarusian authorities expect from their dialogue with the West the legitimisation of Lukashenka's fourth term in power.

Despite its declared radicalism, the marginalised political youth is overwhelmed with idealism and would never perpetrate terror against innocent people.

Pockets of infuriated and disoriented people – who could possibly originate from military or special circles – are capable of perpetuating a terrorist act. Perhaps, such a group of people exists... But do they possess a specialist in mine-laying?

We can assume that even if there was such a specialist among them, the success of the act would be in doubt without the support, even if indirect, of some 'forces' within the echelons of power. It is not enough to construct a 'clever' device; it also has to be placed in a territory controlled by hundreds of policemen. (In fact, it was reported that two policemen were injured). It looks like this is the key to the answer of July's 'bloody show'.

Within the highest echelons of power there is a struggle not for power but for life. And among those people there was someone who controlled the formation of some group that planned a terrorist act. Somebody decided to let them do their 'business', i.e. not to preclude them. Who is this person? Regardless of who this person is and what post he/she occupies, we should understand that this is a person with a lot of will, capable of taking highly important decisions without Lukashenka's consent...

Politics and Society

Vatican Envoy Says Hopes Pope Will Visit Belarus



The Vatican's second-ranking official said his talks in Belarus over the past week had paved the way for a visit by Pope Benedict. Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone,

Vatican secretary of state, met President Aliaksandr Lukashenka during a five-day stay in the ex-Soviet state that is accused in the West of crushing freedom of speech and assembly. After Friday's talks, Lukashenka issued

an invitation to Benedict to make his first visit to the country. Bertone was the first senior Vatican official to visit Belarus, where the Orthodox Church is predominant, but Roman Catholics account for about 14 percent of 10 million residents. Lukashenka said he welcomed any warming of relations that might result from it. Bertone criticised the use of sanctions by the United States against Belarus as the Vatican has denounced such measures elsewhere, including the U.S. trade embargo on communist Cuba. "Every nation must make use of its right to independent development," he said. "Sanctions against Cuba, Belarus and other countries are unacceptable as it is people who suffer." The country has endured little of the

animosity between Orthodoxy and Catholicism that has bedevilled ties in Russia.

Holidays of both faiths are officially observed and thousands went to the country's largest cathedral to hear a mass by Pope Benedict that was beamed in from Rome in March. Lukashenka, who describes himself as an "Orthodox atheist", agreed after the talks to sign an agreement with the Catholic Church on relations and land allocation. An accord recognising Orthodoxy as Belarus' main faith has long been in effect.

On the photo Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone meets with Belarus' Orthodox Exarch Metropolitan Filaret

22/06/2008

Source: Reuters

New Russian President Medvedev Visits Belarus

Russia's new president has visited Belarus, on the 67th anniversary of the country's invasion by the Nazis. Their talks focussed on energy co-operation, and it is believed Minsk will ask Russia for more generous terms in gas supplies over the



Aliaksandr Lukashenka and Dmitry Medvedev

next three years, during which the price will go up from two-thirds to 90 percent of the market price. Last year, Belarus only paid around 50 euro

for every 1,000 cubic metres. Also under discussion are the two nations' plans to create a unified state, once enthusiastically supported by Moscow, and now rather less so. It was created in 1997, but has yet to be properly set up, or constitutionally sealed by treaty.

22/06/2008

Source: euronews.net

Belarus Starts Election Race to Elect New Parliament



Lidzia Yarmoshina

Belarus starts on June 24 an election campaign to elect deputies to the new legislature. Election Day is fixed on September 28. "The president received a package of appropriate documents. It was established that the campaign to elect the House of Representatives and the Council of the Republic (the upper chamber)

starts on June 24," chairman of the Central Election Commission and on holding a republican referendum Lidzia Yarmoshina told reporters. She discussed questions on holding the election race with President Aliaksandr Lukashenka. According to the CEC chairwoman, the head of state emphasised that the elections should pass democratically and quite transparently. National and international observers should have the full volume of information on preparation of the election race and processes taking place directly at polling stations and election

commissions on Election Day. The chairwoman already had a meeting with representatives of the technical mission of the OSCE ODIHR, who were in Minsk on June 9-11 to study conditions for their participation in monitoring the parliamentary elections. Yarmoshina said about the results of the meeting that it is expedient to welcome around 700 international observers from the OSCE to monitor the elections.

