

# Belarus Headlines

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*Office for a Democratic  
Belarus*

## *Inside this issue:*

<i>Belarusian poster art exhibition in Warsaw, Berlin and Dresden</i>	1
<i>Politics and society</i>	2-4
<i>EU and Belarus</i>	4-5
<i>Finance and economics</i>	6-7
<i>Culture</i>	8-9
<i>Belarusian design</i>	

We on the Web

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

## **Belarusian Poster Art Travelling Exhibition in Warsaw, Berlin and Dresden**



The Office for a Democratic Belarus is pleased to present a travelling exhibition of the Belarusian poster art, entitled "Visual code of the time: post-Soviet poster art in Belarus", which provides comprehensive insight into a particular aspect of Belarusian history and culture of the late Soviet era. The display features the works of 15 outstanding representatives of poster art that have become symbols of the whole epoch. The main goal of the artists was to encourage the public to broaden their outlook, and to cast off the blinkers of traditional Soviet ideology. A number of posters presented in this exhibition won international contests.

The exposition will be available in the following galleries:

*"Zoya", Warsaw, October 9-21*

*"Für Fortgeschrittene", Berlin,  
October 24-31*

*"Aquarium" Student Club,  
Dresden, November 5-28*

The ODB should like to express its gratitude to all partner organisations who helped make this project possible, in particular the Robert Bosch Stiftung and the German Marshall Fund of the United States. We should also like to thank the galleries and institutions that agreed to host this exhibition.

In addition, we would like to extend our special thanks to the Belarusian Union of Designers who provided the posters for the exhibition free of charge.

## Politics and Society

### 'Last dictator' Caught Between East and West



*Alyaksandr Lukashenka*

Alyaksandr Lukashenka, the president of Belarus, revels in his notoriety.

Lucky are those, he says with a smile, who get to meet and sit down at a table with "the last dictator in Europe".

It is a sign of the 54-year-old Belarusian leader's defiance of western political rules that he is ready to turn this epithet into a joke. It is also a measure of his confidence. After 14 years in power, he faces few internal challenges, in spite of a parliamentary election due at the end of the month.

Given the authoritarian control he has ruthlessly established in his country of 10m, it could hardly be otherwise. A decade of strong economic growth has also allowed the former farm manager to retain much of the genuine popularity he secured when he took power in 1994 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Periodic protests organised by divided opposition parties are largely confined to the capital, Minsk.

He relishes his hold on domestic power. "I will be happy if you communicate the straightforward message to people in Europe that I have no dictatorial aspirations to stay in power but a tremendous dependence on the will of the people," said Mr Lukashenka on Thursday in an interview with the Financial Times and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

The Belarusian president spoke for two hours on everything from the forthcoming England-Belarus World Cup

football match to energy and his political credo.

Foreign media appearances are unusual for Mr Lukashenka. But these are unusual times. However strong his position at home might be, he is feeling pressure from outside, chiefly from Russia, his political sponsor, aid donor and energy supplier. Well before the Georgian crisis, Mr Lukashenka put out feelers to the west in an effort to ease the isolation (including a visa ban on senior officials) imposed by the European Union after international observers condemned as unfair the 2006 presidential elections. Brussels indicated it would be ready for a moderate rapprochement, as long as Mr Lukashenka eased his regime's severity, starting with the release of political prisoners and efforts to improve democratic standards in the parliamentary polls.

Mr Lukashenka has delivered on the prisoners, as the EU has confirmed, and is now concentrating on the elections. He says he is breaking Belarusian laws to ensure the polls meet EU norms, for example in pushing electoral commissions to include more opposition representatives. He also welcomes international observers, saying: "We have opened the country for all." But he warns the EU and the US to be objective in their post-election assessments, accusing the west of "double standards". He complains important countries with similar political shortcomings escape punishment, notably Russia. "Whether the west likes it or not, parliament will be elected in accordance with our constitution," he says. "I will not go begging for visas to the EU."

Mr Lukashenka wonders whether the west's real aim is regime change. He insists he is in no hurry to go, pointing out that "the English Queen" has been in power for some time.

