

The goal is a growth trajectory

The strategic goal of the Belarusian regional policy is the integrated development of each region and reduction of existing regional disparities, taking into account the effective use of its resource potential and competitive advantages in order to ensure high standards of living for the population, nature conservation and positive contribution of the regions to national competitiveness and security. Within the framework of the second stage of the National Strategy for Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus for the period until 2030, the regions are taking many concrete steps aimed at solving socio-economic and environmental problems, reducing subsidization and ensuring a high standard of living for the population. In particular, it is envisaged to implement about 80 innovative projects to create high-tech industries. Among the priorities should be highlighted the development of six "projects of the future", which are focused on new production, technologies and goods that correspond to global trends. How are all these challenges being addressed using the potential and opportunities of international cooperation? This is the subject of the proposed study.



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Chronicle of international cooperation

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Commonwealth of Independent States: from conjugation of integration processes - to co-operation of regions

In December 2020, the CIS Council of Heads of State approved a new version of the Concept for the Further Development of the Commonwealth and a plan of main measures for its implementation. The new edition fixes the main task of the CIS - "to increase the efficiency of its activities, including by ensuring the fulfilment by the states of their commitments and monitoring their implementation. The document defines economic co-operation as a key priority"¹. For the Belarusian side, the subject of the Commonwealth of Independent States development is especially relevant today, since the Republic of Belarus became the chair of this international organisation on 1 January 2021. And now, to a large extent, its approach to strengthening integration mechanisms in the post-Soviet space will determine to what extent the CIS will be able to cope with the urgent problems caused by globalisation and new challenges of modernity.

At the December 2020 meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Belarus identified among the main priorities of its chairmanship in the CIS such as liberalising trade, reducing restrictions and exemptions to a minimum, eliminating technical barriers, unifying rules and procedures for public procurement, establishing common markets for goods and services, as well as boosting investment activity, expanding industrial cooperation, and searching for common points of economic growth. The same line includes strengthening humanitarian ties, expanding contacts in scientific fields, education, health care, culture, sports and tourism, youth work, as well as enhancing the image of the Commonwealth in the international arena with a focus on strengthening cooperation between CIS member states in the field of information.

The attention to the intensification of information co-operation in this context is explained by the concerns voiced at the CIS Council of Heads of State about the state of affairs in this area. The participants in the summit recognised "the lack of awareness among the people of our countries, the level of their awareness of what the Commonwealth does and its importance. It is necessary to make more active use of modern information and communication technologies, which are especially demanded by the younger generation. It is

¹ Meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of State [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/zasedanie-soveta-glav-gosudarstv-sng-25085/

expedient to create discussion platforms more actively, to involve the export community and the journalistic corps. It is necessary to think through and adopt a plan for the information promotion of the CIS"². We should assume that this proposal will be taken into account in the Concept of the Belarusian Chairmanship and the Action Plan for its implementation. This proposal sets serious tasks for the information sphere of all the CIS countries to ensure adequate media articulation of the integration processes that will take place in the CIS during the presidency of the Republic of Belarus. Of course, a special role in solving this creative task should be played by representatives of the international segment of the national journalism of the chairing country, who should set the tone in the media sphere by addressing the most topical issues of integration building in the post-Soviet space. In doing so, they should take into account a number of important points.

Even before the beginning of its presidency, the Belarusian side announced at the highest level that it intends to focus its attention in 2021 on the development of the common economic space of the Commonwealth, with "special emphasis planned to be placed on the conjugation of integration processes in the CIS and the EAEU"³, in order to create within the Commonwealth the same level of co-operation as in the Eurasian Economic Union. This intention actualises for media representatives the study of the existing experience of integration construction in the EAEU, which could be successfully used in the CIS. Especially since the economic union of Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia has such experience.

It should be recalled that in November 2020, a meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of Government was held in the format of a videoconference, at which its participants approved the action plan for the implementation of the first stage of the CIS economic development strategy for the period until 2030. This document "covers the period from 2021 to 2025 and contains 29 sections, including trade and economic cooperation, industry, fuel and energy complex, transport, communications and informatization, agro-industrial complex, monetary and financial policy, labour market"⁴. The measures contained in the adopted plan and aimed at strengthening and improving the competitiveness of

² Moldova proposes to think over a plan of information promotion of the CIS [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/moldova-predlagaet-produmat-plan-informatsionnogo-prodvizhenija-sng-420785-2020>

³ On the meeting of the Minister of Foreign Affairs V. Makei with the Chairman of the CIS Executive Committee - Executive Secretary [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: https://mfa.gov.by/press/news_mfa/b824e89c5996ccf3.html

⁴ The next meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of Government will be held in Minsk on 28 May 2021 [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/sledujuschee-zasedanie-soveta-glav-pravitelstv-sng-projdet-v-minske-28-maja-2021-goda-414460-2020/>

the CIS economies, developing new cooperation and infrastructure projects, developing the digitalisation of the economy, implementing scientific, technical and educational potential should help to effectively use the integration mechanisms of this international organisation to restore the positive dynamics of the scale of cooperation. After all, for seven months of 2020, the value of foreign trade turnover of goods between the CIS countries decreased by almost 17 per cent. In addition, "in January-August, the volume of industrial production of the Commonwealth countries decreased by 4 per cent compared to the same period last year. Cargo transport decreased by 4.8 per cent and passenger transport by more than a quarter, by 28 per cent"⁵.

Of course, these indicators do not look very convincing against the background of the results of the Eurasian Economic Union, where there are a number of positive trends in economic activity. Thus, "over the past 5 years, the volume of mutual trade of the Union's countries has grown by 35% to \$62bn (in 2015 it was \$46bn). Total GDP increased by 21% and reached \$2 trillion"⁶. And if we take even the year 2020, which is not the most favourable for epidemiological reasons, agricultural production grew by another two and a half times and there was no decline in industrial production in the manufacturing sectors. But the EAEU is well aware that the union should only accelerate the pace of integration of the industrial potentials of the member states. For this reason, just a week before the meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of State, the EAEU approved the strategic directions for the development of Eurasian economic integration, which envisage a faster pace of this international organisation moving forward. "It is necessary to grow by 4.5 per cent of GDP every year to reach the indicators laid down in the strategy for the development of integration until 2025"⁷. The adopted strategy, which includes eleven directions and 332 implementation mechanisms, provides for a fuller utilisation of the EAEU's industrial potential and its logistical capabilities in order to fully ensure the complementarity of the economies. Particular attention will be paid to education, health care, and the movement of citizens. In order to implement this peculiar roadmap for the development of integration, "it will be necessary to conclude 13 international treaties, more than 60 normative legal acts, as well as to introduce about 25 amendments and

⁵ Roman Golovchenko took part in the meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of Government [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://government.by/ru/content/9638>

⁶ Nazarbayev: it is necessary to increase the volume and sustainability of trade flows inside and outside the EAEU [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/nazarbaev-neobhodimonarashchivat-objemy-i-ustojchivost-torgovyh-potokov-vnutri-i-za-predelami-eaes-419719-2020/>

⁷ The strategy of development of Eurasian integration will allow solving many issues in a new way - Myasnikovich [Electronic resource]. 2020. URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/strategija-razvitijsa-evrazijskoj-integratsii-pozvolit-po-novomu-reshat-mnogie-voprosy-mjasnikovich-419794-2020/>

additions to the EAEU Treaty and national legislation"⁸. As we can see, there is a lot of work to be done. An important detail: the strategy for the development of Eurasian integration until 2025 was adopted when the Republic of Belarus was chairing the EAEU, which allows us to hope for an effective chairmanship of the Belarusian side in the CIS in 2021.

Another interesting experience for the CIS in terms of interfacing integration processes with the EAEU could be the transition from the formation stage to the stage of project integration in this economic union, where the emphasis is placed on investment cooperation and complementary specialisation in the real sector of the economy. The essence of this transition is contained in the industrialisation and agro-industry maps currently being formed in the EAEU. The former is designed to identify import-dependent technological areas and import-substituting potential of producers, as well as areas for possible industrial cooperation and specific implemented and planned major industrial projects in the EAEU. "The current version of the draft map includes 177 large investment and significant projects for relevant industries worth \$194.5bn in 21 sectors"⁹. As for the agro-industry development map, it will also include areas where projects that involve the formation of co-operation chains for the development of import-substituting industries are to be implemented. The experience of implementing these components of project integration in the post-Soviet space should, of course, be in the focus of attention of both the Belarusian media and all the Commonwealth countries.

The experience of the EAEU in expanding scientific-technical and innovation cooperation, including through the formation of Eurasian technological platforms, the main task of which is to "ensure systematic work to accumulate advanced national and global achievements of scientific and technological development, mobilise the scientific potential of member states to solve applied problems in the development of innovative products and technologies, as well as their introduction into industrial production"¹⁰. The fact is that "the Treaty on the EAEU lacks basic provisions on scientific and technical co-operation, which would allow to regulate the innovative

⁸ The EAEU Strategy until 2025 contains 330 measures and mechanisms for the development of integration - Malkina [Electronic resource]. 2020. URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/strategija-eaes-do-2025-goda-soderzhit-330-mer-i-mehanizmov-po-razvitiju-integratsii-malkina-419802-2020/>

⁹ Pivovarov, E. Maps of industrialisation and agroindustry will contribute to import substitution in the EAEU - Malkina / E. Pivovarov // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/karty-industrializatsii-i-agroindustrii-budut-sposobstvovat-importozamescheniju-v-eaes-malkina-419027-2020/>

¹⁰ Eurasian technological platforms [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-vystupaet-za-rasshirenie-nauchno-tekhnicheskogo-sotrudnichestva-v-eaes-shumilin-397579-2020/>

interaction of the countries of the Union"¹¹ . For this reason, the Republic of Belarus initiates the inclusion of a separate article in the Treaty on the EAEU, which would define the areas of co-operation between the member states of the Union in the scientific, technical and innovation spheres.

Recall that back in April 2016, by decision of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council, a list of Eurasian technology platforms was formed, which included 14 areas: 1. Medical and medical biotechnologies, pharmacy. 2. Information and communication technologies. 3. Photonics. 4. Aerospace technologies. 5. Nuclear and radiation technologies. 6. Energy. 7. Transport technologies. 8. Metallurgy technologies and new materials. 9. Extraction of natural resources and oil and gas processing. 10. Chemistry and petrochemistry. 11. Electronics and engineering technologies. 12. Environmental development. 13. Industrial technologies. 14. Agriculture, food industry, biotechnology.

In January 2019, the EAEU formed the 15th Eurasian platform - "Energy and Electrification", the founders of which were nine enterprises and scientific institutes of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia, which outlined such main areas of activity as "energy engineering, electrification, as well as the creation and distribution of smart grids - electrical installations that ensure parallel operation of different energy sources in the network. In addition, it is planned to develop and utilise renewable sources for energy saving of remote consumers"¹² . In August 2019, the Council of the Eurasian Economic Commission approved the 16th Eurasian technology platform - "Technologies for maintenance and repair of industrial equipment", which is designed to address such tasks as "development of industrial partnership and import substitution, re-engineering of obsolete units and assemblies on the basis of technical re-equipment and modernisation of production facilities, introduction of breakthrough technologies"¹³ . At the same time, the Eurasian Centre for Machine Tool Construction was established to maintain a unified register of machine tool equipment produced in the EAEU countries, which will help determine what competencies and production capacities they possess.

¹¹ Belarus is in favour of expanding scientific and technical cooperation in the EAEU - Shumilin [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-vystupaet-za-rasshirenie-nauchno-tehnicheskogo-sotrudnichestva-v-eaes-shumilin-397579-2020/>

¹² Pivovar, E. Technological platform in the energy sector is created in the EAEU / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/economics/view/tehnologicheskaja-platforma-v-sfere-energetiki-sozdana-v-eaes-333240-2019/>

¹³ The EAEU formed a new Eurasian technological platform on technologies of maintenance and repair of industrial equipment [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/13-08-2019-1.aspx>

For the Republic of Belarus, participation in these Eurasian technology platforms is important because the focus here is on the implementation of highly innovative projects that have not only economic, but also political and social significance. In particular, this is characteristic of the Belarusian side's participation in the implementation of the technology platform related to space and geoinformation technologies. "Work in this direction has made it possible to create our own satellite, as well as a whole sector of the economy that deals with the sphere of space, and to declare ourselves on the international arena as a space power"¹⁴. An important addition: in April 2020, the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission approved a global co-operation project in the field of space and geoinformation services based on Earth remote sensing data, which is scheduled to be implemented in 2021-2025. "At the first stage, the current and prospective satellite constellations of the EAEU countries are to be united. The second stage is to create a unified information portal"¹⁵.

Other interesting areas of Belarus' participation in the Eurasian technology platforms include the EurasiaBio technology platform, which involves the development of joint projects in the field of biotechnology for effective use in the interests of science, education, economic sectors, social sphere and state needs, as well as the project "Organisation of LED lighting equipment production", whose participants include Belarusian, Russian, Armenian, Kazakh and Kyrgyz organisations.

Another important area, which, to all appearances, will be updated by the Belarusian side in the CIS in 2021 and on which representatives of the media sphere should focus, is related to the topic of interaction between the regions of the Commonwealth countries, as Minsk expects "a noticeable effect from the implementation of the Interstate Programme of Innovative Cooperation, the Concept of Interregional and Cross-Border Cooperation and the Priority Areas of Cooperation in the Field of Transport"¹⁶. It should be noted that over the years of the Commonwealth's existence the regions have become an effective instrument of interstate dialogue and an integral part of economic interaction. The Concept of Interregional and Cross-Border Cooperation approved at the November (2020) meeting of the CIS Council of

¹⁴ Nikitina, Yu.F. Perspectives of technological platforms: Synergetic effects / Yu.F. Nikitina// Designing the Future. Problems of digital reality: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference (7-8 February 2019, Moscow). - Moscow: Keldysh IPM, 2019. - C. 88-89.

¹⁵ EAEU countries intend to create a Eurasian space constellation [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: https://www.tvr.by/news/obshchestvo/strany_eaes_namereny_sozdat_evraziyskuyu_kosmicheskuyu_gruppir_ovku/

¹⁶ Exit from economic recession, increase of mutual and foreign trade - Igor Petrishenko named the most important tasks facing the CIS at the current stage [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9678>

Heads of Government should introduce new effective elements into this priority of development of this integration structure. It should be recalled that this area of interaction between the Commonwealth countries includes "a set of legislative, administrative and economic measures that promote the most rational allocation of productive forces and equalisation of the living standards of the population, covering all the most important branches of material production, health protection, ensuring law and order and security, employment of the population, placement of the service sector, promotion of tourism"¹⁷.

Speaking about interregional cooperation, in developing this area of cooperation, back in April 2020 the Commonwealth countries adopted the Convention on Interregional Cooperation of the CIS Member States, which clarified the term "interregional cooperation", which now means concerted actions of the parties "aimed at strengthening and developing friendly relations, trade and economic, social, cultural, legal and humanitarian cooperation between the regions of the Parties"¹⁸. More than twenty areas have been identified among the priorities of activity that contribute to the achievement of the set goals, including the creation of free economic zones in the regions, the implementation of investment projects, trade and fair activities.

With regard to cross-border co-operation, the relevant convention of the CIS member states was adopted back in October 2008. This document defines "cross-border cooperation" as "concerted actions aimed at strengthening and promoting good-neighbourly relations between border territories, conclusion, in accordance with the legislation of the Parties, of agreements necessary to achieve these goals"¹⁹. Among the more than twenty areas of activity mentioned here that contribute to the development of cross-border co-operation, we should mention the creation of special or special economic zones in the border areas, cross-border trade, industrial and technical co-operation.

The Republic of Belarus is one of those CIS countries where special attention is paid to regional co-operation. Thus, at the IX meeting of the Council for Interregional and Cross-Border Cooperation of the CIS member states, held in the format of a videoconference in September 2020, it was noted that in the Belarusian regions "more than 600 documents on cooperation in

¹⁷ The state of interregional and cross-border cooperation in the CIS member states (information and analytical report). - M.: CIS, 2017. - C. 4.

¹⁸ Convention on Interregional Co-operation of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States [Electronic resource]. - 2020. – URL: https://pravo.by/upload/docs/op/N01600091_1585774800.pdf

¹⁹ Convention on Cross-Border Co-operation of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States [Electronic resource]. - 2008. - URL: <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/902196976>

trade, economic, scientific, technical and humanitarian spheres with the regions of the CIS member states are still in force"²⁰. And although over 430 agreements out of them fall on the regions of Russia, recently active actions have been taken to expand partnership relations of the regions with other countries as well. Thus, 26 such documents were signed only during the preparation and holding of the first Forum of Regions of Belarus and Uzbekistan in July 2019. Almost 15 agreements have been concluded with the regions of Armenia. And a draft of such a document between Minsk and Yerevan is ready to be signed. There are 23 co-operation agreements with the regions of Kazakhstan, Moldova - 18, Kyrgyzstan - 5. As for Azerbaijan, partnership relations have been established between Minsk and Baku, Mogilev and Sumgait. Belarusian-Turkmen interregional co-operation is based on the existing agreements between Minsk and Ashgabat, Mogilev region and Mary province. Vitebsk, Gomel, Minsk, Mogilev voblasts and Minsk actively co-operate with the regions of Tajikistan.

As we can see, the potential for partnership is considerable. How it is reflected in the national media today is not an easy question. But in any case, this diversity of regional ties will have to be fully disclosed in 2021, first of all, by the Belarusian regional mass media, based on the provisions of the CIS Information Promotion Plan, which was discussed at the December 2020 meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Commonwealth, in order to reflect this direction of integration in the post-Soviet space as adequately as possible in their publications, programmes and broadcasts, thus contributing to the successful chairmanship of the Republic of Belarus in this international body

²⁰ Speeches of the participants of the IX meeting of the Council on Interregional and Cross-Border Cooperation of the CIS Member States on the state of interregional and cross-border cooperation in the CIS Member States [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://e-cis.info/cooperation/3763/89102/>

Eurasian Economic Union: Focusing on international co-operation

In early October 2019, a meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council was held in Yerevan, where the leaders of the five member states of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) discussed the issues of economic interaction, financial policy, energy, as well as the main areas of international activities and development of cooperation with third countries. Noting the serious intensification of interaction between this integration association and such international formats as the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, President Lukashenko drew attention to the fact that "in order to expand the international agenda of the Eurasian Economic Union, it is necessary to pay special attention to the countries of the 'far arc', where our goods and services are still little recognised"²¹.

It should be recalled that by the time of the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in Yerevan, the EAEU already had a free trade zone with **Vietnam**. The agreement on its creation was signed by the parties back in May 2015, and the document came into force in October 2016. In order to adapt the national economies of the EAEU countries to the free trade regime with Vietnam, transitional periods of five to ten years were established for certain goods, during which there would be a gradual reduction in the rates of import customs duties. And as of 2017 alone, the Eurasian Economic Union has "zeroed import duty rates for Vietnam with respect to 43% of the total number of tariff lines of the Single Customs Tariff (SCT of the EAEU). Within 10 years, duty-free import of goods into the common union market for Vietnamese exporters will expand to cover 90 per cent of the positions of the EAEU CCT"²².

And in June 2019, the parties have already started discussing opportunities to expand trade and economic co-operation, as the free trade zone agreement quickly proved its effectiveness. "Already in the first full year of the agreement - 2017 - the increase in trade turnover was 36 per cent (\$5.6 billion). At the same time, Union exports to Vietnam increased by 40 per cent

²¹ Participation in the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/uchastie-v-zasedanii-vysshego-evrazijskogo-ekonomicheskogo-soveta-22132/

²² EAEU free trade zone Vietnam [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.economy.gov.by/ru/zst-vietnam-ru/>

(from US\$1.6 billion to US\$2.3 billion) and imports of goods from Vietnam by 35 per cent (from US\$2.7 billion to US\$3.7 billion)."²³ . In 2018, the existing trend continued. Perhaps also for this reason, the Vietnamese economy grew by more than seven per cent in 2018, a record high since 2008, with a trade surplus of more than seven billion dollars and foreign investment attracted of 19 billion dollars. At the same time, as Vietnamese researchers note, "it is not only Russia that benefits from the agreement: Belarus is also launching more and more joint ventures in Vietnam"²⁴ . In particular, a project for the production of trucks of Minsk Automobile Plant is being implemented in Hung Yen province within the framework of the joint venture MAZ Asia. And in the same province, work is underway to set up a joint venture to produce dairy products from Belarusian raw materials. That is why, at the June (2019) talks with the Eurasian Economic Commission, the Vietnamese side said it would like to maximise relations with the EAEU and consider all opportunities to boost cooperation, including in the areas of financial and tourism services.

Apparently, the positive example of developing relations between the EAEU and Vietnam played no small part in the fact that on 1 October 2019, the Agreement on the Establishment of a Free Trade Zone between the Eurasian Economic Union and **Singapore** was signed in Yerevan within the framework of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council. This document provides for Singapore to grant duty-free access for all goods from the EAEU countries - Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia. Similar commitments - on duty-free access for Singaporean goods - have been assumed by this integration association. In addition, the signed agreement fixed the obligations of the parties to comply with: international standards in licensing procedures; prohibitions and quantitative restrictions; technical regulation of sanitary and phytosanitary norms; transfers and payments for the supply of products; fees associated with the passage of procedures at the border; application of anti-dumping, countervailing and special protective measures. It also formulates "significant groundwork for improving the quality and development of co-operation in such areas as e-commerce, ecology, countering anti-competitive practices, transparency in public procurement, protection of intellectual property rights, which is especially relevant when discussing issues

²³ EAEU and Vietnam discussed opportunities to expand trade and economic co-operation [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/13-06-2019-4.aspx>

²⁴ Nguyen, C.T. Benefits of the free trade zone of Vietnam and the EAEU / C.T. Nguyen // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://eurasian-studies.org/archives/11237>

of technology transfer"²⁵ . Interestingly, work on the agreement lasted more than two years. In signing it, the Singaporean side emphasised the prospects of the Eurasian market - "it is a large market at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. It has a huge potential for economic growth, especially in the areas of logistics and digital. All these are areas of interest for Singapore"²⁶ , so the creation of a free trade zone "will contribute to the development of industry in the EAEU member states, investment, establishing contacts between people, business representatives"²⁷ .

In the second half of October 2019, Moscow hosted a meeting of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council, during which the heads of government of all five member states of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) focused their attention on the development of sectoral areas of cooperation, as well as on strengthening the organisation's position in the international arena, stressing that "international cooperation holds a special place in the development of Eurasian integration"²⁸ . And, indeed, in October 2019 alone, this Eurasian integration structure made a number of concrete steps to develop interaction with states located both in Europe and Asia.

In particular, the same meeting of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council saw the signing of the Agreement on Free Trade Zone between the EAEU and **Serbia**, which, according to the parties, should give new impetus to the expansion of trade and economic cooperation between its participants. It should be recalled that Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan already had bilateral free trade agreements with Serbia before this document. Nevertheless, the new agreements with the Serbian side, firstly, "open a fundamentally new market for Armenia and Kyrgyzstan - with immediate duty-free access to the vast majority of export goods, and, secondly, create new export opportunities for producers of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia"²⁹ . At the same time, the parties to the agreement receive economic benefits not only in the short term in the form of immediate savings in customs duties on existing exports, but also in

²⁵ Pivovar, E. The EEC told the details of the agreement on free trade zone with Singapore / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/v-EEK-rasskazali-podrobnosti-soglasheniya-o-zone-svobodnoj-torgovli-s-singapuruom-364247-2019/>

²⁶ Prime Minister of Singapore notes great growth potential in the Eurasian Economic Union [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/economics/view/premier-ministr-singapura-otmechaet-bolshoj-potentsial-rosta-v-evrazijskom-ekonomicheskom-sojuze-364128-2019/>

²⁷ EAEU and Singapore signed an agreement on the creation of a free trade zone [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/economics/view/eaes-i-singapur-podpisali-soglashenie-o-sozdaniizony-svobodnoj-torgovli-364131-2019/>

²⁸ Meeting of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9076>

²⁹ EAEU and Serbia signed a free trade agreement [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eaes-i-serbija-podpisali-soglashenie-o-svobodnoj-torgovle-367118-2019/>

the medium term in terms of realising export opportunities while expanding the free trade regime. In addition, the document guarantees stability, predictability and transparency of trade relations, as well as the fulfilment of obligations to comply with international standards in terms of licensing procedures, prohibitions and quantitative restrictions, technical regulation, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, application of anti-dumping, countervailing and special protective measures, and protection of intellectual property rights.

Another example of the EAEU's expanding international cooperation concerns **Iran**, whose interim agreement leading to the creation of a free trade zone was signed back on 17 May 2018 and entered into force on 27 October 2019. This document "provides for limited commodity coverage, but includes virtually all major products, which account for 55 per cent of the EAEU's total exports - agricultural and industrial groups of goods. <...> Preferential import coverage accounts for 49 per cent of Iran's total supplies to the EAEU"³⁰. More specifically, the list of goods for which exporters of the EAEU countries, including Belarus, received preferences includes meat and oil and fat products, certain types of confectionery and chocolate, electronic and mechanical equipment, as well as metals and cosmetics. It is also important that the parties will now have to ensure most-favoured-nation treatment for all goods traded between the EAEU and Iran. And all fees related to the import of goods should no longer exceed the cost of services rendered for customs clearance. And unreasonable tariffs, which restrict trade, should no longer be applied to goods that are listed in the agreement. In addition, welcoming any co-operation with the EAEU in the banking, financial and investment spheres, the Iranian side proposed to create a working group for the development of joint economic projects, the potential of which could be very extensive. For example, "Iranian ports in the Caspian Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, railways and roads on the territory of the country and a secure environment make it possible for neighbouring countries to transit goods through Iran"³¹.

Finally, on the day of the meeting of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council - 25 October 2019 - the Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation between the EAEU and **China**, signed on 17 May 2018, entered into force. Let us immediately stipulate that this document is not a free trade

³⁰ Pivovarov, E. Temporary agreement on free trade zone between the EAEU and Iran entered into force / E. Pivovarov // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/vremennoe-soglasenie-o-zone-svobodnoj-torgovli-mezhdu-eaes-i-iranom-vstupilo-v-silu-367284-2019/>

³¹ Tehran proposes to establish a working group on economic projects between Iran and the EAEU [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/tegeran-predlagaet-sozdat-rabochuju-gruppu-po-ekonomicheskim-proektam-irana-i-eaes-364137-2019/>

agreement, as its provisions do not provide for the reduction or elimination of import customs duties. The purpose of the agreement is different: "to increase the transparency of regulatory systems, simplify trade procedures, and develop co-operative ties"³². In particular, the document establishes a much higher level of transparency of the parties' systems of sanitary and phytosanitary measures and technical regulation. In the area of customs procedures, the agreement contains an agreement on the release of goods without unreasonable delays, with the designation of accelerated customs clearance of perishable goods. It also provides substantial guarantees for Belarusian, Russian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Armenian exporters with regard to the protection and defence of intellectual property rights. For Belarus, which is currently in the process of accession to the World Trade Organisation, this document is also important because it establishes in its relations with China "legal guarantees for the implementation of key WTO principles"³³.

In accordance with the development strategies of the EAEU member states, the priorities of co-operation with China are industry and agro-industrial complex. With this in mind, the parties have identified three most important areas of co-operation: 1) creation of a common digital space; 2) localisation of technologies; 3) effective cooperation in the scientific, technical and innovation spheres. In order for all these areas to be successfully implemented, the EAEU is now creating an industrialisation map, which will "identify those areas where attracting foreign investment and technology will be most appropriate"³⁴. At the same time, the creation of common digital platforms and solutions will eliminate barriers to the movement of goods, services, capital and data. The key competences on the basis of which this industry of the future will be formed include electric transport, additive manufacturing, and unmanned technologies.

As for the second area of cooperation between the EAEU and China, an important strategic task is to ensure the transition from localisation of production to localisation of competencies, where the starting point should be the forecasting of the EAEU's unique competitive advantages in the global arena, which can be realised through the creation of technology parks, clusters

³² The heads of government of the EAEU countries adopted a joint statement with China on the occasion of the entry into force of the Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation between the EAEU and the PRC [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9074>

³³ Agreement on trade and economic co-operation between the EAEU and China entered into force [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/soglashenie-o-torgovo-ekonomicheskoy-sotrudnichestve-eaes-i-kitaja-vstupilo-v-silu-367082-2019/>

³⁴ Pivovarov, E. The EEC has identified three main areas of industrial cooperation between the EAEU and China / E. Pivovarov // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eeek-opredelila-tri-osnovnyh-napravleniya-promyshlennogo-sotrudnichestva-eaes-s-kitaem-365900-2019/>

and technology platforms. It should be noted that the first steps in this direction have already been taken. For example, Belarus, together with China, has already implemented a project to create the Great Stone industrial park, which in 2019 received the status of a territorial special economic zone, which gave the residents of the industrial park the maximum possible customs advantages in this integration association in the post-Soviet space, and where the volume of investment in projects is already more than one billion dollars.

In Russia, the Haier industrial park opened in Naberezhnye Chelny in August 2019 at the Chinese side's encouragement, as well as a smart factory for the production of washing machines, which will also produce refrigeration, freezing and kitchen equipment, and TV sets using smart technologies. In Kazakhstan, under a contract with China National Chemical Engineering Company, an integrated gas-chemical complex, Kazakhstan Petrochemical Industries, is being built to produce half a million tonnes of polypropylene a year, and production of polyamide materials from grain using Chinese technology will also be established. Speaking about strengthening scientific and technical cooperation, it is worth emphasising the EAEU's interest in cooperation with China in the agricultural sector, in the introduction of advanced agricultural technologies and innovations, as well as in terms of energy efficiency and productivity of processing industries.

Another important aspect of the topic under consideration is that from 1 January 2020 the Republic of Belarus will become the chair of the Eurasian Economic Union, and from 1 February of the same year the Belarusian representative will head the Eurasian Economic Commission. The Belarusian side intends to use these formats of activity "to give a new impetus to integration processes and to form common policies by the member countries"³⁵. In particular, to ensure that producers from the EAEU member countries receive the most favourable conditions when exporting their products to foreign markets, and consumers - safe, high-quality and inexpensive goods, the Union plans to "accelerate the signing of an agreement on the procedure and conditions for the elimination of technical barriers to mutual trade with third countries, which will establish an effective mechanism to ensure barrier-free movement of goods in the EAEU and third countries"³⁶. In fact, as early as

³⁵ Grishkevich, A. Belarus as the chairman of the EAEU will seek to create a full-fledged economic union - Ministry of Foreign Affairs / A. Grishkevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-kak-predsedatel-v-eaes-budet-dobivatsja-sozdaniya-polnoformatnogo-ekonomicheskogo-sojuza-mid-366038-2019/>

³⁶ Pivovar, E. EEC proposes to accelerate the signing of an agreement on the procedure for removing technical barriers with third countries / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL:

autumn 2019, the EAEU has already started a new cycle of forming a list of priority countries with which this integration association will conclude free trade area agreements. In particular, procedures to this effect with Israel are being finalised, "at the beginning of the next [2020] negotiations with India. There is another list of 12 states with which we would like to work in approximately 2-3 years. This list can be supplemented by other countries"³⁷.

Indonesia, one of the key economies in the Asia-Pacific region, is among the states with which the EAEU is going to conclude a free trade agreement in the future. In October 2019, the Eurasian Economic Commission signed a memorandum of co-operation with the government of this country. This document is expected to help build an effective infrastructure for the development of trade and economic co-operation. On its basis, the parties have already established a working group, the first meeting of which will be held in the first quarter of 2020 in Moscow and which will focus on "issues of supranational competence of the EEC, such as trade facilitation, customs and technical regulation, development of financial markets"³⁸. It should also be noted that the Eurasian Economic Commission already interacts with the governments of such countries as Peru, Mongolia, Cambodia, Morocco, Jordan, Faroe Islands, Cuba Thailand, Bangladesh, Moldova in the form of memoranda, and with the government of Greece in the format of a declaration.

This list also includes such a South American country as **Chile**, with which the Eurasian Five have significantly expanded their co-operation in recent years. In particular, in 2018, trade turnover between the parties grew by almost a third to \$1.2 billion. "At the same time, exports of EEAS countries to Chile increased by 54.8 per cent, imports - by 28.7 per cent"³⁹. A free trade agreement between the EAEU and Chile could open up a lot of opportunities for Belarus, as currently the Belarusian-Chilean trade turnover is only about ten million dollars, of which 90 per cent is the supply of goods from this South American country. The reason for this phenomenon lies in "the presence of

<https://www.belta.by/economics/view/EEK-predlagaet-uskorit-podpisanie-soglashenija-o-porjadke-ustraneniya-tehbarjerov-s-tretijimi-stranami-364105-2019/>

³⁷ Belarus expects export growth due to the EAEU agreements and FTA with third countries [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-rasschityvaet-na-rost-eksporta-blagodarja-soglashenijam-eaes-o-zst-s-tretijimi-stranami-365828-2019/>

³⁸ Pivovar, E. EEC and Indonesia signed a memorandum of co-operation / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/economics/view/EEK-i-indoneziya-podpisali-memorandum-o-sotrudnichestve-366253-2019/>

³⁹ Pivovar, E. Chile shows interest in creating a free trade zone with the EAEU / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/chili-projavljaet-interes-k-sozdaniju-zony-svobodnoj-torgovli-s-eaes-365298-2019/>

some problems with duties, which are still significantly higher for Belarusian goods than for other foreign products entering Chile"⁴⁰.

Another country with which negotiations on the creation of a free trade zone have already entered an active phase is **Egypt**. This African state will be the first to have a joint industrial infrastructure with the EAEU, the creation of which will "become a window for the countries of the integration association to promote our industrial products in Africa and the Middle East"⁴¹. Apparently, the memorandum of understanding signed on 24 October 2019 between the Eurasian Economic Commission and the African Union Commission, according to which "the parties intend to cooperate in infrastructure and agriculture, trade, investment and business development, regional economic integration and other areas of mutual interest"⁴². In accordance with this document, a co-operation plan will be developed with a focus on activities for the business communities of the parties. In the language of numbers, the prospects for this co-operation look very impressive. After all, the African Union is an international intergovernmental organisation uniting 55 states of the "black" continent with a population of about one billion people. The EAEU's trade turnover with them has grown almost 2.7 times since 2010, reaching \$21.7 billion at the end of 2018. At the same time, more than 80 per cent of the Eurasian Five's exports go to just five African countries - Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria and Tunisia. So the reserves for the development of partnership ties here are truly considerable.

⁴⁰ Grishkevich, A. Chile is interested in long-term co-operation with Belarus - Benitez / A. Grishkevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/politics/view/chili-zainteresovana-v-dolgosrochnom-sotrudnichestve-s-belarusiju-benites-365275-2019/>

⁴¹ Pivovarov, E. EAEU countries intend to create a joint industrial infrastructure in Egypt / E. Pivovarov // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/economics/view/strany-eaes-namereny-sozdat-sovmestnyuyu-promyshlennuyu-infrastrukturu-v-egipte-364924-2019/>

⁴² ECE and African Union Commission sign Memorandum of Understanding [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/24-10-2019-5.aspx>

Eurasian Economic Union: Focusing on long-term priorities

The Republic of Kazakhstan, which holds the presidency of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2021, guided by the long-term development priorities of this international organisation, has outlined five main areas of its activities in the year of its presidency:

- 1) give a new impetus to industrial co-operation in the form of joint ventures in industry, agro-industry and services;
- 2) eliminate remaining barriers to mutual trade between the member countries of this integration formation at the central, regional and municipal levels;
- 3) harness the potential of cross-border transport arteries and logistics hubs to build trust across the Eurasian continent;
- 4) to make comprehensive digitalisation a driving force for the development of the economies of the member states of the Union, giving qualitative acceleration to the introduction of digital technologies in industry, agriculture, transport;
- 5) expand access to foreign markets, "more actively develop trade and economic relations with third countries and integration associations"⁴³.

The effective and full implementation of the Strategic Guidelines for the Development of Eurasian Economic Integration until 2025, adopted by the heads of the EAEU member states at the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in December 2020 and published in January 2021, will contribute to the fulfilment of these tasks. This document contains 330 measures and mechanisms to develop cooperation, grouped into 11 system blocks, the implementation of which by 2025 should lead to the achievement of such results as:

- 1) completion of the formation of a common market for goods, services, capital and labour;
- 2) increasing the efficiency of regulation of the common market of the EAEU;

⁴³ Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Kemelevich Tokayev to the Heads of the Member States of the Eurasian Economic Union [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/18-01-2021-1.aspx>

3) transfer to a qualitatively higher level of customs regulation and administration;

4) ensuring guarantees of quality and safety of goods;

5) formation of the EAEU digital space;

6) Establishment of mechanisms for targeted economic development assistance;

7) building a management system for joint co-operation projects, development of high-performance sectors;

8) stimulation of scientific and technological progress;

9) improving the efficiency of the EAEU institutions;

(10) Launching co-operation mechanisms in the fields of education, health, tourism and sports;

11) establishment of the EAEU as one of the most significant development centres of the modern world.