24/06/2008

Source: Interfax

Politics and Society

Belarus Tightening Controls on Internet Journalism



Belarusian lawmakers gave final approval Tuesday to a crackdown on Internet journalism, one of the last remaining independent sources of information in the repressive former Soviet republic.

The legislation also forbids all Belaru-

sian media outlets from accepting foreign funding, a restriction that will affect about 30 publications that now receive U.S. or EU money.

The bill, drafted by authoritarian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka's office, "is among the harshest in Europe and throws Belarus back to the worst Soviet times," said Aleh Gulak, the leader of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee.

The new restrictions come ahead of parliamentary election, which is set for September 28.

His government argues that the Internet needs to be brought to heel to shield the population from foreign propaganda.

"We have to protect society from the negative effects of the Internet," First Deputy Information Minister Liliya Ananich told parliament members Tuesday.

The new measures require all Internet sites to be officially registered with the government; many independent newspapers that have been closed down by the authorities have taken refuge in cyberspace.

The legislation also toughens controls on journalists, who can be imprisoned for two years for reproducing foreign media reports that "discredit Belarus."

25.06.2008

Source: The Associated press

Belarus Brings New Charges of Commercial Espionage against Jailed US Citizen



Emmanuel Zeltser

The Belarusian KGB filed new charges of commercial espionage against a U.S. citizen who has been jailed for more than three

months.

Zeltser's imprisonment and concerns about his health have prompted protests from the United States. An American doctor who was allowed to examine Zeltser, who is 54, in prison Thursday

confirmed that his health was failing. KGB spokesman Valery Nadtachayeu said charges of commercial espionage were brought against Zeltser and another U.S. citizen, Joseph Kay, who has claimed some of Patar-katsishvili's assets. The whereabouts of Kay, an ethnic Georgian, were not immediately clear.

The KGB did not explain the charges. Zeltser's defense lawyer, Dmitry Garachka, said he was forbidden to reveal the essence of the new accusations.

Zeltser heads the non-governmental

American Russian Law Institute in New York and is an expert on organized crime and money laundering, particularly in former Soviet republics such as Georgia and Belarus.

He was detained March 12 as he arrived in Belarus. He has been charged with using false documents tied to Patar-katsishvili and drug smuggling. The KGB confiscated medicine from Zeltser that he said was for treating his diabetes and other illnesses.

28/06/2008

Source: PR-inside

Genadz' Niavyglas, Viktor Sheiman Dismissed from Their Posts



G.Niavyglas, V.Sheiman

President of Belarus Aliaksandr Lukashenka signed a decree to dismiss Viktor Sheiman from the post of the State

Secretary of the Security Council as he will be transferred to another job on July 8, BelTA learnt from the presidential press service.

The Belarusian head of state also signed a decree to dismiss Genadz' Niavyglas from the post of Head of the Presidential Administration due to his transfer to another job.

No one has claimed responsibility for Friday's blast, the authorities have played it down and Lukashenka, who was nearby but unhurt, said he did not see it as an assassination attempt. An inquiry has been launched.

"I don't think that you should remain in your position after this incident," Lukashenka told security chief Viktor Sheiman, according to state news agency BelTA, adding: "You are the first to be guilty."

Officials said the bomb, which was packed with nuts and bolts and wounded 54 people, was an act of hooliganism -- a common Soviet-era

phrase used to play down such incidents. The president threatened to sack members of the security forces investigating the explosion if progress was not made in determining who was responsible for the attack.