He argues he has served his country well, pulling it out of post-Soviet economic confusion, bringing stability and raising incomes to 2 times Soviet lev-

els. The economy grew 8.2 % last year and expansion is forecast to slow only a little to 7.1 % this year, according to the International Monetary Fund. Belarus is changing but at its own pace, he says. "If you want to change us to your standards, you can think about it but you don't need to push us to it. Maybe we can come to realise we can be 80 % like Germany or Great Britain. It must be our choice." Having kept state enterprises in place much longer than other former communist states, Mr Lukashenka says privatisation is on the agenda, with up to 100 per cent stakes for sale. But he warns the price must be "fair". Greenfield investors are also welcome. "Decent" business people will even be given free land for their houses "so they can live not on the edge of Europe, as in London, but in the centre of Europe".

The Belarusian president acknowledges he has irritated Russia by not recognising the breakaway Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. But he does not rule out doing so in future, saying the new parliament should have a say. He rejects as "absolutely stupid" suggestions that Russia's action set a dangerous precedent for Belarus. "God forbid Russia should try and do the same against Belarus. In that unimaginable case Europe would have the full right to resist Russia with no compromise on any methods or leverage," he says. Mr Lukashenka wants the west to be more engaged in the former Soviet Union, saying western influence was the main reason why former Soviet states declined to follow Russia in recognising Abkhazia and South Ossetia. But what is the guarantee that, in the future, the west will be a strong enough counterweight to "the ever-increasing might of Russia and the growing influence of Russia in these countries"? A fair question but one that is not easy for the west to discuss with Mr Lukashenka.

18/09/2008

*Stefan Wagstyl, The Financial Times*

## Politics and Society

### Aliaksandr Kazulin Visits Brussels

On 16 September 2008, the Office for a Democratic Belarus attended European Parliamentarians' meeting with a former presidential candidate and political prisoner Aliaksandr Kazulin that took place in the EP in Brussels, Belgium. In his address to the audience, which included members of the European Parliament, representatives of NGOs and media, Mr Kazulin presented a statement on behalf of the United Democratic Forces of Belarus on the issue of normalisation of Belarus' relations with the EU, the US and various international organisations. While describing the release of political prisoners as the first important step on the part of the Belarusian authorities, the speaker nonetheless noted that this measure does not solve all the problems. Fundamental institutional changes are required to prevent the current regime from carrying out systematic political repressions in the future. It has therefore been stressed that a dialogue with the Lukashenka government should take place only with the participation of the country's democratic forces, and EU-Belarus relations should develop on the basis of fundamental values and democratic principles.

It has further been noted that in order to facilitate democratic development in Belarus, the EU has to implement an open-door policy that would promote the dissemination of European values among all strata of Belarusian society. In this regard, Mr Kazulin underscored the importance of lowering Schengen visa fees for Belarusian citizens and liberalising EU-Belarus visa regime.

The speaker also suggested that the EU and the USA should develop a common strategy, or Road map, vis-à-vis Belarus.

Finally, Mr Kazulin expressed his cordial regards to all people in Europe for their support during his time in prison and all members of the European Institutions who put pressure on the Belarusian authorities for his release. For his part, Jacek Protasiewicz, head of EP Delegation for Relations with Belarus who chaired the meeting, reminded the audience that Aliaksandr Kazulin has been nominated for the prestigious Sakharov Prize, a yearly award given by the EP to defenders of democracy and human rights around the world.

In the discussion that followed, Mr Kazulin answered questions regarding Russia's role in Belarusian politics, the level of support to the Lukashenka regime among ordinary Belarusians, and divisions within the country's opposition forces. With regard to the first issue, Mr Kazulin said Russia plays a very important role on the political scene of Belarus and that Moscow's subsidies – and the non-traditional way of counting the GDP – may explain the government's declared success of the Belarusian economy. He admitted that Lukashenka has considerable support among Belarusians, but noted that in case of free and fair elections the opposition would receive from 40 to 50 % of parliamentary seats. He also raised a question of Belarus' membership in the Council of Europe.



