

Belarus independence day

Belarus: the beating unknown heart of Europe

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Republic Day, celebrated July 3, was conceived not just as a state holiday, but as a personal holiday of common people. In spite of being as young as the country itself, it is more significant than a usual holiday. Undoubtedly, Independence Day (the Day of the Republic) symbolizes modern Belarus and its contemporary history. It is the principal state holiday and coincides with the liberation of Belarus from German invaders.



Freedom, memory of and gratitude to the veterans is what unites people in recent years. The tradition of flower-laying ceremonies at the monuments of victorious soldiers all over the country is very strong in Belarus: It has been alive for 64 years now. It is anchored in the Belarusian mind and is subject to no corrosion. The way the past is reflected in reality is a way it will transcend into the future.

The location of the Republic of Belarus in the center of Europe, its rich natural and cultural heritage, its advantageous geographical position and convenient transportation links attract tourists from many countries.

The cognitive historical and cultural wealth of Belarus has been forming throughout centuries. The Duchies of Polotzk and Turov-Pinsk, the ancient formations in the basins of the Zapadnaya Dvina and Dnepr rivers, have been known since the ninth century. At the end of the 10th century Orthodox Christianity was adopted, which was of decisive importance for the further cultural development of Belarusian lands.

The names of 12th-century enlighteners — Euphrosynia Polotskaya and Kirill Turowsky — are widely known. Lazarus Bogsha, a jeweler, made a unique rood at the request of Euphrosynia, which is considered a masterpiece of national and world art. Unfortunately, the rood was lost during World War II. Polotzk was the first among the towns of Kievskaya Rus to obtain political independence. The monuments of Po-

lotzk — Savior-Euphrosynia Convent, the Temple of Sophia and Bogoyavlensky monastery — embody a rich history.

In the 13th century, the Belarusian Ponemanye became the educational center of one of the largest feudal monarchies in Europe — the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Russia and Zhemoit (GDL). Novogrudok was the first capital of that state. The old Belarusian language was the official and everyday colloquial language of the GDL.

This was the language of annals, chronicles, religious and scientific works, as well as the language for the Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania of 1588 — the most advanced code of law in medieval Europe, a classical example of feudal

law, which was in force up to 1840 in Belarus. Birch bark documents found by archaeologists were also composed in the old language.

In the middle of the 16th century, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland united into a new state — Rech Pospolita. The period from the middle of the 16th century to the late 17th century was a time of prosperity for the noblemen culture. In Belarus the relative weight of nobility was extremely high — every sixth family had titles of nobility. At that time, numerous manufacturers and theaters were opened; palaces and park manors emerged and developed, the images of which have lived to our age in drawings by talented

artist Napoleon Orda.

The majestic castle of the 15th-17th centuries in the town of Mir is a monument of international significance and is included in the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List. Encircled by parks, the 16th-century palace complex was preserved in Nesvizh, the capital of the Radzivils magnate clan. The 16th-century Farny catholic church is the first Baroque monument on the territory of East Europe. It contains preserved wall paintings and the family vault of the Radzivils.

Renaissance and Reformation ideas were popular in Belarus in the 16th century and the 17th century brought the Counter-Reformation. The most prominent cultural figure of

this age was Francisk Skoryna from the town of Polotzk, the first Belarusian and East Slavic printer and enlightener.

At the end of the 18th century, the Belarusian lands joined the Russian Empire. In this period, manors and palaces were constructed in classical style, especially in the eastern part of the country.

In the 20th century, three revolutions and three sanguinary wars roiled over Belarus. The country's independence was declared in 1918 and in 1922, it participated in founding the Soviet Union alongside Russia and Ukraine. In 1991, Belarus, Russia and Ukraine denounced the Union Treaty in Viskuli, a part of the Belovezhskaya forest preserve, which is located in Belarusian territory.

The most heroic and tragic period of Belarus' contemporary history is the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. The brutal violence of German invaders provoked mass resistance. A vast majority of Belarusian people took part in guerrilla and underground movements. The price of freedom is immense: Belarus lost every third citizen during the war. The country has a great number of war monuments. The majestic "Brest hero-fortress" memorial was created in 1971. The Khatyn memorial is a symbol of the suffering of civilians during the war. Architects created the memorial in 1969 at the site where the village with its 149 dwellers was burned. Khatyn is now world famous.

Owing to various political reasons, primarily because of the absence of national statehood during a number of centuries, Belarus was considered a donor of noblemen to other countries. Adam Mitzkevich and Vladislav Syrokomlia, natives of the modern territory of Belarus, became classicists of Polish literature; Stanislaw Moniushko was a well-known Polish composer; Tadeush Kostiuszko was a national hero in the United States, France and Poland; Ignatyi Domeyko was one of the pioneers of science in Chile; Nikolay Sudzilovsky-Russel was the first president of the Republic of Hawaii; Simeon Polotsky was the mentor of Peter the Great, the first



Freedom symbol: The Neo-Romanesque Roman Catholic Church of Saints Simeon and Helena, also known as the Red Church, was built in Minsk in 1906-10, immediately after religious freedoms were proclaimed in Imperial Russia and the czar allowed dissidents to build their churches.

Russian emperor; and Mikhal Kleophas Oginsky was a Polish composer and a Russian diplomat. Belarusians were printing pioneers in Russia and helped to establish Russian professional literature.

Among the sons of Belarus you can find Igor Sikorsky, an inventor and designer of modern planes and helicopters; mathematician Vladimir Platonov; and astrophysicist Boris Kyt. Belarus is the motherland of Haim Veitzman, the first president of Israel; Menachem Begin and Shimon Peres, Israeli prime ministers and Noble prizewinners; Naum Goldman, president of the World Congress of Jews in 1949-1978; and others.

Belarus gave the world such great 20th-century artists as Vasili Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevych and Marc Chagall. Chagall is recognized worldwide, and that includes Japan, where a Japanese crew made a film about him and some exhibitions of his works were held several years ago.

The rich historical heritage is widely represented in almost 150 museums and galleries, not only in Minsk, but in all large cities of the country. Numerous churches and monasteries of small towns and villages offer glimpses into the spiritual side of people's lives, and varieties of architectural styles to those who are really interested in these matters. The Belarusian nation has always been susceptible to new trends from the West as well as from the East.

Many social and cultural movements rooted here, having refracted through local traditions.

The peculiarities of cultural traditions are the basis of discovery tourism in Belarus. Many tourists visit Belarus with the purpose of spending their vacation in rural areas, which offer fishing, hunting and hiking in the pine forests of Polesye or in the lake lands of the Vitebsk region.

Belarus doesn't have the bright colors of Mediterranean countries, the delicate slyness of the Middle East or the snowy mountains of the Himalayas. It is a country of gentle or even intelligent beauty. Its quiet charm penetrates into the traveler's soul gradually, through a soft play of the morning sky over the vague horizon line, through the velvet verdure of the vast expanses of the fields, through the overpowering balmy air of a century-old pine forest, and through the tender mooing of cows and the sad cries of cranes in the meadows.

The ethereal beauty of Belarus does not expose itself to everyone; for this you have to stop and feel the surrounding world: keep looking into the blue eyes of Belarus, its deep lakes, put your hands into the icy waters of a ringing brook, hide from a warm rain under a shaggy branch of a spruce. Perhaps this is one of the few remaining places on our planet where one can see the amazing miracle — the miracle of untouched nature.



Centerpiece: Independence Square is the largest square in Minsk and home to the Belarusian government. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

Congratulations

to the People of the Republic of Belarus

on the Occasion of Their Independence Day

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