"We cannot have a repeat of Vitebsk. If this happens, others will be working in your positions," he was quoted by BelTA as saying on Monday.

In 2005, a home-made bomb wounded more than 40 in the northern town of Vitebsk, no one was convicted of the attack.

08/07/2008

Source: BelTA, Reuters

Economic News

New Oil Field is Discovered in Belarus



A new oil field has been discovered in our country. It is situated in Hoinistki District of Homel Region. By estimation, the oil field contains about 150 thousand tons of oil. The industrial extraction of the oil will start at the beginning of autumn.

23/06/2008

Source: ERB

VTB Bank Belarus Launches Small Business Finance Programme



VTB Bank Belarus has designed a small business finance programme using the Russian VTB Bank 24 technologies.

VTB Bank Belarus offers various loan products for corporate clients and individuals in national and foreign currency for the term of 10 years.

The Bank has simplified the loan application procedure. No business plan for financing a deal is required. VTB Bank Belarus informed that the interest rate of new loan products for small business will be determined individually for every client.

"There are more than 200,000 small businesses in Belarus and this figure will be growing, VTB Bank Belarus plans to take a leading position in small business finance market.

Therefore the Bank has offered small companies and sole traders unique terms and mechanisms. We are confident that the programme will be in great demand and will help small business in Belarus grow more intensively," the director of the retail banking department of the bank, Dmitry Frolov, said.

VTB Bank (earlier ZAO Slavneftebank) is a full-service financial institution which has been on the market

since 1996. In April 2007, VTB Bank (Russia) acquired a controlling stake of the Belarusian bank. Other shareholders are Belneftekhim and its subordinate organisations, State Property Committee of the Republic of Belarus, Mozyr Oil Refinery, Benefeststrakh insurance company and Lidanefteprodukt.

On October 9, 2007 Fitch Ratings assigned long-term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) "B", support rating "4", short-term IDR "B" and individual rating "E". The short-term IDR outlook is Stable.

25/06/2008

Source: BelTA, Reuters

Belarus Ups Rate, Hopes '08 CPI Lower Than 10 %

Belarusian Economy Minister Mikalai Zaichanka said on Thursday inflation should not exceed 9-10 percent by year-end, though that would be higher than a previous government target of 8 percent.

Earlier, the central bank said it would raise its key refinancing rate to 10.25 percent as of July 1, from 10 percent now, to increase "returns on savings in the national currency".

Belarus, like many of its neighbours, is fighting accelerating inflation which has been boosted by higher prices for staples such as energy and food.

"We are taking measures to keep infla-

tion at minimal levels. We are trying to keep inflation no higher than 9-10 percent," Zaichanka told journalists, blaming inflation on external factors. Russia has increased gas import prices to Belarus to \$119 per 1,000 cubic metres at the beginning of this year from \$100 in 2007 when the price was doubled from the previous year, which Zaichanka said knocked inflation into double-digits.

Inflation jumped to 12.1 percent last year, overshooting a government target, against 6.6 percent in 2006. This was still lower than the 16.6 percent reached in neighbouring Ukraine but a

touch higher than 11.9 percent in Russia.

Belarus last year received its maiden credit ratings from Moody's and Standard &

Poor's, raising foreign investors' interest in the former Soviet state.



Mikalai Zaichanka

26/07/2008

Source: guardian.co.uk

Minsk to Host Session of Belarusian-Turkish Business Council

A session of the Belarusian-Turkish Business Council will be held in Minsk on July 8-11.

According to the Embassy of Turkey in Belarus, Foreign Trade Minister of the Republic of Turkey Kursad Tuzmen will be in Minsk on July 8-11. During the session Turkish companies will meet with Belarusian businessmen to conduct bilateral talks.