*Aliaksandr Kazulin speaking at the European Parliament*

Following the meeting, Aliaksandr Kazulin and Jacek Protasiewicz took part in a press conference at which they were joined by Vice President of the Socialist Group Jan Marinus Wiersma and MEP for the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania Justas Vincas Paleckis. During the conference Mr Wiersma reiterated the EU's declared preparedness to re-assess the situation in Belarus, and the sanctions in place against it, in the light of the legislative elections. He nonetheless stressed that any improvement in electoral practices would be welcomed and evaluated. Mr Paleckis added that Belarus' neighbours are closely watching the situation in the country.

16/09/2008

**Source: ODB**

**Photo: EP photo-service**

### Milinkevich Meets with German Leader Angela Merkel



Belarusian opposition politician Alyaksandr Milinkevich met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on the sidelines of a human rights conference in Berlin on September 17.

Mr Milinkevich shared his view on the situation in Belarus with the German leader and called on the European Union and Germany to conduct "an active

moral and flexible policy toward Belarus," according to the former presidential candidate's press office. Speaking at the conference, Ms. Merkel described steps to improve Belarus' human rights record as Europe's priority.

17/09/2008

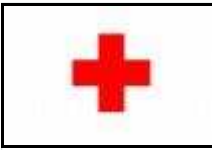
**Source: BelaPAN**

**Photo: Kas.de**



## Politics and Society

### Head of Red Cross Regional Office Paying Official Visit to Belarus



On September 18-19, Head of the Regional Office of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine Jaap Timmer paid an official visit to Belarus.

Mr. Jaap Timmer was elected head of the Regional Office in July 2008. The major objective of his visit to Belarus is to survey the work of the Belarusian

Society of the Red Cross, consider cooperation prospects in the humanitarian area with the heads of the UN Offices, the European Union, the International Organization for Migration, the Office of the Federation.

The Belarusian Society of the Red Cross General Director Viktor Kalbanau said that "the first visit of the head of the Regional Office to Belarus is a good opportunity to discuss the prospects of further cooperation, collaboration in the implementation

of various humanitarian programmes in the country".

BSRC is a non-governmental organization with the unique status and emblem. Founded in 1921, the charitable organization is financed by voluntary contributions of the people and organizations. The major principles of the activity are humanity, impartiality, independence, voluntariness, unity, universality.

18/09/2008

Source: Trend News

### Opposition Decides Not to Boycott Parliamentary Election while Lukashenka Threatens to Cut Relations with West if it Does Not Recognize the Election Results



Belarus' liberal and patriotic opposition overcame divisions Sunday and agreed

not to boycott a parliamentary election that the government hopes will improve its poor relations with the West.

About 70 opposition candidates have been allowed on the ballot for 110 seats, far more than in previous elections.

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has staked his hopes on next Sunday's vote to secure legitimacy from

the United States and European Union and expressed impatience with Western demands on Saturday, saying Minsk had bent over backward to stage an election that would win their approval. "If even this time the election turns out to be undemocratic, we will cease all discussions with them," he said.

21/09/2008

Source: The Moscow Times, Interfax

## EU and Belarus

### Senior European Union Officials Call for a Thaw in Ties with Belarus



Javier Solana

Senior European Union officials called for a thaw in ties with Belarus after it freed political prisoners and declined to recognise Moscow-backed breakaway regions of Georgia. "They have taken important decisions on the release of political prisoners... We would like very much to find some-

thing on our side to reward that sort of behaviour," EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana told reporters at an EU meeting.

EU External Affairs Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said it was time to reopen a high-level political dialogue with Belarus, due to hold a Sept. 28 parliamentary election that will be under close international scrutiny.

She suggested inviting the Belarus foreign minister to meet his EU



Benita Ferrero-Waldner

counterparts in Brussels on Sept. 15 and cutting the cost of visas for Belarusian citizens visiting EU countries.

"I am in favour of more openness and possibly of helping in terms of visas,"

Ferrero-Waldner told reporters on the sidelines of the meeting in the southern French city of Avignon.

06/09/2008

Source: worldbulletin.net

## EU and Belarus

### Polish Foreign Minister Pays Unexpected Visit to Belarus



*Syarghei Martynau and Radoslaw Sikorski*

Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski met with his Belarusian counterpart Syarghei Martynau on September 12 to discuss border security, transportation and energy cooperation issues.