In order to realise these strategic directions, "it will be necessary to conclude 13 international treaties, adopt more than 60 regulatory legal acts, and introduce about 25 amendments and additions to the EAEU Treaty and national legislation"⁴⁴. It is assumed that all these measures will help to increase by 2025 only non-resource exports to third countries from the EAEU states by a quarter. This can be achieved if we follow the path of creating joint Eurasian companies to mutually complement each other and produce competitive products. So far, "there are 17.5 thousand joint ventures in the EAEU, including 2.4 thousand in Belarus. The EAEU is interested in implementing investment projects with a total estimated cost of about \$200 billion"⁴⁵.

Another important segment of Eurasian integration is the implementation of digital projects, as the process of integrating digital technologies into all aspects of activity is now a key condition for progress. The Republic of Belarus is going to play not the least role in this in the EAEU, where sufficient infrastructural groundwork for digital transformation has already been created, where the largest IT cluster in Eastern Europe - the High

⁴⁴ Pivovar, E. The strategy for the development of Eurasian economic integration until 2025 has been published / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/opublikovana-strategija-razvitiya-evrazijskoj-ekonomicheskoy-integratsii-do-2025-goda-423997-2021/>

⁴⁵ Pivovar, E. Myasnikovich considers it necessary to develop industrial co-operation in high-tech industries in the EAEU / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/mjasnikovich-schitaet-neobhodimym-razvivat-v-eaes-promkooperatsiju-v-vysokotekhnologichnyh-otrasljah-427278-2021>

Technology Park - has been functioning for quite some time. "In 2020, its exports exceeded \$2.5bn - that's more than 20% of Belarus' total exports of services"⁴⁶.

At the Digital Almaty Forum 2021 international forum held in February 2021, the Belarusian side named the Eurasian Development Bank's project "Travelling without COVID" as one of the joint digital projects in the EAEU that were actually implemented in the interests of the population. At the same time, the attention of the forum participants was drawn to the fact that other projects on the EAEU digital agenda are stalled. Few tangible results, including economic ones, have been achieved in three years. This is why the implementation of the digital agenda in the Union has not yet led to the development of national segments. In this regard, it is now very important to set specific tasks, identify the executors, develop clear rules for the information architecture, and synchronise the pace of work both in the EAEU member states themselves and at the integration level, so that, as a result, digitalisation will bring the real sector of the economy to a new level in the first place. In fact, Kazakhstan, which will chair the EAEU in 2021, is demonstrating just such an approach in this matter. Suffice it to say that the project initiated by Kazakhstan to create wholesale and distribution centres, as well as the full-fledged launch of the ecosystem of digital transport corridors, proposed by Belarus together with its partners in the union, are now among the priorities in the union. In addition, one of the joint projects could be a "smart city", as all major cities in the EAEU have the same tasks of managing lighting, traffic flows, electricity, water and heat supply. According to the Belarusian side, "all these tasks can be solved with the help of multifunctional digital platforms"⁴⁷, but this will require a lot of concerted work to achieve a powerful synergistic effect.

Another of the most important areas of development of the Eurasian Economic Union for the next five years should be the intensification of economic cooperation with foreign countries and international organisations, which will allow for coordinated work on the conjugation of integration processes in the Eurasian space, including economic interaction "within the framework of the idea of the Greater Eurasian Partnership"⁴⁸. Recall that the

⁴⁶ HTP exports in 2020 exceeded \$2.5bn - Golovchenko [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-pvt-v-2020-godu-prevysil-25-mlrd-golovchenko-427222-2021/>

⁴⁷ Belarus is in favour of accelerating the implementation of digital projects in the EAEU - Golovchenko [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-vystupaet-za-uskorenie-realizatsii-tsifrovyyh-proektov-v-eaes-golovchenko>

⁴⁸ Strategic directions for the development of Eurasian economic integration until 2025. - M., 2020. - C. 9.

idea of forming a Greater Eurasian Partnership, proposed in 2015 by the Russian side, is a network of dialogues between key players in Eurasia, not only among the largest national economies, but also regional economic associations linked by a flexible system of international legal norms, transport and logistics, energy, telecommunications and financial infrastructures, joint projects and institutions. This large-scale concept, which has already been called the most ambitious integration project of the current century, implies the implementation of a number of basic principles that distinguish it from other Eurasian unification plans.

First of all, it does not pretend to compete with other regional integration structures, but only develops them for the future unified Eurasian economic mechanism. The Greater Eurasian Partnership "does not act as a unification of the Eurasian East against the European West"⁴⁹. It is assumed that the implementation of this project, whose participants are already characterised by differences in models of social, political and economic development, will not impose a single set of values on anyone, but will only create the most comfortable conditions for all participants, not dividing them into leaders and outsiders, but providing for a variety of flexible forms of involvement of individual countries in the partnership. It is expected that the Greater Eurasian Partnership will affect not only the economy, but also other spheres of interaction - science, education, culture, humanitarian sphere, as well as in parallel will contribute to strengthening food, energy and continental security, addressing such global problems as climate change, combating pandemics, migration. Another distinctive feature of this project should be the very principle of implementation - "bottom-up", in which the foundation of the project will be formed by specific agreements between regional integration associations and individual countries. In particular, the planned pairing of the Eurasian Economic Union with China's One Belt, One Road initiative fits very harmoniously into this scheme. And not only that.

Thus, as early as the East Asia Summit held in November 2020, it was stated that the further development of various integration projects in the Asia-Pacific region will only contribute to the strengthening of economic cooperation. In this regard, such "regional and subregional associations as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Eurasian Economic Union, and

⁴⁹ Kortunov, A. Eight principles of the Greater Eurasian Partnership / A. Kortunov // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/vosem-printipov-bolshogo-evraziyskogo-partnerstva/>

the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation can interact in the interests of the entire region, harmoniously and effectively complement each other"⁵⁰.

⁵¹In turn, Kazakhstan, which will chair the EAEU in 2021, declaring its approach to the consistent expansion of access to foreign markets, active development of trade and economic relations with third countries and integration associations, focused its attention not only on systematic work to establish an equitable, mutually beneficial and pragmatic dialogue between the EAEU and the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), but also on the fact that "an effective strategy of interaction with the new EU and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will have to be developed.

Indeed, in mid-November 2020, an agreement was signed at the ASEAN summit to form potentially the world's largest free trade bloc between the ten countries of this association (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and the five leading economies of the Asian region - Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and Vietnam. This agreement "brought together countries with a combined gross product approaching \$26 trillion (one-third of global GDP) <...> and a population exceeding 2.2 billion"⁵². It is clear that the development of mutually beneficial interaction with such a major partner in the global arena can become a powerful impetus for the EAEU to become one of the most significant development centres of the modern world.

The Central American Economic Integration Subsystem, which was formed in October 1993, could also soon become a promising partner of the Union. Its members are such countries of the region as Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, El Salvador and Guatemala. In February 2021, the Eurasian Economic Commission and the Secretariat for Economic Integration in Central America (SIECA), which is the technical and administrative body of the Subsystem, signed a memorandum of understanding between the two organisations aimed at intensifying trade and economic cooperation between the parties in such areas of interaction as mutual trade, technical regulation and standardisation, industry and agro-industry, macroeconomics, to share experience, develop recommendations, and promote

⁵⁰ The world's largest free trade zone is created in Asia [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/28129>

⁵¹ Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Kemelevich Tokayev to the Heads of the Member States of the Eurasian Economic Union [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/18-01-2021-1.aspx>

⁵² Erokhin, V.L. Comprehensive regional economic partnership: a review of the main indicators of the trade alliance / V.L. Erokhin // Marketing and Logistics. - 2020. - №6. - C. 25.

cooperation between the two countries. The EAEU believes that "Central American countries have great potential for increasing co-operation. The signing of the memorandum is the first step to intensify trade and investment co-operation and, in the long term, to integrate into global value chains <...>. Since 2015, mutual trade turnover has increased by 22.6 per cent"⁵³. In order to practically implement the provisions of the memorandum, the parties will soon form a joint working group.

Another country of the American continent with which the EAEU's interaction will be significantly intensified in 2021 is Cuba, with which a memorandum of understanding was concluded back in 2018 and which was granted the status of an observer state to the EAEU at the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in December 2020. Many facts show that the level of development of trade and economic co-operation between the parties to the memorandum has serious potential for growth. In particular, "at the end of 2019, the EAEU's trade turnover with Cuba totalled \$214.7 million, including exports - \$197.1 million and imports - \$17.6 million. In 2018, a record level of trade turnover between the EAEU and Cuba was recorded since 2010 - \$417.5 million"⁵⁴.

Continuing the theme of the EAEU's bilateral format of international cooperation, we note that in fulfilment of the tasks set out in the Strategic Guidelines for the Development of Eurasian Economic Integration until 2025, the Eurasian Economic Commission is now doing the necessary work to conclude agreements on the creation of free trade zones with a number of other countries. In Asia, among the states interested in developing full-scale co-operation with the EAEU is Iran, with which an interim agreement leading to the formation of a free trade zone was signed in May 2018 and entered into force in October 2019. In December 2020, the heads of the EAEU member states decided to start negotiations on an agreement to establish a free trade area with Iran by October 2022. Already in February 2021, the participants in these negotiations focused their attention on transport and logistics projects that could "have a positive impact both on the growth of trade turnover between

⁵³ Pivovar, E. EEC and the Secretariat for Economic Integration in Central America signed a memorandum / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/EEK-i-sekretariat-po-ekonomicheskoy-integratsii-v-tsentralnoj-amerike-podpisali-memorandum-430366-2021>

⁵⁴ Pivovar, E. Cuba has appointed a representative in the Eurasian Economic Commission / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/kuba-naznachila-predstavitelja-v-evrazijskoj-ekonomicheskoy-komissii-427078-2021/>

the EAEU countries and Iran and on increasing the level of transport connectivity of the entire large Eurasian region"⁵⁵.

In 2021, the EAEU intends to establish interaction between business circles and significantly strengthen trade and economic ties with such a South Asian country as Bangladesh. A memorandum of co-operation with Bangladesh was signed in 2019. The fact that the Bangladeshi economy "has demonstrated significant growth over the past ten years, with GDP increasing by 8% per year on average and even during the pandemic the growth rate was 5.6%"⁵⁶ speaks of a rather high potential for the development of partnership ties. And it is now important to identify where the two sides have mutual interest and where trade diversification can be achieved. In addition, studies on the prospects of forming free trade zones with Indonesia and Mongolia have already begun. And in the first half of 2021, the negotiation process will resume "with the largest economy in Africa - Egypt, as well as with India"⁵⁷.

The EAEU is also expected to intensify its actions across the entire post-Soviet space, as evidenced by the signing in February 2021 of the Action Plan for 2021-2022 for the implementation of the memorandum on deepening cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Commission and the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which envisages the implementation of joint projects and the holding of joint events, including with the participation of business communities. Recall that the memorandum signed in 2018 provides for cooperation between the EAEU and the CIS "in the areas of customs regulation, traceability and labelling of goods with means of identification, public procurement, consumer protection, digital economy, tax policy and administration, foreign trade, competition policy and antimonopoly regulation, as well as sanitary, veterinary-sanitary and quarantine phytosanitary measures"⁵⁸. And in bilateral terms, the EAEU is very interested in Uzbekistan's proposal to jointly build the Trans-Afghan railway. This is explained by the fact that "in 2020, the volume of railway transit through the states of the Union in the direction from Asia to Europe and back increased by more than 60%, and the efficiency of transport has significantly increased. This

⁵⁵ Chairman of the EEC Collegium Mikhail Myasnikovich met with Chairman of the Majlis of the Islamic Council of Iran Mohammad Beger Ghalifab [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/09-02-2021-01.aspx>

⁵⁶ Possibilities of intensification of trade and economic cooperation between Bangladesh and EAEU discussed in the EEC [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/29-01-2021-3.aspx>

⁵⁷ Pivovarov, E. EAEU intends to create free trade zones with Egypt, India, Indonesia and Mongolia / E. Pivovarov // [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/caes-nameren-sozdat-zony-svobodnoj-torgovli-s-egiptom-indiej-indoneziej-i-mongoliej-426578-2021/>

⁵⁸ EEC and CIS Executive Committee signed a plan of co-operation for 2021-2022 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/05-02-2021-07.aspx>

shows the prospects of this direction and the need for concerted efforts"⁵⁹ . In other words, by contributing to the concept of transport connectivity in Greater Eurasia, the implementation of this project will allow both the EAEU member states and Uzbekistan to improve the competitiveness of their enterprises and the efficiency of trade, as well as to create new jobs. This is the orientation towards long-term priorities in the Eurasian Economic Union.

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⁵⁹ Pivovar, E. EAEU will consider Uzbekistan's initiative on the construction of the Trans-Afghan railway / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eaes-rassmotrit-initsiativu-uzbekistana-o-stroitelstve-transafganskoj-zheleznoj-dorogi-431104-2021/>

Belarus - Russia: Regions expand partnership ties

The VII Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia, held in September 2020, set the task to intensify joint activities of the parties in a whole range of areas in politics, economy, social sphere, education, culture, and also actualised "improvement of work in the media space and strengthening of economic cooperation on an equal basis"⁶⁰.

The Pskov Region, located in the North-Western Federal District of the Russian Federation, is among the **Russian** regions where specific measures are being taken today to achieve this goal in co-operation with Belarusian partners. This is evidenced by the action plan for 2021-2023 signed in early December 2020 by the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the administration of the Pskov region to implement the existing agreement between the parties on trade, economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation. The adopted joint document aims to return the partnership ties of the Belarusian regions with Pskov Oblast to the trajectory of sustainable growth. After all, so far "trade turnover between Belarus and Pskov region in January-September 2020 amounted to \$77 million and decreased by 17.3% compared to the same period last year. The balance for Belarus is positive - \$16.6 million"⁶¹.

It should be reminded that the basic agreement between the parties was signed back in October 2000. It was later reinforced by more than 20 more agreements between the municipalities of the Pskov Oblast and Belarusian districts. This contributed to the fact that in 2017 the trade turnover between the parties totalled almost \$200 million, and "more than 100 enterprises with Belarusian capital are registered on the territory of the region"⁶². True, already "in 2019 the trade turnover between Belarus and the Pskov region totalled \$121 million and increased by 12% compared to 2018"⁶³. Nevertheless, all these facts allow the leadership of the Russian region to assert with good reason that

⁶⁰ Roman Golovchenko: Belarus and Russia need to intensify cooperation in politics and economy [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9593>

⁶¹ Belarus is ready to participate more actively in agricultural development programmes in the Pskov Oblast [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-gotova-aktivnee-uchastvovat-v-programmah-razvitiya-selskogo-hozjajstva-v-pskovskoj-oblasti-418071-2020>

⁶² Priority directions of regional co-operation development as a key factor of union building: information-integration project / compiled by, interviewed by: K. Gusev, B. Zalessky. Gusev, B. Zalessky. - Minsk: Biznesofset, 2018. - C. 287.

⁶³ Roman Golovchenko proposed to the Governor of the Pskov region to intensify co-operation in various sectors [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9588>

"Belarus is our key foreign economic, foreign trade partner. This partnership accounts for 35% of trade turnover"⁶⁴.

The 3-year action plan for cooperation adopted in early December 2020 envisages the realisation of a large potential for cooperation in a wide range of areas. In particular, this document "includes measures for the participation of Belarusian enterprises in the construction of social facilities and housing construction"⁶⁵. Here we are talking about the construction of housing estates, as well as schools, kindergartens, hospitals with the help of credit resources of the Development Bank of Belarus. The fact is that the parties already have a good experience of cooperation in this area, as "the largest school in Pskov was built by Belarusian construction organisations. And we are satisfied with this experience, because the quality is very high"⁶⁶.

Another promising area of co-operation is providing this Russian region with Belarusian passenger, cargo, road-building and municipal equipment. In this respect, the Belarusian side proceeds from the understanding that "the Pskov region is facing the issue of cardinal renewal of the fleet of city buses, first of all in the capital of the region"⁶⁷. And already in September 2020 the dealer of Minsk Automobile Plant won the tender for the supply of 11 buses of extra-large and 6 - large capacity to Pskov. A pilot operation of a Belarusian bus powered by gas motor fuel was successfully conducted there.

Investment co-operation between the parties should also receive additional impulses for development in the next three years. This will be facilitated by the cooperation agreement signed in September 2020 between the Belarusian National Agency for Investment and Privatisation and the Investment Development Agency of the Pskov Region. In this document, the parties agreed, in particular, to "create favourable conditions for mutual attraction of investments, development and implementation of joint projects, exchange information on business conditions, investment opportunities and

⁶⁴ Meeting with the Governor of the Pskov Region of Russia Mikhail Vedernikov [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/vstrecha-s-gubernatorom-pskovskoj-oblasti-rossii-mixailom-vedernikovym-24596/

⁶⁵ Pskov region plans to build social objects with the participation of Belarusian companies [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/v-pskovskoj-oblasti-planirujut-stroit-sotsobjekty-s-uchastiem-belorusskih-kompanij-418082-2020>

⁶⁶ Pskov region is interested in Belarusian agro-towns, machinery and construction services [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/pskovskaja-oblast-zainteresovalas-belorusskimi-agrogorodkami-tehnikoj-i-stroitelnyimi-uslugami-408508-2020/>

⁶⁷ Igor Petrishenko: Belarus is ready to participate more actively in agricultural development programmes in the Pskov Oblast [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9668>

proposed projects, as well as take joint participation in thematic seminars, conferences, forums and other investment-oriented events"⁶⁸.

Finally, another new vector of co-operation, which will be developed in the near future, is in the field of education. We are talking about the fact that Belarus is starting to train medical personnel for the Pskov Oblast. In this regard, "an agreement on co-operation and strategic partnership has been signed between Pskov State University and three higher education institutions of Belarus"⁶⁹. The relevance of this topic for the Russian region can be expressed by one figure: the deficit of medical personnel in the Pskov region today is almost 50 per cent. So the help of Belarusian partners is more than necessary here and now.

Another interesting example of developing ties with Belarusian partners in the same Northwestern Federal District is shown by the **Leningrad Region**. In March 2021, the ninth meeting of the joint commission for the development of cooperation between the Leningrad Region and the Republic of Belarus took place, at which the parties signed a new Agreement on cooperation in trade and economic, scientific and technical, and socio-cultural spheres. Recall that the interaction of this Russian region with the Belarusian side began in 1997, when framework co-operation agreements were signed with four regions in Belarus - Minsk, Gomel, Vitebsk and Mogilev. "A year later, the agreements were already signed by the governments of the Leningrad Region and the Republic of Belarus. These documents became the basis for the establishment and development of mutually beneficial ties in the following years"⁷⁰.

For a long time, the key area of cooperation between the region and the republic in terms of the intensity of interaction has remained the sphere of agro-industrial complex, where agro-enterprises traditionally maintain close ties and co-operation with the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus has been established. An interesting fact: "About 20 per cent of spring grain crop seeds in the Leningrad Region are sown with varieties developed by Belarusian breeders <...> At the same time, the cultivated varieties from year to year show high performance in all parameters, proving the high level of breeding

⁶⁸ Investment Agencies of Belarus and the Pskov Oblast signed an agreement on co-operation [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/agentstva-po-investitsijam-belarusi-i-pskovskoj-oblasti-podpisali-soglashenie-o-sotrudnichestve-408584-2020/>

⁶⁹ Belarus will train medical personnel for the Pskov region [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: https://www.belta.by/society/view/belarus-budet-gotovit-meditsinskie-kadry-dlja-pskovskoj-oblasti-408501-2020/?utm_source=belta&utm_medium=news&utm_campaign=accent

⁷⁰ Regions of Russia - in the Republic of Belarus: Information and Integration Project / compiled by B. Zaleskii, A. Kiselev, E. Korovkin. B. Zalesky, A. Kiselev, E. Korovkin. - Minsk: Theseus, 2009. - C. 65.

development in Belarus"⁷¹. In this regard, the demand for Belarusian seed from the agrarians of the Russian region continues to grow.

According to the results of 2019, the Leningrad Region became 11th among Russian regions in terms of trade turnover with Belarus, which then totalled about \$600 million. True, in 2020, for known reasons of epidemiological nature, it has slightly decreased: in the first half of the year - about 280 million dollars. That is why in September 2020, at a high level, the parties decided to "update the programme of cooperation between Belarus and the Leningrad Region and set clear and specific objectives"⁷². And in 2020, the Russian side increased purchases of Belarusian forestry equipment and started buying heavy road machinery. Moreover, for 2021 in the budget of the region is planned to buy more than a hundred units of such equipment. "Urban transport is also of interest to the Leningrad region. The company "Piteravto" plans to make a large purchase - up to 1.5 thousand combined buses. The first hundred buses will be purchased already in the first quarter of 2021"⁷³.

As for the new cooperation agreement signed in March 2021, it focuses the parties' attention on such an important area as ecology, including Belarusian technologies and equipment for water treatment, as well as waste recycling. The fact is that the Russian region is considering the possibilities of partnership with the Belarusian side in terms of the choice of technologies for the construction of enterprises for the recycling of household waste, relying on the experience of the Brest region in this matter. Suffice it to say that "within the framework of the federal project "Clean Water" 13 water treatment plants of Belarusian production have already been installed in the Leningrad region, and now 9 more water treatment plants and 4 modular treatment facilities (sewage treatment plants) are being installed. In the period of 2021-2022 it is planned to purchase 108 water treatment plants and 31 wastewater treatment plants of Belarusian production for the amount of 1.65 and 2.40 billion Russian rubles respectively"⁷⁴. In addition, the Action Plan for cooperation in trade, economic, scientific, technical and cultural areas for 2021-2023, signed at the ninth meeting of the joint commission, provides for "increasing supplies of

⁷¹ Priority directions of regional co-operation development as a key factor of union building: information-integration project / compiled by, interviewed by: K. Gusev, B. Zalessky. Gusev, B. Zalessky. - Minsk: Biznesofset, 2018. - C. 204.

⁷² Roman Golovchenko: Leningrad Oblast can enter the top 5 trade partners of Belarus among Russian regions [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9586>

⁷³ Meeting with the Governor of the Leningrad Region of Russia Alexander Drozdenko [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/vstrecha-s-gubernatorom-leningradskoy-oblasti-rossii-aleksandrom-drozdenko>

⁷⁴ Ecology - in the focus of co-operation [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9787>

public transport using various types of fuel, road-building, municipal and agricultural machinery to the Leningrad Region from Belarus, as well as supplies of pedigree livestock, fertilisers, machine-building and woodworking products to Belarus"⁷⁵ .

The planned expansion of co-operation between the region and the republic over the next three years may also be augmented by the intensification of co-operation between the parties at the municipal level. According to the Committee for External Relations of the Leningrad Region, partnership or twinning relations have already been established between such districts as: 1. Volosovsky and Logoisky (2010); 2. Volkhovsky and Mozyrsky (2006); 3. Vyborgsky and Rechitsa (2011); 4. Gatchinsky and Nesvizhsky (2010); 5. Kingiseppsky and Svetlogorsky (2010); 6. Kirovsky and Myadelsky (2013); 7. Lomonosovsky and Baranovichi (2008); 8. Luzhsky and the city of Bobruisk (2017); 9. Luzhsky and Gorodoksky (2014); 10. Podporozhsky and Miorsky (2017); 11. Priozersky and Mogilevsky (2006); 12. Slantsevsky and Shklovsky (2018); 13. Tikhvinsky and Dzerzhinsky (2009); 14. Tosnensky and Rogachevsky (2010); 15. Tosnensky and Polotskiy (2010); 16. Shcheglovskoye Rural Settlement and Vileysky District (2012); 17. The towns of Kommunar and Svetlogorsk (2007); 18. Sosnovoborsk Urban District and Ostrovets District (2012, 2016).

As we can see, the potential for co-operation between the Leningrad Region and the Republic of Belarus is already considerable. It only needs to be updated to the maximum extent possible in all areas of mutual interest in accordance with the plans adopted by the joint commission. And then the results that the parties are counting on will not be long in coming.

In the Siberian Federal District, **Tomsk Region** has seriously intensified its interaction with Belarusian partners. In December 2020, the first meeting of the working group on cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and this Russian region was held, at which the parties agreed to focus on expanding trade turnover, to consider opportunities for the production of new products, including innovative products, as well as the opening of joint ventures of different forms of ownership. Especially since "there are a large number of growth points for the development of co-operation in terms of meeting the

⁷⁵ Belarus and the Leningrad region signed an agreement on co-operation [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-leningradskaja-oblast-podpisali-soglashenie-o-sotrudnichestve-434519-2021/>

needs for raw materials, components, finished goods, and natural resources"⁷⁶. In addition, it is planned to strengthen contacts and expand co-operation in the field of science, education and culture. This is discussed in the updated plan of joint activities for 2021-2023, which the Tomsk side submitted to the Belarusian partners for approval.

It should be reminded that the Agreement on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical, and Cultural Cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and Tomsk Oblast was signed in 2016 at the plenary session of the Third Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia. In this document, which gave new impetus to the bilateral interaction between the republic and the region, the parties identified the main priorities of joint work in a very wide range of areas, relying on the existing experience of interaction. And very soon concrete results of the agreement's implementation appeared.

Thus, "the Agrarian Centre of Tomsk region signed a number of cooperation agreements with the Scientific and Practical Centre of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus on Agricultural Mechanisation, Grodno State Agrarian University and Belarusian State Agrarian Technical University"⁷⁷. The National Research Tomsk State University, National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University, Tomsk University of Control Systems and Radioelectronics, Tomsk Scientific Centre of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences became participants of joint projects with Belarusian partners related to fundamental and applied research, as well as the development of academic mobility among undergraduates and teaching staff.

In particular, within the framework of the Union State's Pramen programme, scientists from the Tomsk Institute of Atmospheric Optics of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences and specialists from the Institute of Physics of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences jointly developed special complexes for monitoring the state of the atmosphere, which allow not only to determine the distance to any object, but also to scan the composition of the atmosphere along the way. Thus, there is no need for sampling and analyses, as the data immediately appear on the operator's monitor. Another interesting project is the joint work of scientists from the National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University and the Belarusian State University "on the

⁷⁶ Belarus is ready to co-operate with Tomsk Oblast in economic, humanitarian and scientific spheres - Khudyk [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-gotova-k-sotrudnichestvu-s-tomskoj-oblastju-v-ekonomicheskoy-gumanitarnoy-i-nauchnoj-sferah-421752-2020/>

⁷⁷ Tomsk region has good opportunities for expanding economic ties with the Republic of Belarus [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://tomsk.er.ru/activity/news/u-tomskoj-oblasti-est-horoshie-vozmozhnosti-dlya-rasshireniya-ekonomicheskikh-svyazey-s-respublikoj-belarus>

development of nanocomposite coatings resistant to radiation effects, which are intended for use in nuclear reactors. The results of the research may be in demand in other areas where operation in extreme situations is expected: for example, in space, in steam turbines of thermal power plants"⁷⁸ .

The partnership relations between this Russian region and the Belarusian manufacturer Amkodor are developing very effectively in line with the signed agreement. In June 2016, the Tomsk region approved a medium-term cooperation plan to expand the supply of its machinery. And today, this equipment is used in this Russian region in municipal services and forestry. In particular, in December 2017, Verkhneketsky leskhoz purchased a logging complex, which began to be used in selective and clear sanitary felling as part of the execution of state assignments. "This is the third logging complex that Amkodor has supplied to the forestry enterprises of the region. By the way, it will now be easier to service this equipment, as the company opened its own branded service centre in the region in the summer of 2017"⁷⁹ .

All these facts show that the basis for cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the Tomsk region is not bad, but it needs to be developed, since so far mutual trade accounts for an insignificant share in the total volume of their foreign economic activity - just over \$10 million for 10 months of 2020. The Tomsk side expects to emphasise the development of partnership ties in such areas as "crop and livestock farming, hunting and fishing, industry and consumer market, ecological and rural tourism, additional professional education and advanced training, use of IT systems for state and municipal needs, support for innovative entrepreneurship"⁸⁰ . The Belarusian side sees prospects in supplying a wide range of export goods - buses, trucks, municipal, road-building, logging, agricultural machinery, food, light industry and agro-industrial complex products. In short, the potential for partnership between the parties is very solid. And this inspires optimism that the plans adopted at the first meeting of the working commission to expand cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the Tomsk Oblast will be successfully implemented.

Speaking about Belarusian partners in the Siberian Federal District, we should recall **Irkutsk Region, where** the Agreement on Trade, Economic,

⁷⁸ Technologies and innovations in the cooperation of the regions of the Union State as an impetus for the development of Eurasian integration: inform.-integration project / co-authored, interviewed : B. Zaleskii, M. Valkovski, A. Greshnikov. - Minsk: Biznesofset, 2017. - C. 202.

⁷⁹ Priority directions of regional co-operation development as a key factor of union building: information-integration project / compiled by, interviewed by: K. Gusev, B. Zalesky. Gusev, B. Zalesky. - Minsk: Biznesofset, 2018. - C. 345.

⁸⁰ Tomsk region and Belarus agreed to expand cooperation [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://tomsk.sm.news/tomskaya-oblast-i-belarus-dogovorilis-rasshirit-sotrudnichestvo-42561-u3t5/>

Scientific, Technical, Cultural, and Humanitarian Cooperation was signed in December 2016. At the same time, the first meeting of the working group formed from representatives of the parties was held to prepare a roadmap - the Action Plan for 2017-2019 - for the implementation of the signed agreement in order to rapidly increase trade and economic cooperation. The fact is that 2016 highlighted a serious problem in the development of partnership ties between Belarus and the Irkutsk Region - the trade turnover between the parties has almost halved. And this is despite the fact that in 2015 the mutual trade indicator was the highest for five years - \$115 million. This gave the parties a reason to outline the main task for the near future in a very simple way: "Belarus and the Irkutsk Region of Russia should find reserves to increase mutual trade"⁸¹.

⁸²It is worth recalling that in the pre-crisis period, trade and economic interaction between the parties was carried out in a wide range of areas, including the creation of a system of business cooperation using modern information technologies and electronic systems, expansion of the product range of mutual supplies, the establishment of service and repair centres for Belarusian-made machinery in the Irkutsk region, the organisation and holding of joint trade fairs and exhibitions, as well as the establishment of joint trade fairs and exhibitions.

In their search for new reserves of trade and economic cooperation, the parties decided to rely on the existing achievements. Firstly, the Belarusian side proposed to make more active use of its export potential in Priangarie, where there are still significant prospects for supplying quarry, truck and other specialised equipment, as well as loaders for coal and other mineral deposits in the Russian region. After all, Belarus is well aware that the Irkutsk region is one of the leaders in Russia in terms of mining, so the quarry equipment of the Belarusian Automobile Plant for the mining enterprises of the region would be very useful. Besides, the Minsk Automobile Plant was already "ready to meet the needs of the region in passenger vehicles using gas motor fuel"⁸³. At the same time, the Belarusian side offered such attractive financing schemes as leasing, budget subsidies, and preferential lending for its export supplies, which may also apply to the latest Belarusian novelties in the form of

⁸¹ Negotiations with the Governor of the Irkutsk Region Sergey Levchenko [Electronic resource]. - 2016. - URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/peregovory-s-gubernatorom-irkutskoj-oblasti-sergeem-levchenko-15007/

⁸² Common Economic Space: integration of regions: inform.-integ. project / compiled by, interviewed by: B. Zalesky, M. Valkovsky, A. Mostovoy. - Minsk: Biznesofset, 2013. - C. 118.

⁸³ Andrei Kobyakov met with the Governor of the Irkutsk region [Electronic resource]. - 2016. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/6866>

innovative urban electric transport - electric buses and trolleybuses with autonomous running.

Second, an important section of the roadmap for cooperation between Belarus and the Irkutsk Region was to be production cooperation not only with defence industry companies. In this respect, the attention of Belarusian manufacturers was attracted to the territory of advanced socio-economic development "Usolye-Sibirskoye" created in the Russian region, which has a special tax regime and where assembly production of Belarusian tractors could well appear. All the more so because "large areas of unused arable land in the Irkutsk Oblast are planned to be put into agricultural turnover. For this project, the Russian region is resuming programmes on leasing and investment projects. This should contribute to the growth of sales of tractor equipment"⁸⁴. The parties also mentioned agriculture, construction, logging, and water resources as other areas for intensifying co-operation. In total, this list includes more than a dozen promising areas of joint activity, which, to all appearances, will be supplemented. In particular, we are also talking about co-operation between scientific institutions, primarily those related to agriculture, as well as in the tourism sector. All these facts spoke about the seriousness of the parties' intentions to bring partnership ties to a qualitatively new level. And, it must be said, today these plans are gradually taking real shape.

In March 2021, the Irkutsk Region and Minsk Tractor Plant agreed to supply more than 160 Belarusian tractors to this Russian region. They are expected to significantly replenish the fleet of BELARUS-branded machinery, which is already close to ten thousand machines in demand in the Priangarie region in the agricultural and municipal sectors. As part of further expansion of this cooperation, the Belarusian side also announced the possibility of "transfer of forest and special machines for experimental operation in the organisations of the region. This type of machinery has not been supplied to the region before. The possibility of purchasing equipment for volunteers involved in extinguishing forest fires is under consideration"⁸⁵. In addition, the leaders of the Russian region and the Belarusian company have already discussed the issue of establishing a specialised service and technical centre in

⁸⁴ Assembly production of BELARUS tractors may appear in the Irkutsk region [Electronic resource]. - 2016. - URL: <http://www.belta.by/economics/view/sborochnoe-proizvodstvo-traktorov-belarus-mozhet-pojavitsja-v-irkutskoj-oblasti-222392-2016/>

⁸⁵ Irkutsk region will purchase more than 160 BELARUS tractors [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/irkutskaja-oblast-priobretet-bolee-160-traktorov-belarus-433486-2021/>

the region, which would allow for prompt and cheap repairs of tractor equipment from Belarus.

Recall that the Irkutsk Region and Minsk Tractor Plant signed a cooperation agreement in September 2020. At that time, the Russian region made a proposal "to set up several maintenance stations in the Irkutsk region so that it would be possible to repair Belarusian machinery, including major repairs"⁸⁶. Especially since the region, as noted above, has territories of advanced socio-economic development with benefits, as well as a surplus of labour force. In March 2021, representatives of MTZ have already visited the site proposed by the Irkutsk side to organise overhaul and repair of BELARUS machinery in order to make a concrete decision on all components of the implementation of this joint mutually beneficial project.

Note that back in November 2018, the parties agreed to establish and develop joint ventures in different areas. "Especially in those areas that the region is rich in. This is the timber processing complex, machine building, aircraft construction"⁸⁷. In September 2020, the Belarusian side also announced its readiness to participate on an equal footing with other manufacturers in tenders for the supply of cargo, forestry, passenger, municipal, road-building equipment for the implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects in the Irkutsk region. And among the promising areas of cooperation she noted "co-operation in the forestry sector, in the field of environmental protection and natural resources, in processing municipal waste and providing clean drinking water to the population"⁸⁸.

The intensification of cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the Irkutsk Region five years ago had a positive impact on bilateral trade. Suffice it to say that in 2016-2019, the volume of trade turnover between the parties increased more than fourfold and showed a record level of \$284 million at the end of 2019. The basis of Belarusian exports to Priangarie then was made up of supplies of wires, fluorides, trucks, tyres, parts for cars, rolling stock, paints, varnishes, lifts, milk, cream. For the first time in 2019, special purpose vehicles and X-ray equipment were sent to the Irkutsk region from Belarus. And in 2020, two new shops of Belarusian products - "Traditions and Tastes"

⁸⁶ MTZ and Irkutsk region concluded a co-operation agreement [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/mtz-i-irkutskaja-oblast-zakljuchili-soglashenie-o-sotrudnichestve-408690-2020/>

⁸⁷ . Matveev, V. Belarus and the Irkutsk Oblast have agreed to create and develop JVs in different areas / V. Matveev // [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-irkutskaja-oblast-dogovorilis-o-sozdanii-i-razvitii-sp-v-raznyh-sferah-325641-2018/>

⁸⁸ Roman Golovchenko: Belarus is ready to participate in tenders for the supply of equipment to the Irkutsk region [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9587>

- were also opened there. This is largely due to the fact that a variety of Belarusian goods and products have been presented in the retail market of the region in recent years. Among them are "heavy-duty automobile, passenger, trailer and truck crane equipment and spare parts of Belarusian manufacturers MAZ and MTZ, women's clothing - Belarusian knitwear, cosmetics, food products - cheese, dairy, meat, fruit and vegetable products"⁸⁹.

But the decline in economic activity caused by the epidemic of coronavirus infection led to the fact that in 2020 "based on the results of January-October, trade turnover decreased 2.1 times"⁹⁰. That is why in December 2020, at the meeting of the working group on cooperation between Belarus and the Irkutsk region, the parties decided to focus their efforts on restoring the volume of mutual trade in 2021. The development of co-operation in the industrial sector and the forestry industry, as well as agriculture and agro-industrial complex were named as the most promising areas. In addition, "Belarusian mining equipment, <...> quarry equipment, public transport, electric vehicles, and various types of transport on gas motor fuel" may be of interest in this Russian region⁹¹. As we can see, the parties have opportunities for successful solution of the task. Let us hope that they will be fully utilised in the near future.

⁸⁹ Priority directions of regional co-operation development as a key factor of union building: information-integration project / compiled by, interviewed by: K. Gusev, B. Zalessky. Gusev, B. Zalessky. - Minsk: Biznesofset, 2018. - C. 168.