Please see the next page for the rest of the article:

Economic News

Minsk to Host Session of Belarusian-Turkish Business Council (continuation)



A Turkish delegation will include representatives of the companies manufacturing food, clothes and textile, construction materials, household appliances, mechanical and transport vehicles, electrical appli-

ances, furniture, leather.

The Belarusian-Turkish Business Council was set up in 1992 with the assistance of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Union of Turkish Chambers and Exchanges. The Council seeks to expand economic links between Belarus and Turkey, develop contacts

between businessmen of the two countries. Since the founding the Council has held nine joint sessions for 800 Belarusian and Turkish companies.

08/07/2008

Source: Capital Trendaz

Belarus Begins First Hearing on Amendments to Telecoms Law



At the end of June, Belarus' Minister of Telecommunications and Informatisation, Mikalai Pantselei, presented the draft law on amendments to the country's telecoms law to the National Assembly for its first hearing. Online news portal e-belarus.org writes that the amendment law is designed in accordance with a Presidential decree of 26 December 2007, backed by the Council of Ministers enactment No. 267, of February 2008. The changes are intended to harmonise Belarusian legislation with the International Trade Organisation's

agreements and European legislative norms. The draft law calls for a number of changes to the July 2005 'Law On Telecommunications' including amongst other things:

- Taking into account traits of mobile cell telecommunications - absence of communications between base stations and end users' devices
- Providing conditions for the development of all telecommunications services, including compensation of expenses linked to their rendering to telecommunications operators, including for the national operator, as per the remit of article 14 of the current law

-Creating a non-discriminating, fair and transparent telecoms environment for all operators when connecting telecommunications networks, and for their interaction in Belarus.

- Establishing separate obligations for telecom operators which occupy a dominant position in the domestic telecom market, and
- Managing the partial privatisation of the state-owned national fixed line operator Beltelecom.

09/07/2008

Source: telegeography.com

Belarus Increases Trade with Non-CIS Countries 1.5 Times over 5 Months

In January-May 2008, the trade between Belarus and the non-CIS countries reached \$12.378 billion, or 50.6% up over the same period last year, BelTA learnt in the Belarusian Ministry of Statistics and Analysis.

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis, the Belarusian exports to the non-CIS states made up \$7.704 billion (65.9% up), imports - \$4.673 billion (30.7% up). A surplus in trade with the non-CIS countries exceeded \$3 billion. Over the five months of 2008, the trade with Germany hit \$1.359 billion (34%

up) including exports - \$392.6 million (2 times up), imports - \$966.4 million (16.9% up).

In January-May 2008, Belarus' foreign trade hit \$29.583 billion, or 57.4% up over the same period last year. The Belarusian exports increased by 60.8%, to make up \$13.917, imports increased by 54.4%, to make up \$15.665 billion. Belarus posted a deficit in foreign trade at the amount of \$1.748 billion.

In the period under review, the trade between Belarus and the CIS member states made up \$17.204 billion (62.6% up) in-

cluding exports - \$6.212 (54.8% up), imports - \$10.991 billion (67.4% up). Belarus posted a deficit in trade with the CIS member states at the amount of \$4.779 billion.

Over the five months this year, Belarus' trade with Russia hit \$14.572 (60.3% up) including exports - \$4.529 billion (42.3% up), imports - more than \$10 billion (70% up).

09/07/2008

Source: BelTA

Belarus and Lithuania to Set Final Quota for Cargoes and Passengers Transportation in 2008

Belarus and Lithuania will set the final quota for cargoes and passengers transportation for 2008 and the preliminary quota for 2009. The issue will be considered during a session of the joint Belarusian-Lithuanian Commission for International Highway Service in Vilnius on July 17-18.

During the session the two sides will share the statistical information about cargoes and passengers transportation via the territories of both of the countries. They will also discuss the urgent issues concerning the cargoes and passengers transportation.

