

Belarus Headlines

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*Office for a Democratic
Belarus*

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We on the Web

www.democraticbelarus.eu

3 Калядзі!



Merry Christmas!

EU and Belarus

OSCE Election Experts to Visit Minsk for Consultations



Belarusian election officials will hold consultations with representatives of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in Minsk in the latter half of January, said Lidziya Yarmoshyna, head of the central election commission on December 17.

The consultations will focus on changes to Belarus' election regulations recommended by the international organization.

Alyaksandr Lukashenka asked the government to study the recommendations earlier this month.

Ms. Yarmoshyna said that apart from the central election commission, the government's legislature-drafting centre would also examine the recommendations. "We are going to send the OSCE final report to all local election authorities for a study in order to discuss the election campaign and the OSCE recommendations at a round-table conference afterward. At least a dialogue will begin," said Yarmoshyna.

The official failed to specify which of the OSCE proposals could be the most acceptable for the Belarusian authorities.

While the preliminary report issued by OSCE observers shortly after September's elections said the vote had been in compliance with national regulations, the final report did not mention it and put an emphasis on shortcomings,

Ms. Yarmoshyna said. "This is evidence that this document is politically biased," she stressed.

In its report, the international organization concluded that the vote had fallen short of international standards despite certain improvements.

In particular, the OSCE said that the "election environment" in the country "still did not allow genuine political competition and equal treatment of election competitors by authorities."

The organization concluded that Belarusian regulations continues to "present obstacles" to the conduct of elections in line with OSCE standards.

17/12/2008

Source: **BelaPAN**

EU Welcomes the Registration of For Freedom Movement



Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), welcomed the decision of the Belarusian Ministry of Justice to register the "For Freedom" movement headed by former Belarusian presidential candidate Aliaksandr Milinkevich.

"The issue of legal rights of civil society organisations has played an important role in the ongoing dialogue between the European Union and the Belarusian authorities. The release of the last internationally recognised political prisoners last August has led to a new phase in this dialogue.

The decision on the For Freedom movement is an important step, which will further support positive developments in the relationship between the European Union and Belarus," reads the statement.

Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner welcomes registration of Belarus NGO "For Freedom"

"I welcome the registration of the Belarus NGO "For Freedom" by the Belarus authorities. This is a step in the right direction towards respect of NGO rights and for freedom of assembly that the EU has been consistently calling for.

At the same time I also congratulate the "For Freedom" movement and its chairman Mr Milinkevich and encour-

age an open and constructive debate among all those in Belarus who aim for the well-being and respect of the rights of the Belarusian people".

The Commissioner also recalled "the EU's commitment of 13 October to reengage with Belarus and to further review its restrictive measures against Belarusian individuals in the light of further progress towards democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law.

In this context, it is essential that Belarus remains a country without political prisoners and respects freedom of expression, association and assembly."

17-18/12/2008

Source: **consilium.europa.eu, ec.europa.eu**

Politics and Society

Belarus Concerned Over Russian Stand on Union State Development - Source



A Russian-Belarusian summit planned in Moscow for December 1 has been delayed by the uncoordinated agenda, a source close to Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka told Interfax on the condition of anonymity.

He said Minsk "was concerned over the Russian volatile attitude to the Union State development." "Belarus is always ready to discuss any aspects of the Union State in any format - either a one-to-one meeting or a session of the Union State's Supreme State Council," the source said. The Belarusian and Russian leaders "reached a clear agreement on giving a fresh impetus to the development of the Union State in the light of current geopolitical conditions," he said. The agreement was reached in Brest on June 22 and in Moscow on October 25.

"With this in mind, the Belarusian side suggested broadening the 'routine' agenda of the Supreme State Council with major political, economic and military matters. Russia refused to discuss the matters at the Supreme State Council and suggested holding a closed-door meeting. Belarus accepted the offer," the source said.

Yet Moscow changed its mind at the last moment and agreed to hold a meeting of the Supreme State Council "with the 'routine' agenda, which, by the way, was not fully coordinated," said the source.