⁹⁰ The volume of trade turnover between Belarus and the Irkutsk Oblast has doubled in five years [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/objem-tovarooborota-mezhdu-belarusiju-i-irkutskoj-oblastiju-za-pjat-let-udvoilsja-420587-2020/>

⁹¹ Meeting with Igor Kobzev, Governor of the Irkutsk Region of Russia [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/vstrecha-s-gubernatorom-irkutskoy-oblasti-rossii-igorem-kobzevym>

Belarus - Uzbekistan:

Commission outlines priorities for co-operation

The eighth meeting of the joint intergovernmental commission on bilateral cooperation between Belarus and Uzbekistan was held in early March 2021 in Tashkent. It discussed issues related to the development of trade and economic, investment and cooperation ties, strengthening relations in the scientific-educational and socio-humanitarian spheres, interregional cooperation, information technologies, and tourism.

Diplomatic relations between the two former Soviet republics were established in January 1993. In 2020, the Belarusian-Uzbek trade turnover grew by another 17 per cent and exceeded \$280 million with the share of supplies from Belarus - more than \$237 million. "The main items of Belarusian exports last [2020] year were trucks, tractors and tractor-trailers, meat and meat products, sugar and dairy products, medicines, vaccines, and blood serums"⁹². Noting these positive trends, the parties at the meeting of the intergovernmental commission nevertheless focused their attention on those issues, the solution of which would help to bring bilateral relations to a qualitatively new level. One of such urgent priorities was the expansion of the legal framework of Belarusian-Uzbek cooperation, which had more than 70 agreements until March 2021. The eighth meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission contributed to its further expansion.

In particular, the National Metrology Institutes of Belarus and Uzbekistan signed in Tashkent an agreement on co-operation, which defines the main areas of interaction for the next five years. The document refers to the close partnership of the parties in the development and implementation of programmes to create national and working measurement standards. "Another direction is participation in the development of interstate documents on the issues of ensuring the uniformity of measurements to solve the problems of harmonisation of national legislations and development of common principles of activity in this field"⁹³. In addition, the programme of cooperation for 2021-2023 was adopted by the State Committee for Standardisation of Belarus and the agency "Uzstandart", which outlined comparisons of state measurement

⁹² Belarus aims at further development of bilateral relations with Uzbekistan [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9736>

⁹³ Institutes of Metrology of Belarus and Uzbekistan signed an agreement on co-operation [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/instituty-metrologii-belarusi-i-uzbekistana-podpisali-soglashenie-o-sotrudnichestve-431178-2021/>

standards, calibration of measurement standards and working measuring instruments, as well as participation of laboratories in proficiency testing programmes. All this, together with the planned establishment of a permanent group, should help to resolve issues related to technical barriers to trade between the two countries. Another important aspect of cooperation between Belarus and Uzbekistan in this area is that the Eurasian Economic Union currently has a draft agreement on the procedure and conditions for the elimination of technical barriers to trade with third countries in high readiness. In this regard, the Belarusian Gosstandart is "working on the possibility and making a proactive proposal that the first pilot project under this agreement after its entry into force be implemented with Uzbekistan"⁹⁴.

Ten more cooperation documents were signed in early March 2021 by higher education institutions of the two countries. They supplemented the already very extensive legal framework of interaction between educational institutions and scientific organisations, which already included about two hundred direct agreements. Thanks to them, joint faculties are now successfully functioning, Belarusian-Uzbek educational programmes are being implemented, including dual-diploma programmes. A joint Belarusian-Uzbek Interindustry Institute of Applied Technical Qualifications was opened in Tashkent. The establishment of the Uzbek-Belarusian University of Materials Science is under consideration. The following figures are quite eloquent: "In the 2020-2021 academic year, Belarusian educational institutions will host about 2,000 Uzbek students. Exports of educational services to Uzbekistan last year [2020] totalled \$1.7 million, having increased by almost 14% compared to the previous year"⁹⁵. It should be assumed that the appearance of ten more documents on co-operation between the universities of the two countries will only contribute to the further expansion of Belarusian-Uzbek interaction in the educational sphere.

It should be noted that a number of domestic universities are showing considerable interest in developing co-operation with Uzbek partners. Among them are the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics, the Belarusian National Technical University, the Belarusian State Technological University, the Masherov State University of Vitebsk, the Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno, and the Francysk Skorina State

⁹⁴ Gosstandart of Belarus and the agency "Uzstandart" signed a programme of cooperation for 2021-2023 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/gosstandart-belarusi-i-agentstvo-uzstandart-podpisali-programmu-sotrudnichestva-na-2021-2023-gody-431298-2021/>

⁹⁵ Universities of Belarus and Uzbekistan signed 10 documents on co-operation [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/uzuzy-belarusi-i-uzbekistana-podpisali-10-dokumentov-o-sotrudnichestve-431140-2021>

University of Gomel. The Belarusian State University (BSU) is also busy implementing big plans to expand its presence in the Uzbek educational market and plans to seriously expand the range of joint educational programmes here.

In particular, the agreement signed in April 2021 on cultural and scientific co-operation between BSU and Mirzo Ulugbek National University of Uzbekistan, the first and leading higher education institution in Central Asia, offers great opportunities in this regard. Established in 1918, today it unites 12 faculties: Mathematics, Physics, Biology, Chemistry, Economics, Social Sciences, History, Geology and Geoinformation Systems, Geography and Natural Resources, Foreign Philology, Journalism and Taekwondo and Sports. Until recently, the interaction between the two universities consisted in joint training of Uzbek students in "medical and biological science" and "medical ecology" on the basis of the International State Ecological Institute named after A.D. Sakharov BSU. ⁹⁶The document signed in April concerns not only cooperation on student and faculty exchange, preparation of theses, dissertations and publications, joint scientific research and events, exchange of literature and periodicals, but also expands the subject area of inter-university relations in new directions, among which "the parties have indicated an increase in joint educational programmes in the humanities and natural sciences, the organisation of mutual summer schools, interaction between the Uzbek and Uzbek sides. In addition, the Uzbek side was interested in the BSU's experience in organising a system of continuing education for lawyers, which is implemented through a law college and faculty, as well as the Institute for retraining and advanced training of judges, prosecutors, courts and justice institutions. It is also quite possible that Belarusian scientists with relevant experience will participate in the development of a satellite for the Uzbek university.

The topic of expanding the range of educational programmes is also relevant in the BSU's interaction with the Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, where Uzbek students have been jointly studying Oriental (Chinese) philology since 2019. Among the new areas under discussion is the use of BSU's experience in training specialists for the IT industry, as well as the development of interdisciplinary specialities. In particular, in April 2021, "the

⁹⁶ BSU and the National University of Uzbekistan reach a new level of co-operation [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/bgu-i-natsionalnyj-universitet-uzbekistana-vyhodjat-na-novyy-uroven-sotrudnichestva-436206-2021/>

initiative of joint training of students in the field of computer linguistics"⁹⁷, as well as the implementation of youth startup projects was supported.

A concrete result of the implementation of the roadmap signed in April 2021 between BSU and Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature named after Alisher Navoi will be the opening in December 2021 in Minsk of a cabinet of Uzbek language and literature, the activities of which "will be aimed at strengthening educational and cultural ties between the two countries, creating conditions for studying the language, history and ethnic characteristics of Uzbekistan"⁹⁸.

The cooperation agreement between BSU and Tashkent State Law University has been in force since 2020. This year, this cooperation will be expanded through joint education of Uzbek students on the basis of the law college of the Belarusian university with the prospect of further enrolment in the BSU Law Faculty, as well as the opening of joint programmes with the BSU Faculty of International Relations. It is worth noting here that the Uzbek partners were very "interested in the experience of BSU participation in international rankings, according to which the Belarusian university is close to the top 1% of the world's best universities"⁹⁹. In April 2021, the parties agreed to set up a working group to promptly develop documents on the implementation of the proposed initiatives, as well as to organise a joint educational programme to train legal personnel in September. Finally, in cooperation with the University of Journalism and Mass Communications of Uzbekistan, the two sides are currently discussing the issues of Uzbek teachers' internships at BSU, their training in advanced training programmes, and inviting Belarusian university staff to lecture in Tashkent.

Another important outcome of the work of the intergovernmental commission was the first meeting of the Belarusian-Uzbek business council held in Tashkent, which brought together more than 170 representatives of business circles of the two countries who were able to discuss "specific cooperation projects in agriculture, machine building, logistics, food industry, chemical and pharmaceutical production, science and education, and

⁹⁷ BSU plans to expand joint educational programmes with Uzbekistan [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/bgu-planiruet-rasshirit-s-uzbekistanom-sovmestnye-obrazovatelnye-programmy-435893-2021/>

⁹⁸ Cabinet of Uzbek language and culture will be opened in BSU [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/kabinet-uzbekskogo-jazyka-i-kultury-otkrojut-v-bgu-435914-2021/>

⁹⁹ BSU will expand co-operation with Uzbekistan in the field of education [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/bgu-rasshirit-sotrudnichestvo-s-uzbekistanom-v-oblasti-obrazovaniya-436565-2021/>

information technologies"¹⁰⁰. The potential for the implementation of these projects is very eloquently demonstrated by the example of the Minsk Motor Plant, whose representatives brought to the Uzbek capital contracts worth more than four million dollars. This is largely due to the fact that "MMZ's distribution network in Tashkent is represented by BURAN-SAVDO, SIGMA, INDUSTRIAL MARKETING, FUTURE GENERATION MARKETING. In 2019-2020, MMZ sold more than 1 thousand engines to the primary and secondary markets of Uzbekistan"¹⁰¹.

A logical continuation of the first meeting of the Business Council was the participation of 23 Belarusian companies in April 2021 in the international exhibition "INNOPROM. Big Industrial Week in Uzbekistan", where exporters from Belarus presented products of mechanical engineering, metallurgy, chemical industry, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, as well as scientific developments and consumer goods. One of the concrete results of the participation of Belarusian manufacturers in this exhibition event was the signing of a letter of intent by MAZ-Tashkent LLC, a subsidiary of the Minsk Automobile Plant in Uzbekistan, "for the supply of chassis and machine kits for the assembly of vehicles to the Uzbek market for the amount of \$10 million. A contract was also signed with a private Uzbek company for the supply of 50 units of MAZ machinery for a total of \$3 million.¹⁰². So the prospects for the development of economic ties between the two countries are serious.

We would like to remind that the basic document of trade and economic interaction between Belarus and Uzbekistan is the roadmap of cooperation between the two countries, adopted in November 2018 and comprising 158 measures. By May 2020, more than a third of them had already been fulfilled. This immediately affected the state of Belarusian-Uzbek partnership ties: "At the end of 2019, the volume of trade turnover between the countries reached \$239 million and increased 1.5 times by 2018"¹⁰³. This means that the parties intend to achieve as quickly as possible the goal, which was outlined in the same 2018 by the heads of the two states - to increase the volume of bilateral trade turnover to one billion dollars. "The task is supposed to be solved in three

¹⁰⁰ More than 170 business representatives of Belarus and Uzbekistan took part in the meeting of the Business Council [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/bolee-170-predstavitelej-biznesa-belarusi-i-uzbekistana-prinjali-uchastie-v-zasedanii-delovogo-soveta-431374-2021>

¹⁰¹ MMZ during the intergovernmental commission in Uzbekistan plans to sign contracts for more than \$4 million [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/mmz-vo-vremja-mezhpravkomissii-v-uzbekistane-planiruet-podpisat-kontrakty-bolee-chem-na-4-mln-431277-2021/>

¹⁰² More than 20 Belarusian enterprises took part in a major industrial exhibition in Uzbekistan [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/bolee-20-belorusskih-predpriyatij-prinjali-uchastie-v-krupnoj-promyshlennoj-vystavke-v-uzbekistane-436286-2021/>

¹⁰³ Vladimir Dvornik held talks with the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sardor Umurzakov [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9423>

to four years, actualising all possible areas of cooperation"¹⁰⁴ , among which agriculture is one of the most promising.

The fact is that the main trend in the development of the agro-industrial complex of Uzbekistan today is the formation of a cluster system of production. In other words, clusters should unite producers of agricultural raw materials and their processors into industrial enterprises. Uzbek partners view the Belarusian experience in this regard as very positive and therefore demonstrate their high interest in establishing direct business contacts and partnerships with Belarusian producers and processors, the effectiveness of which is evidenced by the figures.

In 2019, agricultural products and foodstuffs worth \$35 million were supplied to the Uzbek market from Belarus, which more than doubled the level of 2018. The positive dynamics of mutual trade in this area continued next year, despite the restrictions caused by the spread of the coronavirus. "Belarusian food exports more than doubled in 2020 and reached \$73 million. supplies of Belarusian beef more than doubled, sugar 3.5 times, milk powder twice, fish and fish products 1.5 times increased to Uzbekistan"¹⁰⁵ .

At the same time, cooperation between Belarus and Uzbekistan, of course, is not limited only to mutual supplies of food products, but also includes a wide range of interaction, including the development of joint scientific approaches and modern technologies. In particular, "promising areas of cooperation in the agro-industrial sector include participation of the Belarusian side in the construction of dairy complexes, organisation of milk processing, establishment of joint ventures for the production of veterinary drugs, cooperation in the field of breeding, organisation of training and retraining of Uzbek specialists on the basis of Belarusian agrarian educational institutions"¹⁰⁶ .

The first Belarusian-Uzbek Agrarian Forum, which took place in 2020 and was attended by more than 700 people, demonstrated this diversity of effective partnerships. The business part of the Belarusian delegation alone included about 150 representatives of agricultural and food exporting companies, scientific and educational institutions of the country. In particular,

¹⁰⁴ Zaleskii, B. Vector of post-Soviet integration. View from Belarus / B. Zalesky. - Palmarium Academic Publishing, 2019. - C. 223.

¹⁰⁵ Belarusian food exports to Uzbekistan more than doubled in 2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-belorusskogo-prodovolstvija-v-uzbekistan-v-2020-godu-vyros-bolee-chem-v-dva-raza-431838-2021/>

¹⁰⁶ On the results of Vladimir Dvornik's visit to Uzbekistan [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9301>

an active participant of the forum was Gomselmash OJSC, which signed an agreement with the Tashkent Agricultural Machinery Plant in autumn 2019. "The document provides for the creation of an assembly production of combines in the capital of Uzbekistan"¹⁰⁷. From the Uzbek side were delegations from all regions of the country, as well as from the relevant ministries and organisations of the agro-industrial complex. As a result, on the margins of the forum, "Belarusian exporting enterprises signed more than 30 agreements and contracts with Uzbek partners"¹⁰⁸. In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Belarus and the Ministry of Agriculture of Uzbekistan adopted a Memorandum of Understanding and Co-operation.

Simultaneously with the agrarian forum, an exhibition was organised in Tashkent, where the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus alone presented more than 60 innovative developments and technologies for agriculture in Uzbekistan. Among the novelties of Belarusian scientists from the Scientific and Practical Centre of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus on Food, vegetable marmalade aroused great interest. "The line includes marmalade made of sweet corn, red carrots, ripe pumpkin, juicy tomato and spicy celery. The marmalade contains prebiotics and no artificial colours"¹⁰⁹. The Institute of Soil Science and Agrochemistry demonstrated a range of complex mineral fertilisers with a balanced ratio of nutritional elements for cultivated crops. The S.N. Vyshellesky Institute of Experimental Veterinary Medicine showed vaccines for the prevention and treatment of viral and bacterial diseases of farm animals. Scientists from the Centre for Identification Systems and Electronic Business Operations offered technologies for digital identification and traceability of animals and animal products. The Scientific and Practical Centre for Potato Breeding interested the visitors of the exhibition with new potato varieties - "Manifest", "Uladar", "Palats" - resistant to a complex of diseases. As we can see, even this short list of novelties presented in Tashkent clearly shows what tempting prospects are opening up in the development of Belarusian-Uzbek partnership in agriculture in the near future.

¹⁰⁷ "Gomselmash" will present its potential at the agrarian forum in Uzbekistan [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/gomselmash-predstavit-svoj-potentsial-na-agrarnom-forume-v-uzbekistane-380486-2020>

¹⁰⁸ More than 30 agreements and contracts signed as a result of the Belarusian-Uzbek agrarian forum [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/bolee-30-soglashenij-i-kontraktov-podpisano-po-itogam-belorussko-uzbekskogo-agrarnogo-foruma-381350-2020/>

¹⁰⁹ NAS of Belarus presented in Uzbekistan more than 60 innovative developments for agriculture [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/nan-belarusi-predstavila-v-uzbekistane-bolee-60-innovatsionnyh-razrabotok-dlja-selskogo-hozjajstva-381057-2020/>

Belarus - Hungary: trade turnover demonstrates sustainability and business community shows interest in partnership

In April 2021, at the initiative of the Hungarian business community, a Hungarian-Belarusian business forum was held online, attended by more than 80 companies from both countries. This took place while trade relations between Budapest and Minsk remained very active. Suffice it to say that "Belarus's trade turnover with Hungary has generally demonstrated resilience to external shocks during the pandemic. In 2020, it reached \$245.5 million, with Belarusian exports totalling \$121.8 million"¹¹⁰. The main supplies from Belarus to the Hungarian market were railway cars, potash and mineral fertilisers, plywood, parts and accessories for cars and tractors, and furniture. In addition, 412 Belarusian tractors worth more than seven million dollars were delivered to Hungary via Poland in 2020. All these facts show that there is a serious potential for further increasing the volume and expanding the range of mutual trade turnover, as well as attracting mutual investments.

Based on the understanding of the existing prospects in bilateral trade and economic cooperation, the participants of the business forum came to the conclusion that it was necessary to establish a joint Belarusian-Hungarian business council on the basis of the chambers of commerce of the two countries. It was decided to formalise its composition at the next meeting of the intergovernmental trade and economic commission, which is scheduled for the second half of 2021. With the emergence of such a council, the parties connect not only hopes for new business contacts, revival of the export-import and investment component of bilateral interaction. "This platform could become a discussion platform where problematic issues are discussed, new ideas and recommendations for the governments of the two countries to develop bilateral trade are developed"¹¹¹.

It should be noted that trade and economic interaction has traditionally been one of the main priorities in the development of partnership ties between Belarus and Hungary. Thus, the 10th meeting of the Intergovernmental Belarusian-Hungarian Commission for Economic Cooperation, which took

¹¹⁰ Belarus and Hungary will create a joint business council [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-vengrija-sozdatut-sovmestnyj-delovoj-sovet-439230-2021/>

¹¹¹ Ponomarev, A. Viktor Orban's visit - a new stage of Belarusian-Hungarian cooperation / A. Ponomarev // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/interview/view/vizit-viktora-orbana-novyj-etap-belorusko-vengerskogo-sotrudnichestva-7346/>

place in May 2020, discussed, first of all, pressing issues of trade interaction, as well as the state of partnership in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, energy, transport, science, education, and tourism. A month later, in June 2020, the issues of economic interaction were in the centre of attention during the visit of Hungarian Prime Minister V. Orban to Belarus. Orban, when the task for the next two-three years was announced - to increase trade turnover between the countries up to 500 million euros. This can happen through the implementation of various projects, "which include both the attraction and use of Belarusian technologies in Hungary in such areas as mechanical engineering and construction, and Hungarian technologies in Belarus - agriculture and pharmaceuticals"¹¹². In this regard, cooperation between the parties in the field of electric transport can be particularly effective, since "given Hungary's plans to switch to green technologies, cooperation in the production of buses and electric buses is particularly promising..."¹¹³

Another promising area of economic partnership between the two countries, which could focus the attention of the business council being formed, is the electricity sector. Recall that in June 2020, a memorandum of cooperation was signed by the Ministry of Energy of Belarus and the Office of the Prime Minister of Hungary, which cemented the mutual interest of the parties in cooperation in the nuclear energy sector in order to develop contacts between business entities whose activities are related to the construction of nuclear power facilities and infrastructure. "In addition, it is planned to exchange experience in the field of operation of nuclear power plants, storage and disposal of radioactive waste. The memorandum envisages various forms of interaction, including the establishment of joint ventures to participate in investment projects in the field of electric power industry"¹¹⁴. This interest of the parties in co-operation is explained by the fact that Hungary, like Belarus, "has decided to co-operate with Russia in the development of nuclear power, a model identical to the Belarusian power units will be used in the expansion of the Paks NPP. This opens up additional opportunities for finding points of contact"¹¹⁵.

¹¹² Roman Golovchenko: Belarus is ready to share experience in the development of electric transport with Hungary [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9444>

¹¹³ Negotiations with the Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orban [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://president.gov.by/ru/media/details/peregovory-s-premer-ministrom-vengrii-viktorom-orbanom-1591375023>

¹¹⁴ Belarus and Hungary signed a memorandum of co-operation in the field of electric power industry [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-vengrija-podpisali-memorandum-o-sotrudnichestve-v-oblasti-elektroenergetiki-393689-2020/>

¹¹⁵ Hajnowski, A. Belarusian-Hungarian co-operation is pragmatic and effective / A. Hajnowski // [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/interview/view/belorusko-vengersko-sotrudnichestvo-javljaetsja-pragmatichnym-i-effektivnym-6383/>

We would also like to recall that back in January 2019, Belarus and Hungary signed a number of important documents outlining promising areas for the development of bilateral relations. Among them, we would like to single out two - the intergovernmental Belarusian-Hungarian agreement on the promotion and mutual protection of investments, as well as the memorandum of the two countries' foreign ministries on the promotion of interregional cooperation. Minsk and Budapest see the agreement on mutual protection of investments as particularly important because "it is of exceptional importance for investors of any country. <...> It is an excellent impetus for the realisation of investment projects"¹¹⁶. This document, which has been worked on for almost ten years, contains an important signal for the business community of the two countries to intensify co-operation. Especially since already "Hungary and Belarus are developing co-operation in many areas, there are joint projects in engineering, pharmaceuticals, construction, and finance"¹¹⁷. In particular, in 2017, a joint venture with Belarusian partners in the construction sector appeared in Hungary. The company, established with the participation of Belstroycentre, participates in construction projects here and is also engaged in supplying Belarusian construction materials here. And the pharmaceutical company Gedeon Richter has been operating in Belarus for many years. In total, there are "eight enterprises with Hungarian capital"¹¹⁸.

Nevertheless, according to the parties, "there is a need for joint new investment projects, deep industrial cooperation with the prospect of entering not only national markets, but also the capacious markets of the European Union for Belarus and the Eurasian Economic Union for Hungary"¹¹⁹. And such plans should get their real outlines in the foreseeable future. In particular, it was assumed that as early as in 2019 "the first Belarusian-Hungarian agricultural enterprise, which will use Hungarian technologies for corn processing, will be established in the Mogilev region"¹²⁰. And in the same

¹¹⁶ The agreement on mutual protection of investments between Belarus and Hungary gives impetus to the implementation of projects - Sziijártó [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/soglashenie-o-vzaimnoj-zaschite-investitsij-mezhdu-belarusiju-i-vengrijej-daet-impuls-dlja-realizatsii-333401-2019/>

¹¹⁷ Meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Hungary Péter Sziijártó [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/vstrecha-s-ministrom-inostrannyx-del-i-vneshnej-torgovli-vengrii-peterom-sijarto-20273/

¹¹⁸ Meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Hungary Péter Sziijártó [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/8529>

¹¹⁹ Transcript of the approach to the press of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus V. Makei following the talks with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Hungary (14 January 2019) [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: http://mfa.gov.by/press/news_mfa/c74a125b79ac2a47.html

¹²⁰ Grishkevich, A. The first Belarusian-Hungarian agricultural enterprise will be created in Mogilev region / A. Grishkevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/pervoe-belorussko-vengerskoe-selhozpredpriyatie-sozhdadut-v-mogilevskoj-oblasti-332570-2019/>

year, the two countries planned to open a joint line for the production of double-decker cars for railway trains. "A total of 19 double-decker trains are to be manufactured. This will be a first in the history of Hungarian railways. They will be used on the most popular destinations"¹²¹.

It is to be assumed that the future business council will also focus on the issues of intensification of interregional cooperation, the potential of which the parties have yet to really master. Thus, the free economic zone (FEZ) Grodnoinvest, whose administration was among the participants of the Hungarian-Belarusian business forum in April, is ready to become one of the active participants of this partnership. The interest of Hrodna residents is based on the already existing foundation of co-operation with partners from this European country. In particular, "the trade turnover of residents of FEZ Grodnoinvest with Hungary totalled \$2.1 million in 2020, including exports of \$575 million. In particular, "the trade turnover of FEZ "Grodnoinvest" residents with Hungary in 2020 totalled USD 2.1 million, including export of USD 575 thousand. US DOLLARS. The main exports are chipboard, furniture, plastic products"¹²².

An important role in this context should also be played by the memorandum on promoting interregional cooperation, which gives the parties an opportunity to expand cooperation between the regions not only within the two capitals - Minsk and Budapest - but also within their respective countries. Recall that the Cooperation Agreement between the Minsk City Executive Committee and the Municipality of Budapest was signed in 2016. At that time, the Belarusian capital was seriously interested in the experience of Hungarian partners in the use of large sports facilities, public transport management, waste recycling, and water treatment. In April 2018, Budapest hosted the Days of Minsk, which once again showed what serious potential of the partnership the parties can still use in practice. Suffice it to say that Minsk companies sold goods "worth over \$26 million on the Hungarian market in 2017, increasing the volume of exports by 37.2% compared to 2016"¹²³. At the same time, in April 2018, a co-operation agreement was signed between the Partizansky district of Minsk and the Csepel district of Budapest, which opened new

¹²¹ Belarus and Hungary will produce double-decker cars for trains [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-vengrija-budut-proizvodit-dvuhetazhnye-vagony-dlja-poezdov-332532-2019/>

¹²² Administration of FEZ "Grodnoinvest" took part in the Hungarian-Belarusian business forum [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://grodnoinvest.by/press-center/administraciya-sez-grodnoinvest-prinyala-uchastie-v-rabote-vengersko-belorusskogo-biznes-foruma/>

¹²³ Parukova, E. Days of Minsk in Budapest: what links the two capitals and how their cooperation will develop / E. Parukova // [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://minsknews.by/dni-minska-v-budapeshte-cto-svyazyvaet-dve-stolitsyi-i-kak-budet-razvivatsya-ih-sotrudnichestvo/>

opportunities, first of all, for economic interaction. After all, both districts are industrial, so the enterprises located on their territory will be able to co-operate mutually beneficially. And they are already doing it. For example, "the Kozlov plant works with Siemens. <...> The search for points of contact continues"¹²⁴. In June 2020, representatives of the Gomel region and the Hungarian region of Győr-Ménfőcsanak, one of the leading in the country in terms of economic indicators, also discussed the possibilities of establishing interregional partnerships. The discussion was primarily about the implementation of the "memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the field of poultry breeding" signed in 2020¹²⁵, where very tempting prospects are opening up.

In May 2020, as noted above, the 10th meeting of the Intergovernmental Belarusian-Hungarian Commission for Economic Cooperation - the leading bilateral platform where positions are brought closer together and solutions are worked out on a wide range of topical issues on the economic and humanitarian agenda - was held. For the first time in the practice of bilateral relations, this event was held in the videoconference format for quite understandable reasons, but it did not lose its relevance in terms of comprehending the prospects of Belarusian-Hungarian cooperation, the development of which can be characterised by several major trends.

One of the drivers of growth back in 2020 was agriculture, as evidenced by the following facts. At the end of 2019, the trade turnover of agricultural products and foodstuffs between Belarus and Hungary increased by almost 15 per cent and exceeded \$17 million. An important detail: "Exports of Belarusian agro-industrial complex products more than tripled during this period. Among the main export items are seeds and fruits of various oilseeds, shellfish"¹²⁶. The first quarter of 2020 saw a similar picture: the turnover of agricultural products and foodstuffs grew by almost ten per cent and Belarusian exports by twenty per cent. At the same time, the parties continued to actively increase their efforts to implement new joint projects in this area. In March 2020, during the visit to Belarus of P. Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign

¹²⁴ The leaders of Partizansky district of Minsk and Csepel district of Budapest signed an agreement on cooperation [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://part.gov.by/3744-rukovoditeli-partizanskogo-rajona-minska-i-rajona-chepel-budapeshta-podpisali-soglasenie-o-sotrudnichestve>

¹²⁵ Grishkevich, A. Gomel region establishes ties with the Hungarian region / A. Grishkevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/gomelskaja-oblast-nalazhivaet-svjazi-s-vengerskim-regionom-396832-2020/>

¹²⁶ Markovich, E. Belarus in 2019 increased exports of agricultural products to Hungary more than three times / E. Markovich // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-v-2019-godu-uvlechila-eksport-produktsii-apk-v-vengriju-bolee-chem-v-tri-raza-393476-2020/>

Economic Relations of Hungary, the parties "identified the main areas for further cooperation in food supplies, investments, and poultry farming"¹²⁷.

In June 2020, the 1st Minsk Poultry Farm and the Hungarian company Babolna Tetra signed a framework cooperation agreement totalling about three and a half million euros. This document, which will last for three years, provides for breeding poultry and egg breeding stock. Thanks to this project, from 2020 the Belarusian side will be "practically exempt from importing breeding laying hens, and from 2023 it will be able to fully supply the domestic market with its own breed of egg chickens"¹²⁸.

Belarus is also interested in commodity supplies from Hungary in those areas of the agricultural sector that are very well developed in this country - corn, cattle, and poultry. In particular, we are talking about the implementation of a joint project with Hungarian partners to grow geese in Gomel region "to restore the regions affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe"¹²⁹. At least, during the negotiations held on this issue in June 2020, the financing of this project was already discussed, as well as where this production will be organised and who from the Belarusian side will take part in it. In addition, in June 2020, Belarus and Hungary "agreed to develop an agreement on cooperation in the field of training of personnel for agricultural industries, to establish cooperation between agricultural universities, as well as to establish a working group for cooperation in agriculture"¹³⁰.

Other promising areas of cooperation include medicine. Thus, back in July 2020, the Belarusian JLLC Nativita and the Hungarian company Pharma Gap Kft signed an agreement in Budapest on the intention to cooperate in order to speed up the registration and distribution "in Hungary and other countries of vital medicines produced in Belarus. The list of medicines includes medicines used in the treatment of oncological diseases, as well as cytokine storm in infection caused by COVID-19"¹³¹. And in December 2020, the

¹²⁷ Belarus and Hungary plan to expand co-operation in the agro-industrial complex [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-vengrija-planirujut-rasshirjat-sotrudnichestvo-v-sfere-apk-381906-2020/>

¹²⁸ Markovich, E. Belarus and Hungary will co-operate in poultry farming / E. Markovich // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-vengrija-budut-sotrudniczat-v-sfere-ptitsevodstva-393454-2020/>

¹²⁹ Markovich, E. Belarus is interested in the implementation of a joint project with Hungary on goose breeding / E. Markovich // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-zainteresovana-v-realizatsii-sovmestnogo-s-vengriiej-proekta-po-vyraschivaniju-gusej-393464-2020/>

¹³⁰ Belarus and Hungary will develop an agreement on cooperation in training of personnel for agro-industrial complex [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-vengrija-razrabotajut-soglashenie-o-sotrudnichestve-v-podgotovke-kadrov-dlja-apk-398804-2020/>

¹³¹ Grishkevich, A. Belarusian drugs enter the pharmaceutical market of Hungary / A. Grishkevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/beloruskie-lekarstva-vyhodjat-na-farmatsevticheskij-rynok-vengrii-399319-2020/>

parties, discussing cooperation in the pharmaceutical sector and current approaches to drug treatment of complications caused by coronavirus infection, oncological and other serious diseases, reached an agreement "on the conditions of access of Belarusian medicines to the Hungarian market"¹³². The agreements between the Ministry of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade of Belarus and the Hungarian Competition Authority reached in 2020 should also play a positive role in the development of trade and economic relations between the two countries. In particular, the parties agreed on the "final version of the memorandum of co-operation in the field of competition policy"¹³³.

It only remains to add that the legal framework of Belarusian-Hungarian bilateral cooperation today "includes about 20 international treaties regulating trade and economic, scientific and cultural cooperation, cooperation on legal and tax issues, agriculture, sports, tourism, education, defence, and road transport"¹³⁴. This creates a solid basis for the successful activity of the joint business council to be formed, the appearance of which, as noted above, is scheduled for the second half of 2021.

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¹³² Belarus and Hungary discussed co-operation in the pharmaceutical industry [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/belarus-i-vengrija-obsudili-sotrudnichestvo-v-farmatsevticheskoy-otrasli-420817-2020/>

¹³³ MART and the Hungarian Competition Authority plan to sign a memorandum of co-operation [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/mart-i-vengerskoe-konkurentnoe-vedomstvo-planirujut-podpisat-memorandum-o-sotrudnichestve-400521-2020/>

¹³⁴ Bilateral relations [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: https://hungary.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral_relations/HUN/pol/

Belarus: Sustainable Development Goals and Media

In August 2019, the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus established a working group to promote the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Belarus, which includes specialists of the ministry in the field of media relations and representatives of television and print media. The aim of this group is to raise awareness of the Belarusian society about the implementation of the SDGs in our country.

We recall that in September 2015 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the resolution "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", in which it fixed 17 Sustainable Development Goals, aimed, in particular, at eliminating poverty and hunger, combating inequality and injustice, and addressing climate change. This event required all states of the planet, including the Republic of Belarus, to start creating mechanisms for achieving the SDGs.

A year and a half later - in May 2017 - the institutional framework for managing the implementation of the plans has been established in our country: firstly, the post of the national coordinator for the Sustainable Development Goals has been established; secondly, the national architecture for managing the implementation of the SDGs has been built, which includes the Sustainable Development Council, parliamentary, regional and partnership groups for sustainable development, ensuring effective interaction between the public sector and public organisations. The Council for Sustainable Development has assigned each of the 17 SDGs to the Belarusian government agencies responsible for addressing the relevant issues. As a result, "all involved state bodies are part of four sectoral blocks: economy, ecology, social sphere, monitoring"¹³⁵.

Following the recommendation of the United Nations to conduct a three-level - global, regional, national - analysis of progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, Belarus presented its voluntary report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the international level as early as 2017, then took part in the presentation of the Eurasian Economic Union's report on sustainable development at the UN headquarters, and in 2018, it organised a regional forum of national coordinators dedicated to building partnerships between countries and organisations in the region. As a result, Belarus ranked

¹³⁵ Shchetkina, M. Sustainable development depends on each of us / M. Shchetkina // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/interview/view/ustojchivoe-razvitie-zavisit-ot-kazhdogo-iz-nas-6646/>

23rd on the 2018 Global Sustainable Development Goals Index, which was calculated for 156 countries based on one hundred SDG-related indicators, with a "score above the average for the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region"¹³⁶.

One of the conditions for successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Belarus is national legislation. In 2018, the Belarusian parliament adopted a number of laws aimed at achieving the SDGs. Among them are laws on specially protected natural areas, on the production and circulation of organic products. In 2019, bills on healthcare, rights of the disabled were considered. It is also assumed that it is the Sustainable Development Goals that will become an organic part of the country's socio-economic development to reach a gross domestic product of one hundred billion dollars by 2025 and "join the group of countries with average per capita incomes at purchasing power parity above the world average"¹³⁷.

Another important condition for the successful achievement of the SDGs is the synchronisation of the work of regional groups, as "sustainable development of the country as a whole is possible only in case of sustainable development of all its regions"¹³⁸. This is why territorial development plans should be proposed not only by the national government, but also, first of all, by representatives of local governments, taking into account the needs and interests of citizens. That is why the comprehensive development plan for more than 30 Belarusian regions lagging behind in terms of socio-economic development, the implementation of which would make it possible to pull these territories up to the national average level, developed in August 2019 by the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Belarus together with regional executive committees, seems to be extremely important in this context. Suffice it to say that "today a package of 280 projects has been formed. About 54 projects will be created from scratch, about 80 will be investments in existing production facilities and 140 projects are related to infrastructure (about 30% - industrial infrastructure, the rest - social facilities)"¹³⁹. In addition to these 280 projects, there are another 224 investment proposals. It is also important

¹³⁶ Belarus ranked 23rd among 156 countries in achieving the SDGs for 2018 [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/politics/view/belarus-zanjala-23-e-mesto-sredi-156-stran-v-dostizhenii-tsur-za-2018-god-333890-2019/>

¹³⁷ Belarus considers the 2030 Agenda as a basis for a new global policy - Myasnikovich [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/belarus-rassmatrivaet-povestku-2030-kak-osnovu-dlja-novoj-globalnoj-politiki-mjasnikovich-333892-2019/>

¹³⁸ Meeting of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/8943>

¹³⁹ It is proposed to include 280 projects in the development plan of the lagging regions of Belarus [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/v-plan-razvitiya-otstajuschih-regionov-belarusi-predlagaetsja-vkljuchit-280-proektov-359816-2019/>

that some of the projects in this comprehensive plan will be financed by "foreign investors, as well as international financial institutions, which allocate funds primarily for infrastructure development, for example, the construction of water deferriization stations or the conversion of boiler houses to local fuels, the development of alternative forms of energy. World Bank funds will be used to renovate schools and hospitals"¹⁴⁰.