09/06/2008

Source: BelTA

Belarusian Youth

Belarus' Creative Opposition: Art from Anger



Iryna Vidanava, editor-in-chief of *CDMAG*, an independent student publication in Belarus, continues to present sketches of some of the most creative young people in Belarus. Today, the hero of her article is a young photographer, **Sasha**.

Sasha, an 18 year-old photographer, journalist and environmental activist, is already well-known in Minsk artistic circles. Although she is a freshman at the Visual and Cultural Studies Department of the exiled European Humanities University, takes photos for the online art project "The City of Minsk" (<http://horad.exe.by/>), shoots video for the unique multimedia youth compact disc publication *CDMAG*, and publishes the fun-zine *TRYZNAS*KEFIRAS*, Sasha still does not consider herself "a super busy person."

Changing the color of her hair depending on her mood, Sasha is one of the most creative and talented people that I've ever met. She describes creativity as a buzz-word which isn't really understood by many young people. "To be creative means not being afraid to do things in an unusual way, even when you don't know what you will end up with," Sasha says. "And if you care about something, then you shouldn't be lazy and only talk about your cause," she continues, now describing her

views on activism. Sasha is a strong believer in a strong, direct connection between creativity and activism. Even traditional opposition demonstrations, in her opinion, become much more effective when something unusual happens during them, like "when anarchists began playing their drums during the Cherno-

byl Day and Social marches, catching everyone's attention!" Sasha does things her own way. During a recent march against the regime's



Sasha

cancellation of benefits for students and other vulnerable segments of society, she was part of a small group of young people who refused to follow the planned route and instead marched down one of Minsk's main streets. Unlike most students, Sasha also lives her life according to environmentally friendly principles. She is inspired by many things, but one of her chief motivations is what a friend once called "positive anger" – a feeling of despair that pushes one to do something new. She also has a few favorite creative blogging communities, such as <http://community.livejournal.com/4asa> [popi3](http://community.livejournal.com/4asa) or <http://community.livejournal.com/desi>

[gn books](#), but says that her main "community" is the company of her friends. Sasha is often inspired by people and one of them is the owner of Lithuania's largest photo studio with whom she has recently had a conversation.

Sasha is one of hundreds of Belarusians studying at the European Humanities University, a leading private institution which was shut down by Belarusian authorities in 2004 and now operates in exile in Vilnius, Lithuania. For Sasha, who graduated from an elite high school in 2007, studying at the EHU was a conscious choice. "After hearing terrible stories about the Journalism

Department at Belarusian State University or Cultural Management Department at the University of Culture from my friends, I had no wish to apply there. So, I found a syllabus from the EHU online and decided that it was the best place for me." After a semester of commuting between Minsk and Vilnius, she still thinks it was the right choice. "First of all, something is always

happening here and you don't feel like you live in a can anymore," Sasha explains. "Secondly, I'm gaining precious experience from studying and living abroad. Even being just three hours from Minsk, I've begun looking at things from a different perspective." Sasha hasn't planned her future yet. She says that it isn't easy for her even to make plans for next week. She is excited about her artistic projects, open to new ideas, and hopes someday to be publishing samizdat magazines and marketing the environmentally friendly soap she now makes at home for herself.

By Iryna Vidanava
Source: Transitions Online
Photo of Iryna Vidanava by ODB

Culture

Mikola Selyashchuk – the Artist from Above the Ocean

The new building of the National Art Museum in Minsk is a grand hall. With its whitewashed walls and columns, it resembles the ancient Roman *thermae*. This part of the Museum has been unveiled only a couple of years ago. It contains some of the most outstanding pieces of Belarusian art – those

few, which were not lost, looted or destroyed during many never-ending wars, occupation periods, and ideological purges.

In one of the hall's corners, you will find a modest glass-covered stand, something like a jeweler's showcase. Looking inside, you cannot help thinking you see a handful of gems. However, as you take a closer look, they turn out to be sheets of paper, vividly coloured by some meticulous hand. What you see is book graphics by Mikola Selyashchuk, one of the most outstanding Belarusian artists of the late 20th century.

