

Brno 15 November 2020

Establishment of the Embassy of Independent Belarusian Culture in the Czech Republic

The Centre for Experimental Theatre in Brno (CED), which includes the Husa na Provazku Theatre, HaDivadlo and the Teren Platform, is setting up an Embassy of Independent Belarusian Culture in the Czech Republic in Brno. The opening of the embassy is symbolically directed to November 17, which is a national holiday in the Czech Republic and a Day of the Struggle for Freedom and Democracy.

**AMBASÁDA NEZÁVISLÉ
BĚLORUSKÉ KULTURY**

**АМБАСАДА НЕЗАЛЕЖНАЙ
БЕЛАРУСКАЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ**

The Czechs have experience with both the totalitarian regime and civic protests against undemocratic behaviour and their subsequent repression. Therefore, in recent months, the Centre for Experimental Theatre has been closely following events in Belarus, where people have been fighting for fair elections, freedom and democracy for four months now, despite widespread arrests, imprisonment, harsh repression and intimidation.

On Tuesday, November 17, 2020, we commemorate the anniversary of the Velvet Revolution and the victory of freedom and democracy in our country. The Centre for Experimental Theatre intends to follow the legacy of Vaclav Havel on this important day, and this time it is going to use the ethos of this day to commemorate what is happening in Belarus these days.

„We contemplated what form would be the best to choose and agreed that it is not very useful to organize a one-day debate or similar event, but that most of all it is necessary to continuously and consistently inform the general public in the longer term about what is happening in Belarus these days. Unfortunately, people in Central and Western Europe know very little about this country - we are convinced that the independent Belarusian culture and the overall context of current events in Belarus now need to be made much clearer in public, „says Miroslav Oščatka, director of the Centre for Experimental Theatre, and he further adds:

„We have therefore decided to establish the position of ambassador of independent Belarusian culture in the Czech Republic at our theatres in Brno. In the coming weeks and months, this person will not only hold discussions and lectures on Belarusian culture, but also intend to publish a monthly newsletter, which we will send across the society to all media and all cultural institutions in the Czech Republic. The translator Sjarhej Smatrychenka was appointed the Ambassador and he has been significantly helping mutual recognition of Czech and Belarusian culture for many years. „

In addition to Belarusian citizenship, Smatrychenka also acquired Czech citizenship and currently lives with his family in Brno. A portrait of Sjarhej Smatrychenka and the plan of activities of the newly established embassy can be found in a separate file.

„I feel that there is a desire and determination in the Czech artistic and cultural scene to support its Belarusian colleagues and the whole Belarusian society in its struggle for creative freedom - even in the struggle for mere survival. We would like to give this determination another impetus and direction. I am also sure that there is a lot that Belarusian culture, despite or even due to difficulties, may offer the Czech public, „said the newly appointed ambassador Sjarhej Smatrychenka.

The Centre for Experimental Theatre and the Embassy of Independent Belarusian Culture in the Czech Republic are also in contact with the Belarusian opposition Coordination Committee, which is aware of their activities and fully supports them.

The project of the Embassy of Independent Belarusian Culture in the Czech Republic is also financially supported by the city of Brno.

„The establishment of the Embassy of Independent Belarusian Culture in the Czech Republic is another step of the city of Brno in supporting Belarusian citizens in their struggle for freedom and democracy. We will symbolically open the embassy on November 17, the Day of the Struggle for Freedom and Democracy, a date that also gave hope to our nation. In addition to culture, this independent embassy will also focus on informing about events in Belarus, „said Tomas Kolacny, 2nd Deputy Mayor.

„As a city, we joined the support of Belarusian citizens in their struggle for freedom and democracy in mid-August, when we were the first city in the Czech Republic to hoist the traditional Belarusian flag at the New Town Hall, which became a symbol of protests against rigged elections. On the occasion of the opening of the embassy, we will symbolically transfer this flag and hang it at the Husa na Provazku Theatre. The shield of Margrave Jost on the statue at Moravian Square (Moravske namesti) also remains dressed in Belarusian colours, „added Marek Fiser, Councillor for Culture.

The purpose of establishing the embassy is to promote an independent Belarusian culture, which is currently being suppressed in Belarus. At the same time, it will strive to ensure that the inhabitants of the Czech Republic have better access to information about current events in Belarus. The CED considers the creation of such a bridge to be meaningful and important.

It also emphasizes that this is not a political format, but a cultural project focused on an independent and free Belarusian culture and its manifestations in all its breadth and diversity.

„We are not politicians, we are artists. However, we believe in the power of culture and its ability to win people for a good cause. After all, it was theatres, artists and students who eventually became the driving force behind democratic change in our country, „concludes director Ošcatka.