In January 2019, Minsk hosted the first National Forum on Sustainable Development, where more than four hundred participants reviewed the national experience of Belarus in achieving the SDGs, the progress of the National Strategy for Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of the country until 2030, as well as the peculiarities of the preparation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development until 2035. The positive experience of Brest and Mogilev oblasts in this respect was noted. And today it is a question of overcoming the varied progress in organising this work in other Belarusian regions.

The same First National Forum on Sustainable Development noted that an important role in the implementation of the main provisions of the 2030 Agenda in national strategic documents, sectoral and regional programmes should be played by the country's media, which "still have much to do for a broad public understanding of the essence of the SDGs and the role of each person in their achievement"¹⁴¹. That is why in August 2019 the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus created a working group in the national architecture of SDGs management, composed of journalists deeply immersed in the topic, to conduct information work on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. But it is already clear that the efforts of one working group alone will not be enough to realise such an ambitious media project.¹⁴² That is why, in August 2019, the Ministry of Information of the country, with the support of the national coordinator of the project of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) "Supporting the functioning of the governance architecture of the Sustainable Development Goals achievement process in the Republic of Belarus", announced a national contest "From

¹⁴⁰ Shchetkina: the work of regional groups on achieving the SDGs in Belarus should be synchronised [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/schetkina-rabotu-regionalnyh-grupp-po-dostizheniju-tsur-v-belarusi-nuzhno-sinhronizirovat-333887-2019/>

¹⁴¹ Media will make up a separate group in the work on achieving the SDGs in Belarus - Shchetkina [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/smi-sostavjat-otdelnuju-gruppu-v-rabote-nad-dostizheniem-tsur-v-belarusi-schetkina-333874-2019/>

¹⁴² The republican competition for mass media "From Global Goals to Local Actions" is announced [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/objjavlen-respublikanskij-konkurs-dlja-smi-ot-globalnyh-tselej-k-lokalnym-dejstvijam-359398-2019/>

Global Goals to Local Actions" to engage the Belarusian society in the process of achieving the SDGs and activate the work of journalists.

Until 1 December 2019, this competition accepted essays, interviews, articles, TV and radio spots, cycles of publications and broadcasts in seven categories, which include areas such as: 1) environmental; 2) social topics, including gender equality and youth issues; 3) economic; 4) topics related to vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, and the implementation of the principle "Leave No One Behind"; 5) interagency cooperation to achieve the SDGs; 6) projects aimed at achieving the SDGs and implemented by businesses, including impact investing projects; 7) public initiatives aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The results of the contest showed that it was a good test of the level of competence of, first of all, Belarusian journalists and another opportunity for them to unlock their creative potential. Thanks to this format of creative competition, the Belarusian press had a very diverse discussion of the main directions and Sustainable Development Goals, as well as opportunities for their implementation and realisation. After all, it was not only leading journalists who took part in it. The competition also attracted a wide audience of readers, TV and radio listeners, once again confirming the conclusion that "Mass media are not just one of the main channels in informing the population about the SDGs. In this context, they play a crucial role - educating citizens about the opportunities to make informed and responsible decisions about themselves, their families, and to influence the decision of the authorities to implement the SDGs"¹⁴³.

An important detail: in 2020 the Republic of Belarus should significantly strengthen the work on the Sustainable Development Goals, first of all, at the regional level. Regional mass media should again have their own weighty word in addressing this issue, because, according to M. Shchetkina, the national SDG coordinator, "without informing the population, without involving them in the work to achieve the SDGs, practically nothing can be done"¹⁴⁴. This means that the range of publications on this topic in regional media should be very broad, dealing with virtually all 17 Sustainable Development Goals and taking into account the priorities of socio-economic development of the

¹⁴³ The editorial teams of "7 Days" and "Belaruskaya Dumki" won the competition for coverage of the SDGs [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/society/view/kollektivny-redaktsij-7-dnej-i-belaruskaj-dumki-pobedili-v-konkurse-po-osvescheniju-tsur-373180-2019/>

¹⁴⁴ In Belarus in 2020 will strengthen the work on achieving the SDGs at the regional level [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/v-belarusi-v-2020-godu-usiljat-rabotu-po-dostizheniju-tsur-na-regionalnom-urovne-373167-2019/>

country until 2030. It is worth recalling here that media work is very closely linked to Goal 16, which is to promote peaceful, open societies and partnerships.

As for other SDGs, Goal No. 5: "Decent Work and Economic Growth", which sets the task to develop the economy of Belarusian regions at an accelerated pace, is of particular relevance for the Republic of Belarus in the current conditions. A characteristic detail in this regard is that "the traditional economy has practically exhausted its growth reserves, and further development is possible only through the creation of new industries, including those involving foreign investors"¹⁴⁵. In other words, as First Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus D. Krutoy said, "one of the most important tasks will be to attract investment, improve the relevant legislation and revise the entire investment agenda"¹⁴⁶. At the same time, regional policy will be put in the centre of attention. In particular, the Belarusian government is already actively engaged in three large pilot projects: Orsha district of Vitebsk region, working with the territories lagging behind in terms of socio-economic development, as well as 11 major cities.

In addition, in 2019, the country implemented the most important investment projects in such areas as automotive, metallurgical and construction industries, pulp and paper, wood processing and light industries, oil refining, petrochemical and energy complexes. In total, as of mid-December 2019, "out of 34 particularly significant investment projects, 22 have already been commissioned"¹⁴⁷, 12 of which have reached their design capacity. But not only these major projects should be in the sphere of special attention of the regional media.

Thus, Vitebsk region demonstrates positive dynamics in attracting foreign investments, in particular Latvian investments, at the regional level. In the three quarters of 2019, the volume of investments from Latvian investors has grown here three and a half times, exceeding two million dollars. There are already 90 organisations registered on the territory of Vitebsk region in the sphere of trade, woodworking, provision of motor transport services, tailoring services, production of plastic products. The fact that "33 co-operation

¹⁴⁵ Sergei Rumas: Belarus is developing an action plan to create conditions for economic development [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9175>

¹⁴⁶ Serhiy Rumas presented to the staff of the First Deputy Prime Minister [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9155>

¹⁴⁷ Sergey Rumas: 22 out of 34 especially significant investment objects have been put into operation. [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9174>

agreements have been concluded between districts and towns of Vitebsk region and Latvian municipalities"¹⁴⁸.

In this context, even more significant indicators are characteristic for Brest region, in which economy in 2020 it is planned to attract at least 90 million dollars of foreign direct investment on a net basis. Half of them are supposed to be directed to the free economic zone "Brest". As for specific cities of the region, "the task for Brest is about \$15 million of direct foreign investment, Baranavichy and Pinsk - over \$6 million"¹⁴⁹. A little less than half of these funds will be used for the purchase of machinery, equipment and vehicles to open about six and a half thousand new jobs through the modernisation and technical re-equipment of existing enterprises and the creation of new production facilities.

At the level of specific economic entities, an interesting experience of working with foreign investments is demonstrated by the company with almost 60-year history - JSC "Gorynski Agrokombinat", located in the working settlement of Rechitsa, Stolin district, Brest region, which only in August 2019 came out of the rehabilitation procedure by concluding a settlement agreement with creditors. Having actively worked with foreign investors, the staff of the joint-stock company received about 800 thousand dollars from the Polish partner to complete the production of green peas. Modernisation of the existing production facilities allowed to expand the range of products. In particular, the company "started production of a new type of product - boiled sterilised vegetables in vacuum packaging. This is an absolutely natural product without the addition of preservatives, even such harmless ones as sugar and salt. The shelf life of such ready-to-eat vegetables is six months, and the colour, quality and taste of the product are preserved"¹⁵⁰. If we take into account that the work on the introduction of new technology in production at the agro-company has been practically completed and even made it possible to conclude a contract with a Russian company for the delivery of a new line of products to the retail network, then this experience of attracting foreign investment can be considered doubly successful. And it can become the subject of detailed study

¹⁴⁸ Scherbitsky, A. The volume of Latvian investments in Vitebsk region for 9 months increased by 3.5 times / A. Scherbitsky // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/objem-latvijskih-investitsij-v-vitebskuju-oblast-za-9-mesjatsev-vyros-v-35-raza-371103-2019/>

¹⁴⁹ Foreign direct investment in the economy of Brest region in 2020 will be at least \$90 million [-Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/prjamye-inostrannye-investitsii-v-ekonomiku-brestskoj-oblasti-v-2020-godu-sostavjat-ne-menee-90-mln-374236-2019/>

¹⁵⁰ Polish investor invested Br1.6 million in the production of Goryn agrocompany [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/polskij-investor-vlozhl-v-proizvodstvo-gorynskogo-agrokombinata-br16-mln-373083-2019/>

not only in the Brest regional press, but also in the media of other Belarusian regions.

All the above facts eloquently illustrate the conclusion that the implementation of each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG No. 5 related to the topic of attracting foreign investment and its effective use in the Belarusian regions, should be firmly anchored on the front pages of regional, district and city newspapers and reflect as fully as possible the experience of specific economic entities already accumulated in this regard. It is also important to intensify the work of the mass media in this direction because "the media not only record our perception of reality, but also actually model reality itself, the scenario and dynamics of events..."¹⁵¹. At the same time, the task of the media is to reflect reality with all its problems, complexities and contradictions, "to further influence the change of the situation for the better"¹⁵².

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¹⁵¹ Kuntsevich, A. Responsibility to society distinguishes a journalist from other subjects of information creation / A. Kuntsevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/opinions/view/otvetstvennost-pered-obschestvom-otlichayet-zhurnalista-ot-drugih-subjektov-sozdaniya-informatsii-7110/>

¹⁵² Karlyukevich, A. The main task of the media is to reflect reality with all the problems and difficulties / A. Karlyukevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://news.21.by/other-news/2019/12/11/1940593.html>

Belarus: global information security and the regional press

Global digitalisation, which we are all witnessing today, is rapidly changing the world around us, including the information and media sphere. At the same time, new technologies affect not only the nature of the creative labour of modern journalists, but also actualise a number of challenges and threats to which the journalistic community must respond. At the international scientific-practical conference "Security and Sustainable Development: Theory and Practice in Digital Transformation" held in Minsk in December 2019, it was noted that "the leading players in the information field are now hastily building lines of defence. At the same time, while a few years ago the information sphere was dominated by the topics of free trade and human rights, now the issue of security is the dominant one"¹⁵³. The apparent militarisation of the information space in a number of countries, which has a destructive impact on other participants in the media and information sphere, is also alarming.

Taking into account all these challenges and threats, a number of initiatives were put forward in the Republic of Belarus in 2019 to settle the issues of global information security. In particular, in March, the Concept of Information Security of the country was approved, which refers to information sovereignty as a new approach to ensuring information security, and information neutrality as a form of state-responsible behaviour and self-restraint on the use of destructive technologies to the detriment of other states. More precisely, information sovereignty in Belarus will be achieved through the formation of a system of legal regulation of relations in the information sphere, ensuring safe sustainable development, social justice and consent. Within the framework of this approach, the development of national mass media and telecommunications should be ensured, educating and stimulating in society "a critical attitude towards manifestations of disrespect for national foundations, traditions and violations of moral and legal norms in the information sphere, intolerance to disinformation, information manipulation and other implicit information and psychological influences"¹⁵⁴.

¹⁵³ Offensive potential in the information sphere has already been formed in some states - Makarov [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/nastupatelnyj-potentsial-v-informatsionnoj-sfere-uzhe-sformirovan-v-nekotoryh-gosudarstvah-makarov-371838-2019/>

¹⁵⁴ Concept of information security of the Republic of Belarus [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://president.gov.by/uploads/documents/2019/1post.pdf>

At the same time, in international relations, the information sovereignty of the Belarusian state should be ensured based on the principle of information neutrality.¹⁵⁵ Its essence boils down to the fact that, defending its own national interests in the information sphere using all available forces and means, the Belarusian side aims at pursuing a peace-loving foreign information policy, respecting the universally recognised and generally accepted rights of any state in this sphere, excluding the initiative of "interference in the information sphere of other countries aimed at discrediting or challenging their political, economic, social and spiritual standards and priorities, as well as harming the information society". Important for representatives of the journalistic community in this context is the provision contained in the Concept of Information Security of the Republic of Belarus that in order to ensure a policy of information neutrality it is necessary to increase the degree of Belarus' presence in the world information space and expand international information exchange.

In other words, the existing security threats point to the need to expand interstate co-operation and increase mutual trust in the information sphere. Based on the urgency of this problem, in September 2019, at the high-level international conference in Minsk "Combating Terrorism through Innovative Approaches and the Use of New Emerging Technologies", the Belarusian side proposed to form a "digital neighbourhood belt" aimed at defusing tensions in the information sphere. According to the President of Belarus A. Lukashenko, "the key elements of such agreements could be the ideas of digital sovereignty and neutrality, which would first of all guarantee non-interference of countries in each other's information resources"¹⁵⁶. The Belarusian side sees the conclusion of bilateral and multilateral agreements on ensuring information security as a mechanism for implementing this initiative.

Speaking in September 2019 from the high rostrum of the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly on the need to expand interstate digital cooperation and increase mutual trust in the information sphere, the Belarusian side once again focused the attention of the entire global community on the need to implement the ideas of digital sovereignty and neutrality, as well as non-interference of countries in each other's information resources. It was particularly emphasised: "Digital sovereignty should guarantee the ability of a state to control its information field, prevent and

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Participation in an international conference on counter-terrorism [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/uchastie-v-mezhdunarodnoj-konferentsii-po-borbe-s-terrorizmom-21910/

block cyberattacks, and ensure reliable protection of critical infrastructure. Digital neutrality implies that countries will not take actions in cyberspace that harm the security of other states. Ultimately, such agreements could lay the groundwork for international rules for responsible behaviour in virtual space"¹⁵⁷ .

The launch of such a "wave of digital security" could undoubtedly increase the effectiveness of joint efforts to counter terrorist threats in the virtual space. In this context, Belarus is ready to cooperate and strengthen ties with all countries of the world and, especially, with its neighbours, including in the Commonwealth of Independent States, where there is an active search for a unifying agenda, new ideas shared by a wide range of states and organisations, and where, first of all, "it is necessary to agree so that we do not roll over each other in the media and do not wage this information war against each other"¹⁵⁸ . It should be noted that the Belarusian initiative to create a "digital neighbourhood belt" in the post-Soviet space was supported, first of all, by Russia, which was announced by the head of the Foreign Ministry of this country Sergey Lavrov in November 2019. According to him, this initiative "fully meets Russia's focus on the formation of the largest possible number of digital neighbourhoods"¹⁵⁹ . The Belarusian side also expressed the need to expand international cooperation and increase mutual trust in the information sphere at the summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation in November 2019 in Bishkek, stressing that "information security should be firmly established among the priority areas of the CSTO"¹⁶⁰ . In addition, in December 2019, at the 26th meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the participating States of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, official Minsk drew the attention of the members of this international structure to the need to conclude international agreements in the field of cybersecurity "similar to the agreements on additional confidence- and security-building measures in the politico-military sphere"¹⁶¹ , in order to better adapt to the changing security environment and, thus, increase joint

¹⁵⁷ Statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus V. Makei in the general discussion at the 74th session of the UN General Assembly (26 September 2019, New York) [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: http://mfa.gov.by/press/news_mfa/b698116bea64ee66.html

¹⁵⁸ Participation in the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the CIS [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/rabochij-vizit-v-turkmenistan-22184/

¹⁵⁹ Lavrov: Moscow welcomes Minsk's proposal to ensure digital security [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://tass.ru/politika/7145127>

¹⁶⁰ Collective Security Treaty Organisation Summit [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/sammit-organizatsii-dogovora-o-kollektivnoj-bezopasnosti-22481/

¹⁶¹ Statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus V. Makei at the 26th meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council (Bratislava, 5 December 2019) [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://mfa.gov.by/press/statements/e8f7cc1b86026dad.html/>

actions on An important aspect of the fulfilment of this initiative is also the consistent development of partnerships between the Republic of Belarus and within the framework of bilateral relations, both at the level of individual States and their regions.

At the same time, "one of the security reserves that has not yet been fully utilised is the resource of analytical and expert communities, which have a unique research potential"¹⁶². It should be assumed that representatives of the international segment of Belarusian journalism could also contribute to the development of certain areas of analysing security reserves in the information sphere. Especially as regards the fight against fake information, methodology of responsible behaviour in the information and media sphere, and ways of verifying information on the Internet.

It should be reminded that the above-mentioned Concept of Information Security of the Republic of Belarus singled out "manipulation of mass consciousness, discrediting of ideals and values, erosion of national sovereignty, and instability of the information infrastructure" among the modern challenges and threats emerging in the information sphere and posing a danger to the constitutional foundations and vital activity of the state¹⁶³. Proceeding from the fact that today the information sphere has already become of key importance for any state and every person, Belarus sets the task to expand the sphere of influence of the national mass media and to take "measures to increase the volume, diversity and quality of national broadcasting, the trust of the population to the official mass media"¹⁶⁴.

The fact is that in the course of the Big Talk with the President held in early March 2019, the head of the Belarusian state drew attention to the fact that "despite the powerful development of the media space, there is a deficit of content that would enjoy absolute trust of the audience, One of the reasons is the so-called fake news. They spread instantly, capture the audience, stir up thoughts"¹⁶⁵. In this regard, the role of a deterrent in the fight against fake news should take on today:

¹⁶² Building a reliable security system by the state alone is impossible - Vakulchik [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/postroenie-nadezhnoj-sistemy-bezopasnosti-tolko-silami-gosudarstva-nevozmozžno-vakulchik-371768-2019/>

¹⁶³ Matveev, V. The concept of information security of Belarus is planned to be approved in the near future / V. Matveev // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://belta.by/society/view/kontseptsiju-informatsionnoj-bezopasnosti-belarusi-planiruetsja-utverdit-v-blizhajshee-vremja-339646-2019/>

¹⁶⁴ Meeting of the Security Council of Belarus [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/zasedanie-soveta-bezopasnosti-belarusi-20668/

¹⁶⁵ Meeting with representatives of the public and expert community, Belarusian and foreign mass media "Big Talk with the President". [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL:

1) authoritative **media**;

2) professional **journalists** who steadfastly observe the laws of ethics and morality in the media space and strive for maximum accuracy and objectivity in their work;

3) **representatives of the expert community**, who by virtue of their competence have yet to take a special place in the work of the media.

The resolution of the XIII Belarusian International Media Forum "Partnership for the Future: Digital Agenda for Media Space", which was held in Minsk in September 2018, stated that traditional media should become a powerful unifying factor in the fight against fake information and unprofessional approaches to the coverage of current foreign and domestic issues. The resolution of the forum then emphasised that preserving the authority and positions of traditional media - print and electronic - is extremely important, as it is these subjects of the information field that are able to fully "bear responsibility to society for the quality, completeness and reliability of the information presented, and have the ability to ensure a professional approach to the creation and dissemination of information products"¹⁶⁶.

Real practice shows that the general audience's trust in the mass media arises when the media competently analyse events taking place in society and promptly provide comprehensive answers to current issues arising among readers, viewers and listeners. In other words, it is possible and necessary to minimise the threat of negative information impact in the form of fake news by creating one's own interesting, relevant and truthful content, so that "any fake can be confidently responded to and destroyed at the root"¹⁶⁷. It is clear that without close and constant co-operation with representatives of the expert community, media structures will hardly be able to fully solve such a large-scale task.

In order to strengthen the coordination of actions of the media and expert communities in this direction, it seems that it is time to start forming professional **media and expert** pools on the most important areas of Belarusian foreign and domestic policy. Professionalism in the information sphere in this case should be understood as qualitative and interesting

http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/vstrecha-s-predstaviteljami-obschestvennosti-i-ekspertnogo-soobschestva-belorusskix-i-zarubezhnyx-smi-20590/

¹⁶⁶ Media need to unite in the fight against fake information and unprofessionalism - resolution of the media forum [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/smi-nuzhno-objedinitjsja-v-borbe-s-fejkovoj-informatsiej-i-neprofessionalizmom-rezoljutsija-mediaforuma-317622-2018/>

¹⁶⁷ Pavel Legky: the main tool in the fight against misleading information on the Internet - people's trust [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/pavel-legkij-glavnyj-instrument-v-borbe-s-nedostovernoj-informatsiej-v-internete-doverie-ljudej-317648-2018/>

presentation of materials, skilful technical organisation of the creative process, availability of expert opinions and analytics based on reliable data. We see something similar, for example, in the course of implementation of the global Sustainable Development Goals in Belarus, where among partner groups, at the suggestion of the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus, a media-expert group was created in the national architecture of SDGs achievement management to conduct information work in the media space on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Another interesting example in this direction is the Plan of Joint Actions for Covering Belarus' Export Potential in the Mass Media for 2019, signed in March this year by the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus and the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry to facilitate "the dissemination of objective information on the development of national exports, strengthening international contacts of Belarusian enterprises, and the entry of their products into new markets"¹⁶⁸. The basic component of this media-expert interaction should be a series of seminars for journalists working on foreign economic issues to not only highlight the key problems of Belarusian export development for them, but also to generally contribute to the expansion of the presence of topical economic issues in the Belarusian mass media at all levels - from central to regional. It should be reminded that the National Programme of Support and Development of Exports of the Republic of Belarus for 2016-2020 among the eight main tasks contains the requirement to **promote export culture** in the form of consolidating in the mass consciousness the significance of exports for the development of the country and society and raising its priority. In this regard, the adoption by the Ministry of Information and the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry of a plan of joint actions to highlight the export potential of Belarus in the media sphere appears to be an extremely important and necessary step.

In this context, the topic of interaction between media and expert communities at the regional level, including the implementation of the policy of international cooperation of Belarusian regions, deserves a separate discussion. The fact is that "regional mass media occupy their own unique niche in which neither national nor international mass media can compete"¹⁶⁹. But at the same time, "despite the powerful development of the media space,

¹⁶⁸ Mininform and BelCCI signed a plan of joint actions on media coverage of Belarusian exports [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/society/view/mininform-i-beltp-podpisali-plan-sovmestnyh-deystvij-po-osvescheniju-v-smi-belorusskogo-eksporta-339703-2019/>

¹⁶⁹ Digitalisation boosts regional media - Lung [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/tsifrovizatsija-sposobstvuet-povysheniju-urovnja-regionalnyh-smi-legkij-317725-2018/>

there is still a lack of content that would enjoy absolute trust of the audience"¹⁷⁰. And this is in conditions when the thematic spectrum, in which the Belarusian regional press should be embedded, has been expanding with exceptional speed in recent years. These are just some of the directions emphasising the geography of international cooperation between the regions of Belarus that have emerged in recent years and which should be adequately reflected in the regional media in order to contribute to the effective solution of the problems arising here:

1) development of large-scale economic integration with the regions of the Eurasian Economic Union countries and especially with the Russian federative entities within the Union State, as well as with the regions of the Commonwealth of Independent States;

2) expansion of comprehensive cooperation with the regions of the European Union countries and especially within the framework of the Eastern Partnership initiative, as well as with the regions of the Neighbourhood Belt countries - Poland, Lithuania, Latvia;

3) deepening cooperation with the regions of the countries involved in the implementation of the "One Belt, One Road" megaproject and especially with the provinces, autonomous regions and cities of the People's Republic of China;

4) further intensification of trade and economic ties with the regions of the "far arc" countries - South-East Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America - and especially with those where there is significant potential for mutually beneficial interregional cooperation.

In the Republic of Belarus, it is assumed that the role of traditional regional mass media will be increasingly growing, as "the successful development of any region depends in general on the information space, on the ability to quickly adapt to the conditions of the rapidly growing market of communication technologies"¹⁷¹. That is why here, too, information strategies specific to international regional issues are already required, which can significantly expand the sphere of influence of a particular media outlet due to the high quality of the media product it creates.

¹⁷⁰ Trust of the audience district editions can be maintained by exceptional truthfulness - Melnikova [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://belta.by/regions/view/doverie-auditorii-rajonnye-izdaniya-mogut-podderzivat-iskljuchitelnoj-pravdivostiju-melnikova-338797-2019/>

¹⁷¹ The role of local media in the socio-economic development of regions will be discussed at the republican meeting [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/rol-mestnyh-smi-v-sotsialno-ekonomicheskom-razvitii-regionov-obsudjat-na-respublikanskom-soveschanii-337842-2019/>

Belarus: exports as a response to challenges

Sustainable economic growth at a rate of three to four per cent per year - this is the specific task set in the Republic of Belarus today to ensure stable socio-economic development of the country for the medium term. In order to successfully achieve this goal, a number of conditions must be met - "to ensure the efficient operation of each enterprise, the even and sustainable development of the country's regions; to create conditions for attracting foreign and domestic investment; to increase exports, including to new markets"¹⁷². The presence of the export theme in this list of the most important conditions is explained by the fact that "export is the basis of the open Belarusian economy, as it ensures the inflow of foreign currency into the country, profits to enterprises, and taxes to the budget of the Republic of Belarus"¹⁷³. Among the Belarusian companies active in the current challenging conditions in foreign markets, we should name, first of all, the world's largest manufacturer of dump trucks and transport equipment for the mining and construction industry, which occupies about one third of the world market of dump trucks of particularly high payload capacity - the **Belarusian Automobile Plant**, whose exports in 2020 are developing in several major vectors at once.

The first vector is the **regions of Russia**. Thus, in April 2020, another batch of 180-tonne BELAZ-75180 dump trucks was shipped to the Kirov branch of Apatit JSC in the **Murmansk region in accordance with the agreement** signed in September 2019. In February 2020, three 130-tonne vehicles have already arrived in this Russian region. In total, at least 50 dump trucks will be sent there in the next three years to be used in the development of apatitonepheline deposits in the Khibiny. It is expected that the 180-tonne dump trucks "will later be modified into intelligent dump trucks and will acquire new technical characteristics. The additionally installed equipment will make it possible to control them at a great distance. An experimental site

¹⁷² Address by Kochanova at the opening of the second session of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of Belarus of the seventh convocation [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/vystuplenie-kochanovoj-na-otkrytii-vtoroj-sessii-soveta-respubliki-natsionalnogo-sobranija-belarusi-385692-2020/>

¹⁷³ Zaleskii, B.L. Export culture and mass consciousness / B.L. Zaleskii // Journalism-2016: status, problems and prospects: proceedings of the 18th International Scientific and Practical Conference, celebrating the 95th anniversary of the BDU, 10-11 October 2016, Minsk / edited by S.V. Dubovik (ed.) [and others]. 2016, Minsk / edited by: S.V. Dubovik (ed.) [and others]. - Vyp. 18. - Minsk : AAT "Paligrafkambinat Ya. Kolas", 2016. - C. 234.

for operation of quarry equipment in the unmanned mode is planned to be set up in the Nyorpakkh open pit of the Eastern mine"¹⁷⁴.

Also in April 2020, six more dump trucks from the Belarusian manufacturer started work in the Krasnoyarsk **region** at the Achinsk Alumina Plant, which is part of JSC Rusal Achinsk. The renewal of the mining and transport equipment fleet at the Mazulsky mine will improve labour productivity and reduce costs in the technological process of raw material extraction. A characteristic detail: in 2020, Rusal, one of the world's largest aluminium producers, plans to purchase several dozens of Belarusian machines, as "this equipment has high performance characteristics and is more economical in terms of fuel and lubricant consumption. The driver's cabins have improved visibility and control system, equipped with comfortable seats and climate control systems"¹⁷⁵.

Another Russian region where the second 130-tonne dump truck BELAZ-75131 has been shipped this spring since the beginning of 2020 is the **Sverdlovsk region**, where eleven 130-tonne Belarusian trucks are already working at the mining and processing enterprise Uralasbest OJSC, each of which transports up to 1,500 tonnes of rock per shift. Such figures show how important it is for the Russian side. The BELAZ trucks work "on the basis of the Bazhenovskoye deposit, the explored reserves of which will last for more than 150 years. The deposit is developed by open-pit mining. The length of the open pit is 8 kilometres, width - 2,5 kilometres, depth - 350 metres"¹⁷⁶.

The second vector is the countries of the **Eurasian Economic Union**. In particular, **Armenia**, where three 90-tonne BELAZ-75585 dump trucks were delivered in the spring of 2020. They were added to the fleet of equipment of the Sotk mine, a gold ore deposit, the largest pure gold mine in Armenia, whose reserves are estimated at more than 120 tonnes. It should be noted that 130-tonne Belarusian machines are already working here with high efficiency. The new dump trucks were equipped with diesel engines with a capacity of up to 1,200 horsepower. "New high-strength steels have been used to improve the

¹⁷⁴ BELAZ delivered another batch of dump trucks to the Russian "Apatit" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belaz-postavil-ocherednuju-partiju-samosvalov-rossijskomu-apatitu-386828-2020/>

¹⁷⁵ Nemankova, Yu. BELAZ dump trucks started working in Krasnoyarsk Krai / Yu. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/karjernye-samosvaly-belaz-pristupili-k-rabote-v-krasnojarskom-krae-386202-2020/>

¹⁷⁶ Nemankova, Y. Another 130-tonne dump truck BELAZ will start working at the Russian "Uralasbest" / Y. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/ocherednoj-130-tonnyj-samosval-belaz-nachnet-rabotu-na-rossijskom-uralasbeste-385689-2020/>

reliability of the main load-bearing elements of the dump trucks, and cast elements have been used in the most stressed places"¹⁷⁷ .

The third vector is the countries of the **far arc**, the share of which in the exports of the Belarusian Automobile Plant has increased almost one and a half times since the beginning of 2020 and amounted to 40 per cent. For example, in April, eight 130-tonne dump trucks BELAZ-75131 started working at a coal mine located on the island of Kalimantan in **Indonesia**. All the wishes of the Indonesian partners and climatic conditions of operation were taken into account in their configuration. And these are such tropical options as "appropriate rubber, air conditioning, special cooling system"¹⁷⁸ . The Belarusian Automobile Plant is actively working to increase its presence on the African continent in **Algeria**, where in the spring of 2020 it shipped another batch of five front loaders BELAZ-78221. The company's plans include "participation in specialised exhibitions and direct negotiations with interested consumers of quarry machinery in the region"¹⁷⁹ .

Gomselmash Holding, a manufacturer of grain and forage harvesters, cob harvesters, potato harvesters, mowers, and other agricultural machinery that is already operating in the fields of Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Chile, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Argentina, China, South Korea, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, is one of the Belarusian companies that are active on foreign markets even in such difficult conditions as we see today. In the first quarter of 2020, the holding's enterprises shipped more than 400 units of machinery to their customers. "At the same time, 278 self-propelled combines and machine kits to them were delivered outside Belarus. Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Moldova are on the list of countries where the machinery was shipped to. <...> In total, the shipment increased by 373% by the same period of 2019"¹⁸⁰ .

Minsk Tractor Plant is another enterprise that is now actively promoting its products to foreign markets. For example, more than 250 tractors have been shipped to Pakistan alone since the beginning of 2020. This is

¹⁷⁷ Nemankova, Y. BELAZ has sent dump trucks to Armenia / Y. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belaz-otpravil-v-armeniju-karjernye-samosvaly-385547-2020/>

¹⁷⁸ Eight dump trucks BELAZ started work in Indonesia [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/vosem-karjernih-samosvalov-belaz-pristupili-k-rabote-v-indonezii-387074-2020/>

¹⁷⁹ Nemankova, Yu. A batch of BELAZ loaders shipped to Algeria / Yu. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/partija-pogruzchikov-belaz-otgruzhena-v-alzhir-385911-2020/>

¹⁸⁰ "Gomselmash" in the first quarter delivered to foreign markets more than 270 combines and machine kits [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/gomselmash-v-i-kvartale-postavil-na-vneshnie-rynki-bolee-270-kombajnov-i-mashinokomplektov-388443-2020>

eloquent evidence that "even despite the crisis in many Asian countries and restrictive measures introduced due to the difficult epidemiological situation, the deliveries remain at the planned level"¹⁸¹. In total, since 1955, Minsk tractor builders have shipped more than 120 thousand machines to this country of South Asia. The enterprise does not forget about other export directions. In particular, in the first quarter of this year about five hundred units of machinery and tractor kits were shipped to the markets of European countries. The following fact speaks volumes: "Export of MTW products to African countries for the first quarter of 2020 increased by 70%"¹⁸². For one of the countries of this continent - Sudan - in April this year another "batch of more than 100 tractors <...> was formed. This is the second shipment in 2020"¹⁸³. The following figures also add to this picture quite convincingly. "Since the beginning of the year, the company has increased deliveries to Russian regions by 20%. Exports of Belarusian agricultural machinery to Uzbekistan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia have also increased"¹⁸⁴. The supplies to Tajikistan have increased especially significantly - twice - with more than a hundred tractors and tractor kits shipped there in the first three months of this year. In many respects, such dynamics is explained by the fact that "from January 2020, spare parts and components imported into Tajikistan for further assembly of agricultural machinery are not subject to VAT and customs duties"¹⁸⁵. In the first quarter of this year, the Minsk Tractor Plant's products were shipped to the markets of more than thirty countries, including 22 non-CIS countries.

In the first quarter of 2020, **Minsk Automobile Plant** increased its supplies of equipment to non-CIS countries almost two and a half times. An important component in achieving this indicator was the fact that at the beginning of this year, the company, together with the Barysau-based Pozhsnab LLC, signed a contract for the supply of 73 units of fire and rescue

¹⁸¹ MTZ has supplied more than 250 tractors to Pakistan since the beginning of the year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/mtz-s-nachala-goda-postavil-v-pakistan-bolee-250-traktorov-388294-2020/>

¹⁸² Nemankova, Y. Export of MTZ products to African countries increased by 70% / Y. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-produktsii-mtz-v-strany-afriki-vyros-na-70-386540-2020/>

¹⁸³ Nemankova, Y. MTZ will supply the second batch of machinery to Sudan / Y. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/mtz-postavit-vtoruju-partiju-tehniki-v-sudan-386164-2020/>

¹⁸⁴ MTZ has good export indicators: 20% increase in deliveries to Russia, 70% - to Africa [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://ont.by/news/u-mtz-horoshie-pokazateli-po-eksportu-na-20-vyrosli-postavki-v-rossiyu-na-70-v-afriku>

¹⁸⁵ MTW increased export of products to Tajikistan in 2 times [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/mtz-uvelichil-eksport-produktsii-v-tadzhikistan-v-2-raza-387386-2020/>

vehicles to the Mongolian Agency for Emergency Situations. And MAZ has already "started to fulfil the contract to supply chassis and assemble passenger vehicles for export to Mongolia. The joint project will be realised during this year"¹⁸⁶.

In spring 2020, **Amkodor-DOMZ**, a unitary enterprise based in Dzerzhinsk, Minsk region, seriously updated its export plans by shipping the first batch of its products to the Russian region of the Republic of Karelia in April. There, these seven overhead cranes with lifting capacities from 3.2 to 16 tonnes will be used to implement an investment project, to which the Karelian government attaches great importance, "to set up a high-tech import-substituting full-cycle production facility on the premises of the former Onega Tractor Plant to manufacture forestry equipment: harvesters and forwarders of medium and heavy class"¹⁸⁷. A characteristic detail: the overhead travelling cranes sent to Karelia are new generation equipment, which is controlled from the floor by radio signal, which ensures high safety standards for the personnel. It is also important that a second batch of equipment is planned to be sent to Karelia this spring from Dzerzhinsk, Belarus.

Another Belarusian company that significantly strengthened its position in the Russian market in the first quarter of 2020 is **BELJI SZAO**. The company assembled 5,059 cars in the first three months of this year, and sold a total of 5,230 cars. At the same time, "deliveries to the Russian market increased 2.5 times, 2,705 cars were exported there in the first quarter"¹⁸⁸. The company plans to sell a total of 28,000 cars in 2020, of which 18,000 will be shipped to Russia.

Belarusian producers of agricultural products and foodstuffs continue to increase their supplies abroad. In the first quarter of 2020, their exports to 83 countries grew by almost 10 per cent to almost \$1.5 billion. An important detail: the increase in supplies was observed in almost all directions. In particular, "exports to Russia increased by 4.4 per cent, to CIS countries excluding Russia - by 24.7 per cent, to Asia and Oceania - by 2.2 times, to America and the Caribbean - by 52.4 per cent, to the EU - by 54.3 per cent.

¹⁸⁶ Nemankova, Yu. MAZ in the 1 quarter increased exports to far abroad almost 2.4 times / Yu. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/maz-v-i-kvartale-uvelichil-eksport-v-dalnee-zarubezhje-pochti-v-24-raza-387079-2020/>

¹⁸⁷ "Amkodor-Onego" in Karelia received the first batch of overhead travelling cranes [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/amkodor-onego-v-karel'ii-poluchil-pervuju-partiju-mostovyh-kranov-388008-2020/>

¹⁸⁸ "BELJI" in the 1 quarter increased exports to Russia by 2.5 times / Y. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/beldzhi-v-i-kvartale-uvelichil-eksport-v-rossiju-v-25-raza-386430-2020/>

The Chinese direction showed a 2.4-fold growth"¹⁸⁹. In the first three months of 2020, supplies of Belarusian meat and meat products, milk and milk products, and potatoes to foreign markets increased particularly intensively. These positive trends were largely a continuation of the strong export performance that the Belarusian agro-industrial complex demonstrated in 2019.