Mikola Selyashchuk was born in 1947 in the village of Velikaryta; you can hardly find a place in Belarus, which would be further to the south. It's a country of sunflowers, big juicy apples, and white sand on the riverbanks. Having moved to a big city in pursuit of an artistic career, Mikola Selyashchuk carefully preserved the fragments of his childhood dreams, which he later generously inserted into his paintings.

Uladzimer Nyaklyaeu, a poet and friend of Mikola Selyashchuk, recalls himself telling the artist a story about a boy, who grew up with his father, a forester, in the woods without any knowledge of the outside world. One day the boy was struck to see a car, which came bustling through the thick of the forest to his house. "This is a story about me!" said Mikola Selyashchuk. "I also remember, how



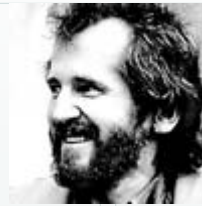
The way home

a metal machine invaded my world once, bringing its own strange smell and colour along. It happened on a homestead, where I grew up... This homestead was my whole world, when I was a kid. I hadn't known any other world before. That's where I come from, that's where I have brought all these fairytale dwarfs and insects from".

In his paintings, Mikola Selyashchuk created his own universe, which is at the same time a very Belarusian one. It is populated by men in clothes of different ages, beautiful women, and some strange creatures, which remind you of magic fairytales or pagan myths. They all populate Belarusian landscapes, which are so vivid and realistic that you almost sense the odour of melting snow or fresh grass.

"The meaning of such babel of characters, colours, and techniques is *the Game*", writes Siarhey Hareuski in his series of articles "100 Masterpieces of the XXth Century", published in the weekly newspaper *Nasha Niva* in 1999. "The foreboding of the Creation emerges out of the mixed rubbish, unfinished puppets, sheets of paper, fragments, splinters, and extracts. The artist fixes his look on the half-backed things, ready to breathe life into them".

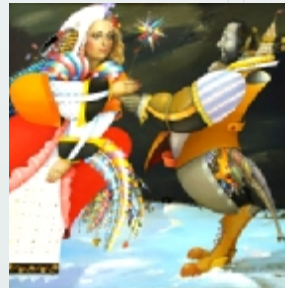
Mikola Selyashchuk first became fa-



Mikola Selyashchuk

mous in the 1970s with his book graphics. He prepared illustrations for some collections of Belarusian folk stories and fairytales. Books with his colourful miniatures could be found in almost every Belarusian family in the 1990's. It would not be an exaggeration

to say that the imaginary world of Selyashchuk has, to a large extent, shaped views of many Belarusians, who are now in their late twenties. The artist made Belarusian classics sound different by illustrating, for instance, the epic poem "Symon the Musician" by a prominent Belarusian poet, Yakub Kolas. "Playing around with filigree details, like puppets, filling the composition with the realm of strange, incomplete characters, which either fly or swim or grow, has become the special style of the artist", writes Siarhey Hareuski.



I love meeting you

The paintings by Mikola Selyashchuk resemble still shots from movies, or frozen theatre scenes. Sometimes the author himself appears between the characters of his paintings, like a director during the opening night of a theatre show. In terms of audience, Mikola

Selyashchuk usually had full house; his works appear in many private collections and museums around the world.

Mikola Selyashchuk often introduced himself as an "artist from above the ocean". This should be understood literally, for

his workshop was on the top floor of the house in Minsk, right above the famous seafood store "Ocean". By some tragic twist of fate, he found his last rest in the salty waters of Tyrrhenian Sea, when he was fulfilling his old dream of touring Italy in 1996. Mikola Selyashchuk was swimming when a wave swept over him. Sailing, flying, drifting away was a frequent motive of his phantasmagoric works...

by Ales Kudrytsky



The Ship