01/12/2008

Source: Interfax

Belarusian Activist Gets One Year of Freedom Restriction



Alyaksandr Barozenka with his mother outside the court

The Minsk Central Court imposed a one-year "restricted freedom" sentence on opposition activist Alyaksandr Barozenka over his role in a demonstration an unsanctioned protest held earlier this year. Barozenka will be serving his sentence at home. He was released in the court room.

The January protest saw about 2,000 entrepreneurs protesting in downtown Minsk over new legislation that

doubled their taxes and forced them to reregister their businesses.

Alyaksandr Barozenka insisted he was innocent. Several dozen protesters chanted "Freedom!" outside the Minsk Central Court.

09/12/2008

Source: ERB, the Associated press

Belarus Police Briefly Detains Belarusian Activists



Opposition activists conducting a flash-mob near the KGB building in Minsk

Police in Belarus have arrested at least 20 opposition activists marking Human Rights Day.

A number of activists wearing mock prison clothing were arrested Wednesday outside the Minsk headquarters of the Belarusian security service, known by its Soviet-era name the KGB. The demonstrators carried placards with slogans, such as "I'm an independent journalist" and "I am a human rights activist."

Several activists were arrested in front of a Minsk department store after handing out leaflets with the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Four other protesters were arrested in the western city of Grodno. All the detainees were released on the same day without charges.

10/12/2008

Source: VOA News

Politics and Society

Thousands of Belarusian Small Business Owners Protest



Thousands of Belarusian small traders took to the streets on Monday (December 15) as a senior government official announced a phased plan to fight the effects of the world financial crisis. More than 2,000 protestors gathered in central Minsk to protest against the government's intention to make illegal most small-scale goods imports.

Most of authoritarian Belarus' economy is owned and run by the state. Small-scale import/export trade is one of the few sectors of the economy where free enterprise is allowed.

Demonstrators carried banners saying "New rules for importers are a worthy contribution to the world crisis," "Liberalisation is the path to the survival of our country," and "You don't need our taxes, cancel them!" The gathering near the Academy of Sciences was loud but peaceful, with demonstrators chanting "Work!" and "Freedom to businessmen!" Police presence was moderate. The demonstrator crowd at some locations obstructed the automobile traffic, a violation giving Belarus' police a legal right to arrest. However, the representatives of the law enforcement bodies by mid-afternoon had made no move to interfere with the march.

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka last month said that beginning 2009 Belarusian importers would have to pay import duties on all goods brought into the country except those produced in Russia, the

value of the goods notwithstanding. The executive order was aimed at generating tax revenues from small-scale Belarusian traders carrying predominantly Chinese consumer products in luggage, and avoiding import tax by declaring the goods personal effects. Andrei Tur, Belarus' Deputy Minister for Economy, later in the day announced a package of reforms aimed at lessening the impact of the world financial crisis on the Belarusian economy but had no response to the small traders' call to exempt them from import tax.

A yet-to-be-formed government leasing company will make major Belarusian machine exports such as tractors and harvesters available to customers at more affordable rates, said Tur.

15/12/2008

Source: The Earth Times

Lukashenka to Visit Moscow on December 22



Lukashenka and Medvedev at the meeting in Sochi

Alyaksandr Lukashenka is to pay a working visit to Moscow on December 22, according to the Kremlin press office.

Issues concerning the forthcoming visit were discussed during a telephone conversation between Mr. Lukashenka and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on Wednesday, said press office.

The Belarusian leader said the previous day that he was going to discuss the

issue of gas supplies to Belarus with the Russian leadership.

Messrs. Lukashenka and Medvedev had been expected to meet during a session of the Supreme State Council of the Belarusian-Russian Union State in Minsk on December 1, but the session was cancelled.

17/12/2008

Source: naviny.by

Swiss Consular Services Start Issuing Schengen Visas in Minsk

Swiss consular services have started issuing Schengen visas in compliance with requirements, which are common for all Schengen treaty member-states, BelTA learnt from Dietrich Dreyer, head of the Minsk office of the Swiss embassy.

