

FOREWORD



Geography, the scientific study of terrain, is like mathematics: a common language of peoples and cultures, a universal discourse of mutual intelligibility. Its power to create common grounds has always played an indisputable role in international relations. Unfortunately, for historical reasons, the horizons of geographic research in Hungary were confined within the country's borders for many years. However, since 2005 the publication of a series of atlases presenting countries and regions by the Geographical Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences has indeed broadened the horizon of geographic research performed in Hungary.

The present volume, *Belarus in Maps*, is the latest edition of this series. Belarus borders a country neighboring Hungary and the European Union. In geographical terms Belarus is undeniably a European country, nevertheless many of us European readers have only limited knowledge of its geography and the exciting history

of its people. But if you look closer, its history not only reveals a true European identity, but also sheds light on shared Hungarian-Belarusian episodes in our past: István Báthory, Prince of Transylvania, was also King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania between 1575 and 1586. Today's Lithuania and today's Belarus both regard Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as their predecessor. István Báthory died in Hrodna, on the territory of present-day Belarus, in 1586, without succeeding in creating a great East-Central European state of Poles, Lithuanians, Belarusians and Hungarians that could counter German and Russian influence at the time.

Despite heavy political issues around present-day Belarus, Hungarian geographers have worked hand in hand with their Belarusian colleagues. They have always remained true to the idea of academic freedom to produce a work that presents scientific facts with an objective eye. I hope that their joint results will be widely discussed and acknowledged in Budapest, Minsk, throughout Europe and beyond.

By sponsoring the publication of 100 detailed maps that define this ambitious enterprise, we are proud to contribute to a learned dialog between scholars and political decision-makers about Belarus. *Belarus in Maps* does not only enhance the prestige of Hungarian research in geography but, I hope, will also enable the application of scientific results in policy-making both on national and international levels.

László Lovász
President
Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Esteemed Reader,

I am glad that you are holding in your hands the present publication, rich in content, maps and statistical data. This book might give answers to your questions about what is the modern Belarus, who are the Belarusians and why we are such. It will certainly raise some new questions, maybe will provoke interest in learning more, excite further scientific discussions for the benefit of the most complete and objective understanding of Belarus by the foreigners.

Surprisingly, in the year of the 500th anniversary of the first Belarusian book printed in 1517 by the prominent Francysk Skaryna from Polack, despite of its long and rich history, Belarus still remains for many an unknown land that needs presentation and explanation.

Indeed, in the course of centuries, in our extremely interconnected and interdependent region, full of rivalry, devastating wars and religious conflicts, whole peoples and nations were dissolved and assimilated by more powerful neighbours. We have survived. During the alternate periods of flourishing, declines or external suppression we have managed to preserve our national identity and our native – Belarusian – language. Moreover, the hearts of Belarusians have not hardened and they have kept a high level of ethnic and religious tolerance.

The tragedies and sufferings of the past had led to the consolidation of the Belarusian nation, for which peace, stability and good neighbourly relations became the core values, preconditions for the very existence and for further evolutionary development, which is based on the historical experience and resulting mentality.

Not disposing of much of mineral resources, Belarusians relied on achieving high level of organizational skills, educational and intellectual potential, and succeeded in this endeavour. It is most important that, by the end of the 20th century, Belarus, one of the UN co-founders, regained and preserved its independence and statehood.

Hungary was among first countries to recognize sovereign Belarus and to establish diplomatic relations with my country exactly 25 years ago. This represented an important gesture of solidarity and a strong signal of support to a newly reborn state. Since then both countries have managed to build up together friendly rela-

tions grounded on the principles of cooperation, mutual respect and understanding.

I congratulate the Hungarian and Belarusian authors, involved institutions and individuals on their great work on collecting, systematizing sociological, geographical, economic and other statistical data that resulted in the publication of the present book. I believe that this publication, which by the way in many aspects differs from the official Belarusian vision, will become subject of interest not only for specialists but also for the general public.

I do hope that this reading will encourage people, for whom Belarus still remains unknown, to visit my country, to see it with their own eyes, and to draw their own conclusions. In February 2017 Belarus unilaterally abolished visas for short-term travels for the nationals of 80 countries, including EU member-states, all the more reason for arranging such a visit.

*Aliaksandr Khainouski
Ambassador of Belarus to Hungary*

Studying Belarus – Toward a better understanding of Europe

For a period of more than 1,155 years (since the first written reference to Polack, the oldest town in the Belarusian lands, which dates to 862), the Belarusian nation has undergone various stages of ethnogenesis and socio-economic development on the ridges of the divide between the Baltic and Black Seas and in the adjoining plains. These centuries-long processes have been recorded in various forms, such as ancient chronicles, travelogues and, more recently, encyclopaedias. These latter sources reveal to modern readers the diversity of the world, the natural environment, and the way of life of Europe's nations. Maps and atlases are a special form of representing the globe and its parts, and they offer a comprehensive spatial picture of regions and countries. More than 400 years ago, in the academic circles and libraries of Europe, the first cartographic representation of the Belarusian lands appeared in the form of a map by Tomasz Makowski (1575–1630, painter and engraver at the court of Prince Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł in Niasviž) entitled "*Magni Ducatus Lithuaniae, Caeterarumque*

Regionum Illi Adiacentium Exacta Descriptio Ills mi. ac Excells mi. Principis et Dni. D.Nicolai Christophori Radziwil D.G.Olijc ac in Nieswies Ducis, S. Rom. Imperrii Principis in Szylowiec ac Mir Comitit et S.Sepulehri Hierosolimitani Militis etc. opera. cura et impensis facta ac in lucem edita. – Amsterodami : excudebat Guilhelmus Janssonius, 1613". The map depicted hydrography, the road network, over 340 human settlements, and other objects of the time.