It should be recalled that at that time, supplies of agricultural products and foodstuffs to 104 countries of the world exceeded the figure of five and a half billion dollars in monetary terms, accounting for almost one sixth of the merchandise exports of the Republic of Belarus in 2019. A number of positive trends contributed to the achievement of this level. First, "shipments of milk and dairy products, rapeseed oil, prepared or canned fish, canned vegetables and fruits, soybean oil, poultry meat, eggs, chocolate and other finished products containing cocoa, and potatoes increased"¹⁹⁰. Second, the geographical diversification of Belarusian exports increased. New markets included countries on almost all continents: in Asia - Afghanistan; in Africa - Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Kenya, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Sudan, Uganda; in the Americas and the Caribbean - Belize, Cuba, Uruguay; in Europe - Luxembourg, Finland, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The diversity of supplies from Belarus to these new countries could be seen in the following examples. Thus, supplies of whey and skimmed milk powder were launched to Afghanistan, malt to Angola and Burkina Faso, skimmed milk powder to Benin, Mozambique and Niger, canned milk and milk powder to Cuba, alcoholic beverages to Uruguay, fur and fur raw materials to Finland, sugar and potatoes to Albania, and potatoes to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Third, Belarusian exports of agricultural products and foodstuffs to the markets of Belarus's strategic partners - Russia and China - increased in 2019. In particular, the volume of exports to Russia increased by three per cent to \$4.3 billion. It should be noted that "dairy products became the main driver of growth of supplies to Russia. Revenue from its exports increased by 23 per cent. Supplies of eggs, flax fibre, gelatin, seeds and rapeseed oil also increased"¹⁹¹.

¹⁸⁹ Export of Belarusian agricultural products in the first quarter increased by 9.8% [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-belorusskoj-selhozproduksii-v-i-kvartale-vyros-na-98-389760-2020/>

¹⁹⁰ Exports of Belarusian agricultural products in 2019 exceeded \$5.5 billion [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-belorusskoj-selhozproduksii-v-2019-godu-prevysil-55-mlrd-378531-2020>

¹⁹¹ Nemankova, Y. Belarus plans to supply more than 3 million tonnes of dairy products and 316 thousand tonnes of meat to Russia in 2020 / Y. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL:

As for China, Belarus' shipments to China increased by almost 60 per cent to USD 131.5 million. This brought the share of Belarusian exports to the Chinese market in the structure of total exports to Asia and Oceania to 68 per cent. At the same time, "the volume of supplies of processed meat products with high added value (beef and poultry) increased by \$53.3 million and reached 44.1 per cent in the total structure of food exports to China"¹⁹². And this is along with the fact that supplies of rapeseed oil, flax fibre, chocolate, alcoholic beverages, mineral waters, skimmed milk powder and whey powder increased to the Celestial Empire.

Even more intense plans for the development of exports of agricultural products and foodstuffs were adopted in Belarus for 2020 - "to increase supplies by 4.2% compared to 2019 and reach the amount exceeding \$5.7 billion"¹⁹³. At the same time, hopes were pinned not only on dairy products, but also on crop products, as well as meat products. In particular, 3.6 million tonnes of dairy products and 316 thousand tonnes of meat products will be shipped to Russia alone. Interesting prospects are also opening up for China, where 14 new meat producers from Belarus were accredited in January 2020. These include 11 new beef producers - Pinsk, Brest, Zhlobin, Gomel, Grodno, Vitebsk, Slonim, Volkovysk, meat processing plants, Brest Traditions, Vahavyak Plus, Miron, as well as three chicken meat producers - Belorusneft-Osobino and two sites of Rassvet poultry farm. Another five enterprises have expanded the range of products possible for export to the Chinese market, "including chicken feet, wing tips and by-products"¹⁹⁴.

All these facts demonstrate the main point: whoever stays strong in the most difficult conditions wins in the end, contributing to overcoming the consequences of the unfavourable epidemiological situation in the world.

<https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-planiruet-postavit-bolee-3-mln-t-molochki-i-316-tys-t-mjasa-v-rossiju-v-2020-godu-378543-2020>

¹⁹² The first container train with meat products is planned to send to China this year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/pervyj-kontejnernyj-poezd-s-mjasnoj-produktsiej-planirujut-otpravit-v-kitaj-v-etom-godu-378553-2020>

¹⁹³ Belarus plans to increase food exports by 4.2% in 2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-planiruet-uvelichit-eksport-prodovolstvija-na-42-v-2020-godu-378535-2020>

¹⁹⁴ Another 14 producers have been accredited to supply Belarusian meat products to China [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/dlja-postavok-belorusskoj-mjasnoj-produktsii-v-kitaj-akkreditovany-esche-14-proizvoditelej-375197-2020/>

Belarus: on the way to export diversification

One of the priority tasks for the development of the Belarusian economy, set out in the Programme of Activities of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for the period until 2025, is commodity and country diversification of exports, which should ensure the growth of Belarusian exports to \$50 billion in 2025, as well as "promotion of goods and services to new markets"¹⁹⁵. It is clear that those enterprises that have already created a certain foundation for the development of foreign markets can contribute to this task. These include, of course, first of all, the flagships of the Belarusian industry.

Thus, despite the coronavirus pandemic, Minsk Tractor Plant exported \$530 million worth of products in 2020. At the same time, it increased deliveries to far abroad by 18.5 per cent. And although the main importers of its equipment remained Russia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, "in total, the products were supplied to 45 countries, including nine countries where they were not sold in 2019 (Burundi, Great Britain, Haiti, Guatemala, Guinea, Dominican Republic, Zimbabwe, Indonesia, Spain)"¹⁹⁶.

The Belarusian Steel Works shipped two million tonnes of steel products to 52 countries in 2020. The share of the European Union countries in total exports exceeded 45 per cent. The fact that "the volume of shipments to Spain, Slovenia and France has grown two or more times. Shipments to Austria, Ireland, Romania, Poland and Finland increased by more than 30 per cent"¹⁹⁷. The highest demand on the markets of these countries was for wire rod, flat-rolled bronze and steel wire, as well as structural rolled products intended for the automotive industry.

The Minsk Motor Works (MMZ), on the other hand, increased its deliveries to Russia by more than 12 per cent in 2020 alone, exceeding the value of \$40 million. This is largely due to the fact that in the neighbouring

¹⁹⁵ Programme of Activities of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for the period up to 2025. - Minsk, 2020. - C. 46.

¹⁹⁶ MTZ in 2020 increased export of products to far abroad by 18.5% [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/mtz-v-2020-godu-uvelichil-eksport-produktsii-v-dalnee-zarubezhje-na-185-427593-2021/>

¹⁹⁷ BMZ has increased export of steel products to 13 countries of the European Union [Electronic resu3rs]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/bmz-narastil-eksport-metalloproduktsii-v-13-stran-evrosojuza-426139-2021/>

country MMZ "cooperates with 59 Russian industrial assembly enterprises and is also working on establishing partnerships with ten more"¹⁹⁸.

Enterprises of the Bellegprom Concern are starting the new five-year period from a rather high position in terms of exports. Last year they shipped to 52 countries about 60 per cent of all their manufactured goods, having achieved a foreign trade surplus of more than \$170 million. Exports to Lithuania (128.7 per cent), Germany (104.6 per cent), Estonia (115.3 per cent), Japan (296.2 per cent), Uzbekistan (107.3 per cent), Sweden (102.8 per cent), Bulgaria (158.2 per cent), Slovakia (176.2 per cent), Czech Republic (115.8 per cent), Israel (129.4 per cent), Denmark (360.3 per cent), Australia (361.2 per cent), Austria (261.4 per cent)"¹⁹⁹.

In 2020, the enterprises of Bellesbumprom Concern increased their exports of goods by five per cent. The volume of exports to the markets of 70 countries reached almost \$610 million and accounted for a record three quarters of the total volume of the Concern's products. This was largely due to the increased sales of export items to non-CIS countries. In particular, supplies to Albania, Ireland, Iceland, Cyprus, Mexico were resumed, but the highest growth rate was noted in the USA, Canada, Austria, Great Britain, Switzerland, Finland, Turkey, India, Indonesia. In addition, "exports to China grew almost 1.3 times by the end of the year. Exports to Russia increased by 5.2 per cent and to Ukraine by 7 per cent"²⁰⁰.

It should be assumed that in 2021, these and other Belarusian enterprises will try to keep up the momentum. At least, the results of January of this year show that economic entities in our country have taken up the task of export quite responsibly, having increased the supply of goods and services to foreign countries by 13.5 per cent - up to more than three billion dollars. At the same time, "exports of goods increased by 19.4 per cent to \$2.36 billion <...>. The balance was positive in the amount of \$100.2 million (in January 2020 it was negative and amounted to \$61.2 million"²⁰¹.

¹⁹⁸ MMZ in 2020 increased the volume of supplies to Russia by more than 12% [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/mmz-v-2020-godu-narastil-objemy-postavok-v-rossiju-bolee-chem-na-12-425977-2021/>

¹⁹⁹ "Bellegprom" in 2020 supplied products to 52 countries of the world [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/bellegprom-v-2020-godu-postavil-produktsiju-v-52-strany-mira-427383-2021/>

²⁰⁰ Enterprises of "Bellesbumprom" in 2020 increased the export of products by 5% [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/predpriyatija-bellesbumproma-v-2020-godu-uvelichili-eksport-produktsii-na-5-427809-2021/>

²⁰¹ Belarus increased exports of goods and services by 13.3% to \$3.057 billion in January [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-v-janvare-uvelichila-eksport-tovarov-i-uslug-na-135-do-3057-mlrd-432023-2021/>

Among those who have already made a significant contribution to the achievement of this indicator, it is worth mentioning again the enterprises of Bellesbumprom Concern, which in January were able to increase the supply of their products abroad by another 18 per cent - up to \$55.5 million. This was due to the growth of exports of wood boards, furniture, pulp, plywood, paper and cardboard. In total, almost 50 commodity items were shipped to the markets of 48 countries. An important detail: more than half of the export volume - almost \$30 million - was shipped to non-CIS countries. In addition, "shipments to the European Union increased by 15.5 per cent, to China - by 35.9 per cent. Shipments to CIS markets increased by 10.6%"²⁰². Among the countries, Russia, Poland and China became the leaders in this list. In general, in 2021 the enterprises of the concern "Bellesbumprom" plan to "continue increasing exports of goods by less than 6.5% to the level of 2020"²⁰³. In particular, in this regard, a plant for the production of multilayer cardboard on the basis of the Dobrush paper mill "Hero of Labour" and a new production facility for wood fuel - pellets - in Vitebsk are planned to be put into operation this year.

Domestic high-tech products can and should contribute to achieving high export diversification indicators. In 2020, the Republic of Belarus set a task to maintain the volume of its exports at the level of USD 15 billion, both through supplies of existing items and the emergence of new priorities. Recall that last year, such products were supplied abroad in such areas as radio electronics, instrumentation, machine building, pharmaceuticals. "A significant contribution to exports is made by the ICT sector. The demand for Belarusian intellectual property is also growing"²⁰⁴. The participation of domestic developers in international exhibitions held in autumn 2020 was a very effective tool for promoting Belarusian high-tech products in foreign markets.

Thus, in November, the exposition of Belarusian manufacturers Made in Belarus was presented at the international exhibition and forum of telecommunication and information technologies Cairo ICT in the capital of Egypt, attended by more than 400 companies from such countries as Russia,

²⁰² Enterprises of "Bellesbumprom" in January increased the export of products by 18% [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/predpriyatija-bellesbumproma-v-janvare-uvlichili-eksport-produktsii-na-18-432143-2021/>

²⁰³ The enterprises of "Bellesbumprom" in 2021 plan to increase exports by at least 6.5% [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/predpriyatija-bellesbumproma-v-2021-godu-planirujut-uvlichit-eksport-ne-menee-chem-na-65-429310-2021/>

²⁰⁴ Belarus expects to maintain the volume of exports of high-tech products at the level of \$15 billion this year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-rasschityvaet-v-etom-godu-sohranit-objem-eksporta-vysokotekhnologichnoj-produktsii-na-urovne-15-421250-2020/>

China, the USA, France, Germany, Italy, the UK, the Republic of Korea, and Saudi Arabia. A distinctive feature of the Belarusian exposition was the latest developments of research organisations of the National Academy of Sciences and higher educational institutions of the Ministry of Education, which have high export potential. In particular, the Belarusian State University demonstrated in Cairo a whole range of medical developments: a set of medical software in cardiology, mathematical models for surgical practice, computer modelling for creating drugs against SARS-CoV coronavirus. The Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics presented developments in the field of information security for banking and customs companies. The Belarusian-Russian University attracted the attention of the exhibition visitors and forum participants with its information and advertising system "Electronic Guide" designed for public transport. As for the United Institute of Informatics Problems of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, it "demonstrated an intelligent micromodule for onboard recognition of surface and object images, as well as a cluster personal supercomputer UIIP-OFFICE, designed for complex scientific calculations, modelling, solving engineering problems and teaching parallel programming technologies at universities"²⁰⁵.

Belarus' national exposition at the Third China International Import Expo in the online format was also a good help in promoting Belarusian high-tech exports. Suffice it to say that the Belarusian side presented more than a hundred scientific, technical and innovative developments in information and communication technologies, healthcare, biotechnology, new materials, and agriculture. Among them it is worth mentioning a more than actual development of the Republican Scientific and Practical Centre of Transfusiology and Medical Biotechnologies - "anticoagulant immunoglobulin for the treatment of patients with severe COVID-19 infection, as well as patients with viral encephalitis and meningoencephalitis"²⁰⁶. The Belarusian National Technical University showed here a unique acoustic system for the treatment of skin oncological diseases, which has a higher efficiency compared to traditional methods and at the same time allows to reduce the radiation dose to the patient by a quarter. The National Academy of Sciences demonstrated at the exhibition of imports an office supercomputer, which has small dimensions and at the same time provides complex scientific calculations and processing

²⁰⁵ Exposition of Belarusian manufacturers Made in Belarus is presented at the international exhibition in Cairo [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/ekspozitsija-belorusskih-proizvoditelej-made-in-belarus-predstavlena-na-mezhdunarodnoj-vystavke-v-kaire-417549-2020/>

²⁰⁶ More than 100 scientific and technical developments will be presented by Belarus at the China Import Expo [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/bolee-100-nauchno-tehnicheskikh-razrabotok-predstavit-belarus-na-kitajskoj-vystavke-importa-414174-2020/>

of a large amount of data, and the Belarusian State University - preparations for plant protection based on natural components that can be used in organic farming. Among the innovative developments of the Belarusian State Technological University at the China International Import Expo in Shanghai were presented "the technology of nickel-diamond coating, self-cleaning antibacterial composite coatings, radio-protective glass, thin nominal sheet glass and flexible glass films for solar batteries"²⁰⁷, as well as the technology of forming imitation decorative coatings on wood, board, facing and composite materials, and dental cements and materiazine materials.

Finally, a wide range of Belarusian high-tech scientific and technical developments was presented at the TeMEx international online industrial exhibition, which was held under the auspices of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry for three months starting from mid-October 2020 and attended by more than 70 companies from eight countries. The Minsk Automobile Plant showed an absolute novelty - an electric bus. The project "Intelligent Quarry" was demonstrated by the Belarusian Automobile Plant. All these and a number of other facts confirm the conclusion that "the main core factor in the development of the industrial complex of Belarus is the growth of the innovation component of its output"²⁰⁸, which, in turn, will inevitably contribute to the growth of Belarusian high-tech exports in the near future.

Another priority area for Belarusian exports is agricultural products and foodstuffs. The above-mentioned Programme of Activities of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for the period up to 2025 in the section "Efficient and Environmentally Safe Agriculture" sets tasks to improve the competitiveness of agricultural production and increase export potential in order to eventually reach "exports of food products and agricultural raw materials in 2025 - USD 7 billion"²⁰⁹. At the same time, the government plans to "bet on all segments: both crop and livestock farming"²¹⁰, as well as on diversification of export supplies.

²⁰⁷ Innovative developments of BSTU will be presented at the exhibition of goods and services in Shanghai [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/innovatsionnye-razrabotki-bgtu-predstavjat-na-vystavke-tovarov-i-uslug-v-shanhae-414078-2020/>

²⁰⁸ Kharitonchik: the main factor in the development of industrial complex of Belarus is the growth of innovative products [Electronic resource]. 2020. - URL: https://www.belta.by/economics/view/haritonchik-glavnym-faktorom-razvitiya-promkompleksa-belarusi-javljaetsja-rost-innovatsionnoj-410940-2020/?utm_source=belta&utm_medium=news&utm_campaign=accent

²⁰⁹ Programme of Activities of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for the period up to 2025. - Minsk, 2020. - C. 35.

²¹⁰ Growth of production volumes and export diversification - Alexander Subbotin outlined the tasks for the meat industry [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9783>

In addition, the Republic of Belarus has approved the State Programme "Agrarian Business" for 2021-2025. It provides for the achievement of such goals as increasing the competitiveness of agricultural products and foodstuffs, developing environmentally friendly agriculture, ensuring a nutritious diet and healthy lifestyle for the population, and "building up export potential"²¹¹. The programme contains nine sub-programmes dealing with areas such as: 1) crop production; 2) seed production; 3) livestock breeding; 4) breeding; 5) fishery activities; 6) land reclamation; 7) engineering flood control measures for the protection of agricultural land; 8) ensuring general conditions for the functioning of the agro-industrial complex; and 9) support for small forms of farming. Subject to their successful implementation, "the export of food products and agricultural raw materials in 2025 is projected to increase by 21.3 per cent by 2020 (up to USD 7 billion)"²¹². It is quite realistic to achieve this provided that the raw material base of agro-industrial production is strengthened, existing industries are modernised and new competitive industries are developed, industries and sub-branches of the agro-industrial complex are digitalised, and breeding and genetics are developed for the needs of sustainable agriculture. And the immediate task - for 2021 - is "to increase exports of agricultural products by 4.3% to the level of 2020. This will amount to just over \$6bn"²¹³.

Belarusian exporters intend to move forward in this direction based on several basic priorities. First, it is important to maintain what has been achieved in traditional markets, which include Russia, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. Suffice it to say that the share of the Russian market in Belarusian agricultural exports in 2020 was almost three quarters of the total volume, or \$4.3 billion. And this is not only meat and dairy products, but also high-tech products. "These are seeds and planting material, pedigree livestock, plant protection products, veterinary drugs, fodder additives, modern agricultural machinery"²¹⁴. At the joint meeting of the board of the agricultural departments of the two countries held in March 2021, the parties outlined further necessary measures to increase mutual trade and the main directions of

²¹¹ 'Prodbezopasnost' and increase of export - the directions of development of agrarian business are defined [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/prodbezopasnost-i-narashchivanie-eksporta-opredeleny-napravlenija-razvitija-agrarnogo-biznesa-427294-2021/>

²¹² State programme "Agrarian business" for 2021-2025 years [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=C22100059&p1=1&p5=0>

²¹³ Belarus expects to increase exports of agricultural products up to \$7 billion in 2025 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-rasschityvaet-v-2025-godu-narastit-eksport-selhozproduktov-dok-7-mlrd-427628-2021/>

²¹⁴ More than 70% of Belarusian food exports to Russia in 2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/bolee-70-belorusskogo-eksporta-prodovolstviya-v-2020-godu-prihodilos-na-rossiju-432008-2021/>

integration of the Belarusian and Russian agro-complexes in the Union State, which gives good reason to believe: co-operation in agriculture between Belarus and Russia will only increase.

As for Uzbekistan, in 2020, the trade turnover of agricultural products and foodstuffs with this country in Central Asia exceeded \$87 million, increasing by 76 per cent at once. An important detail is that "Belarusian food exports more than doubled in 2020 and reached \$73 million. The supplies of Belarusian beef to Uzbekistan increased by more than two times, sugar by 3.5 times, milk powder by two times, fish and fish products by 1.5 times"²¹⁵. The parties also actively co-operated in other areas of the industry. Speaking of cattle breeding, one should recall the supply of about 400 cattle of Belarusian selection to Uzbekistan in 2020. In order to increase the volume of this cooperation, the Belarusian Belplemzhivobedinenie and Uzbek VostokMedGeruda have set up a joint breeding and genetic centre to purchase and supply Belarusian breeding cattle to Uzbekistan, as well as provide scientific and technological support. In the field of veterinary medicine, Belarusian BelVitunifarm together with the Samarkand Institute of Veterinary Medicine and the Research Institute of Veterinary Medicine decided to set up a joint venture to produce veterinary drugs and vaccines on Uzbek territory. In the field of breeding, the result of cooperation between the Research Centre of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and the Research Institute of Vegetable and Melon Crops and Potatoes of Uzbekistan was the production of 45 varieties of vegetables and 6 varieties of melons of Belarusian selection. There are also results in seed breeding, where partnership ties are actively developed by Belsemena and the Seed Breeding Centre of Uzbekistan. In 2020, samples of seeds of peas, beans, carrots, onions and tomatoes of Uzbek selection were sent to Belarus for testing, while tomato, onion, beetroot, radish, carrot and bean seeds of Belarusian selection were successfully grown on Uzbek soil. Finally, in the field of education, the Tashkent State Agrarian University and the Grodno State Agrarian University established joint faculties in Tashkent and Andijan and began admitting students to bachelor's programmes in Plant Protection and Quarantine and Technology of Storage and Processing of Animal Raw Materials.

Belarusian agricultural exports to Azerbaijan also increased by more than 10 per cent last year. More precisely, "in 2020, trade turnover of agricultural products and foodstuffs reached \$35 million and increased by

²¹⁵ Belarusian food exports to Uzbekistan more than doubled in 2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-belorusskogo-prodovolstvija-v-uzbekistan-v-2020-godu-vyros-bolee-chem-v-dva-raza-431838-2021/>

5.3% compared to 2019. Exports of goods - \$30.4 million (or 110.7%), imports \$4.6 million"²¹⁶ . This was due to supplies from Belarus of a wide range of dairy and meat products from such Belarusian exporting enterprises as SOAO 'Belovezhskie Cheese', OJSC 'Luninetsky Dairy Plant', OJSC 'Molochny Mir', OJSC 'Rogachev Dairy Plant', PUE 'Kalinkovich Dairy Plant', OJSC 'Lidsky Dairy Plant', OJSC 'Minsk Dairy Plant No. 1'. In June 2021, enterprises from Belarus will become participants of the international exhibition of food industry InterFood Azerbaijan, which will allow them to open new opportunities to enter the consumer market of this country of the South Caucasus. So the prospects for increasing exports are not bad.

Secondly, special attention will be paid to the diversification of sales markets and the development of exports to other countries of the world. In particular, it is planned to actively develop food supplies to the Chinese market, which in 2020 alone almost doubled due to exports of beef, poultry meat, dried milk, dried whey, ice cream, cheese, butter, as well as sugar, starch, crisps and fish products. And this is far from the limit. It should be noted that in 2020, Belarusian agricultural products and foodstuffs were supplied to 116 countries of the world. At the same time, 20 new markets were opened. "These include Kuwait (started supplying flour confectionery and candy), Nepal (protein substrates), Algeria and Madagascar (flour), Congo (maize seeds), Mali (maize groats), Morocco (beet cake), Namibia (milk powder), Somalia (sugar), Sierra Leone (egg processing products), Equatorial Guinea (poultry meat), South Sudan (whole milk powder). Also on the list are Paraguay, St Lucia, Djibouti, Ireland, Cyprus, Malta, Portugal Croatia"²¹⁷ . In general, the share of the countries of the far arc in the total volume of Belarusian agricultural exports in 2020 increased to \$796 million and amounted to almost 14 per cent.

Overall, in 2020, food exports from Belarus grew by 4.3 per cent and exceeded \$5.8 billion. For example, this allowed our country to become one of the world's top five exporters of a number of dairy products - butter, cheese, milk powder, whey. At the same time, the Belarusian side seeks "not to export raw materials, but to process grain, milk and meat in the country to the maximum extent possible and to supply abroad products with high added

²¹⁶ Exports of Belarusian products to Azerbaijan increased by 10.7% in 2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-belorusskoj-selhozproduktcii-v-azerbajdzhan-v-2020-godu-vyros-na-107-433105-2021/>

²¹⁷ Belarus in 2020 started supplying agricultural products to 20 new markets [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-v-2020-godu-nachala-postavki-selhozproduktcii-na-20-novyh-rynkov-427631-2021/>

value, so that these goods reach the shelves of shops and customers form a stable loyal opinion about Belarusian goods"²¹⁸.

A good example of such an approach to the development and consolidation of its positions in foreign markets is demonstrated, in particular, by OJSC "Rogachevsky MKK". The main trends of the company's foreign economic development in 2020 are: increasing supplies to the already developed markets - Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Ukraine, Israel, USA, as well as entering new markets - UAE, Singapore, South Korea and Afghanistan. This was also due to the fact that in 2020 "the range of products supplied to non-CIS markets was expanded, where consumers appreciated condensed milk with cocoa, coffee and chicory"²¹⁹, choosing in favour of safe and natural products.

Another interesting example in this context is the Turov Dairy Plant, which "now accounts for 80% of production for foreign consumers. Deliveries to other countries brought the company almost \$87 million - 20% more than in 2019"²²⁰. In total, dairy products from Turov were supplied to 16 countries in 2020. At the same time, Mongolia, Turkmenistan and Iraq became new markets. In 2021, the plant plans to increase export volumes by more than a quarter. These plans are based on the active re-equipment of the enterprise. In 2020, it increased the capacity for the production of cream cheese, installed lines for whey processing and thickening. In 2021, the modernisation of the extraction cheese line is planned.

All these examples show that the potential and opportunities for successful implementation of the tasks set for the new five-year period to diversify exports from the Republic of Belarus are quite realistic and achievable with the active work of Belarusian economic entities both in industry, in the production of high-tech products, and in the agro-industrial complex.

²¹⁸ Export of Belarusian agricultural products in 2020 increased by 4.3% [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-belorusskoj-selhozproduksii-v-2020-godu-vyros-na-43-427620-2021>

²¹⁹ Rogachev MCC in 2020 expanded exports by supplying new markets in four countries [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/rogachevskij-mkk-v-2020-godu-rasshiril-eksport-za-schet-postavok-na-novye-rynki-chetyreh-stran-427607-2021>

²²⁰ Turovsky dairy plant in 2020 produced one third more cheese and earned \$110 million [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/turovskij-molochnyj-kombinat-v-2020-godu-proizvel-na-tret-bolshe-syrov-i-vyruchil-110-mln-427862-2021/>

Belarus: free and special economic zones as regional growth points

The Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Free Economic Zones", adopted on 7 December 1998, defines the attraction of "investments in the creation and development of export-oriented and import-substituting industries based on new and high technologies" as one of the main objectives of FEZ creation²²¹. More than 20 years of experience of FEZs established in the country shows that during this period this model of economic relations in the regions has demonstrated many positive trends, and in the future it may turn into an even more effective instrument of socio-economic development of the Belarusian state.

The Minsk FEZ, established in Belarus in 1998, has been quite successful in achieving this goal. As of the beginning of February 2020, it has already united 116 resident enterprises on its territory, 57 of which are foreign-invested. Over its more than 20-year history, the capital's FEZ has attracted investments in excess of two billion dollars, including from investors from more than 20 countries. Occupying an area of about three thousand hectares, it now includes 23 sites in Minsk and the capital region, including such cities as Molodechno, Zhodino, Fanipol, Borisov, where machine-building and metalworking, chemical and petrochemical, timber and construction industries successfully operate. A kind of business card of FEZ "Minsk" are such well-known not only in Belarus, but also abroad manufacturers as: "Stadler-Minsk" - electric trains and trams; "Alutech" group of companies - components for security rollers, gate systems; "Adani" - X-ray equipment; "BELJI" - passenger cars and low-tonnage vehicles; "S.N.E. Europe Industries Bisov" - bimetallic band and end saws.

The fact that this industrial centre on the business map of Belarus continues to develop very actively is evidenced by the facts. Suffice it to say that in 2019, the administration of FEZ Minsk registered another 17 new resident companies. One of them in December 2019 became JSC Belagromash, which intends to create the production of specialised steel railway containers on the territory of Molodechno Metalware Plant, whose innovative properties will increase the speed of loading and unloading of goods due to the fact that the new containers can be lifted from one type of transport to another - from a

²²¹ Law of the Republic of Belarus On Free Economic Zones [Electronic resource]. - 1998. - URL: <http://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=H19800213>

railway platform to a motor vehicle platform and vice versa. This project is also attracted by the fact that "the main customer of the containers is a foreign company, so the new production will be maximally export-oriented. At least 130 jobs will be created"²²² .

On the eve of 2020, BelMetr Limited Liability Company became a resident of the FEZ. Its plans include the implementation of an investment project in Zhodzina for the production of vandal-proof water consumption meters with improved characteristics. These include: anti-magnetic protection; anti-fraud device against external impact on the cover; high sensitivity of the meter; elimination of misting of the upper part of the case. And let "production at the initial stage will be carried out on rented premises, in the future it is planned to build a new production building"²²³ .

The ranks of FEZ Minsk residents began to swell quite intensively in 2020. In mid-January, the company Techno-Express, one of the leading Belarusian manufacturers of passenger car life support systems, was registered here. The company plans to implement an investment project in the FEZ to produce electrical equipment for passenger cars of locomotive traction. In particular, it concerns the production of air-conditioning converters - "devices designed to power asynchronous motors of air-conditioning installation on railway passenger cars as part of electrical equipment and life support complexes"²²⁴ . This project has both import-substituting and export-oriented potential, as the main consumer of the above products will be not only the Belarusian railway, but also interested companies in neighbouring countries.

A week later, the FEZ welcomed its second resident in 2020 - BEL-DOZER LLC. It plans to build a plant in Fanipol to produce a wide range of specialised machinery for earthmoving, construction and transport works. It intends to "produce loaders-excavators - multifunctional machines for construction and repair works, as well as graders - productive special equipment, which is actively used in the construction and maintenance of

²²² Production of freight containers will be established in Molodechno [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/proizvodstvo-gruzovyh-kontejnerov-naladjat-v-molodechno-372673-2019/>

²²³ Investment project for the production of water meters will be realised in Zhodino [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/economics/view/investitsionnyj-proekt-po-proizvodstvu-schetchnikov-vody-budet-realizovan-v-zhodino-374581-2019/>

²²⁴ The first resident in 2020 is registered in FEZ "Minsk" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/pervyj-v-2020-godu-rezident-zaregistirovan-v-sez-minsk-376013-2020/>

motorways and aerodromes. <...> The volume of investments in the project implementation will amount to more than 1 million euros"²²⁵.

Another new resident of FEZ Minsk - Emfil Oil LLC, registered here at the beginning of February 2020, will be located in Fanipol. A distinctive feature of its investment project will be a pronounced export-orientation of products. The fact is that "the enterprise plans to establish production of dedusting, as well as chemically active filter elements for air purification, on the basis of which the production of innovative high-tech equipment will be organised"²²⁶, the design, development and manufacture of which will be carried out exclusively under the order.

Finally, a very recent example. In May, the FEZ "Minsk" registered its seventh resident in 2020 - LLC "Zaslavskie paints", which intends to organise the production of special paint and varnish materials for road markings in Zhodzina. "The cost of the investment project is estimated at \$10 million"²²⁷. As we can see, with the arrival of 2020 in FEZ "Minsk" does not reduce growth rates, contributing to the socio-economic development not only of the capital region, but also of the country as a whole.

The Brest Free Economic Zone was the first to be established in the Republic of Belarus. It took place in 1996. Today it is a multi-profile economic territory, where production, technological and logistic activities can be developed. Moreover, part of it is adjacent to the road and railway checkpoints across the state border and can be used as a logistics component. Since the FEZ was established, the total volume of investments here has exceeded one and a half billion dollars. These investments are certainly giving their return. For three quarters of 2019, residents of FEZ "Brest" have almost doubled their contributions to the budget - from 20.9 million Belarusian rubles in 2018 to 41 million now. Today, there are already 73 enterprises from 20 countries operating on its territory. It is noteworthy that in 2018 they "exported goods worth \$700 million, the geography of exports includes 70 countries of the world"²²⁸. A year later - at the beginning of 2020 - "FEZ economic entities

²²⁵ A new resident of FEZ "Minsk" will build a plant for the production of special equipment in Fanipol [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/novyj-rezident-sez-minsk-postroit-v-fanipole-zavod-po-proizvodstvu-spetstehniki-376899-2020/>

²²⁶ A new resident of FEZ "Minsk" will produce non-standard equipment for air purification [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyj-rezident-sez-minsk-budet-vypuskat-nestandardnoe-oborudovanie-dlja-ochistki-vozduha-378734-2020>

²²⁷ The plant for the production of paint and varnish materials will be built on the territory of FEZ "Minsk" in Zhodino [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/zavod-po-proizvodstvu-lakokrasochnyh-materialov-postrojat-na-territorii-sez-minsk-v-zhodino-390518-2020>

²²⁸ Residents of FEZ "Brest" doubled the deductions to the budget [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/rezidenty-sez-brest-vdvoe-uvlechili-otchislenija-v-bjudzhet-367876-2019/3>

exported goods worth \$718 million, and the export geography includes 75 countries of the world"²²⁹ .

Germany is the leader among foreign countries in terms of investment in FEZs. German investors account for one third of the total amount of foreign investments made here. And enterprises with German capital show high economic efficiency. Among them are Santa Bremore, Discom, and Salamander Window and Door Systems, whose products are well known both in Belarus and abroad. In particular, in April 2019, Discom opened a new production facility for paint and varnish materials in the FEZ, with about two million euros invested in its construction. This company is part of the German concern DAW SE, founded in Germany back in 1895. "Today, Discom employs more than 250 specialists. The opening of the new plant has created about 20 additional jobs for the residents of Brest"²³⁰ .

Italian entrepreneurs are very active in the FEZ "Brest", who "have already invested 3 million euros in new projects and created 150 jobs. In 2018, a new production facility of the Italian-Belarusian company Frieza Industri was opened at the Airport site. Here they manufacture energy-saving devices for refrigeration equipment"²³¹ and show one of the highest export growth rates among FEZ enterprises. It should be reminded that back in 2010 the Ministry of Economic Development of Italy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus and Brest Regional Executive Committee signed a declaration on the creation of an Italian industrial district on the territory of the FEZ, the territory of which is 26 hectares. A year later, a Memorandum of Understanding on the development of this industrial district was adopted in Trieste, which provided for the creation of the most favourable conditions for attracting Italian investors and envisaged "the development of the Italian industrial zone in Brest as a transport and logistics centre providing transshipment and transit of goods between the European Union, the Customs Union and, in the future, China"²³² . So, the prospects for Italian business in FEZ "Brest" are simply huge.

Polish businessmen also show great interest in the FEZ. Today, 11 companies with Polish capital, including Stomil Sanok BR, operate here. Investors from this European country "rank third after Germany and Russia. In

²²⁹ History [Electronic resource]. -2020. - URL: <https://fezbrest.com/history>

²³⁰ Opening of new production "Discom" [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://fezbrest.com/otkryitie-novogo-proizvodstva-%C2%ABdiskom%C2%BB>

²³¹ Discussion of the Belarusian-Italian business forum continued in Brest [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://fezbrest.com/obsuzhdenie-voprosov-belorussko-italyanskogo-biznes-foruma-prodolzhilos-v-breste>

²³² Zaleskii, B. International relations and media. View from Belarus / B. Zalesky. - Palmarium Academic Publishing, 2014. - C. 147.

the total volume, the share of Polish investments is 17 per cent"²³³ . In particular, the English Windows Ltd with Polish investment was registered here in March 2019. "It is planned to create at least 20 jobs at the new enterprise"²³⁴ . It is quite possible that in 2020 the co-operation agreement signed in April 2017 between the administration of FEZ "Brest" and the Lower Silesia Economic Development Agency will be further developed in the form of concrete projects.

Israeli entrepreneurs are also interested in co-operation with FEZ "Brest", as they have a good example to follow: the current resident of the free economic zone is "a company with Israeli capital Fa-UN, which has established in the FEZ the production of feed additives for agricultural production"²³⁵ . In September 2019, the experience of FEZ "Brest" was thoroughly studied by a delegation from the Israeli city of Ashdod, whose port is the largest in Israel, as 60% of all cargo imported to this Middle Eastern country passes through it, including from the FEZ resident - the company "Santa Bremore". It should be assumed that the dialogue that has begun between the parties on establishing cooperation ties between the enterprises of Brest and Ashdod will develop in the near future.

Swiss entrepreneurs have their own interest in the FEZ. They are attracted, first of all, by the favourable location of Brest airport, which makes it possible to use it for flights of private aviation. And further it can be a question of locating here "production facilities of enterprises with Swiss capital related to mechanical engineering and food production"²³⁶ .

