BELARUS

Officially our country is called the Republic of Belarus, a sovereign independent state with its own government, constitution, state emblem, flag and anthem (гимн). Belarus is a member-state of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) and one of the UN (United Nations) founder-members.

Belarus is a country in Eastern Europe. It borders Russia to the east, Ukraine to the south, Poland to the west and Lithuania and Latvia to the northwest. The territory of Belarus is divided into 6 regions: Brest, Vitebsk, Grodno, Gomel, Minsk and Mogilev. The capital of Belarus is Minsk with a population of over 2 mln people.

Belarus is situated on a rolling plain (равнине) rising to hills, the highest of which is Mountain Dzerzhinskaya reaching 350 meters above sea level. Most of Belarus is a flat plain, with little variation in relief. About one-third of the country is covered with forests. There is a rich variety of wildlife, including such rare animals as bison, moose (лось), wild boar (дикий кабан), deer, beavers, otters (выдры) and squirrels; and birds like stork, duck, cuckoo and woodpecker. Stork is also a national symbol of the Republic of Belarus.

For a long time Belarus was thought to be poor in minerals, its natural resources were limited to peat (торф), gravel, sands and clays (глина). However, recent surveys have uncovered major deposits of coal, shale (сланца), oil, and potassium salts (калийной соли). The soils (почвы) are generally poor, and much of the land has been contaminated by radioactivity from the Chernobyl accident of 1986.

Belarus has rich history and traditions. It used to be a part of the Kievan Rus, the first East Slavic State, Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. In the XXth century Belarus has lived through three revolutions and bloody wars. The Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 is one of the most heroic and tragic periods in the history of the country. For three years the territory of Belarus was occupied by the Nazi. The country lost more than 3 million people (every third citizen felt in the fight against fascism), many towns and villages were ruined. Belarus lost more than half of its national wealth.

Belarus gained its independence in 1991. Today Belarus is a presidential republic, governed by President and the National Assembly. Since 1994, Alexander Lukashenko has been the President of Belarus. The National Assembly is a bicameral parliament which consists from House of Representatives (the lower house) and the Council of the Republic (the upper house).

Today Belarus is a developed industrial state. The main industries include power engineering, mechanical engineering, farming, chemical industry, timber industry (лесная промышленность) and construction. The major industrial centers in Belarus are Minsk, Gomel, Vitebsk, Mogilev, Soligorsk, Zhodino, Brest and others. Belarussian goods are exported to many countries. Belarusian industry produces heavy-duty trucks (грузовики) and tractors, large-capacity dump trucks (самосвалы), refrigerators, TV sets and fertilisers (удобрения). They make its chief exports. Small business accounts for 20% of the country's economy. In retail and wholesale trade ( в розничной и оптовой торговле), as well as in customer service sector, most of the companies are privately owned. Agriculture of Belarus specializes in milk and meat production, flax (лён), vegetables (especially potatoes) and-fruit (especially apples).

There are a lot of places of interest in Belarus. Part of the Białowieża Forest, known as Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park, is the unique and largest part of the primeval (первобытный) forest which initially covered the whole area of northeastern Europe. It is remarkable (замечателен) for its rich flora and fauna. In Brest there is famous Brest Fortress which became one of the most important World War II monuments. In Vitebsk there is Marc Chagall Museum. It is located in the House of Marc Chagall who was a well-known Russian and Belarusian artist.

**Answer the questions**

1. **Geographical position of Belarus.**

1) Where is Belarus situated and what countries does it border on?

2) What is the territory and population of Belarus?

**2. History**

What are major milestones in the history of Belarus?

**3. Belarusian industry.**

1) What does the Belarusian industry produce nowadays?

2) What natural resources is Belarus rich in?

3) What are the main agricultural products?

4) Why do we say that our forests are the national possessions and wealth of our country?

**4. State system.**

**1)** When did Belarus become a sovereign state?

**2)** What branches of power does the state system of Belarus consist of?

**5. Education.**

1) What are the main principles of education in Belarus?

2) What opportunities to continue education does a University graduate have in the system of lifelong education?

**6. Belarus for the tourists.**

1) What has become an identity card for Belarusian art and culture?

2) What sights would you recommend to visit in Belarus and why?

3) What famous people of Belarus are known to you and what is their contribution to the development of the country?