The diplomat explained, a Schengen visa allows travellers to stay in a country for up to 90 days within 6 months during tourist, private and business trips. The Minsk office of the Swiss embassy handles visa matters in Belarus. Visa clearance takes at least three weeks. All papers are sent to the embassy in Warsaw for processing to be returned to Minsk by diplomatic mail, said Dietrich Dreyer.

18/12/2008

Source: BelTA

Finance and Economics

Iranian Company to Buy Shares of Two Private Belarusian Banks

Iranian company of Mobina Group seeks purchasing shares of two private Belarusian banks.

The company Chairman Mohammad Reza Ezadbin in a meeting with Belarusian Prime Minister Syarhei Sidorsky said talks on purchasing the two banks are underway and "having reached an agreement on the project, we will start implementation of some other eco-

nomic projects including building waste recycling plant and several commercial and residential centres in the country." In addition, Iran's Tejarat Bank, whose initial capital is five million euros will open a branch in Belarus.

Over recent years, Minsk has intensified economic cooperation with Tehran. The two countries run oil ex-

ploration projects in Iran; Belarus plans to produce Iran's Samand car, and Iranian experts are involved in the construction of commercial and administrative centres in Belarus.

Belarus looks forward to selling shares of many of its private banks to foreign investors.

01/12/2008
Source: ISNA

Putin Approves Baltic Oil Pipeline Bypassing Belarus



Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin approved an expansion of the Baltic

Pipeline System to reduce Russia's dependency on links through countries such as Belarus for crude exports. Putin signed an order for pipeline operator OAO Transneft to build the BTS-2

link from Unecha near the Belarusian border to Ust-Luga on the Baltic Sea, the Energy Ministry said in an e-mailed statement today. The system, with a total capacity of 50 million tons a year, will be built in two stages, the ministry said. The first phase is planned to begin shipping 30 million tons of crude a year in the third quarter of 2012.

Financing will come from long-term

ruble bonds sold to state-run banks, according to the statement. A number of government agencies, including the Energy, Finance and Economy Ministries, will develop the necessary financing mechanisms together with state development bank Vnesheconombank.

01/12/2008
Source: AFP

Russia's Sberbank Aimed at Belarus Expansion

Russia's biggest saving bank, Sberbank, is to consider the possibility of launching a new bank or acquiring the existing bank in Belarus, Sberbank's CEO German Gref told reporters on Tuesday in Minsk after meeting with Belarus' President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, reports Interfax.

"We are proceeding to the active work with the National Bank to determine a method to enter the market of Belarus. It

will be either the launch of a new bank or the purchase of existing one," said Gref. He added that Sberbank is aimed at the mutually beneficial presence in Belarus that will last for at least 10 to 20 years.

With the financial markets jolting worldwide, Sberbank's arrival on the market of any country will be a significant event, Gref pointed out. "In the CIS, the market of Belarus is one

of the highest priorities and of greatest interest," the banker said. "We have received today the approval for our future potential presence in Belarus. The president has expressed interest in it: We have got a vital signal that the investment climate in Belarus is very positive."

02/12/2008
Source: AFP

Belarus Forex Reserves Decline to \$4.544 bln

Belarus' foreign exchange reserves fell to \$4.544 billion as of December 1 from \$4.801 billion at the beginning of November, despite receiving a \$1 billion loan from Russia, according to Central Bank data made public on Friday.

Reserves of Belarus have been falling steadily since August when authorities began supporting the Belarusian rouble, pressured against the dollar by the global financial crisis.

Continued on p. 6

Finance and Economics

Belarus Forex Reserves Decline to \$4.544 bln (continuation)

Reserves stood at \$3.4 billion on November 1, 2007.

"At a time when currency revenues of our enterprises are getting smaller, the central bank must ensure the stability of the national currency," Central Bank spokesman Anatoly Drazdou told Reuters. The Belarusian rouble has slipped to 2,174 to the dollar from 2,111 in September.