Assessing the results of his visit to Belarus, Minister Sikorski voiced hope that the European Union will aim at liberalizing visa restrictions for senior Belarusian officials. He announced bilateral talks which would aim at dropping the visa ban for Belarusian officials introduced as sanctions for human rights violations. 'We would like our citizens to travel to each other's country without any problems. We will jointly consider lowering visa prices and liberalising rules for their granting and develop better cooperation between consular services. We will look at ways for doing away with EU entry visas for

Belarusian officials,' Sikorski said. Minister Sikorski declared Poland considers Belarus a European partner. He underscored the visit to Minsk and talks with his Belarusian counterpart had full EU approval and were held thanks to the latest promising developments in Belarus, mainly the release of political prisoners.

Poland's head of diplomacy also positively acknowledged the fact of allowing international on-the-spot observers to evaluate the recent parliamentary elections in Belarus.

12.09.2008

Source: Polskieradio.pl

### EU Ministers Woo Belarus Ahead of Polls

European foreign ministers on Monday held out the prospect of aid and lifted sanctions in a bid to persuade the Belarusian authorities to hold democratic elections next month. The 27 foreign ministers, meeting in Brussels, said the EU would "re-evaluate the situation in Belarus in the light of the legislative elections and the progress made by Belarus on the road to democratic values and human rights"

EU ministers also held out the possibility of "positive and concrete measures" for progressively improving ties with Belarus, including official exchanges



and trade and cultural initiatives: "The Council will evaluate the situation in Belarus in the light of the parliamentary elections and of the progress made by Belarus in embracing the values of democracy and human rights, and is prepared to begin to review the restrictive measures against Belarusian leaders, and to take positive and concrete measures that may lead to a gradual reengagement with Belarus, including via a meeting between the European Union troika and the Belarusian Minister for

Foreign Affairs. It recalls in this connection the possibilities offered by the European neighbourhood policy, including the document on the European Union's offer to Belarus of November 2006. In this context, the European Union remains ready to increase its official, commercial and cultural exchanges with Belarus, and to significantly increase its bilateral aid. The Council would also emphasise the benefits that Belarus could receive from the regional forms of cooperation developed by the European Union."

15/09/2008

Source: ODB, concilium.europa.eu

### Lithuania Ready to «Help Belarus Embark on European Path»

Lithuania has always been ready to help Belarus embark on a European path, Violeta Gaizauskaite, Spokesperson for the Lithuanian foreign ministry, said in an interview with BelaPAN.

"Belarus could demonstrate such a movement in the forthcoming parliamentary elections," the spokesperson said.

She emphasised the importance of EU foreign ministers' Monday decision to consider revision of the EU sanctions against Minsk if the country's September parliamentary elections are free and fair.

Commenting on September 11 meeting between the Belarusian and Lithuanian premiers, the spokesperson said that it had been fruitful. The premiers "exchanged opinions about a wide spectrum of key bilateral issues, as well as discussed the situation in the region."

"Lithuania has its own interests in Belarus, as has Belarus in Lithuania," she said. "Dialogue on many issues that are directly connected with the everyday needs of our peoples should continue. The results of such dialogue are well known. They include the final demarcation of the shared border, trade growth, transit shipments, and preparations for an agreement on the two-way travel of border area residents that are nearing completion."

18/09/2008

Source: naviny.by

## Finance and Economics

### Short Summary for September 2-22

#### Raiffeisen Ups Stake in Belarus' Priorbank to Almost 80%



Raiffeisen International Bank Holding AG increased its stake in Belarus' Priorbank to 79.43% stake in August from 63.05%, a member of the Belarusian Currency and Stock Exchange told Interfax.

A total of 47 deals for 22.6 billion Belarusian rubles were registered on the exchange in August to buy 2.322 million shares in Priorbank, or 2.88% of its charter capital.

In addition, as earlier reported, Raiffeisen in August bought 10.884 million shares in Priorbank, or 13.5% of its charter capital, for \$50.173 million from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Priorbank told Interfax that these transactions were executed with the bank's minority shareholders as part of a 30-day offer Raiffeisen called on August 19 for the purchase of the bank's stock. Priorbank has charter capital of 270.1045 billion Belarusian rubles split into 80.628 million shares with par value of 3,350 rubles.