In 2019, the export volume of resident enterprises of the **free economic zone Grodnoinvest** approached one billion dollars, having increased by almost 10 per cent compared to 2018. This allowed to increase the share of the free economic zone in the total export of industrial goods of Grodno region to 42 per cent. In general, the trade turnover of FEZ residents exceeded one and a half billion dollars with a surplus of more than 380 million dollars. Two main vectors can be identified in the geography of these exports: post-Soviet - Russia, Ukraine; European - Poland, Lithuania, Romania, Latvia. At the same

²³³ Strengthening partnerships [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://fezbrest.com/2-ukreplyaya-partnerskie-svyazi>

²³⁴ A new resident of FEZ "Brest" is registered [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://fezbrest.com/zaregistirovan-novyij-rezident-sez-%C2%ABrest%C2%BB>

²³⁵ The administration of FEZ "Brest" held a meeting with a delegation from Israel [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://fezbrest.com/v-administraczii-sez-%C2%ABrest%C2%BB-proshla-vstrecha-s-delegaczij-iz-izrailya>

²³⁶ In the administration of FEZ "Brest" discussed the proposals of the Swiss business community [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://fezbrest.com/v-administraczii-sez-%C2%ABrest%C2%BB-obsudili-predlozheniya-delovyix-krugov-shvejczarii>

time, the basis of supplies outside Belarus "was formed by companies from the sectors of woodworking and furniture production (30% of total exports), food production (27%), machine building and metalworking"²³⁷. In the same row should be noted the enterprises of chemical and textile industries, as well as manufacturers of vehicles and equipment, rubber and plastic products. The FEZ sees prospects for development in attracting new residents who could contribute to further increase of exports of goods and services.

It should be reminded that the FEZ Grodnoinvest, established in 2002, now comprises 12 territories not only in Grodno, but also in such cities of Grodno Region as Mosty, Novahrudak, Slonim, Shchuchyn, Smorgon, and Svisloch. As of mid-January 2020, 75 companies with capital from 41 countries were operating in the FEZ. In 2019, four companies from Belarus, Austria and Poland, engaged in woodworking and non-metallic mineral products production, became residents of the FEZ, where potential investors are offered land plots and production areas with engineering and transport infrastructure, tax, customs and other preferences, allowing to significantly reduce project costs and increase the competitiveness of products, with a total volume of declared investments of more than \$190 million, including in fixed capital - four companies from Belarus, Austria and Poland. They intend to build highly efficient plants in Grodno and Svisloch, creating more than 560 new jobs. At the same time, "most of the output will be supplied to the countries of the European Union"²³⁸.

In this context, the year 2020 has also started very productively for the FEZ. In particular, in February, the company EUECOPAK was registered as a resident here. The company intends to invest more than one million dollars in the creation of production facilities to produce disposable paper packaging and tableware. This topic is certainly very relevant for Belarus, where legislative measures are now being taken to stimulate the transition of enterprises to the use of environmentally friendly packaging, including that made of paper. The new FEZ resident intends to produce paper kraft bags with and without handle, carton packaging of the Lunchbox type, paper cocktail tubes and cups for cold and hot drinks. It is expected that these products "will be sold mainly on foreign markets. The share of export supplies will exceed 85%. The main markets will

²³⁷ Exports of FEZ residents "Grodnoinvest" in 2019 approached \$1 billion [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-rezidentov-sez-grodnoinvest-v-2019-godu-priblizitsja-k-1mlrd-379958-2020>

²³⁸ 4 companies with investment projects for \$190 million became residents of FEZ "Grodnoinvest" in 2019 [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/rezidentami-sez-grodnoinvest-v-2019-godu-stali-4-kompanii-s-investproektami-na-190-mln-375887-2020/>

be the countries of the European Union"²³⁹. In addition, 25 new jobs will be created here.

In the same February 2020, the company ZOV-MARKET became a resident of the FEZ, which will create a modern enterprise for the production of dry trimmed boards, timber and furniture blanks on the basis of an unfinished construction site in Hrodna. It is characteristic that "70% of production will be exported to the countries of the European Union"²⁴⁰. One of the new FEZ residents in the near future may become Berango logistics company from France, which is interested in the implementation of the investment project "on the creation of a multimodal logistics terminal for processing and cleaning of containers and tanks"²⁴¹. Negotiations on this particular issue took place with the FEZ administration in Hrodna in February 2020.

The existing FEZ residents are also actively expanding the production of export-oriented products. Thus, in February 2020, LLC "Terrazit Plus" demonstrated a new innovative control handle VPC ALPHA Grip of Constellation series within the innovative project Virpil Controls on creation of devices for virtual control of aeroplanes, helicopters, prototypes of spaceships. What is important in this regard is that this "product is in demand in the Western European market, almost all production is for export"²⁴², and the project involves pilots, designers, constructors and software developers.

In 2019, Belabedding IOOO, which has been a resident of the FEZ since 2006, started producing new products - continental beds of the Boxspringbett type. And now "more than 80% of the company's products are exported to the countries of Western Europe"²⁴³. It should be assumed that the measures taken in the FEZ will bring even more significant results in terms of increasing

²³⁹ Production of paper packaging will be created by a new resident of FEZ "Grodnoinvest". [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/proizvodstvo-bumazhnoj-upakovki-sozdast-novyy-rezident-sez-grodnoinvest-379035-2020/>

²⁴⁰ ZOV-MARKET" LLC is registered as a resident of FEZ "Grodnoinvest". [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://grodnoinvest.by/press-center/ooo-zov-market-zaregistrovano-v-kachestve-rezidenta-sez-grodnoinvest/>

²⁴¹ The company from France considers the possibility of creating a terminal in FEZ "Grodnoinvest" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/kompanija-iz-frantsii-rassmatrivaet-vozmozhnost-sozdaniya-terminala-v-sez-grodnoinvest-379266-2020/>

²⁴² Resident of FEZ "Grodnoinvest" LLC "Terrazit Plus" presented new innovative products [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://grodnoinvest.by/press-center/rezident-sez-grodnoinvest-ooo-terrazit-plyus-predstavil-novuyu-innovacionnyuyu-produkciyu/>

²⁴³ The resident of FEZ "Grodnoinvest" IOOO "Belabedding" launched the production of new products [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://grodnoinvest.by/press-center/rezident-sez-grodnoinvest-iooo-belabedding-zapustila-vypusk-novoj-produkcii/>

exports of products of residents of the free economic zone Hrodnainvest in 2020.

In June 2019, a **special economic zone** (SEZ) regime came into effect in the Republic of Belarus for the **Bremino-Orsha** multimodal logistics complex located in the village of Bolbasovo, Orsha District, Vitebsk Region. This means that Belarus has the second economic complex operating in such a mode. The first in this list of SEZs was the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park "Great Stone" back in 2015. It should be noted that the Customs Code of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) strictly limits the possibility of creating such territorial formations in the member states of the integration association. In particular, only "three such zones can be created in Russia, two in Belarus, one each in Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan"²⁴⁴. It should be reminded that the term "special economic zone" is usually used to designate a territory that has "a special legal status in relation to the rest of the country and favourable economic conditions for entrepreneurs"²⁴⁵. SEZs are created to attract foreign direct investment, create new jobs for highly qualified personnel, develop the export base, minimise costs due to the absence of export and import duties, bring production closer to the consumer, use cheaper labour, and develop territories.

The Bremino-Orsha SEZ intends to attract investors with a number of incentives and tax advantages. In particular, zero rates of taxes on profit (for 9 years), on real estate (for 20 years), on dividends (until 1 January 2033), as well as zero rates of offshore duty, export value added tax (VAT) when exporting manufactured goods outside the EAEU, VAT on the sale, rental or leasing of real estate by residents (until 1 January 2033), finally, a special legal regime for 50 years to engage in industrial processing, wholesale trade, e-commerce, logistics and warehousing services, postal services, information and administrative services, research and development. For this purpose, two sectors - industrial and logistics - are being created in the SEZ. The first of them will house the production of household appliances and electronics, pharmaceutical products and preparations, food products - coffee, tea, rice, as well as auto parts, perfumes and cosmetics, household chemicals, jewellery. There will also be shops of finished products, showrooms, warehouses, a business centre and a car park.

²⁴⁴ Special economic zone "Bremino-Orsha" started operating in Bolbasovo [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://news.21.by/other-news/2019/06/27/1827049.html>

²⁴⁵ Special economic zone (SEZ) [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: https://www.audit-it.ru/terms/taxation/osobaya_ekonomicheskaya_zona.html

As for the logistics sector, it "will include road, railway and air terminals. Within the territory of the special economic zone there will be a departmental customs clearance point operating round the clock, phytosanitary and veterinary services, a bank branch, an insurance agent and a customs brokers' office"²⁴⁶. By December 2023 - the project completion date - the investment in this multimodal industrial-logistics complex will amount to 200 million dollars. In total, 17 thousand square metres of office space, 190 thousand square metres of warehouse space and 280 thousand square metres of production space will be built here. Plus 1.7 thousand parking places for lorries. The railway terminal will handle cargo flows between European and Asian countries, which allow already today to plan that "in 2018-2022 the total transit flow through "Bremino-Orsha" will be 10 million tonnes, reaching full capacity - 12 million tonnes of cargo per year is planned for 2026"²⁴⁷.

It is important to note that the first steps in the implementation of this project have already been made. In February 2019, the first export train with Belarusian goods - more than forty containers - travelled from here to the Chinese city of Nanchang. Its travelling time is ten days. "Carriage by sea would take 40 days. The train will run once a month"²⁴⁸. In the same February 2019, Bremino Group LLC opened the first phase of the Bremino-Orsha complex in Bolbasovo, in the realisation of which about 20 million dollars were invested. A road logistics terminal with a car park for 212 trucks has started operating here, which already ensures the transshipment of almost two million tonnes of cargo per year. Customs, veterinary and phytosanitary control services, which work 24 hours a day without holidays, are located in the administrative building. The established infrastructure already allows for the picking and processing of cargo and the receipt of necessary services to support the logistics process.

And in early December 2019, Bremino Group signed an agreement with Chinese partner Shaanxi Zhongqiao Silk Road Technology Development Co. Ltd an agreement providing for the emergence in the SEZ of the Silk Road International Trade City, which, spread over 62 hectares, will be a large-scale trade and exhibition complex, It is expected that here "will be carried out wholesale and small wholesale trade in consumer goods, delivery of goods and

²⁴⁶ The special economic zone "Bremino-Orsha" started operating in Bolbasovo [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/osobaja-ekonomicheskaja-zona-bremino-orsha-nachala-rabotat-v-bolbasovo-352502-2019/>

²⁴⁷ The second special economic zone with a favourable tax regime has started functioning in Belarus [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: https://interfax.by/news/biznes/novosti_kompaniy/1260614/

²⁴⁸ Zakrzewski, G. "Bremino-Orsha": at the crossroads / G. Zakrzewski // Transport bulletin. - 2019. - 14 February - P. 9.

warehousing, trading operations from electronic platforms, as well as exhibitions of products from various Asian countries"²⁴⁹. The amount of investments in this project, which is being implemented within the framework of the Chinese initiative "Belt and Road", will exceed 128 million Belarusian rubles.

All these examples very eloquently illustrate one simple truth: despite the difficult situation in the global economy due to the coronavirus pandemic, we should never stop looking for new ways of development. Moreover, the contours of tomorrow are already beginning to appear today. The functioning of free and special economic zones, the impact of which on the economic life of the country is becoming more and more noticeable and significant, is one of them in Belarus.

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²⁴⁹ International trade town will appear in the special economic zone "Bremino-Orša" [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/mezhdunarodnyj-torgovyj-gorodok-pojavitsja-v-osoboj-ekonomicheskoy-zone-bremino-orsha-371406-2019/>

Belarus: investment and export locomotives of regional development

The five-year development programme and the target forecast for the next three years, which are currently being developed in the Republic of Belarus, identify free economic zones (FEZs) operating in the country among the most important segments that should receive new impulses for development in the medium term, the number of residents in which exceeded 450 business entities as of the beginning of autumn 2020. The high potential of FEZs is also evidenced by the fact that "today free economic zones account for almost 17% of industrial production, 20% of foreign direct investment and almost 20% of the country's exports"²⁵⁰. And there is every reason to believe that in the current difficult conditions of development of the Belarusian economy it is FEZs that can and should become the main investment locomotive, on the basis of which the innovation, production and export potential of the territories where they are located could be developed. Especially since "our neighbours are forming zones with completely different conditions of preferential treatment and functions"²⁵¹. Today, Belarus should continue to actively develop FEZs not only in terms of improving legislation, land relations and infrastructure development, but also in terms of ways to increase the inflow of investment and improve economic efficiency. Moreover, Belarusian FEZs have already gained some experience in addressing these issues. Suffice it to say that in the first half of 2020 alone, the number of residents in Belarus' free economic zones increased by more than 60 business entities. And in the first quarter of the same year, foreign investors invested in the real sector of the country's economy by almost three billion dollars. "The main investors of Belarusian organisations were business entities from Russia (35.7% of all incoming investments), Cyprus (15%) and Austria (8.4%). Foreign direct investment inflows totalled \$2.1bn, or 75.1% of all foreign investment inflows"²⁵². These facts clearly show that Belarus has many

²⁵⁰ More than 60 residents registered in FEZ of Belarus in the first half of the year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/bolee-60-rezidentov-zaregistrirovano-v-sez-belarusi-v-i-polugodii-405375-2020/>

²⁵¹ FEZs should become the main investment locomotive - Nikitina // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/sez-dolzhen-stat-osnovnym-investitsionnym-lokomotivom-nikitina-405379-2020/>

²⁵² Foreign investors invested \$2.8 billion in the economy of Belarus in the first quarter [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/inostrannye-investory-vlozhi-v-i-kvartale-ekonomiku-belarusi-28-mlrd-390601-2020/>

examples of successful investment solutions that contribute to the socio-economic development of the country as a whole.

In particular, the **FEZ "Minsk"** demonstrated high rates of development in 2020, where at the beginning of September there were 118 resident companies, 69 of which - with foreign investment, and which received more than \$118 million from abroad in the first half of the year. At the same time, "foreign direct investment on a net basis for January-June amounted to almost \$70 million, an increase of 76% compared to the same period last year. The key investors were the Swiss Confederation, the Republic of Cyprus and the People's Republic of China"²⁵³.

This inflow of investments had a very positive impact on the volume of exports of FEZ residents, which for the first half of 2020 came close to 560 million dollars. Its main part was made up of electronic products and components, medical equipment, cable products, metal structures, auto and electric transport, railway and tram cars, parts and equipment for cars, electrical equipment for passenger cars. It should be assumed that the range of export positions of the capital's FEZ will only expand in the near future, as a number of significant investment projects are being implemented here. Among them are production of regulating valves for petrochemical industry, innovative high-tech equipment and air filtration systems, special paint and varnish materials for road markings, electrical equipment for locomotive traction passenger cars, paper packaging, as well as assembly of structures and products made of ferrous and non-ferrous metals. Each of these projects is already opening new jobs in the FEZ. Suffice it to say that in the first six months of 2020, 482 people were employed here.

The facts show that FEZ Minsk did not intend to slow down the pace of development in the second half of 2020. Thus, in October, the 14th resident was registered here in 2020. (There were 17 such residents in the whole 2019!). This is the company "BASISPRO-GRO GROUP", whose intentions include the implementation of the investment project "for the production of aluminium distance frame for translucent enclosures"²⁵⁴, the consumers of which will be not only Belarusian construction companies, but also from neighbouring countries. After all, fences made with the use of aluminium frames are widely

²⁵³ Over \$118 million of investments came to FEZ "Minsk" from abroad in the first half of the year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/svyshe-118-mln-investitsij-postupilo-v-i-polugodii-v-sez-minsk-iz-za-rubezha-406018-2020/>

²⁵⁴ A new resident of FEZ "Minsk" will build a plant for the production of aluminium products [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyj-rezident-sez-minsk-postroit-zavod-po-proizvodstvu-izdelij-iz-aluminija-411877-2020/>

used today in the construction of modern buildings. And in November 2020, the 15th resident of the current year was registered in the FEZ - the company MKtrade, which specialises in the manufacture of galvanised steel products with various types of polymer coatings. Its arrival here is connected with the fact that it plans to open a new production facility for the production of fence and roofing elements for cottage-type buildings, for which "it intends to expand its own capacities and organise a new workshop at the production facilities in Fanipol"²⁵⁵.

The investment project of InKata to create a science and technology park in the capital's FEZ to provide services to technology start-ups is also very promising. For its successful implementation, fast-erecting pneumatic-frame buildings will be constructed near the village Privolny in the Minsk region, which "will house a design office, a research and development (R&D) centre and a prototyping centre. There will be dedicated offices for manufacturing consultants, investors and business mentors"²⁵⁶. This will allow to actualise in FEZ "Minsk" the development of innovative entrepreneurship in such areas of science and technology as nanotechnology, microelectronics, aerospace technologies, power electronics, robotics, in order to help residents of this science and technology park to eventually successfully enter the international market due to additional competitive advantages.

In terms of investment co-operation, the capital's FEZ and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development may turn out to be interesting. In June 2020 it became known about the intention of this international financial institution to allocate a loan of nearly 15 million euros "for the construction of substation "Cherkasy" for power supply of the free economic zone "Minsk"²⁵⁷. It is expected that this loan will be attracted in 2020-2022 for a period of 15 years.

As for **FEZ "Brest"**, it will be 25 years old in 2021. Today it is located on more than ten thousand hectares. Its borders include land plots located not only in Brest and Brest district, but also in such cities as Baranavichy, Pinsk, Kobrin, Gantsevichy. As of mid-February 2020, over 70 residents from two dozen countries were registered here, including 47 with foreign capital, where

²⁵⁵ The new resident of FEZ "Minsk" will produce roofing and facade materials [Electronic resource]. - 20230. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyj-rezident-sez-minsk-budet-proizvodit-krovelnye-i-fasadnye-materialy-415998-2020/>

²⁵⁶ Scientific and technological park to help startups will be built on the territory of FEZ "Minsk". [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/nauchno-tehnologicheskij-park-v-pomosch-startapam-postrojat-na-territorii-sez-minsk-411305-2020/>

²⁵⁷ Belarus wants to attract €14.11 million from the EBRD to build a substation for FEZ "Minsk". [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-hochet-privlech-ot-ebrd-1411-mln-evro-na-stroitelstvo-podstantsii-dlja-sez-minsk-394602-2020/>

more than 21 thousand people are already working. In 2019, the FEZ attracted 107 million dollars of investment, and the exports of its residents to 75 countries reached almost 730 million dollars. These positive trends continued in 2020, during the first quarter of which the FEZ attracted foreign direct investment on a net basis in the amount of almost 50 million dollars, which is four times more than the target. The dynamics of FEZ development today is such that all performance indicators of 2019 in 2020 can be exceeded. The prerequisites for this were serious. Thus, if in 2018 due to the opening of new production facilities of residents in FEZ created 721 jobs, and in 2019 - 890, in 2020 it was planned to open at least one thousand of them. With such development potential, five new residents with Polish and German capital are coming here at once, whose areas of activity are focused on light industry, woodworking, cosmetology, production of metal products, units and assemblies for the automotive industry.

It should be noted that at the end of April 2020, two more land plots with a total area of over a hundred hectares were included in the FEZ "Brest", located in Ivatsevichi and Ivatsevichi district and intended for the implementation of investment projects with the participation of foreign capital. Already in June 2020, a new FEZ resident was registered here - Polipol Mebel Bel LLC, which is a part of Polipol Produktions Verwalfund GmbH, a well-known holding company in the European market, which has been producing upholstered furniture for 30 years. Its ten factories employing more than seven thousand people are located not only in Germany, but also in other European countries. On the industrial site in Ivatsevichy, the new resident plans to build a workshop for the production of upholstered furniture and a number of other related facilities. "The project realisation is designed for six years. During this time the company intends to invest more than 25 million euros in furniture production and create more than 1 thousand jobs. At the same time, 90% of production will be exported"²⁵⁸. An important detail: Polipol Mebel Bel LLC has already become the seventh company in the FEZ with German capital. In general, entrepreneurs from Germany occupy the first place in terms of investments, as their share is more than one third of the total investment portfolio of the FEZ.

Other new residents are also coming here with interesting projects. For example, half a million euros is planned to be invested in the organisation of the production of sawn timber - planks, beams, and various building structures

²⁵⁸ The new resident of FEZ "Brest" intends to invest more than 25 million euros in furniture production [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/novyj-rezident-sez-brest-na-meren-investirovat-v-proizvodstvo-mebeli-bolee-25-mln-evro-394124-2020/>.

- by the company with Belarusian capital Savantdrev LLC, which was registered as a FEZ resident in May 2020. The production site near Krasnogvardeyskaya Street in Brest is supposed to produce fuel pellets or pellets, which are very popular in the European Union countries, from wood waste. That is why "Savantdrev expects to supply up to 85 per cent of its products to the foreign market"²⁵⁹. The full-scale production cycle will start here in 2021. At least 15 jobs will be created at the new enterprise.

In the same May 2020, Lady-Ix LLC was registered in the FEZ, which plans to locate its production facilities on the unused premises of Baranavichy Automated Line Plant. The Belarusian company plans to "invest about 2 million euros in the project for the production of collection clothes. <...> When reaching the design capacity in 2024, the number of employees of the enterprise will reach 260 people"²⁶⁰. In addition, previously registered residents should start their activities in the FEZ. In particular, "BTV-Agro LLC has built the first mushroom cultivation complex for Bonche SOOO, which is engaged in the production of champignons. Jobs will also be created there. The issue of organising the production of car wiring and campers on the FEZ territory is under consideration"²⁶¹.

The Italian industrial district is also expected to contribute to the fulfilment of the FEZ's objectives, and its infrastructure is planned to be completed in the near future. A 5 MW transformer substation and a sewage pumping station have already been built there, in the Airport industrial zone. In addition, a street and road network, water supply and storm water drainage are being laid. In 2021 the facility should be put into operation. Since a significant part of this territory is already provided with the necessary engineering infrastructure, including power, gas and water supply, sewerage and telephony, "it allowed FEZ business entities to locate 10 enterprises here. Two more are under construction"²⁶².

It should be reminded that the idea of creating such a district in the industrial zone "Airport" sounded about ten years ago, when in June 2011 in Trieste a Memorandum of Understanding on the development of an industrial

²⁵⁹ A new resident of FEZ "Brest" will be engaged in woodworking [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyj-rezident-sez-brest-zajmetsja-derevoobrabotkoj-392514-2020/>

²⁶⁰ A new resident of FEZ "Brest" will produce collectible clothes [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/novyj-rezident-sez-brest-budet-vypuskat-kollektsionnuju-odezhdju-392737-2020/>

²⁶¹ The FEZ "Brest" plans to create 1 thousand jobs [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/v-sez-brest-planirujut-sozdat-1-tys-rabochih-mest-380116-2020/>

²⁶² FEZ 'Brest' completes the development of the Italian industrial district [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/sez-brest-zavershaet-obustrojstvo-italijanskogo-promyshlennogo-okruga-418092-2020/>

district in Brest region was adopted, which envisaged "the creation of the most favourable conditions for attracting Italian investors and their implementation of projects in Belarus"²⁶³. Today not only Italians can come to the territory of the district, but also any investor willing to organise and develop his business here, using the advantages of the free economic zone. Therefore, two companies with investments from Germany, as well as companies with Israeli, British, Polish, Russian capital are already working here. "In 2018, a new production facility of the Italian-Belarusian enterprise Frieza Industri for the manufacture of energy-saving elements for commercial refrigeration equipment started operating at the Aeroport site. Today the JV has one of the highest export growth rates among FEZ enterprises"²⁶⁴. All these examples certainly give optimism when assessing the development prospects of FEZ "Brest".

An interesting example of development is also shown by **the FEZ Hrodnoinvest**, whose residents attracted a record amount of foreign direct investment on a net basis - \$59.8 million - out of the total volume of \$157 million of foreign capital received in the first three months of 2020. "The main investor countries were Russia (over \$45 million), Austria (\$39 million), and the Netherlands (\$34 million). Investments came from 15 countries, including UAE, Germany, USA, UK"²⁶⁵. In total, over the 18 years of its existence, the FEZ Grodnoinvest has attracted more than \$900 million of foreign investments from 40 countries, including Japan, Cyprus, Turkey, Canada, and Poland.

The growing investment attractiveness of this production site, of course, could not have come from nothing. It is largely due to the attention of the FEZ administration to the development of the free economic zone infrastructure. The following statistics is quite eloquent: since 2015, about nine million Belarusian rubles have been invested in their infrastructure from the FEZ Development Fund to increase the investment attractiveness of industrial sites in Grodno and Grodno district, Lida and Smorgoni. For example, a transformer substation was built at the FEZ site near Grodno in the "Novaya Gozha" neighbourhood, which provided electricity for the residents' new production facilities and created the necessary reserve for potential investors. In Lida, at

²⁶³ Zalessky, B. Belarus - Europe: Partnership Potential. Multi-vector policy in the context of global challenges / B. Zalessky. - LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2016. - C. 43.

²⁶⁴ FEZ "Brest" completes this year the creation of infrastructure in the Italian industrial district [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/regions/view/sez-brest-zavershaet-v-etom-godu-sozdanie-infrastruktury-v-italijanskom-promyshlennom-okruge-380751-2020/>

²⁶⁵ Residents of FEZ "Grodnoinvest" attracted a record volume of FDI on a net basis in the first quarter [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/rezidenty-sez-grodnoinvest-v-i-kvartale-privlekli-rekordnyj-objem-pii-na-chistoj-osnove-389251-2020/>

the industrial site in the Severny district, water supply, sewerage, communication and power supply networks were laid.

In 2019, Smorgon, at the expense of the same FEZ Development Fund, started a large-scale project to reconstruct Industrial Avenue, which connects the city with the industrial site of the FEZ, where the production facilities of such residents as Kronospan Group, Smorgon Aggregate Plant, Europlastic Invest, and Shinaka Mebel Bel are located. The project should result in a four-lane motorway with stop pavilions and small architectural forms, outdoor lighting, electricity and water supply, rainwater drainage and outdoor communication systems. All this is being done with a single purpose: "The new infrastructure will make the site more attractive for potential investors and participants of the Furniture Cluster in the FEZ "Grodnoinvest""²⁶⁶

Here it should be explained that today "an effective furniture cluster has been formed in Grodno region, which includes more than 20 enterprises producing packaging wood products, wood panels, furniture and much more"²⁶⁷. It should be noted that wood processing accounts for about half of all investments in FEZ. Therefore, one should not be surprised by the fact that in 2019 residents of FEZ Grodnoinvest attracted \$436 million of investments, which was a fourth of the figure for all FEZs in Belarus. And as a result, this one of the youngest Belarusian FEZs became the leader in terms of attracted investments from foreign investors.

In November 2020, 75 companies with capital from 40 countries were already operating here. At the same time, a number of new FEZ residents appeared in 2020. Among them are the Irish company Skywatt with a project to build a photovoltaic power plant, the Belarusian company ZOV-MARKET with a project to create wood processing production, the Belarusian-Russian company EUEcoPak with an actual project to create paper packaging production. Another company, IBA Investment, is implementing a project as a resident of the special tourist and recreational park Avgustovsky Kanal"²⁶⁸. Especially interesting in this series is the project of the Irish investor "Skywatt", the volume of investments in which exceeds five million euros, to create a network of photovoltaic stations to provide FEZ residents with green

²⁶⁶ FEZ Grodnoinvest has invested about Br9 million in infrastructure development over five years [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/sez-grodnoinvest-za-pjat-let-investirovala-v-razvitie-infrastruktury-okolo-br9-mln-387801-2020/>

²⁶⁷ FEZ "Grodnoinvest" residents attracted \$436 million of investments in 2019 [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/rezidenty-sez-grodnoinvest-v-2019-godu-privlekli-436-mln-investitsij-385388-2020/>

²⁶⁸ Since the beginning of the year the residents of the SMEZ "Grodnoinvest" have paid more than Br157 million of taxes [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/s-nachala-goda-rezidenty-sez-grodnoinvest-uplatili-bolee-br157-mln-nalogov-415012-2020/>

energy. Its implementation will allow, among other things, "to establish co-operative relations with international concerns with requirements for the use of energy from renewable sources"²⁶⁹ .

In mid-December 2020, the foundation stone was laid by HSBelakon LLC, a subsidiary of the Austrian HS Timber Group, which is one of the leading woodworking companies in Europe, at the construction site of a modern woodworking enterprise in Svisloch district in plot No. 12 of FEZ Grodnoinvest. The construction is planned to be completed in 2022. "The investment amount will be about \$84 million. Here they plan to process up to 500 thousand cubic metres of softwood per year. The main focus will be on zero-waste production and creation of pellets"²⁷⁰ . In addition to all this, it will provide jobs for about 230 people, which is important for such a district as Svisloch.

The emergence of new residents in the FEZ Grodnoinvest is largely dictated by the obvious advantages of this Belarusian region, among which stands out "the availability of both wide and narrow railway tracks. This allows logistics companies to deliver goods from Asia to Europe and back quickly and efficiently"²⁷¹ . That is why in the summer of 2020 the FEZ administration offered potential investors to participate in the creation of a multimodal logistics centre on the Belarusian-Polish border, where ten pairs of trains per day could be processed. We are talking about the implementation of infrastructure subprojects here - the construction of a motorway, access and exhibition railway tracks, and engineering networks. Let's hope that this proposal will resonate with interested business people. Especially since "since 2018, five companies with investments from Belarus, the Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates, and China have become residents of FEZ Hrodnainvest in the logistics sector"²⁷² .

And in 2020, their active investment policy continued to be a characteristic feature of FEZ residents' activity. Over the first 10 months of this year, they invested almost a hundred and fifty million Belarusian rubles in

²⁶⁹ FEZ resident Grodnoinvest will create a network of photovoltaic power plants [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/rezident-sez-grodnoinvest-sozdast-set-fotoelektricheskikh-stantsij-410108-2020/>

²⁷⁰ Austrian investor will build a woodworking enterprise in Svisloch district [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/avstrijskij-investor-postroit-derevoobrabatyvajushee-predpriyatie-v-svislochskom-rajone-420771-2020/>

²⁷¹ Investor from Germany considers the possibility of building a container terminal near Hrodna [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/investor-iz-germanii-rassmatrivaet-vozmozhnost-stroitelstva-pod-grodno-kontejnernogo-terminala-417507-2020/>

²⁷² Investors are offered the project of multimodal logistics centre on the Belarusian-Polish border [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/investoram-predlagajut-proekt-multimodalnogo-tsentra-logistiki-na-belorussko-polskoj-granitse-396558-2020/>

fixed assets, of which the majority - over 60 per cent - was spent on the purchase of technological machinery and equipment. This trend is especially visible at the enterprises located at the industrial sites of the FEZ in Smorgon district, where more than 90 million Belarusian rubles were invested and where such companies with foreign capital as Kronospan, Szynaka, Sodrugestvo are successfully operating. Recall that the industrial zone FEZ Grodnoinvest in Smarhon district was created in 2015. Now it consists of three sectors. "In just a few years, eight new residents with investments from the Netherlands, Poland, Turkey and Cyprus have appeared here. <...> FEZ residents have invested \$425 million in the creation of joint productions"²⁷³. As a result, FEZ residents today form more than 90 per cent of Smarhon district industry, employing more than two thousand people, and the export volume is approaching \$500 million. As for FEZ residents in Grodno and Grodno district, they invested 30 million Belarusian rubles in fixed capital from January to November 2020. At the same time, "the companies "Bigan", "ZOV", "Makey", "Gronitex", "Belagrofert" are actively modernising and expanding their production facilities"²⁷⁴.

The active investment policy of the residents of FEZ Grodnoinvest allows them to successfully solve the issues of exporting their products. In the first 10 months of 2020, they delivered almost 778 million dollars to 55 countries. At the same time, exports to the USA alone grew threefold. In addition, "supplies of FEZ residents' products to Canada (4.7 times), the Netherlands (2.4 times), the United Arab Emirates (2.3 times), Estonia (1.9 times), Turkey (1.5 times), as well as Switzerland and Afghanistan"²⁷⁵. But the main export destinations remain Russia, Poland and Ukraine. Two thirds of all supplies to other countries from FEZs are food and agricultural products, furniture and wood products.

All these facts once again confirm the idea that it is free economic zones in the Republic of Belarus that are becoming the instrument of economic development, the potential of which is only beginning to be truly realised and can bring even more significant results for the benefit of the whole country.

²⁷³ In Smargon the reconstruction of the main part of Industrial Avenue was completed [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/v-smorgoni-zavershili-rekonstruktsiju-osnovnoj-chasti-industrialnogo-prospekta-405149-2020/>

²⁷⁴ Residents of FEZ "Grodnoinvest" invested Br144 million in fixed assets [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/rezidenty-sez-grodnoinvest-vlozhili-br144-mln-investitsij-v-osnovnoj-kapital-417225-2020/>

²⁷⁵ Exports of FEZ "Grodnoinvest" residents to the USA tripled in January-September [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/eksport-rezidentov-sez-grodnoinvest-v-ssha-za-janvar-sentjabr-vozros-v-tri-raza-416050-2020/>

Belarus: projects of the future are being laid today

The Programme of Activities of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for the period until 2025 sets a goal to reach the level of innovative development of the leading countries in the Eastern Europe region in five years. For this purpose, it is planned to create new points of growth of the Belarusian economy, including through the implementation of complex "projects of the future" - "new innovative projects in the following areas: electric industry, electric transport, bioindustry, pharmaceuticals, robotics, instrumentation, composite materials production"²⁷⁶, as well as the development of a line of prototypes of equipment fundamentally new for Belarus and the organisation of serial production on their basis.

It should be noted that the solution to this problem should and will be based on certain experience of previous years. Moreover, there is a lot to draw from. Suffice it to say that over the last five years Belarus has increased the production of innovative products by one and a half times - almost to seven and a half billion dollars. At the same time, "the share of exports of knowledge-intensive and high-tech products increased from 30% in 2015 to 38% in 2020, the share of innovation-active organisations - from 19.6% to 26%"²⁷⁷. In addition, the country has already created a network of 17 technoparks, which cover all Belarusian regions and become centres of attraction for innovative production and development.

Today, great hopes in this regard are placed on the residents of the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park Velikiy Kamen, where 68 companies from 14 countries were registered at the end of 2020. An important detail: 12 residents already belong to the sphere of science, innovations, new, absolutely unique developments. One of such business entities is the innovative Chinese-Belarusian enterprise "Aviation Technologies and Complexes", whose products were presented in Veliky Kamen in December 2020 - unmanned aerial vehicles of multi-rotor and aeroplane types, as well as multi-purpose unmanned aerial complexes of hybrid type. It is no secret that the demand for such equipment in the world is very high now. That is why the manufacturing company has already reached an agreement with the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry "to facilitate active promotion of Belarusian remote

²⁷⁶ Programme of Activities of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for the period up to 2025. - Minsk, 2020. - C. 25.

²⁷⁷ Belarus has increased the production of innovative products by 1.5 times in five years [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-za-pjat-let-uvelichila-proizvodstvo-innovatsionnoj-produktsii-v-15-raza-415135-2020/>

control equipment and technologies in foreign markets"²⁷⁸. We can be sure that such innovative products will have no delays in sales in the near and far abroad. Another promising resident appeared here in December 2020 - the company Solidpipe System, which will implement a project in the field of new materials related to the production and application of innovative protective coating on components for equipment used in the mining industry. The fact is that "this technology is unique for Belarus and the countries of the Eurasian region. The start of production is scheduled for 2021"²⁷⁹.

The Sino-Belarusian centre for cooperation in the field of scientific and technological achievements, which was opened here in December 2020, is intended to promote the development of innovative production in the Great Stone industrial park. The centre will house research laboratories, startup incubation and acceleration zones, a testing and small-scale production centre, and a hall for the demonstration of scientific and technological achievements. It is noteworthy that "among those who will work in the opened centre is the China-Belarus Innovation Centre for Industrial Technologies, which was created by the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and the Academy of Sciences of Guangdong Province (PRC). In the first quarter of 2021, the Spark programme will be launched here, which will help develop research projects of the two countries"²⁸⁰. In addition, in December 2020, the construction of an international exhibition centre began here, which "will become one of the important links in the business infrastructure of the industrial park, along with a trade and logistics park, commercial and trade and exhibition centres"²⁸¹.

In general, in 2021, Veliky Kamen's priorities include support for the implementation of residents' investment projects, as well as the development of a high-quality development programme for the industrial park and a feasibility study for the facilities of its second phase, which envisages "further expansion of production sectors to attract investment, and active promotion of the creation of a platform for regional research and development

²⁷⁸ The company "Aviation Technologies and Complexes" was presented in "Velikiy Kamen" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/v-velikom-kamne-prezentovali-kompaniju-aviatsionnye-tehnologii-i-kompleksy-421952-2020/>

²⁷⁹ The resident of "Great Stone" realises a project in the sphere of new materials [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/rezident-velikogo-kamnja-realizuet-proekt-v-sfere-novykh-materialov-420268-2020/>

²⁸⁰ The Chinese-Belarusian centre of cooperation in the field of scientific and technical achievements is opened in "Great Stone" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/kitajsko-belorusskij-tsentr-sotrudnichestva-v-oblasti-nauchno-tehnicheskikh-dostizhenij-otkryt-v-421475-2020/>

²⁸¹ Construction of the international exhibition centre started in "Velikiy Kamen" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/stroitelstvo-mezhdunarodnogo-vystavochnogo-tsentra-nachalos-v-velikom-kamne-421518-2020/>

cooperation"²⁸². More specifically, during the implementation of the second stage of Velikiy Kamen development and the development of the territory with an area of nearly one thousand hectares, "it is planned to create a smart city - environmentally friendly, with non-standard solutions, introduction of advanced innovations in the field of telecommunications, information, mobile, drone technologies, artificial intelligence, quantum computing"²⁸³. All these facts testify to the fact that the plans related to the Great Stone Industrial Park as an innovative "project of the future" are quite realistic, concrete and feasible, which is especially important in the current difficult conditions for the development of the Belarusian economy.