Belarus is currently engaged in discussions with the International Monetary Fund on a \$2 billion loan authorities describe as a "safety cushion". A new mission is due to arrive in the ex-Soviet state later this month.

04/12/2008

Source: Reuters

Bukala Buys Strategic Railway Junction in Belarus



One of the companies of Czech businessman Zdenek Bakala will control a significant portion of trade between former Soviet Union countries and central Europe. OKD, Doprava has bought a 90% stake in the railway terminal Belterminal in Brest, Belarus. Bakala also holds a majority share in Economia, the publisher of Hospodar-ske noviny.

There is different information on the purchase price. Belarus's news agency BelTA said the transaction was worth USD 2.5 million, while other sources mentioned a number as high as USD 5 million. The buyer does not want to

comment on the price. "I cannot talk about the price at the moment," said OKD, Doprava logistics director and board member Bohumil Bonczek. "The purchase price of the terminal was low," said a source with local knowledge who wished not to be named. Until now, there has been minimal traffic in the terminal - Bakala will have to invest a lot and bring shipping companies to the area. The Belarusian side received higher bids, but opted for Czechs in the end, the source said.

"The purchase of the terminal comes as part of our strategic vision in logistics. We count on more investments, for we want to build up a modern terminal," said Bonczek. The company believes it would make transport between the east and west easier. "We

will cooperate with the Belarusian railways, too," added Bonczek.

Besides rails, the company Belterminal with roughly 50 employees also comprises handling equipment, office buildings and warehouses.

The Brest railway terminal is situated in a strategic locality on the border with Poland, and dispatches all cargo heading to the European Union via Belarus. Containers with raw materials from Russia and other eastern countries are transported on a broad-gauge railway to Belterminal and reloaded here to be able to continue across the European continent. Imported goods from western Europe move in the opposite direction.

10/12/2008

Source: Prague Daily Monitor

ERBD Boosts Financing for Belarus Small Businesses

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development is committing \$10 million to Belgasprombank as part of a \$40 million loan approved by the EBRD board to finance a five-year lending programme for Belarus' micro, small and medium-sized businesses.

This type of lending already accounts for the majority of Belgasprombank's loan portfolio, providing proof of the commercial viability of this niche financing. This is the EBRD's fourth loan to Belgasprombank targeting this

vital sector of the economy. It is precisely this sector which promotes entrepreneurial spirit, flexibility and resilience of the economy so critical in these volatile times and holds the key to the creation of new sustainable jobs in Belarus, said the EBRD's Head of Office in Belarus Valdas Vitkauskas. And it is the development of this sector which will promote the growth of the middle class Belarus so badly needs, added Mr Vitkauskas.

Loans for micro businesses under this programme can be for a maximum of

\$200,000, whereas larger enterprises in the sector will qualify for loans in a range starting from \$200,000 and peaking at \$1 million. They aim both to finance firms' capital expenditure plans and provide them with working capital.

Belgasprombank, established in 1990, ranks as Belarus' seventh largest as measured by assets. It is controlled by Russia's Gazprom group.

15/12/2008

Source: CBondS market information

Finance and Economics

Belarusian Foreign Debt Grows 16.5% in January-September

The cumulative foreign debt of Belarus grew 16.5% in the first nine months of 2008 to \$14.557 billion as of October 1, the country's statistics service reported.

The foreign debt increased 3.1% in the third quarter after growing 3% in the second quarter and 9.7% in the first quarter.

The foreign debt of the non-financial sector grew 19.2% in the nine months, to \$8.082 billion. Short-term debt increased by 20.8% to \$6.66 billion and debt to direct investors rose 49.6% to \$759.9 million.

The foreign debt of commercial banks grew 21.4% to \$3.121 billion.

Government foreign debt increased by 5.3% in the nine months, to \$2.144 billion. The foreign debt of monetary regulators stood at \$450.6 million on October 1, down by 24.4% from the beginning of 2008.