Raiffeisen is buying the Priorbank stock

at a price of 9,739 rubles per share. Priorbank was founded in 1989. Raiffeisen became a shareholder in the bank in 2003. The Belarusian government and state-affiliated shareholders own 10% of the bank.

Priorbank ranked 82nd by assets among CIS banks and third among Belarusian banks in 2007 in the Interfax-1000: CIS Banks ranking. The official exchange rate on September 2 was 2,111 Belarusian rubles/ \$1.

02/09/2008

Source: Interfax

#### Belarus to Allow 50 pct Foreign Stake in Its Banks

Belarus' Central Bank doubled the size of the percentage stake which foreign investors are allowed to own in domestic banks, citing growing interest in the sector. In future, foreign investors will be able to hold up to 50 % in Belarusian banks, up from a current limit of 25%.

Belarus still has a largely command economy inherited from Soviet times, but has talked of allowing more foreign investors in especially after it received its maiden international

credit ratings a year ago. Belarus earlier this year signalled an intention to allow at least six foreign investors into the banking sector, including a sale to Commerzbank of a controlling stake in a large bank, Belinvestbank.

It also aims to sell stakes of 10-15 % of other state banks, including the country's two largest, Belarusbank and Belagroprombank.

"The decision to raise the size of foreign capital was called for by the increase in the interest of foreign strategic

investors in the Belarusian banking sector," the Central Bank said in a statement. "They are ready to inject cash sources in charter capital, not just in existing banks but also in creating new credit-finance institutions."

At the moment, the state owns over 70 % of the capital in the country's banking sector. Foreign investors own about 22.2 % in 29 banks.

04/09/2008

Source: The Guardian

#### GTech Signs Belarus Deal



American gaming technology firm GTech has announced an agreement with closed joint stock company

Sport Pari to create the first online lottery system in Belarus.

Providence-based GTech revealed that Sport Pari had received a Government license to become the exclusive license holder and operator of online lottery games for the European country with the five-year agreement running through July of 2013. Decided

following a competitive procurement, the subsidiary of Italian firm Lotomatica revealed that it expects to receive revenues of \$15.84 million over life of the deal, which begins next month.

"We are pleased to have this opportunity to supply a comprehensive range of lottery solutions and services to our newest customer, Sport Pari," said Jaymin Patel, President and Chief Executive Officer for the Rhode Island firm.

"This agreement in Belarus is strategically important for GTech as we look to

expand our presence in this rapidly-developing region and support governments and their licensed operators in regulating the gaming market."

Under the terms of the agreement, GTech will provide Sport Pari with its Enterprise Series solution and approximately 1,000 terminals for the launch of the first online lotto game next month. It revealed that the number of terminals is expected to grow to up to 5,000 as additional online games are implemented over the life of the deal.

08/09/2008

Source: igamingbusiness.com

## Finance and Economics

### Severstal Seeks to Build Steel Plant in Belarus



Severstal is interested in the construction of a new steel plant in Belarus, the country's Prime Minister

Syarghei Sidorsky was cited by the cabinet's press office as saying following talks with Vyacheslav

Pozgalyov, governor of Russia's Vologda region. The PM noted that the matter had been discussed during a meeting in Minsk. Sidorsky added that the Belarus government planned to introduce the proposal on building the plant to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The project has been estimated at more than \$2bn. A feasibility study

is being carried out, and Belarus intends to launch a construction tender in the near future. Severstal showed interest in the project a month ago, according to Sidorsky.

09/09/2008

Source: RosBusonessConsulting

### World Bank: Belarus Enters List of Top Ten Regulatory Reformers

According to Doing Business 2009, the sixth annual report published by the World Bank and IFC, Belarus entered the list of ten top countries - regulatory reformers.

From June 2007 to June 2008, Belarus made improvements in six out of 10 indicators of regulatory reform to take the fourth place in the list of top ten regulatory reformers. The country moved up a full 30 slots, from 115 to 85, in the overall ease of doing business.

The report provides the information that Belarus' public credit registry expanded credit information by eliminating the minimum threshold for loans recorded in its database. Starting a business became easier: a unified registry database was created, a time limit was introduced for registration, and the minimum capital requirement was cut by half.