**On Tuesday 17 November 2020 at 11,30 am
a symbolic opening of**

the Embassy of Independent Belarusian Culture in the Czech Republic takes place
in front of Husa na Provazku Theatre.

The opening of the Embassy will be attended by CED Director Miroslav Ošcatka,
Ambassador Sjarhej Smatrychenka, Deputy Mayor Tomas Kolacny
and Councillor for Culture Marek Fiser.

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Sjarhej Smatrychenka / Сяргей Сматрычэнка



He was born in 1977 in Vitebsk and grew up in the capital of Belarus, Minsk. In 1994, he graduated from the prestigious Belarusian Humanities Lyceum, where he encountered Czech language for the first time. For the next 5 years he studied Belarusian philology at the University of Minsk and independently also Czech, resp. as a free student with younger students (Czech studies as a field was established at the University of Minsk only in 1996). After graduating from university in 1999, he began teaching Czech, later also Slovak, translation and other Slavic disciplines and remained there until 2010 with a two-year break, when he worked at the University of Vienna. At the turn of 2010/2011, he had to leave his job due to his civic attitudes and half a year later he moved to the Czech Republic. He settled with his family in Brno, acquired Czech citizenship and in recent years has been teaching Czech to foreigners or working as a tourist guide.

Since his student years, Sjarha Smatrychenka has been collaborating with major Belarusian magazines and newspapers, initially as a proof-reader, later as a redactor, translator, editor, etc. He also has experience with administrative work; in 2002-2003 he was the executive director of the weekly Nasa Niva and in 2004-2006 he held the position of Vice-Chairman of the Belarusian Centre of the International PEN Club. His translations have appeared in the press since 1994.

Within a few years, thanks to magazine publications, he became a recognized populariser of Czech literature (later also Slovak) and therefore of Czech culture in Belarus. In 2005, he founded and manages the Czech Collection edition at the Lohvinau publishing house, in which two dozen books by Czech authors have been published to date.

It can be said that most of the translations from Czech, which have been made in Belarus since the late 1990s, were published by Sjarhej Smatrychenka: either he made them himself and published them in books or magazines or he approached other translators and subsequently edited the translation himself. Thanks to his work at the university, he was credited with discovering and involving a number of young talented translators from among his former students, with whom he now carries out numerous projects. He initiated several translation competitions attended by dozens of people and at his own expense prepared and published with his students OKOLO, the Belarusian bohemians' periodical.

He also initiated the creation of the first translation prize in Belarus and after a few years became one of its holders for translations of Vaclav Hrabě's poems. Among other things, he compiled two Czech issues of "gross" literary and social magazines and countless smaller Czech blocks in other media. For many years he moderates meetings with Czech writers, book and magazine presentations, "brought" to Belarus Jachym Topol, Petra Hulova, Antonin Bajaja, Martin Fahrner, Irena Douskova, Bara Gregorova, Katerina Tuckova, Jiri Hajicek, Petra Dvorakova, etc. His Belarusian translations included prose and essay works of Jachym Topol, Vaclav Havel, Bohumil Hrabal, Michal Viewegh, Emil Hakl, Vaclav Cerny, Josef Skvorecky, Jiri Kratochvil, Eva Kanturková, Jan Pelc, Petr Sabach, Milos Urban, Petra Dvorakova, Marketa Pilatova etc., theatre plays by Vaclav Havel and Josef Topol, poems by Vaclav Hrabě, Frantisek Halas, Karel Siktance, Radek Fridrich, Radek Maly, Marie Stastna, Natalie Paterova, etc., children's books by Milos Macourek, Ondrej Sekora, Karel Capek and Iva Prochazkova.

In 2015, he received the Jiri Theiner Award for popularizing Czech culture abroad.

It should be added that just as Sjarhej Smatrychenka is the "ambassador" of Czech literature in Belarus, he is also another mediator of Belarusian literature and culture in the Czech Republic. He organized and partially translated Anthology of Belarusian Short Stories and the Selection of Belarusian Poetry Two Souls, "Belarusian" blocks or whole issues of the magazines RozRazil, Host, Plav, Protimluv, Babylon, Navychod, Labyrint revue, Weles, Pobocza etc., co-organized Author's Reading Month 2007 with participation of 30 Belarusian writers in Brno or the Festival of Stage Readings by.BY there in 2012, within which he helped to organize an accompanying program (photographic exhibitions, concert) and moderates various meetings with Belarusian writers, civic activists and artists in the Czech Republic. He lectured Belarusian at Charles University and MU and led courses on contemporary Belarusian literature and contemporary culture.

Sjarhej Smatrychenka is married and has three children. His biggest hobbies include trail running and hiking.