16/12/2008

Source: Interfax

Belarus to Recapitalise its Four Largest Banks



Belarus will recapitalise four of its largest banks by

\$1.4 billion, using budget revenues and through the issue of 10-year domestic bonds, according to a presidential decree published on Wednesday.

The capital of Belarusbank will be increased by 650 billion roubles (\$295 million), Belinvestbank by 200 billion roubles and BPS Bank by 200

billion roubles through a 2 trillion rouble debt issue. This will raise the capital of Belarusbank by 40 percent, while the capital of Belinvestbank and BPS Bank will be doubled.

The government had already announced plans to raise the capital of Belagroprombank by almost a billion dollars -- 950 billion roubles, or half of that, would come from proceeds of the debt issue and the rest from budget resources.

Belarus, whose economy is still largely in state hands, has said before that it is

considering selling to foreign investors a stake in Belagroprombank and controlling stakes in Belinvestbank and BPS Bank.

The ex-Soviet state is in talks with the International Monetary Fund on a \$2 billion loan, to help defend itself against the impact of the global financial crisis that has taken hold of neighbouring Russia and Ukraine.

17/12/2008

Source: Reuters

Belarus to Adopt New Economy Liberalization Documents by End of 2008



By the end of the year Belarus is expected to adopt new enactments simplifying administrative

procedures and liberalizing economy, Prime Minister Syarhei Sidorsky said at the ceremony of presenting governmental awards for quality achievements in 2008, writes BelTA.

According to the Belarusian Premier, today it is necessary to use any levers to sell products and avoid excessive warehousing given the downturn in the world demand. Hence, close attention will be turned to the activity of

Belarusian companies, production and sales. "Our companies need to produce high-quality, science-intensive products," said Syarhei Sidorsky. Several steps to support the exporters will be undertaken in order to minimize the outcomes of the global financial crisis.

Earlier Mr Sidorsky met with Fishman Group representative Eliezer Fishman to discuss opportunities for implementation of investment projects in Minsk.

The current visit of Israeli businessmen is set to settle all the issues related to the implementation of joint investment projects.

The Fishman Group is one of Israel's largest and most renowned private investment companies. It primarily

invests in trade, media and communications. Jointly with its subsidiaries, the company controls more than five millions square meters of commercial industrial and dwelling estate in Israel. In recent years the company has made great strides in the international market, particularly in real estate and trade. In 2002, the Group initiated strategic projects in Russia, Ukraine and India.

In early 2008, the company signed a partner agreement with the Lyons Company (South Africa) that envisages co-investing in the High-Tech Park of Minsk.

18/12/2008

Source: BelTA

Culture

Yanka Kupala: Belarusian Treasure-Seeker



There is a lovely park in the center of Minsk on a bank of the winding Svislach River. Walking down its moss-covered lanes under the shade of maples and limes, you will eventually reach a fountain. Bronze-cast naked girls send their flower garlands swimming in the water. This symbolizes Kupala, the pagan-rooted Midsummer Night celebration in Belarus. Even today, the holiday is a major event, with groups of young men and women jumping over fires (purging themselves of the influence of evil forces), swimming in lakes and rivers under the star-lit sky and then going on a search for the magic Paparats-Kvetka (fern flower), which is said to blossom on Kupala night only. Even though biologists say that fern doesn't produce flowers, there is at least one person, who has proven to be a real treasure-seeker, who might have found Paparats-Kvetka. His name is Yanka Kupala – a poet, after whose name this park in Minsk was called.

By some nearly mystical coincidence, the poet, whose real name was Ivan Lutsevich, was born on a Midsummer Night of 1882 in Vyazynka, a small village near Minsk. His parents were one of many impoverished noble families, who worked on the land that they rented from more well-off aristocrats.

Kupala helped his family on the field, and also worked as a tutor, clerk, and a brewer.