Strong regions, which are understood as "comfortable and safe living and working conditions, high-quality and affordable social infrastructure, high mobility, investment in new industries and productive employment", are also named among the main priorities of the programme of socio-economic development of the Republic of Belarus until 2025²⁸⁴. At the same time, the regional development strategy implies the implementation of investment projects in lagging regions - on the use of local resources and the creation of new industries, and in territories with preferential treatment - on the creation of high-tech export-oriented industries. It is clear that the more efficient the workplaces in the regions, the higher the productivity there, the more attractive life outside the capital will become. In this regard, "the first task is to create conditions for the emergence in the regions of enterprises with highly productive jobs, with a certain level of wages"²⁸⁵. The Belarusian free economic zones (FEZs), which "are becoming an instrument of economic development, whose potential is just beginning to be truly realised and which can bring even more significant results for the benefit of the whole country"²⁸⁶. This is evidenced by concrete facts.

Suffice it to say that as of 1 January 2021, 440 business entities were registered as residents in the FEZ. And now projects involving investments

²⁸² Yan, G. Will Chinese business continue to invest in Belarus / G. Yan // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/interview/view/prodolzhit-li-kitajskij-biznes-investirovat-v-belarus-jan-gan-onovyh-tsentrah-pritjazhenija-7602/>

²⁸³ Declared investments of the residents of "Great Stone" are estimated at more than \$1.2 billion [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/zajavlennye-investitsii-rezidentov-velikogo-kamnja-otsenivajutsja-v-bolee-chem-12-mlrd-421491-2020/>

²⁸⁴ Main provisions of the draft programme of socio-economic development of the Republic of Belarus for 2021-2025 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.sb.by/articles/osnovnye-polozheniya-proekta-programmy-sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo-razvitiya-respubliki-belarus-na-202.html>

²⁸⁵ GDP growth and development of regions - Minister of Economy on the plans for the five-year period [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/rost-vvp-i-razvitie-regionov-ministr-ekonomiki-o-planah-na-pjatiletku-428671-2021/>

²⁸⁶ Zaleskii, B. With a focus on co-operation. Chronicle of international co-operation in the post-Soviet space / B. Zaleskii. - Palmarium Academic Publishing, 2020. - C. 104.

from more than 30 countries totalling about seven billion dollars are being implemented there. Only in 2020, 43 new residents were attracted to the FEZ of Belarus, of which about half - with foreign capital, with a total volume of declared investments of about two hundred million dollars. Yes, and by other indicators, the dynamics of these territorial complexes can't help but please. "Compared to 2019, an increase in foreign direct investment on a net basis by 1.5 times (up to \$307 million), industrial output and sales revenue by 10% <...>, exports of goods by 2.2% (up to \$5.9 billion) has been achieved. Depending on FEZ residents formed up to 85 per cent of investments, up to half of goods exports and one third of regional industrial production volumes"²⁸⁷.

Thus, only in FEZ "Gomel-Raton", where at the beginning of 2021, 70 business entities were operating as residents, including 32 companies with foreign capital from 16 countries, almost 110 million dollars of foreign direct investment was attracted for the implementation of investment projects in 2020, which was almost half of the total investment in the region. And it gave a corresponding result. FEZ residents sold most of their products outside Belarus. The volume of these supplies exceeded one billion dollars. In total, the goods were supplied to the markets of 63 countries. "The largest share in exports is occupied by Russia (48.1%), Ukraine (18.6%), Poland (7.8%), China (6.1%), Lithuania (6.6%) <...>. Foreign trade turnover of goods in 2020 totalled \$1.7 billion"²⁸⁸ with a surplus of over \$600 million. At the same time, more than 700 new jobs were opened in the FEZ in 2020, and the total number of people employed here today is almost thirty thousand.

The residents of the FEZ Grodnoinvest, which currently account for about 40 per cent of Grodno Region's total exports, also achieved a positive foreign trade balance of \$438 million in 2020. This is due to the supply of wood and paper products, furniture, food products, as well as machinery and equipment, computing, electronic and optical equipment, electrical equipment, vehicles, finished metal and textile products, chemical products and fertilisers. In total, in 2020, the products of FEZ residents were exported to 65 countries. Even to such rather exotic ones as Zimbabwe, Peru, Somalia. But the main markets remained Russia, Poland and Ukraine. Nevertheless, "in 2020, supplies of Belarusian products to the United States of America (337% growth

²⁸⁷ Residents of free economic zones in 2020 formed almost 5% of GDP of Belarus [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/rezidenty-svobodnyh-ekonomicheskikh-zon-v-2020-godu-sformirovali-pochti-5-vvp-belarusi-428975-2021>

²⁸⁸ FEZ "Gomel-Raton" residents increased the volume of production by 13.1% in 2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/rezidenty-sez-gomel-raton-uvlechili-objem-proizvodstva-produktsii-na-131-v-2020-godu-429328-2021/>

rate), the United Arab Emirates (229%), Estonia (210%), Egypt (209%), Canada (194%) and the Netherlands (185%) increased significantly"²⁸⁹. It is also characteristic that supplies to the European Union countries grew to almost 200 million dollars, making up one fifth of all exports of FEZ Hrodnainvest residents.

In FEZ "Minsk" exports of residents in 2020 increased by 11 per cent and amounted to almost \$1.5 billion, while the inflow of foreign direct investment on a net basis increased by 3.7 times - to \$68 million. In addition, in 2020 here "just over 1 thousand people were hired for additionally commissioned jobs"²⁹⁰, and in the future it is planned to implement projects in mechanical engineering, instrumentation and green technologies to create about four thousand more high-performance jobs in the FEZ by 2025.

FEZ Vitebsk is also one of the real tools for the development of the Vitebsk region's economy in the innovative direction. Today, 56 investment projects are being implemented here in 16 sectors with the participation of investors from 15 countries, including Germany, the Czech Republic, Russia, Poland, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Israel, Cyprus, and Estonia. In 2020, they exported their products for more than 550 million dollars, which was almost a third of the volume of supplies to foreign markets of the entire Vitebsk region. This allowed to obtain a positive balance of foreign trade: goods - more than 177, services - more than 13 million dollars. "At the same time FEZ "Vitebsk" is the only one among free economic zones that has worked on services with excess of exports over imports. In total, services worth \$24.4 million were rendered to foreign partners"²⁹¹.

These high indicators would not have been possible without relying on an active investment policy, which is characteristic of this FEZ. Suffice it to say that in 2020 the inflow of foreign direct investment here increased by another 16 per cent and exceeded \$30 million. Thanks to this, 235 new jobs were created here, more than one and a half times exceeding the level stated in the business plans. An important detail: in 2020, six new business entities were registered as residents in the FEZ with a total volume of declared investments of more than 35 million dollars, which will create at least another hundred jobs

²⁸⁹ FEZ "Grodnoinvest" residents exported products to 65 countries in 2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/rezidenty-sez-grodnoinvest-v-2020-godu-eksportirovali-produktsiju-v-65-stran-429156-2021>

²⁹⁰ Exports of FEZ "Minsk" residents in 2020 totalled almost \$1.5 billion [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/eksport-rezidentov-sez-minsk-v-2020-godu-sostavil-pochti-15-mlrd-429290-2021/>

²⁹¹ FEZ "Vitebsk" residents in 2020 increased production by 17% [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/rezidenty-sez-vitebsk-v-2020-godu-uvlechili-objem-proizvodstva-produktsii-na-17-429730-2021>

here. Five of them are companies with foreign capital. "Businessmen from Russia, Canada, Ireland and Azerbaijan intend to implement projects to organise production of food tin cans, special-purpose protective equipment and products, match straw, build photovoltaic stations for energy supply of residents' activities, as well as to establish production of plastic lubricants of a wide temperature range of operation"²⁹².

Three more enterprises received FEZ resident status in two incomplete months of 2021. The first of them, in early January, was STS-Beton LLC with an investment project to develop the production of construction materials. The new resident, specialising in the production of cement and concrete, plans to expand the nomenclature and master the production of new products for the construction industry after the purchase of new equipment. "This will make it possible to increase volume figures, as well as to enter new markets, including exporting products"²⁹³.

In mid-January, Gidropress LLC was registered in the FEZ with a project to develop the production of special hydraulic press equipment. The company, which operates in Polotsk and specialises in the development and production of special hydraulic presses for enterprises of general machine building, railways, military-industrial complex, plans to renew the machine park, replenish it with new machines, which will make it possible to master the production of new types of products of its own design. "Among the novelties will be equipment for the production of pipeline valves for the oil and gas industry by moulding method, as well as a large hydroforming press, which is in demand in the manufacture of shells of vehicles for the rocket and space industry. In addition, the production of equipment for recycling 200-litre drums of fuel and lubricants in the field will be further developed"²⁹⁴. As we know, the environmental problem associated with 200-litre barrels is typical for the Arctic zone. That is why its solution will allow the new FEZ resident to export its products almost completely.

In mid-February, a private enterprise, New Century Spring, appeared in the FEZ with a project to modernise import-substituting production of components for agricultural machinery. The new resident is an associate

²⁹² JSC "Vityaz" is recognised as the best resident of FEZ "Vitebsk" according to the results of 2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/economics/view/oao-vitjaz-priznano-luchshim-rezidentom-sez-vitebsk-po-itogam-2020-goda-429541-2021/>

²⁹³ The new resident of FEZ "Vitebsk" will develop the production of construction materials [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyy-rezident-sez-vitebsk-budet-razvivat-proizvodstvo-stroitelnyh-materialov-422919-2021/>

²⁹⁴ A new resident of FEZ "Vitebsk" will develop the production of special hydro-pressing equipment [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyy-rezident-sez-vitebsk-budet-razvivat-proizvodstvo-spetsialnogo-gidropressovogo-oborudovaniya-424231-2021/>

member of the Russian association Rosspetsmash, which unites manufacturers of agricultural, construction and road machinery, trailers and semi-trailers. The investment project to be implemented in the FEZ will allow to increase the total output by one and a half times, expand the range of spring teeth, tension and compression springs produced for machine-building enterprises, as well as create additional opportunities for diversifying exports and increasing the volume of supplies to foreign markets. And this is despite the fact that already today this enterprise exports more than half of its products to partners from Russia.

In addition, "two more investment projects are considered as promising for registration in FEZ "Vitebsk" - the creation of a wood processing park and the organisation of a bio-coal production facility, in which investors from China and Sweden have shown interest"²⁹⁵ . ²⁹⁶To make these and other promising projects successful, the FEZ is now taking active measures to develop additional power capacities, a water supply facility and to build railway access roads on the territory of the Zhurzhevo sector on the outskirts of Vitebsk, where "the development of the engineering and transport infrastructure of the site will make it possible in the long term to attract at least \$165 million of foreign investment and to organise about 1,000 jobs under projects that are already being implemented or are being prepared for registration in the current [2021] year" xml-ph-0000@deep.l.inte. It should be assumed that the fulfilment of all these plans will mean that FEZ Vitebsk will reach a qualitatively new level of innovative development.

Another important mechanism for implementing the strategy of innovative development in Belarus should be the implementation of investment projects to create 13 clusters and technoparks on unused and inefficiently used production areas of state-owned enterprises. It should be recalled that a technopark is currently understood as a form of territorial integration of science, education and production in the form of an association of scientific organisations, design and development bureaus, educational institutions, production enterprises or their subdivisions. In other words, "the purpose of creating a technopark is to concentrate specialists with a common profile of activity on one territory. Scientists can conduct research in them, teach in educational institutions and participate in the process of implementing

²⁹⁵ A new resident of FEZ "Vitebsk" will develop the production of components for agricultural machinery [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyy-rezident-sez-vitebsk-budet-razvivat-proizvodstvo-komplektujuschih-dlja-selhoz mashin-429288-2021/>

²⁹⁶ About Br40 million is planned to be invested in the construction of infrastructure facilities of FEZ "Vitebsk" [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/okolo-br40-mln-planiruet-sja-investirovat-v-stroitelstvo-objektov-infrastruktury-sez-vitebsk-429858-2021>

the results of their research in life"²⁹⁷. Organisations acquiring technopark resident status receive additional opportunities for development in the form of tax and rent benefits, use of special equipment and production facilities of technoparks, legal and business consulting services.

In Belarus, the first project "to create a science and technology park was implemented in Mogilev. The founders of the CJSC "Technological Park Mogilev" were the city and regional executive committees, as well as universities of the city"²⁹⁸. Its registration took place in March 2011. Today our country's innovation infrastructure network covers all regional centres, as well as Novopolotsk, Pinsk, Gorki, Barysau and Lyakhovich districts, and includes 17 technoparks, 7 technology transfer centres and the Belarusian Innovation Fund. An important detail: residents of Belarusian technoparks have increased their output six times over the last five years - almost to 200 million Belarusian rubles in 2020. At the same time, "the number of residents of technoparks has increased 2.2 times over this period, and the total number of their employees - 2.7 times. In 2016-2020, 2,566 jobs were created in technoparks against the plan of 1,536"²⁹⁹. The main areas of activity of residents of Belarusian technoparks today are instrumentation and mechanical engineering, electronics, information technology and software development, medicine, pharmaceuticals and production of medical equipment, as well as "optics, laser technologies, energy, energy saving, bio- and nanotechnology"³⁰⁰. And good results have already been achieved in a number of these areas.

Thus, 61 residents were registered in the technoparks of Belarusian universities at the beginning of 2021. The volume of products manufactured in them in 2020 exceeded 17 million Belarusian rubles, including innovative products - more than 10 million rubles. The peculiarity of these technoparks is that each of them is included in the educational process and each has its own specialisation depending on the region of location and scientific focus. "In particular, technopark "Unitehprom BSU" specialises in the production of veterinary drugs and pharmacological preparations, science and technology park BNTU "Polytechnik" on the creation and production of medical

²⁹⁷ Xiaojuan, L. Formation of the Belarusian model of technoparks development / L. Xiaojuan // Economics and Banks. - 2018. - №2. - C. 54.

²⁹⁸ Pinyagin, Y. Technoparks as an element of the country's innovation infrastructure / Y. Pinyagin, L. Xiaojuan // Banking Bulletin. - 2016. - №12. - C. 52.

²⁹⁹ Residents of the Belarusian technoparks for 5 years increased the output of products 6 times [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/rezidenty-belorusskih-tehnoparkov-za-5-let-uvlechili-vypusk-produktsii-v-6-raz-428037-2021/>

³⁰⁰ Subjects of innovation infrastructure of the Republic of Belarus / edited by A.G. Shumilin. - Minsk: GU "BelISA", 2018. - C. 3.

equipment products"³⁰¹ . The technopark of Vitebsk State Technological University specialises in the creation of innovative production in the light industry. In addition, in Vitebsk region "a medical and pharmaceutical cluster has been formed on the basis of 10 organisations, including two universities and a technopark. Its core is Vitebsk Medical University, where personnel for pharmacy are trained. And this is a model for the future"³⁰² .

Another interesting example is the science and technology park of Hrodna State University named after Yanka Kupala, the total profit of its residents "in 2020 increased 2.5 times - to more than Br 800 thousand"³⁰³ . In 2018, an unused building of one of Grodno enterprises on Gospodarchey Street was reconstructed for this technopark. Soon 14 companies, half of which were founded by students and teachers of the university, became its residents. Now the technopark is completing construction works on its second stage, for which the former building of the industrial enterprise workshop with the area of more than six thousand square metres was repurposed. The building will house office and production premises with all the infrastructure necessary for the work of an innovative enterprise. It is noteworthy that some of this space has already been reserved by companies working in the fields of electric transport, bioengineering, and energy efficiency. And this indicates good prospects for the development not only of the technopark itself, but also of the region where it is located.

³⁰¹ Technoparks of higher education institutions of Belarus in 2020 produced products worth Br 17 million [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/tehnoparki-vuzov-belarusi-za-2020-god-proizveli-produktsii-na-br17-mln-425772-2021/>

³⁰² Report of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus Roman Golovchenko at the VI All-Belarusian People's Assembly "On the policy of economic growth". [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9740>

³⁰³ Opinion: creation of technoparks on unused areas - an example of advanced development of regions [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/mnenie-sozdanie-tehnoparkov-na-neispolzuemyh-ploshchadah-primer-operezhajuschego-razvitiya-regionov-428389-2021>

Belarus: the goal is comprehensive development of the regions

The Programme of Activities of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for the period up to 2025 plans to pay much attention to the implementation of the regional development strategy in order to reduce the number of backward regions in the country by 18 by the end of the new five-year plan. For this purpose, it is envisaged to implement investment projects in cities and districts with a population of 80 thousand people and more to prepare industrial sites and create infrastructure for the establishment of two or three new enterprises that have no analogues in the country, as well as to "create 1-2 medium-sized industrial enterprises in each district"³⁰⁴. At the same time, the lagging Belarusian regions will receive a certain set of privileges for the creation of new breakthrough industries, and efficiency will be at the centre of the new investment cycle. In other words, "at least one new efficient company should appear in each such region"³⁰⁵. And it should be said that concrete steps are already being taken in the Belarusian regions for the successful implementation of the plans.

Thus, the first half of 2021 is scheduled for the completion of the investment project for the production of special electronics for large-sized vehicles in Braslav district of Vitebsk region, which is being implemented by the unitary enterprise "Plant of Special Electronics "Zaryad" with Russian capital - a developer and manufacturer of electronic and electromechanical products, including electronic, switching units, key switches and automotive lighting equipment for heavy-duty operation, which already has one production facility. Characteristically, the products of the new company will be predominantly export-oriented and import-substituting. The main direction is Russia. More than Br503 thousand has been invested in the implementation of this project"³⁰⁶. An important detail: this investment project with the participation of foreign capital is not the only one for Braslav district. In 2020, a new enterprise for the production of prefabricated metal structures appeared here, in which an investor from Latvia invested more than USD 370 thousand

³⁰⁴ Programme of Activities of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for the period up to 2025 [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/upload/docs/file2635c85fcdcb1ca5.PDF>

³⁰⁵ Support for lagging regions will be based on their potential - Chebotar [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/podderzhka-otstajuschih-regionov-budet-bazirovatsja-na-ih-potentsiale-chebotar-421034-2020/>

³⁰⁶ Pushnyakova, A. The plant for the production of special electronics in Braslav will start operating in 2021 / A. Pushnyakova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/zavod-po-proizvodstvu-spetsialnoj-elektroniki-v-braslave-nachnet-rabotu-v-2021-godu-422488-2020>

and whose products are already being sold not only on the Belarusian market, but also in neighbouring countries.

Another new production facility with an investment volume of about two million Belarusian rubles in the same Vitebsk region opened at the end of 2020 in the urban settlement of Begoml, Dokshitsky district. It is JSC "Plant "Vetraz" - a subsidiary of "Mogilevliftmash" - has set up an electrical assembly shop here, which already employs more than 80 people, and which "will make it possible, together with an Italian firm, to create new types of products and increase the volume of production by 150% in 2021. It will also contribute to the opening of new production facilities"³⁰⁷. In particular, a plastic moulding area will soon be opened, for which two machines have already been purchased.

In the Minsk region, a new production facility was opened in Zhodzina on the eve of 2021. The Minsk Automobile Plant organised here the assembly of electric transport - trolleybuses of various modifications and the latest electric buses, where they intend to assemble at least three hundred vehicles annually, which will be supplied both to Belarusian cities and to countries near and far abroad. This project - the result of the public-private partnership between Minsk Automobile Plant and ETON LLC - has already created more than 130 jobs. It is also important that only half a year passed from the idea to the creation of assembly lines, while the assembly of electric transport in Zhodino is carried out on a full cycle, including welding, adjusting and painting works, adjustment of control systems, diagnostics of electronic systems, control and acceptance of products. At the same time, the large-scale prospects of this project are obvious, as "the development of competences in the field of electric transport construction will allow to create a full line of passenger transport and will allow to be present in all market segments"³⁰⁸.

In Grodno region on the eve of 2021, the State Experimental Forestry Institution "Smargon Experimental Forestry" registered as a resident of the free economic zone "Grodnoinvest" with an investment project for the creation of woodworking production for the production of wood fuel - pellets. The idea of the project is to organise pellet production in Smargon with the involvement of low-quality wood and sawing waste into economic turnover. The whole

³⁰⁷ The new shop of the plant "Vetraz" in Begoml will allow to increase the volume of production [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyj-tseh-zavoda-vetraz-v-begomle-pozvolit-narastit-objem-proizvodstva-422131-2020/>

³⁰⁸ MAZ opened assembly production of electric transport in Zhodino [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/maz-otkryl-sborochnoe-proizvodstvo-elektrotransporta-v-zhodino-422142-2020/>

volume of the product produced here is supposed to be exported. The volume of investments in the new production will exceed two and a half million euros, and the production is planned for the second half of 2021. As a result, "the implementation of the project will make it possible to expand the range of products, increase the scale of production and export volumes, improve the profitability and efficiency of production, create additional jobs and increase contributions to the budget"³⁰⁹.

It is easy to see that all these examples testify to the fact that the Belarusian regions intend to successfully solve the tasks of socio-economic development set before them in the new five-year period, relying on the existing experience of investment activities, including in co-operation with foreign partners. The formats of international co-operation at the regional level that exist in our country and continue to operate are also designed to facilitate this.

Thus, with the arrival of 2021, the period of implementation of the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme "Poland - Belarus - Ukraine" for 2014-2020, which is an important tool for the development of cooperation between the European Union and partner states in Eastern Europe in order to ensure integrated and sustainable regional relations, has come to an end. It should be reminded that this programme, and the first programme period was implemented in 2004-2006, "for 17 years already supports development processes in the border areas of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine by co-financing various projects"³¹⁰. All projects are non-commercial and contribute to improving the quality of life of the inhabitants of the eastern voivodships of Poland, as well as some western regions of Belarus and Ukraine. More specifically, the programme covers the following areas in the three countries: Poland - Krosniński, Przemysl, Rzeszów, Tarnobrzski, Chelmsko-Zamoyski, Pulawski, Lubelski, Bialski, Ostrolecko-Siedlce, Lomzynski, Bialystok and Suwalski counties; Belarus - Grodno, Brest, Minsk, Gomel regions and the city of Minsk; Ukraine - Lviv, Volyn, Zakarpattia, Rivne, Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk regions. Under the four thematic objectives of this programme - Heritage, Accessibility, Security and Borders - three types of projects were implemented in 2014-2020: large infrastructure, regular and micro projects. In 2020 alone, 139 projects were underway at once, 12 of which were completed.

³⁰⁹ Smarhon Experimental Forestry became a new resident of FEZ "Grodnoinvest". [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/smorgonskij-opytnej-leshoz-stal-novym-rezidentom-sez-grodnoinvest-422374-2020/>

³¹⁰ Programme [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.pbu2020.eu/by/pages/135>

In particular, under the thematic objective "Accessibility", 85 kilometres of local roads connecting towns and villages were built or reconstructed and repair works were carried out in the Grodno and Brest regions, the Lublin, Mazowieckie and Podkarpackie voivodships, as well as in the Lviv and Volyn regions. Just in January 2021, two new roundabouts were opened in the Polish city of Biala Podlaska, built in accordance with the project "Improving Transport Accessibility in Brest and Biala Podlaska". And the Brest Road Maintenance Company under the same project "reconstructed seven intersections in Brest, equipping them with an adaptive traffic control system. Subsequently, an Intelligent Transport System (ITS) was developed, which reduces travelling time by regulating the traffic mode"³¹¹. To be absolutely precise, in this case we are talking about the installation of "smart traffic lights" and embedding sensors in the carriageway, which transmit information to special controllers, at the intersections in Brest of Moskovskaya Street with Partizansky and Respublika avenues, Gavrilov and Pionerskaya Streets, as well as Warsaw Highway with Oktyabrskaya Revolution, Krasnoznamennaya and Makhnovich Streets.

As for the thematic objective of the Borders, the main result of the joint work was two additional control lanes and new pavilions for customs and passport control at the border crossing "Kuznica Białostokowska - Bruzgi". "These activities were among other parallel tasks increasing the efficiency of the border. As a result of the completion of these two projects, throughput capacity has increased by almost 76 per cent, which significantly speeds up border controls."³¹². In addition, a number of other projects have been implemented by the customs authorities of the programme countries. Firstly, a major infrastructure project "Construction of the X-ray scanning system for vehicle control at the Berestovitsa road crossing", which involved the construction of an inspection and examination complex "including an X-ray scanning system, a protective building for it and a building for personnel, engineering systems, training of experts for the work, organisation of accelerated vehicle inspection, exchange of experience in the use of scanograms with Polish partners"³¹³. And several regular projects, including "Improving the Efficiency of Customs Control at the Domachevo Road Checkpoint" and "Strengthening the Capabilities of the Canine Service of the Customs Agencies of the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of Poland".

³¹¹ New roundabouts in Byala Podlaska [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.pbu2020.eu/by/news/1961>

³¹² Results of 2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.pbu2020.eu/by/news/1952>

³¹³ Cross-border cooperation programme Poland - Belarus - Ukraine for 2014-2020. [Electronic resource]. - 2014. - URL: <https://www.customs.gov.by/ru/2014-2020-ru/>

The first of these projects, aimed at improving the security of the Belarusian-Polish border and the quality of customs control operations, involved the installation of weighing equipment, which reduced the time required to carry out these operations and accelerated throughput at the border. The second project, aimed at preventing the illegal movement of illicitly trafficked narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, and tobacco products and preventing illegal migration, involved the purchase of six vehicles equipped with cages for transporting service dogs for the Grodno and Brest Customs Houses and the Minsk-2 Customs House.

All these facts show that the completed Cross-border Cooperation Programme "Poland - Belarus - Ukraine" for 2014-2020 helped its participants to solve many specific issues of interaction between border regions. Apparently, the same pragmatic approach will be incorporated into the new cross-border programme for 2021-2027, which is already being actively discussed by the interested parties. In particular, the Belarusian city of Brest and the Polish city of Biala Podlaska are working on the possibility of implementing joint projects in three areas at once: the possibility of converting public transport to electric transport, energy saving projects, energy and heat rehabilitation of social facilities, as well as "purification and further use of rainwater"³¹⁴.

Another important aspect of the topic under consideration is that in the Republic of Belarus today there is a significant intensification of work at the local level on sustainable energy development and adaptation to climate change. Suffice it to say that 53 Belarusian cities have already declared their readiness to join the Covenant of Mayors on Climate and Energy - a large-scale European initiative for cooperation in the climate sphere, which appeared in 2008 and "as of 2020, more than 10000 cities and communities with about 320 million inhabitants have joined it"³¹⁵. Recall that by signing this agreement, "local governments make voluntary commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 30 per cent by 2030"³¹⁶. It is clear that each city is approaching the goal in its own way.

³¹⁴ Brest and Biala Podlaska are working out joint projects in the green economy [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/brest-i-bjala-podljaska-prorabatyvajut-sovmestnye-proekty-v-zelenoj-ekonomike-424871-2021>

³¹⁵ Arikas, D. European cities' energy and climate initiatives / D. Arikas, M. Gratz, E. Ferrer, A. Chumakova, N. Andreenko. - Baltic Environmental Forum Germany, 2019. - C. 4.

³¹⁶ More than 50 Belarusian cities are ready to assume obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/bolee-50-belorusskih-gorodov-gotovy-vzjat-na-sebja-objazatelstva-po-snizheniju-vybrosov-parnikovyh-424013-2021/>

For example, in the Belarusian town of Kostyukovich, Mogilev region, the project "Construction of a photovoltaic system. Decentralised energy supply of a gymnasium from an ecological point of view". It was initiated and financed by partners from the German twin town Dietzenbach, with which Kostyukovich co-operates in various spheres: education, health care, sports, culture, tourism and ecology. Within the framework of the already mentioned project "135 photovoltaic panels with a total capacity of 35.8 kW were installed on the roof of the gymnasium. A monitoring system is also provided for tracking electricity generation, collecting and storing data on the operation of the plant for at least a year for each day, month"³¹⁷. A new solar power plant (SPP), which started operation in 2020 near the village of Asmolovichi, Mstislavl district, is also located there, in the Mogilev region. Here, 4,752 solar panels have been installed on an area of about four hectares. "The nominal power of each of the panels is 335 watts. As a result, the cumulative installed capacity of the new SES totalled 1.6 MW."³¹⁸. In addition, the highest wind power plant in Belarus with a height of 142 metres is also erected in the Asmolovichi area in 2020.

Note that the presence of these environmentally orientated facilities in the Mstislavl district is not a coincidence. The city of Mstislavl itself signed the Mayors' Agreement on Climate and Energy in 2017. Since then, a wide variety of activities have been organised here to promote an energy-saving culture and environmental responsibility among the younger generation. In particular, in the summer of 2020, as part of the organised Energy Days, everyone could take part in the online marathon of Sustainable Development Goals "EcoMy Mstislavl". Its participants placed their materials related to energy saving, ecology, sustainable development of the region in the global network. Interactive classes "How to live ecologically on Earth" were held in pre-school institutions and health camps of the district, a competition "Share with us" was held, and film screenings of "Energy Saving Schools" - about modern ways and methods of saving and conserving energy at home, at school and at work - were organised. Environmental campaigns "We cleaned up here! How about you?". And near the gymnasium in Mstislavl they planted an alley "Education for a Sustainable Tomorrow" of young tui trees, next to which they placed signs with information about each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. The Energy Days ended with the "Mstislavl Ring"

³¹⁷ A photovoltaic station will be built on the roof of the gymnasium in Kostyukovich [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://climate.ecopartnerstvo.by/ru/news/664>

³¹⁸ A new solar power plant has started operating in Belarus [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://climate.ecopartnerstvo.by/ru/news/664>

bicycle race, which was held for the third time and gathered about one hundred participants of different ages from all over the district. These facts show that by participating in all these events, the residents of Mstislavl rayon could see by their own example that the main goal of the Covenant of Mayors Climate and Energy Initiative is sustainable energy development at the local level and the adoption of concrete measures for mitigation and adaptation to climate change, and that "an important role in the work of the rayon to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is played by residents who can make a valuable contribution to the common cause through their personal behaviour"³¹⁹.

Another effective tool that is also actively used in Covenant of Mayors member cities is the European Mobility Week, an international campaign that aims at greening urban transport systems, changing people's transport behaviour, making smarter use of public spaces, and which traditionally takes place every year from 16 to 22 September, ending with a "Car Free Day". The week's events typically involve more than 50 countries around the world. The 2020 theme, "Emission-Free Travel for All," focused on "reducing greenhouse gas emissions and making emission-free infrastructure and transport accessible to all categories of citizens."³²⁰ The popularity of this theme in our country is evidenced by the fact that a record number of cities in Belarus - more than 80 - joined this campaign in 2020. For example, during this week Minsk alone organised a bicycle rally, offered free travel for motorists on city public transport, and opened the first in Belarus eco-route of bicycle riders, which connected three ecological trails of the Belarusian capital - "City of Birds", "Serebryanyi Log" and "Chizhovka". Its peculiarity was "the possibility of cycling and birdwatching"³²¹, as well as familiarisation along the whole route with information stands telling about local birds.

To summarise these considerations, it should be noted that "the strategic goal of Belarusian regional policy is the integrated development of each region and reduction of existing regional differences, taking into account the effective use of its resource potential and competitive advantages in the interests of ensuring high standards of living of the population, nature conservation and positive contribution of the regions to national competitiveness and security"³²²

³¹⁹ Mstislavl is in favour of an ecological way of life! And the Energy Days are the confirmation of it [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://climate.ecopartnerstvo.by/ru/news/616>

³²⁰ European Mobility Week [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://rosavtotransport.ru/ru/activities/european-mobility-week/>

³²¹ A new eco-route, a bicycle race and free transport - what will be the European Mobility Week in Minsk [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyj-ekomarshrut-veloprobez-i-besplatnyj-proezd-kakoj-budet-evropejskaja-nedelja-mobilnosti-v-minske-406811-2020/>

³²² Zalessky, B. The point of reference - multi-vectorality. Part I / B. Zalessky. - Palmarium Academic Publishing, 2020. - C. 24-25.

. As we can see, within the framework of the second stage of the National Strategy for Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus for the period until 2030, Belarusian regions are already taking many concrete steps aimed at expanding local self-governance in addressing socio-economic, environmental and ecological problems, reducing subsidisation and ensuring a high standard of living of the population.

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Belarus: the road to the future is paved by a comprehensive programme

The Republic of Belarus has prepared a draft State Programme of Innovative Development for 2021-2025, which envisages the implementation of about 80 innovative projects to create high-tech industries. Among the priority projects is the development of six "projects of the future", which are oriented towards new production, technologies and goods that correspond to global trends and take into account the development of sales markets. One of the most notable among them concerns national electric transport. The implementation of the prepared comprehensive programme for the development of this industry in 2021-2025 will not only create a new sector of machine building in Belarus - electric vehicle construction, but will also have a large-scale multiplicative effect on the innovative development of other industries, such as metallurgy, electrical engineering, robotics, and information technologies. In addition, "it is envisaged to develop samples of new equipment, create 14 production facilities for freight, passenger and special electric vehicles, including assembly production of electric passenger cars in BELJI SZAO, as well as basic components for it"³²³.

As a reminder, back in March 2020, the Republic of Belarus adopted a decree "On Stimulating the Use of Electric Vehicles", which envisaged measures designed to stimulate demand for this environmentally friendly vehicle in the country, as well as the creation of appropriate charging and service infrastructure in the regions. The appearance of this document was caused by a number of circumstances. First, let us recall that "at the 24th United Nations World Climate Change Conference held in December 2018 in the Polish city of Katowice, Belarus stated that it considers the green economy and low-carbon sustainable development as a strategic vector"³²⁴.

Secondly, existing forecasts by experts show that "by 2030, every fifth car in the world will be electric. This process is spurred by government policies in a number of countries where they are going to impose restrictions on cars with internal combustion engines"³²⁵. Thirdly, the growing number of electric

³²³ Shumilin, A. How Belarus plans to develop the high-tech sector / A. Shumilin // [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/interview/view/kak-belarus-planiruet-razvivat-vysokotekhnologichnyj-sektor-7711/>

³²⁴ Zalesky, B. Points of growth. Features of sustainable development in the context of global challenges / B. Zalesky. - Palmarium Academic Publishing, 2020. - C. 57.

³²⁵ The measures taken will contribute to the creation of electric vehicle production in Belarus - Ministry of Economy [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/prinimaemye-mery-budut-sposobstvovat-sozdaniyu-v-belarusi-proizvodstva-elektromobilej-minekonomiki-383056-2020/>

cars will contribute to the reduction of air pollution in Belarus. Fourthly, "the use of electric transport is one of the directions of a competent increase in electricity consumption"³²⁶, which becomes especially relevant in connection with the commissioning of the Belarusian nuclear power plant. Fifth, the transition to electric vehicles is an appeal to the general public to new technologies that are in line with international best practices, so that by 2025, about 40 per cent of the internal combustion engine vehicles in Belarus could be replaced by electric vehicles.

Turning to the decree, we note some of the measures contained therein. For example, this document exempted owners of electric vehicles from paying a fee for the issuance of a licence to participate in road traffic. Individuals will not have to pay value added tax when importing electric cars into our country for personal use. In addition, "owners of electric vehicles are exempt from parking fees in specially equipped parking spaces in municipal car parks until 1 April 2026"³²⁷.

The decree also contained measures for manufacturers of electric cars and electric charging stations, as well as for organisations operating them. In particular, charging stations were exempted from value added tax if they were used in Belarus. And the Belorusneft Production Association started to lease land plots for construction and maintenance of electric charging complexes without holding an auction. Perhaps for this reason, Belorusneft planned to open 180 fast-charging stations at once in 2020.

At that time, the situation with electric charging stations (ECS) in Belarus was as follows. Since the beginning of 2020 "the network of Echarging stations has expanded to 251 such stations (plus 13 sites)"³²⁸. And it could already serve up to nine thousand electric cars. The network of filling stations on the Belarusian territory includes two types of stations: firstly, Mode 3, where an electric car needs six to eight hours to charge; secondly, Mode 4, where the battery can be charged in less than an hour. An important detail: at the beginning of 2020, Belorusneft's network of filling stations got a new brand - Malanka, under which 639 charging stations will be operating by 2022. And

³²⁶ Ecology and competent consumption of electricity - how the growth of electric cars in Belarus is beneficial [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/ekologija-i-gramotnoe-potreblenie-elektroenergii-chem-vygoden-rost-chisla-elektromobilej-v-belarusi-383046-2020>

³²⁷ Lukashenko signed a decree on stimulating the purchase of electric cars [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-podpisal-ukaz-o-stimulirovanii-zakupok-elektromobilej-383041-2020>

³²⁸ "Belorusneft" plans to open 180 electric charging stations this year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belorusneft-planiruet-otkryt-180-elektrozarjadnyh-stantsij-v-etom-godu-383042-2020>

by 2030, there should be enough of them to serve up to three hundred thousand electric cars.