Belarus created a one-stop shop for property registration and introduced a broad administrative simplification



programme that set strict time limits at the registry and computerized its records. As a result, the time required to register property in Belarus fell from 231 days to 21.

The time required for dealing with construction permits fell by 140 days, thanks to new statutory time limits for preapproval clearances and building permits.

A new customs code and new banking regulations simplified the rules of trade in Belarus. Belarus eased the tax burden on some duties and amended the simplified tax system for small businesses.

World Bank Group representative in the Republic of Belarus Craig Bell noted: "This year Belarus' impressive results in the Doing Business rating show the attempts of the country to introduce reforms and improve the business and investment climate. Stable and versatile reform efforts will continue Belarus' advancement in Do-

ing Business rating".

"Countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia continue to lead the world in easing the regulatory burden on business and in sustaining their reform agendas," co-author of the report Svetlana Bagaudinova said. Many countries that made improvements this year looked to earlier pacesetters for ideas on how to reform their regulations. It is obvious that Belarus' reform in doing business has been determined as one of the top-priority goals and at present we estimate the first achievements of this work," she added.

Doing Business 2009 ranks 181 economies on the overall ease of doing business in 10 indicators of the governmental regulation of doing business including the time and cost of business opening, transborder trade, taxes and business closing. The ratings do not embrace such areas as macroeconomic policy, the quality of the infrastructure, currency stability, investors and the crime rate.

10/09/2008

Source: Trend News

### Belarus Increases Export of Oil Products by 2.4% in January-July



In January-July 2008, Belarus increased export of oil products to 9.092 million tonnes, 2.4% up over the same period of 2007, BelTA learnt

from the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis.

For the seven months, non-CIS countries accounted for the bulk of the oil exports – 8.241 million tonnes (96.6% as against the same period of last year). The deliveries of the Belarusian oil products to the CIS countries soared almost 2.5 times to 851.2 thousand tonnes.

In January-July, Belarus supplied the foreign market with 2.537 million ton-

nes of potash fertilizers, 98.3% over the same period of 2007. The country exported 57 thousand tonnes of nitrogen fertilizers (63%), 87.5 thousand tonnes of chemical fiber and threads (94.8%).

19/09/2008

Source: BelTA



## Culture

### Belarusian Design: Past and Present

Revolutionary initiatives in the 1920's in the Soviet Union gave momentum to the practice of design. Outstanding projects took place in the field of poster art, graphics and fashion. Artists such as Ma-

levich, Lis-sitzky, Popova and the Sternberg brothers contributed to an international art and design process. Belarus played a significant role, primarily by establishing the phenomenon of UNOVIS, a group of experimental artists, -in Vitebsk in 1919. But after Stalin's state doctrine was launched all of alternative artistic initiatives became unwelcome. Revolutionary experiments in the field of art were forgotten for many decades and even considered unsuccessful by some loyal art historians.

It became clear that the Soviet economic system was not able to provide a high living standard on a large scale, as indicated by such sacrifices as design. The culture of the West and its lifestyle has always been strongly criticised. Western music, art and design was nevertheless always of a big interest to many people in the Soviet Union, even if the country was isolated.

The use of the word 'design' in the Soviet Union was very limited; the Soviet equivalent was called 'technical aesthetics'. The development of this concept was nonetheless an achievement, as the state was imposing Marxist



*Design-Format-2008, annual exhibition organised by the Belarusian Designers' Union*

and Leninist aesthetics as the only right approach to art. The first courses of technical aesthetics, introduced in technical schools, were the first attempts to speak about the phenomenon of design in Soviet society. My grandfather was a creator and lecturer of one of such courses at the Polytechnic Institute in Minsk in the mid 1960's. He remembers the challenge of organising a course at which one could speak about Western modern art initiatives. This was one of the few well attended courses, even by students from other universities.