Feeling the itch of creative writing, he first published a couple of sentimental poems in Polish language but, eventually, switched to writing in his native Belarusian. His first Belarusian-language poem “Muzhyk” (‘country man’) was published in 1905. This was a monologue of a peasant – a man, who is disrespected and humiliated by everyone but who, at the same time, feeds the whole country.

Kupala's early poems in their form very much resembled folk songs. They were also a voice of social protest against injustice. Of course, Czarist censors could hardly accept such titles as “The Song of a Free Man”. They qualified many of Kupala's poems as “anti-state,” since reading it, “one cannot but notice an open encouragement of obviously rebellious actions.”

Since 1907 Yanka Kupala's poems and articles began to appear regularly in the weekly newspaper *Nasha Niva*. In 1908, he even moved to Vilnia (Vilnius), where *Nasha Niva*'s office was situated. Kupala's first book “Zhaleyka” (‘folk flute’) was published in St. Petersburg in 1908. Soon it was confiscated by censors who described it as “anti-state propaganda”. In 1914, Kupala became *Nasha Niva*'s editor-in-chief.

Kupala also proved himself as a talented playwright. He wrote a comedy “Paulinka”, which is now the visit-card of the major Belarusian state theatre (also named after Yanka Kupala). Each season opens with “Paulinka”. While “Paulinka” is an entertaining show, Kupala's other play – “Scattered Nest” – is a tragedy showing the life of a struggling peasant family that loses its land. Written in 1913, the play tells a story of people who face the tough choice between silent endurance and joining “The Grand Convention”, the gathering of all Belarusians who discuss how they want to live – a metaphor of future Belarusian independence.

In the 1920s, when the prospects for real

Belarusian independence were becoming increasingly vague, many Belarusian intellectuals embraced the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic as a chance for the nation to continue its development, albeit within the Soviet Union. Anxious to win the people's loyalty, the Soviet regime at that time pursued the policy of “Belarusification”. Belarusian-language newspapers were published, Belarusian-language schools were established throughout the republic, and Belarus was even allowed to found its own Academy of Sciences (where Yanka Kupala eventually found a job). He also went on writing poems, although censorship methodically banned those of them which appeared to be critical of the Soviet regime.

In 1922, Kupala finished a tragicomedy play “Tutejshyja” (‘the locals’), that tells a story about life in Belarus during the turbulent times of World War I, when Belarus changed hands between different occupying powers – Polish, Russian, German and even experienced a short period of independence. The main character, Mikita Znosak, is a typical Belarusian living in Minsk, who despises his Belarusian roots and tries to adjust to every new power like a chameleon. The official critics accused Kupala of “bourgeois sentiments” and “opposing the dictatorship of proletariat” in his play. Today, “Tutejshyja” is just as politically sharp and topical as it was at that time, and this is one of the reasons why it is not really welcome on stages of state-owned theatres in the present-day Belarus. More than 80 years after the play was written, there are still too many Mikita Znosaks in the government, it seems.

In 1922, Kupala and a number of other Belarusian poets attempted to found a “Vir” writer association. When the secret services began to check the prospective members of “Vir”, all of them were given negative characteristics. Kupala was described as “Belarusian chauvinist”. The association was declared illegal.

Culture

In 1924 Kupala finished his major poem “The Untitled”, which praised Belarus’ fight for independence and called upon people to continue their struggle until Belarus becomes completely free. Nevertheless, in 1925 Kupala, as part of official “stick and carrot policy” was awarded the official title of “People’s Poet of Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. Increasingly critical of the Bolshevik regime, Yanka Kupala wrote his “Anniversary Moods” (1927), dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the October Revolution. He praised the events of the Bolshevik coup with such exaggerated pathos that it closely bordered on mockery.

