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Preface

Many intelligent Belarusians look back to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania when the Statutes were written in the Middle Belarusian language. Belarus is, undoubtedly, its most natural heritage state. Since that time, of course, the land has suffered a series of vicissitudes, first in the Rzeczpospolita and later in the Russian Empire. More broadly, the 20th century is regarded as having been one of exceptional war and conflict throughout the world. Belarus, having suffered the fate of being the theatre of war twice in that century, and often regarded by neighbouring countries as more or less their appendage, has a different historical century, as this enterprising new book makes clear: beginning with the early stirrings of protest in the short-lived Belarusian National Republic, and the Slutsk Uprising, followed by Stalin's ruthless destruction of the Belarusian intelligentsia in the early 1930s, and the brief period of the Belarusian National Front after the collapse of the Soviet Union before the coming of Lukashenka, right up to the cruel repressions of 2020–2021. Few developed countries would envy beleaguered Belarus its history, although many long-term visitors have come to be impressed by the manifest humanity of the people, and the undoubted quality of its language (noted by Adam Mickiewicz) and its culture (sometimes claimed, as in the case of Vasil Bykaŭ, more than once claimed as the conscience of the Belarusian nation, as a Russian).

For this enterprising book Professors Andriej Moskwin and Aliaksandr Raszapou have assembled a stellar collection of authors and scholars to throw light on the oppressed and yet resilient country's history during this period. It is a sad commentary on our

times that four of the writers represented here have been driven to leave their country by gross political pressure: in alphabetical order, Alhierd Bacharevič, Andrej Chadanovič, Uladzimir Niakliajeŭ and Russophone Dmitrij Strocev. Many other distinguished Belarusian writers and scholars, most notably Uladzimir Arloŭ and his wife Valiancina Aksak, as well as Henadź Korszunau have suffered the same fate.

It must be hoped that this work will bring to a wider audience the intellectual strength of this unlucky but talented country.

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