The subsequent history of this region of Europe was full of dramatic events, saw unique developments in the economic sphere, and yielded a wealth of masterpieces in the field of indigenous culture. The Belarusian lands have frequently become the scene of clashes between stronger neighbouring nations, especially so in modern times. Such events curtailed the development of civilization among the Belarusian ethnos, but it could not stop it. Having long experienced confederative or union state structures, the Belarusian nation emerged in the first half of the 20th century as an independent state formation. Indeed, it played an active part in the creation of the new world order and of the United Nations in 1945.

The present atlas, which has been made available to the European audience, introduces the main stages of the formation of the present settlement pattern and the spatial structure of the modern economy in the sovereign Belarus. It does so by way of thematic maps and explanatory notes. Initiated and published by the Geographical Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, it was prepared in collaboration with experts from the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and through the involvement of university workshops in the two countries. The various approaches employed by the authors and the different interpretations of the results evidently reflect the complexity of the centuries-long developments and the diversity of the cultural, civilizational and economic processes. These differences, however, should be deemed as a kind of merit of the publication, as they provide an opportunity for the readers to compare the various approaches and results and to draw their own conclusions.

Undoubtedly, it is fruitful to become better acquainted with the country's traditions, the modern way of life of Belarusians, specific features of the Belarusian economy in this era of

globalization, and the strengthening European identity. Prospective visitors to the country are strongly recommended to study the key chapters of this atlas before embarking on their journey. The maps may also guide visitors as they seek to find out more about this unique European country. Similarly, the atlas may serve as a resource for people in the business and cultural spheres as they realize mutually beneficial projects aimed at fostering Pan-European unity.

*With an invitation to visit the country
Regular member of the Geographical Society of
Belarus
Professor Ivan Pirozhnik*

Dear Reader,

Belarus in Maps is a comprehensive reference and cartographic encyclopaedia on the history, economy and geography of Belarus. The atlas has been published with a view to informing readers about the country, which recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. The independence of Belarus was declared on August 25, 1991, and on September 19, 1991 the official name of the country, the Republic of Belarus, appeared for the first time.

Belarus lies at the intersection of western and eastern European civilization, and its people have both Baltic and Slavic roots. The country is the heir of the Principality of Polack and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Geographically, Belarus is situated at the centre of Europe, but in geopolitical terms it is regarded as an Eastern European country. The area is about 207,600 km², which is more than the area of such countries as Iceland, Hungary, Portugal, Serbia or Austria. Belarus is ranked 84th in the world by area, 92nd by population, and 126th by population density.

The country's natural and climatic conditions are quite diverse, and three major physical geographical regions can be distinguished: the Belarusian Lakeland in the north with the forests, lakes and bogs characteristic of the southern taiga; the Belarusian Range in the centre, with mixed upland forests; and Belarusian Paliessie in the south, with broad-leaved forests, meadows and wetlands.

The national symbols of Belarus are the blue lakes of the north, the green meadows of

the south, and the hills and ridges of the centre. The majestic aurochs and white storks are among the main remarkable animals in the country. Today's Belarus is a country of cities, industrial and cultural centres, green fields, wild forests and wetlands.

Various branches of industry are present in Belarus: mechanical engineering, metal processing, chemicals and petrochemicals, and electronics. All these sectors require a skilled labour force. Other major industries include the extraction and processing of potash, the timber and woodworking industry, and light and food industries. The agricultural sector is also well developed.

The favourable geographical location of Belarus and its railway, road, air and pipeline connections have facilitated the development of economic cooperation with many countries around the world. Belarus is at the crossroads of migration routes and in the zone of interaction between world civilizations and different religions.

The historical and cultural atlas of Belarus reveals the centuries-old intermingling of Slavic and Baltic influences and the lasting effects of various principalities and empires. All this helps to explain the ethnographic diversity of the mod-

ern population. In foreign affairs, Belarus seeks cooperation with other countries based on the principle of mutual understanding and on a desire for a system of international security.

The book is intended for readers who are interested in the history, ethnography, economy, geography, and culture of Belarus, in the peculiarities of its regions, and in the conditions for the economic and cultural development of its citizens. *Belarus in Maps* is a result of the joint efforts of geographers in Belarus and Hungary. The collaborative work was made possible by a bilateral academic exchange grant between the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus entitled "Scientific Preparation of Book-Atlas Belarus in Maps". It is admirable that the atlas was initiated and supported by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

I hope that the contents of this publication will inspire readers to develop a deeper understanding of the development of Belarus and its regions.

Vladimir Loginov

Academician

National Academy of Sciences of Belarus