Such creative boldness irritated the Soviet regime, which, it appeared, was running out of carrots, and more and more inclined to grab a big stick. In the 1930s the period of “Belarusification” came to an end. Stalin launched a massive campaign of repressions, which swept away most of Belarusian intellectuals. Kupala, as all other major Soviet authors that were still alive, was forced to write poems full of praise to the Communist regime glorifying the “builders of the socialism”. In Belarus, a mock trial of the so-called “Belarus Liberation Union” was launched. Of course, there was no such anti-Soviet organization in reality; the whole process was made up as a pretext to eliminate or intimidate into full submission Belarusian intellectuals. After long and brutal questionings Kupala was so worn out, physically as well as mentally, that he made an attempt to commit suicide.

Recovering in hospital after his suicide attempt, completely broken, Kupala signed the so-called “Open Letter from Y. Kupala”, in which he renounced his national ideas. After that, the old Yanka Kupala vanished. In the 1930s, the poet wrote pro-Soviet poems and articles, which, with some exceptions, had a rather questionable artistic quality. However, this was exactly what the Soviet regime needed. In 1941 Kupala was awarded the Lenin Prize for his

1930s’ “creative work”.

During World War II Kupala was evacuated to Moscow. On 28 June 1942, he died under mysterious circumstances. All we know is that he fell down from a high marble staircase in the “Moscow” hotel.

There are three versions of the poet’s death. The official version claimed it was nothing more than an unfortunate accident. Allegedly, the poet fainted (some other sources claim he was drunk), leaned on the handrail and fell down a the flight of stairs.

According to another version, the NKVD (the predecessor organization of the KGB) was responsible for Kupala’s death. There have never been thorough investigation into his death – or if there was, its results have never been made public. Perhaps, some ugly truth is still being hidden? After all, the poet was indeed repressed and harassed by KGB agents, who spread information (either by mistake or deliberately false) that he kept contacts with Nazis in the occupied Belarus. It was claimed, the Nazis renamed one of the Minsk streets after him. In reality, though, the street in question was named after Ivan Lutskevich, one of the founding fathers of Belarusian independence in 1918. The original name of Yanka Kupala (Ivan Lutsevich) was nearly identical, except that it lacked “k” in the last name – a minor detail that was easy to overlook.

The third version argues, that it was another, though now successful, suicide attempt by Yanka Kupala.

Throughout the whole creative work of Yanka Kupala, in his most powerful poems, you will find a motive of a kurgan. Kurgans are ancient graves, where our ancestors and their treasures are buried. Such kurgans are found in abundance in Belarus. In his poems, Kupala climbed kurgans, revealed their treasures and revived old heroes buried there. Perhaps, Kupala indeed found the magic flower of Paparats, which, according to the legend, grows on top of a kurgan?

This is what Siarhey Dubavets, a prominent Belarusian literary critic, writes about Kupala: “The idea of uncovering

treasures, which lie buried in kurgans, is greatly attractive to people. And it’s a real miracle when a magician appears and shows them the treasures which they don’t see, even though they literally stand on them. The enormous emotional heat, energy of his works stirs and awakens people’s minds. His simple words reach people’s hearts and remain there forever”.

Yanka Kupala was the founder of a new Byelorussian literature – its architect, who shaped its appearance for many years to come a trailblazer like Shevchenko in Ukrainian and Mickiewicz in Polish culture. Belarusian intellectuals often call the Belarusians “nation of poets”. Of all Belarusian poets Kupala is, undoubtedly, the greatest – not only because of the quality of his talent, but also because his poems helped build the nation and shape its conscience.

By Ales Kudrytski for ODB

**And, Say, Who Goes There?
by Yanka Kupala (translated
by Vera Rich)**

*And, say, who goes there? And,
say, who goes there?
In such a mighty throng assembled,
O declare?*

Belarusians!

*And what do those lean shoulders
bear as load,
Those hands stained dark with
blood, those feet bast-sandal
shod?*

All their grievance!

*And to what place do they this
grievance bear,
And whither do they take it to
declare?*

To the whole world!

*And who schooled them thus,
many million strong,
Bear their grievance forth, roused
them from slumbers long?*

Want and suffering!

*And what is it, then, for which so
long they pined,
Scorned throughout the years,
they, the deaf, the blind?*

To be called human!