A big interest for the public were the few exhibitions of Western design. An exhibition of Finnish design took place in Minsk in 1974. Two years later the Belarusian public had a chance to see works of West German and British designers. Living in isolation created an increased excitement towards Western culture. Western culture came to the Soviet Union through the Socialist countries of Eastern Europe, who were much more linked traditionally with Europe. The Polish art magazines like "Sztuka" or "Projekt" often contained summaries in Russian and were very popular among artists. Thanks to these opportunities Belarusian artists were familiar with

some key personalities in a Western art.

The Soviet Union had also its own infrastructure for design. The All-Soviet Scientific Institute of technical aesthetics had branches in the all former Soviet Republics.

The branch in Minsk specialised more in designing

tractors, agricultural machinery and received orders were from different parts of the USSR. The production of the "Neman" glass factory was of a high design standard. The factory received several international awards for its production, such as Grand-Prix at the International Expo in Brussels (1958) and others. A truck MAZ-630 was also awarded at this international exhibition.

An alternative and a new approach to design was formed in a community of young designers, who obtained qualifications from the Academy of Arts starting in 1982. The beginning of their professional career coincided with a relatively liberal period of *Perestroika*. The area in which they worked most extensively was poster art. The impact of Belarusian poster art during this period was significant because Belarusian artists were represented for the first time on the international stage. By creating challenging posters on environmental and social issues the artists confronted the totalitarian Soviet mentality. The poster art of the mid-1980's and 1990's was the area where Belarusian design was able to fully express itself. A creative potential for Belarusian designers and the use of new media



## Culture

### Belarusian Design: Past and Present

time, on the international stage. By creating challenging posters on environmental and social issues the artists confronted the totalitarian Soviet mentality. The poster art of the mid-1980's and 1990's was the area where Belarusian design was able to fully express itself. A creative potential for Belarusian designers and the use of new media in applied arts was, for the first time, presented on a large scale.

There is a proverb, which says that the soldier who does not want to become a general is not a good soldier. It could be rephrased for a designer who wants his own ideas and projects to be represented on a large scale. Industrial design is such a dream for every designer. Although Belarus is considered an industrial country, it is obvious that our products are not competitive against Western products of the same kind. Besides quality, a good design is a reason for a customer to choose that particular product. Belarusian industrial production still relies on unpretentious tastes typical of the territory of the former Soviet Union. That is why the Belarusian designer's dream to reach an industry with creative decisions remains unrealistic. The luck of a good design with Belarusian origins is based on the way the whole economic and administrative system is structured. It doesn't matter that the industry, good educational facilities for studying design and professional designers themselves are all present.

The Soviet design model was working in a way where a lot of designing projects were undertaken, but almost none of them were transformed into practice. The transition to an independent Belarus was even worse for designers, because the design infrastructure was liquidated but the situation with the industry remained the same. The numerous attempts launched by the Belarusian



*Project of the century, Uladzimir Tsesler, Syarhei Voichanka, 1999*

Designers Union to convince the state that design needs state support and state development programs, remained without prevail. At the same time, the situation was in their favour as well, because now designers could work more for private initiatives, being more independent. A lot of them started to work extensively in advertising, interior and fashion design. New independent initiatives were launched, such as the appearance of a design magazine "Prodesign" which specialises every year in a design exhibition at the National Expo centre.



*"Prodesign", Cover*

The situation of the last decade created a chance for artistic freedom for designers. A lot of them became famous for creating projects that represent something between design and applied arts. Interesting art objects were created. Of a huge interest is the project called "Project of a century," where the most significant artists of the twentieth century were represented in the shape of an egg

that was comparable in size to a dinosaur's egg. You can distinguish Picasso, Dali, Malevich, Vasarely and other important artistic figures. The project was created by designers Tsesler and Voichanka duo and exhibited abroad for several times, including the stage of 51st Venice Biennale. Tsesler and Voichanka also created a chair as another creative solution.

One of the most prominent examples of Belarusian design in the last decade is a design of oil stations by Belarusian designer Shishko. Some of his projects received critical acclaim in the West. This is a good example of how Belarusian design can expand its activities abroad.

It is not clear if Belarusian design is going to be requested on a



*Oil stations by Aliaksei Shyshko in Brest & Minsk*

large scale in industrial production or not but it is always ready to demonstrate its creativity of thinking. This ability always remains a valuable and distinguishing feature for Belarusian design.

**By Yahor Sursky**