Speaking about the production of our own electric cars in our country, we recall that the first Belarusian sample of such vehicles based on Geely was presented back in August 2017. At that time, it was said that "after testing the first electric car, scientists will start developing an improved prototype. It could be ready as early as next year [2018]"³²⁹. Nevertheless, as noted already at the March 2020 meeting of the President of Belarus with the leadership of the Council of Ministers, so far the topic of producing one's own electric car has not received the proper impetus, although electric transport has enormous potential. "This is an urgent need already today. <...> Many states are already developing this promising direction. Countries like us, export-oriented countries that do not have huge reserves under the ground, have long ago orientated themselves towards electric transport"³³⁰.

With the appearance of the decree "On stimulating the use of electric cars" it became clear that BELJI SZAO, which "is ready to consider the production of electric cars in Belarus on condition of selling 5-10 thousand cars a year"³³¹. At the same time, the company received four Chinese electric cars of Geely Geometry A model, which were to be tested: one - at the factory, three - in dealer centres. This version of the electric car attracted by the fact that it has a range of five hundred kilometres, systems of adaptive cruise control and response to pedestrians and cyclists, as well as an intelligent system of automatic parking. At the same time, there were hopes that with the adoption of the presidential decree, the production of the Geely Geometry A model at BELJI SZAO would go much faster.

In January 2021, the draft Comprehensive Programme for the Development of Electric Transport for 2021-2025, developed by the National Academy of Sciences together with other stakeholders, which envisaged increasing the share of public electric transport in Belarus to 30% by 2025, was considered at a meeting of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, where the main requirements of the government to the content of the document were voiced: "The programme should be truly

³²⁹ Gavrilova, V. Ecological, modern and manoeuvrable: scientists presented the first Belarusian electric car / V. Gavrilova // [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/reportazh-ekologichnyj-sovremennyj-i-manevrennyj-uchenye-prezentovali-pervyj-belorusskij-elektromobil-262688-2017>

³³⁰ Meeting with the leadership of the Council of Ministers [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/soveshanie-s-rukovodstvom-soveta-ministrov-23197/

³³¹ "BELJI" is ready to consider the release of electric cars when selling 5-10 thousand cars per year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/beldzhi-gotov-rassmatrivat-vypusk-elektromobilej-pri-prodazhe-5-10-tys-avto-v-god-382660-2020/>

comprehensive - from research and development to incentives for the development of electric transport. That is, it should be "cross-cutting" and affect virtually all spheres, in one way or another related to electric transport"³³². Perhaps for this reason, the development of electric transport in Belarus is also discussed in other relevant high-level documents. In particular, the State Programme "Energy Saving" for 2021-2025 provides for the development of production of electric vehicles, components and charging infrastructure for them in the industrial sector in order to achieve the set goals, while in the sphere of transport it is envisaged to "develop the segment of electric vehicles, hybrid vehicles and charging network, electrification of urban passenger transport in order to replace the use of hydrocarbon fuel"³³³.

As for the research component of this topic, the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus outlined its plans to create an experimental production of Belarusian electric cars back in January 2021. The fact is that domestic scientists are working on middle-class models designed for a wide range of consumers. We are talking about the release of several models at once: a lorry, a car, a minivan, even a sports car. It is characteristic that "this is not Geely, it is a fundamentally different electric car with completely Belarusian stuffing. <...> Several models of batteries are being worked out for the Belarusian electric car - lithium-ion, graphene and graphene-lead"³³⁴ with the expectation that the range of the battery will be 500 kilometres.

In this regard, it should be noted that at the exhibition of achievements and the most significant results of scientific, technical and innovative activities "Days of Belarusian Science - 2021", held in Minsk in January 2021, at the open area it was already possible to get acquainted with a mock-up model of the Academic Electro electric car of the United Institute of Mechanical Engineering, designed for transport in closed areas, i.e. without going on public roads, and designed for two passengers. "The maximum speed of the electric vehicle is 50 kilometres per hour. The frame-panel type of the body allows production in small series according to the customer's requirements"³³⁵. Another feature of this novelty is that the power part of its cabin does not contain metal elements: it is made of fibreglass. In addition, the United

³³² The share of public electric transport in Belarus by 2025 they want to increase to 30% [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9713>

³³³ State Programme "Engergosberezhenie" for 2021-2025. - Minsk, 2021. - C. 15.

³³⁴ NAS expects to create an experimental production of Belarusian electric cars [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/nan-rasschityvaet-sozdat-eksperimentalnoe-proizvodstvo-belorusskih-elektromobilej-425463-2021/>

³³⁵ New drone and electric car - NAS will present about 200 developments at the exhibition for the Day of Science [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/novyy-bespilotnik-i-elektromobil-nan-predstavit-okolo-200-razrabotok-na-vystavke-ko-dnju-nauki-425608-2021/>

Institute of Mechanical Engineering of the National Academy of Sciences is already implementing a number of joint projects with several Belarusian enterprises. Thus, "together with MAZ, an electric truck is being developed, which will be equipped with an electric power plant developed at the Institute"³³⁶. And the result of the work with Minsk Tractor Plant will be an electric harvester for pouring ice on ice rinks, the first serial batch of which is scheduled for 2021. As for the production of electric cars on the basis of BELJI, it was planned to deliver five hundred to one thousand of these electric cars to Belarus in 2021, "in order to study the demand, understand the possibilities, and then carry out all the necessary work to prepare production. We should expect electric cars closer to the second half of the year"³³⁷. In short, the measures taken in Belarus to create its own electric cars promised to yield results in the near future.

Finally, in April 2021, the Republic of Belarus has already finally approved the Comprehensive Electric Transport Development Programme for 2021-2025, which aims to achieve key objectives such as:

- 1) creation of a new branch of mechanical engineering - production of electric transport;
- 2) ensuring conditions for increasing the number of electric traction vehicles in use;
- 3) expansion of electric transport infrastructure; 4) minimising negative environmental impacts.

To this end, the integrated programme involves seven tasks:

- 1) creation of a system of scientific support, including ensuring the scientific and technological security of the country in the field of mechanical engineering;
- 2) organisation of production of electric transport, its basic components and infrastructure elements and their maximum localisation;
- 3) formation of a set of institutional conditions for the development of electric transport on the basis of systemic provision of its standardisation, conformity assessment and regulatory legal support;

³³⁶ Electric trucks, electric combines and electric cars - what Belarusian scientists are working on [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/elektrogruzoviki-elektrokombajny-i-legkovye-elektromobili-nad-chem-rabotajut-belorusskie-uchenye-426333-2021/>

³³⁷ "BELJI to study demand for electric vehicles and prepare for production - Parhomchik [Electronic resource]." - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/beldzhi-izuchit-spros-na-elektromobili-i-budet-gotovitsja-k-proizvodstvu-parhomchik-423890-2021/>

4) creation of electric transport infrastructure, including EHS, with its optimal spatial location and taking into account the specifics of consumers (public passenger and freight transport, personal electric transport);

5) coordination of actions of state bodies on the development of electric transport and its infrastructure on a national and regional scale; optimisation of investments in the creation of production facilities and acquisition of electric transport;

6) formation and implementation of measures to stimulate the development of electric transport from scientific support, acquisition and operation to utilisation and recycling, including for attracting investments for accelerated development of electric transport;

7) minimisation of economic, environmental, social and other risks.

Two subprogrammes - "Production and technological base of electric vehicles" and "Creation of charging infrastructure for electric vehicles" - envisage the creation of research and production facilities to increase the number of electric vehicles in use, as well as a well-developed network of filling stations that will ensure unimpeded movement of electric vehicles throughout Belarus. And among the measures planned by the comprehensive programme we should mention the creation of a pilot experimental production of electric vehicles, as well as "exemption of electric vehicle road users from charging for the use of communally owned car parks"³³⁸. In addition, this type of transport is exempt from transport tax in the Republic of Belarus. More precisely, "owners of vehicles of categories M1, M1G (electric passenger cars and electric passenger cars of high cross-country ability) driven solely by an electric motor will not pay transport tax. This benefit is granted until 31 December 2025"³³⁹.

Of course, all these measures create good conditions for the growth in the number of electric cars, of which there were already more than two and a half thousand in our country as of mid-March 2021. At the same time, "the volume of electricity consumption by charging stations for electric vehicles in Belarus in 2020 almost doubled compared to 2019 - up to 7.7 million kWh"³⁴⁰. Every month up to two hundred new users are registered in the EHS network.

³³⁸ On the Comprehensive Programme for the Development of Electric Transport up to 2025 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <http://government.by/ru/content/9804>

³³⁹ MNS: electric vehicles are exempt from transport tax until the end of 2025 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/mns-elektromobili-osvobozhdeny-ot-transportnogo-naloga-dokonta-2025-goda-434965-2021/>

³⁴⁰ Electricity consumption by charging stations for electric transport in Belarus in 2020 almost doubled [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: https://atom.belta.by/ru/news_ru/view/elektropotreblenie-zarjadnymi-stantsijami-dlja-elektrotransporta-v-belarusi-v-2020-godu-vyroslo-pochti-vdvoe-11190/

And "an average of 250 charging sessions are carried out at stations every day, and in the last two months [January and February] their total number exceeded 15 thousand"³⁴¹. The comprehensive programme contains serious measures to develop the EHS network. While this network now consists of 288 EHSs, by the end of 2021 there should already be 471. At the second stage (2022-2025), 466 will be added, and at the third stage (2026-2030) - another 407.

Another important issue of this topic is that budget Chinese electric cars continue to be particularly popular among Belarusian consumers today, because domestic models do not yet exist. The comprehensive programme states that "it is planned to master serial production of electric cars in BELJI and to produce 1,000 electric cars based on the Geometry C model in 2021"³⁴², as well as to create an experimental assembly production of single samples and small series of electric cars of various modifications in the State National Scientific Institution "United Institute of Mechanical Engineering of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus" on the basis of maximum use of Belarusian-made components and units.

As for other types of electric-powered transport vehicles, a very extensive development programme is planned. In particular, by the end of 2023, the production of electric buses for transporting passengers at airports with Belarusian-made powertrain components is to be mastered. The United Institute of Mechanical Engineering together with the Minsk Automobile Plant will create a model of an electric truck with a load capacity of about four and a half tonnes, and with Belkommunmash - up to ten tonnes. A domestic electric rubbish truck is also to be added to the Belarusian electric transport fleet. Finally, the Belarusian Automobile Plant "within the framework of the programme intends to create a sample of a battery-powered dump truck. The gross weight of such a vehicle will be 176 tonnes, with a payload of 90 tonnes"³⁴³.

As we can see, increasing the use of electric vehicles in Belarus in the coming years should become one of the most promising areas of development, which will not only contribute to reducing the use of imported energy carriers, but will also improve the environmental situation and ensure the utilisation of the capacity of the Belarusian energy system.

³⁴¹ The number of electric cars in Belarus exceeded 2.5 thousand. [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/chislo-elektromobilej-v-belarusi-prevysilo-25-tys-431822-2021/>

³⁴² Comprehensive programme of electric transport development for 2021-2025. - Minsk, 2021. - C. 20.

³⁴³ Electric dump truck, electric garbage truck and electric car of Belarusian production are planned to be created by 2025 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <http://doingbusiness.by/elektrosamosval-elektromusorovoz-i-elektromobil-belorusskogo-proizvodstva-planiruetsya-sozdat-do-2025-goda>

Belarus-China: the engine of development is regional co-operation

In 2019, the Belarus-China relationship of trusting comprehensive strategic partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation continued to develop intensively, demonstrating impressive dynamics. Suffice it to say that "in January-June of this [2019] year, the trade volume between China and Belarus reached \$2.053 billion, up 22.3% year-on-year, and exports of Belarusian goods to China increased by 81.9%"³⁴⁴.

Among the Belarusian regions that have made their considerable contribution to achieving such indicators is **Minsk Region**, whose exports "to China more than doubled in the first nine months of this [2019] year - from \$178 million to \$367 million (growth rate - 206%"³⁴⁵. The basis of these supplies were potash fertilisers, as well as meat and dairy products of such enterprises of the capital region as OJSC Agrokombinat Dzerzhinsky, LLC Velez-Mit, OJSC Smolevichi Broiler, KUP Minoblmyasomolprom, OJSC Minsk Dairy Plant No. 1, OJSC Slutsk Cheese Factory. Such positive export dynamics is largely due to the fact that almost all milk processing and a number of meat processing enterprises of Minsk region already have permission to supply their products to the Chinese market. Therefore, more than \$17 million worth of meat and dairy products were shipped to China in the first eight months of 2019. And, to all appearances, the scale of these shipments will only increase.

The volume of direct Chinese investments in the economy of Minsk region continues to increase in 2019. Their growth for the first nine months of this year was almost ten per cent, reaching the value of \$115 million. The bulk of them - more than \$90 million - was attracted due to the development of the production of passenger car assembly of BELJI. But there are other interesting examples. In particular, in November 2019, the first stage of the Belkali-Migao LLC plant opened in Soligorsk district of Minsk region. This is not only the first joint project of Belaruskali and the Chinese company Migao Corporation Limited, but also the first potassium nitrate plant on the Belarusian soil, whose products are expected to be sold to the European Union, Turkey, Russia, China,

³⁴⁴ Grishkevich, A. China's development cannot do without the support and assistance of Belarus - Cui Qiming // A. Grishkevich [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/razvitie-kitaja-nemozhet-obojsit-bez-podderzhki-i-pomoschi-belarusi-tsuj-tsimin-367736-2019/>

³⁴⁵ Minsk region increased exports to China in January-September more than doubled [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/minskaja-oblast-uvlechila-eksport-produktsii-v-kitaj-zajnavar-sentjabr-bolee-chem-v-dva-raza-369062-2019/>

as well as to enter the markets of North Africa and Latin America. Today this enterprise with a total staff of 150 people is already working in a round-the-clock mode. It is also important that "30 graduates - technologists of Soligorsk Mining and Chemical College - have been employed at the new workplaces. The annual capacity of the first stage of the new plant is 80 thousand tonnes of potassium nitrate and 62 thousand tonnes of granulated nitrogen-potassium fertilisers"³⁴⁶. Within the next year, the second stage of the Belkali-Migao plant should be completed and put into operation, which will bring the annual capacity of the enterprise to 160 thousand tonnes of potassium nitrate, which, in addition to agriculture, is also successfully used in the metallurgical industry, in the production of glass, pyrotechnics and explosives.

A significant event for the development of the Chinese vector of international cooperation of Minsk region was the participation of five enterprises of the capital's Belarusian region in the second international exhibition of imported goods and services China International Import Expo in **Shanghai**, held in November 2019. One of the exhibitors, Slutsk Cheese Factory, even managed to sign a \$2 million supply contract with Greenland Group Corporation. Another document was signed with Shanhai Pujia Food Technology Co."³⁴⁷. And the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park Velikiy Kamen, located in the Minsk region, registered two new residents at the same exhibition in Shanghai - "Satellite Communications of Eurasia LLC (PRC), which will establish a research centre in the park for the development of satellite communication and control systems, and Flex-n-Roll Pro LLC (Belarus, USA) with a project in the field of industrial printing"³⁴⁸.

Another important factor that contributes to the successful promotion of Minsk Region's enterprises to the Chinese market is the development of effective interregional cooperation with partners in China, which, first of all, includes **Guangdong** Province, with which the Belarusian capital region signed a roadmap of cooperation for 2020-2021 in November 2019. This document, according to the parties, will make it possible to form a common market based on the principles of transparency and mutual benefit, as well as strengthen trade and economic ties. Among the main goals here is the direct

³⁴⁶ "Belaruskali" and Chinese Migao launched an enterprise for the production of potassium nitrate [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belaruskalij-i-kitajskij-migao-zapustili-predpriyatje-po-proizvodstvu-nitrata-kalija-368329-2019/>

³⁴⁷ Minsk region and the Chinese province of Guangdong signed a roadmap for cooperation [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/minskaja-oblast-i-kitajskaja-provintsija-guandun-podpisali-dorozhnyu-kartu-sotrudnichestva-368717-2019/>

³⁴⁸ Research centre of satellite communication systems will be created in "Velikiy Kamen" [Electronic resource]. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/nauchno-issledovatel'skij-tsentr-sputnikovyh-sistem-kommunikatsii-sozdatut-v-velikom-kamne-368325-2019/>

co-operation of the regions. In particular, we are already talking about the creation of a joint milk-processing enterprise in the Chinese province. And in the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park "Great Stone" a project related to medical equipment may be realised. We are talking about the fact that the Chinese enterprise from Guangdong province, interested in this project, "has already passed the certification for the European market and is interested in placing production in "Velikiy Kamen". <...> This will be a large-scale and significant project not only for Minsk region, but also for the country"³⁴⁹.

Other Chinese regions that have noticeably intensified their interaction with Belarusian partners recently include **Sichuan** Province. In November 2019, the international railway port of its administrative centre, Chengdu, a city of 20 million people, hosted the registration of the Belarusian National Pavilion of Electronic Commerce, the completion of construction and installation work on the construction of which is scheduled for early 2020. Here, in seven zones on an area of almost 1,500 square metres, Belarusian companies of various kinds will be able to present their export potential, including food and beverages, agricultural products and handicrafts, with rooms for negotiations and business forums. The very location of this pavilion is very promising - in a free trade zone with good logistics, as there is a railway port and two large wholesale markets nearby, each of which has more than seven thousand Chinese wholesale operators. It is also interesting that the pavilion will be presented in the form of Mir Castle and decorated with Belarusian national symbols. It is also important that "on the basis of the Belarusian National Pavilion, China and Belarus are ready to create a comprehensive bilateral platform of ties, which will include such areas as economy, culture, education, tourism, investment, and services"³⁵⁰.

Exporters from **Homiel Region** are going to actively use the potential of the Belarusian National Pavilion in Chengdu. They will be mainly producers of food products - "meat and dairy products <...>, alcoholic beverages, as well as confectionery products, which have already proved themselves on foreign markets"³⁵¹. This is explained by a number of reasons. Thus, back in May 2015, Homiel Region and Sichuan Province signed an agreement on

³⁴⁹ Minsk region increased exports to China more than twice in January-September [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/minskaja-oblast-uvelichila-eksport-produktsii-v-kitaj-zajanvar-sentjabr-bolee-chem-v-dva-raza-369062-2019/>

³⁵⁰ In Chinese Chengdu the ceremony of awarding the plaque of the Belarusian National Pavilion took place [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/v-kitajskom-chendu-sostojalas-tseremonija-vruchenija-tablichki-belorusskogo-natsionalnogo-paviljona-368575-2019/>

³⁵¹ Homiel manufacturers will present their products in the Belarusian pavilion in Chengdu [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/gomelskie-proizvoditeli-predstavjat-pischevuju-produktsiju-v-belorusskom-paviljone-v-chendu-358191-2019>

cooperation, which provided for the organisation of cooperation on the principles of partnership, equality, trust and mutual benefit in such areas as economy, agriculture, health and culture, education, sports and tourism. In addition, "direct contacts and twinning ties will be established between the cities of the two regions to develop co-operation in the above-mentioned areas"³⁵².

And, indeed, three years later - in August 2018 - the agreement on the establishment of twinning relations was signed by the administrative centres of the region and the province - Homel and Chengdu, declaring their intention to develop cooperation in trade, education, culture, tourism, with special emphasis on the great prospects for fruitful cooperation in the economic sphere. The fact is that Chengdu is called the window that opens the way for international co-operation of the western part of China with the countries of Europe. A kind of business card of this Chinese city has already become a "goods train of international importance "Chengdu - Europe" connecting China, Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus"³⁵³. In addition to the economy, the parties see education and healthcare among the promising areas of partnership development, as evidenced by the documents signed at the same time, in August 2018 - the Memorandum on Strategic Partnership between Chengdu Health Investment Corporation and Gomel Regional Clinical Hospital for Invalids of the Patriotic War and the Agreement on Establishing Cooperation between Wuhou Higher Secondary School and Gymnasium No. 71 of Gomel.

Among the Homiel enterprises, whose products will be presented at the Belarusian National Pavilion in Chengdu, we should name, first of all, OJSC Milkavita, which for seven months of 2019 shipped seven times (!) more of its products to the Chinese market than for the same period of 2018. "Every month the company supplies about 500 tonnes of products to the PRC - dry dairy products and liquid products with a long shelf life. The main volume in exports to China is whey powder - about 80%"³⁵⁴. By exhibiting their products at the Belarusian National Pavilion in Chengdu, Homiel exporters hope to significantly expand their presence in Sichuan province. This would allow the same JSC "Milkavita" to increase the supply of its products to China at the end of 2019 to the planned three million dollars.

³⁵² Sidorchik, V. Gomel region and the Chinese province of Sichuan will cooperate / V. Sidorchik // [Electronic resource]. - 2015. - URL: <https://news.tut.by/society/447548.html>

³⁵³ Homiel and Chinese Chengdu became twin cities [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/gomel-i-kitajskij-chendu-stali-gorodami-pobratimami-315608-2018/>

³⁵⁴ Gomel enterprise "Milkavita" increased exports to China by 7 times [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/gomelskoe-predpriyatie-milkavita-narastilo-eksport-v-kitaj-v-7-raz-358197-2019/>

It should be noted that Homiel Region is developing partnership and twinning ties with other Chinese regions as well. Thus, in June 2019, "Homiel Region and the Chinese Autonomous Region of **Inner Mongolia** signed a cooperation programme for 2020"³⁵⁵. Gomel has also established partnership and twinning ties with several Chinese cities. In particular, in 2015, an agreement on friendship and cooperation was signed with Harbin, the administrative centre of **Heilongjiang** Province. The parties agreed that "the creation of joint ventures in such areas as mechanical engineering, electronics, processing of agricultural products <...> should eventually become a priority of economic cooperation between Homiel and Harbin"³⁵⁶. However, the longest relations between Homiel and Huai'an city in **Jiangsu** province have been established since 1997. Thanks to these ties, Mlekovita OJSC, already mentioned above, took part in the International Exhibition of Food Industry in this Chinese city in May 2019, and in June 2019 at the meeting of the leaders of Gomel and Huai'an it was stated that the parties have "great potential for further development of cooperation in various areas, <...> that food products produced in Gomel are of particular interest"³⁵⁷. All this variety of ties with Chinese partners allowed Gomel to exceed the volume of mutual trade with China at the level of forty million dollars at the end of 2018, and in the first four months of 2019 to come close to a trade turnover of 17 million dollars.

The Chinese vector of foreign economic activity in **Vitebsk region** also received quite a powerful development in 2019, as evidenced by the figures. Suffice it to say that in the first eight months of this year, the trade turnover of this Belarusian region "with the provinces of China totalled \$69.6 million, exports - \$13.5 million, which is 2.1 times higher than in the same period of 2018"³⁵⁸. One of Vitebshchina's effective partners in China is **Shandong** Province, which is among the top three Chinese regions. It should be recalled that the first Memorandum of Co-operation was signed by the parties back in 2006. Within the framework of the agreements reached then, the cities located

³⁵⁵ Grishkevich, A. Gomel region and the Chinese Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia signed a cooperation programme / A. Grishkevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/gomelskaja-oblast-i-kitajskij-avtonomnyj-rajon-vnutrennjaja-mongolija-podpisali-programmu-sotrudnichestva-4-2019/>

³⁵⁶ Sidorchik, V. Creating a joint venture may become a priority of economic cooperation between Homiel and Harbin / V. Sidorchik // [Electronic resource]. - 2015. - URL: <http://mozyrisp.gov.by/special/ru/obl-news-ru/view/sozdanie-sp-mozhet-stat-prioritetom-ekonomicheskogo-sotrudnichestva-mezhdu-gomelem-i-xarbinomnn-2135/>

³⁵⁷ Chinese partners are interested in the supply of Homiel food products [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/kitajskie-partnery-zainteresovany-v-postavkah-gomelskoj-pischevoj-produktsii-354606-2019/>

³⁵⁸ Bogacheva, O. In Vitebsk region together with China will produce peat products / O. Bogacheva // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/v-vitebskoj-oblasti-sovmestno-s-kitaem-budut-vypuskat-torfoproduktsiju-366630-2019/>

in these regions began to cooperate: Vitebsk and Jinan, Novopolotsk and Weihai, Orsha and Qingdao.

In particular, Vitebsk and Jinan established twinning relations in April 2009. At that time, the two cities named heavy and light industry, machine-tool construction, logistics, information technologies, as well as production of medical equipment and pharmaceuticals as promising areas of co-operation. The fact is that more than seven million people live in this Chinese city. And there is a steady demand for quality goods there, which certainly opens up interesting opportunities for Vitebsk manufacturers. In September 2017, the parties specified their co-operation intentions in the protocol of implementation of the agreement on the development of twinning cooperation for 2017-2020. In particular, in the field of education, the Chinese side proposed two projects: "scholarships for students allocated annually for Jinan twin cities, as well as summer schools for secondary school students, where children get acquainted with Chinese culture and lifestyle"³⁵⁹. And in terms of more fully utilising the tourism potential of the two cities, it was proposed to create a joint tourism product that would be in demand and popular primarily with Chinese citizens.

As for the cities of Novopolotsk and Weihai, twinning relations between them were established in 2006, "but they have not been particularly active so far"³⁶⁰. Nevertheless, already in October 2019, on the margins of the Forum of Sister Regions held in the Chinese province of Shandong, representatives of the two cities were able to note for themselves the areas in which twinning ties could successfully develop. First of all, it was about ecology and logistics within the framework of the "One Belt, One Road" project. Secondly, given the fact that the city of Weihai is famous for its production of state-of-the-art medical equipment, Novopolotsk sees great prospects for cooperation in this area as well. In turn, Weihai is very interested in co-operation with the Belarusian city in the sphere of higher and secondary specialised education. Therefore, we can hope that the emergence of concrete twinning projects is not far off.

Finally, the Chinese city of Qingdao and Orsha District of Vitebsk Region signed an agreement on the establishment of friendly relations in

³⁵⁹ Antonov, S. Vitebsk and Jinan have identified the main areas of cooperation for the period until 2020 / S. Antonov // [Electronic reshmers]. - 2017. - URL: <http://vitvesti.by/politics/vitebsk-i-teczinan.html>

³⁶⁰ Demidov, D. Shandong - Novopolotsk: horizons of co-operation. What mutual interests determined the forum of twin regions in China? / D. Demidov // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.novaya.by/2019/10/22/shandong-novopolock-gorizonty-sotrudnichestva-kakie-vzaimnye-interesy-opredelil-forum-regionov-pobratimov-v-kitae/>

September 2018. At the same time, "representatives of Chinese business expressed interest in opening a trade facility of Belarusian meat and dairy and bakery products in Qingdao"³⁶¹, as well as in cooperation within the framework of the construction of a multimodal industrial and logistics complex "Bremino-Orsha". In addition, in July 2019, it became known about the intention of the municipal education department of Qingdao to participate in the construction of a school in Orsha for 1020 places. "Such a school can become an experimental platform for testing the jointly developed programmes of optional classes in Chinese language, literature, theatre and art in general"³⁶².

Returning to the interregional interaction between Vitebsk region and Shandong province as a whole, it should be noted that in October 2019, these regions have already reached the signing of the Agreement on Friendship and Comprehensive Cooperation, in which they identified as priorities for the development of partnership ties "the development of an effective mechanism for cooperation in trade and investment, the development of cooperation ties in industry, transport logistics, the creation of joint companies in petrochemicals, water treatment, electronics"³⁶³. All these directions will be embodied in the road map of co-operation, which will be developed in the near future. One of the real projects, which, to all appearances, will be included in this programme of cooperation between the Belarusian and Chinese regions, will be a joint venture to produce peat products, which is planned to be set up in Vitebsk region. Its participants will be "a Chinese agricultural company interested in supplying peat products in large volumes and Vitebskoblgaz, which includes a branch for peat extraction and processing in Dokshitsky district"³⁶⁴.

³⁶¹ Visit of the delegation of Qingdao (PRC) to Orsha district of Vitebsk region [Electronic resource]. - 2018.

— URL: <https://cci-vitebsk.by/ru/content/%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B8%D1%82-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B8-%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BE-%D0%BA%D0%BD%D1%80-%D0%B2-%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%88%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9-%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BE%D0%BD-%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B1%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B9-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8>

³⁶² In Orsha they plan to build a new school. Not a simple one, but with Chinese investments [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://gorod216.by/new/2723>

³⁶³ Bogacheva, O. Vitebsk region and Shandong province signed an agreement on friendship and cooperation / O. Bogacheva // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/vitebskaja-oblast-i-provintsija-shandun-podpisali-soglashenie-o-druzhbe-i-sotrudnichestve-366479-2019/>

³⁶⁴ Bogacheva, O. In Vitebsk region together with China will produce peat products / O. Bogacheva // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/v-vitebskoj-oblasti-sovmestno-s-kitaem-budut-vypuskat-torfoproduktysiju-366630-2019/>

To summarise, it should be noted that "the Year of the Regions of Belarus in China is planned to take place in 2020"³⁶⁵. These plans mean that in the near future both countries intend to develop interregional cooperation even more actively and strengthen trade and economic, scientific and technological, industrial and co-operative, cultural and tourist ties, expanding the number of participants in this interaction.

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³⁶⁵ Belarus and China are interested in intensifying interregional cooperation [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-kitaj-zainteresovany-v-aktivizatsii-mezhregionalnogo-sotrudnichestva-369121-2019/>

Belarus-China: to build on the existing potential for co-operation

³⁶⁶In 2021, the People's Republic of China launched the 14th Five-Year Plan for the country's socio-economic development until 2025, which will take new steps in reform policies and form a new architectonics of mutually beneficial international cooperation to "comprehensively enhance the country's opening up to the outside world, promote the liberalisation and facilitation of trade and investment, promote innovation and trade development, and advance the high-quality development of the joint construction of the One Belt One Road project". Meanwhile, the Chinese side will aim to create new advantages in international cooperation and competition, as it believes that "international economic interaction and exchanges are still objective requirements for the world's economic development. Openness to the outside world is the basic state policy of the country"³⁶⁷. As for Belarus, the Chinese side expresses confidence that the two states should continue to mutually utilise the advantages of their economies, which are largely complementary, develop the existing potential for cooperation, including within the framework of the "One Belt, One Road" project and the China-Belarus Great Stone Industrial Park, and expand cooperation "in such areas as epidemic control, trade and economy, education, science and technology, culture, and interregional ties"³⁶⁸.

It should be recalled that by today the Republic of Belarus has built quite strong and open relations with the People's Republic of China, which are now characteristic of only three countries - Russia, Pakistan and the United Kingdom. This is confirmed by such figures. "The People's Republic of China is Belarus' second foreign trade partner after Russia, with an annual turnover of \$5 billion. <...> About 500 Belarusian exporters have already established themselves in this competitive market. More than 100 agricultural enterprises have been accredited. 24 projects worth almost \$4.5 billion have already been implemented in Belarus using PRC resources"³⁶⁹.

³⁶⁶ Communiqué of the Fifth Plenum of the 19th CPC Central Committee [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <http://ru.china-embassy.org/rus/ggl/t1832267.htm>

³⁶⁷ Qiming, C. China in 2021-2025 intends to implement a new development plan / C. Qiming. Qimin // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/comments/view/kitaj-v-2021-2025-godah-nameren-realizovat-novyj-plan-razvitiya-7479/>

³⁶⁸ Xiaoyun, S. Taking the Bull by the Horns / S. Xiaoyun // [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/interview/view/vzjat-byka-za-roga-sovety-posla-knr-kak-pravilno-vstretit-kitajskij-novyj-god-7657/>

³⁶⁹ Yaroshenko: Belarus has built strong and open relations with China [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/yaroshenko-belarus-vystroila-prochnye-i-otkrytye-otnosheniya-s-kitajem-428410-2021>

Undoubtedly, the flagship project in this context is the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park Velikiy Kamen, which has already invested \$650 million in the incomplete six years of its existence and has already registered 68 residents from 14 countries with declared investments of \$1.2 billion, of which about half have started operations. As a result, "a supercapacitor, truck cranes, laser equipment, drones, Euro-6 engines and heavy-duty gearboxes, a 5G communications pilot zone and a multimodal container terminal are just a few examples of projects currently underway in the park"³⁷⁰. In 2021, they plan to attract 17 more new residents here. Great hopes in this regard are pinned on the project to create a multimodal railway terminal with the participation of Germany, China and Switzerland, which will begin construction in the near future, as well as on the arrival here of the American company Ivy Global, which is considering the possibility of opening in Velikiy Kamen "a pharmaceutical plant for the production of a wide range of drugs, including those to combat COVID-19"³⁷¹. In the same year, "when the second phase of the park's development begins, plans also include the construction of a second residential complex with 173 flats and a second substation"³⁷².

Continuing the theme of construction, it should be noted that in 2021, the construction of a national football stadium and a swimming pool of international standard in Belarus with the help of China's gratuitous technical and economic assistance will also come to the fore with the completion of these projects in 2023, as well as the start of the third phase of construction of social housing on Belarusian soil in the first half of 2021 with the use of Chinese gratuitous assistance. Recall that during the first two stages of the project, 38 houses for 3,286 flats were built in six regions and Minsk, which improved the living conditions of more than ten thousand people. Within the framework of the third stage "it is planned to build 1,166 flats of social housing in 20 houses. The total construction area will be about 66 thousand square metres. The flats will be given to citizens who are on the register of those in need of better housing conditions and have the right to receive social housing"³⁷³.

³⁷⁰ Investments in "Great Stone" during the project implementation totalled \$650 million - Yaroshenko [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/investitsii-v-velikij-kamen-za-vremja-realizatsii-proekta-sostavili-650-mln-jaroshenko-428432-2021/>

³⁷¹ American company Ivy Global is considering the possibility of opening a pharmaceutical plant in "Velikiy Kamen" [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/amerikanskaja-kompanija-ivy-global-rassmatrivaet-vozmozhnost-otkrytija-v-velikom-kamne-farmzavoda-426540-2021/>

³⁷² Industrial park "Velikiy Kamen" expects to attract about 17 residents in 2021 [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/industrialnyj-park-velikij-kamen-rasschityvaet-v-2021-godu-privlech-okolo-17-rezidentov-423412-2021/>

³⁷³ China is going to build 20 more social houses in Belarus [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/kitaj-sobiraetsja-postroit-v-belarusi-esche-20-sotsialnyh-domov-426882-2021/>

Finally, as far as the coronavirus pandemic is concerned, the two countries have joined forces to combat it from the very beginning, providing each other with assistance and support. As a result, "40 tonnes of humanitarian medical supplies were sent from Belarus to China. From China - two shipments of emergency medical aid goods worth about 32.6 million yuan, provided by the Chinese government, as well as 110 tonnes from twin regions and partner companies"³⁷⁴. Taking into account the current situation with repeated outbreaks of the epidemic, the parties intend to continue to actively cooperate together in confronting this global challenge, confirming by concrete actions the existing level of trustful comprehensive strategic partnership and mutually beneficial co-operation.

As for the interaction between the regions of the two countries, back in January 2021, the parties "with a view to developing interregional cooperation, proposed to declare the Year of the Regions of Belarus and China and to hold it within three years, from 2021 to 2023"³⁷⁵. A number of Belarusian and Chinese regions are already taking active steps to actualise these partnerships. Thus, back in 2020, the Belarusian **Grodno region** and the Chinese province of **Hainan** signed an agreement on establishing twinning ties, which provides for a significant expansion of interaction between the regions in the economic, trade and cultural spheres. This is not the first partner in the Celestial Empire for Hrodna.

Back in 2007, Hrodna residents established twinning relations with **Gansu** Province. In 2014, "the parties signed a memorandum of cooperation to strengthen economic and trade interaction and developed the Programme of Cooperation between Hrodna Region and Gansu Province for 2014-2020, in which they tried to take into account the most important aspects of the development of bilateral partnership and twinning ties on a systematic basis"³⁷⁶.

One of the active participants in this interregional interaction is the Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno, which has established multifaceted co-operation with 10 Chinese universities. Today, Chinese students study in Grodno "at all levels - from preparatory department to postgraduate studies.

³⁷⁴ Quyan, C. Covid is not a hindrance - trade between Belarus and China turned out to be stress-resistant / C. Quyan // [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/comments/view/kovid-ne-pomehatorgovlja-belarusi-i-kr-okazalas-stressoustojchivoj-7641/>

³⁷⁵ Telephone conversation with President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/telefonnyy-razgovor-s-predsedatelem-kitayskoy-narodnoy-respubliki-si-czinpinom>

³⁷⁶ Zalessky, B. Vector of partnership - China. Collection of articles / B. Zalessky. - Palmarium Academic Publishing, 2019. - C. 105.

Several joint scientific projects in the field of biochemistry are also being developed. Previously, a project in the field of mechanical engineering was realised, now we also count on a project in the field of logistics"³⁷⁷. In August 2018, in the building of Yanka Kupala GrSU, a centre for the internship of workers from Gansu Province was opened. In 2019, four investment projects based on Chinese investments were implemented in Grodno. In particular, the former Grodno Hotel was being reconstructed. A resident from China registered in the free economic zone "Grodnoinvest" and planned to implement a project in the logistics sector. In addition, "a centre of traditional Chinese medicine and a trade and exhibition centre where the goods of the region's partners from China are presented" were also opened in Hrodna³⁷⁸.

In 2018, Grodno Region signed a Protocol of Intentions to establish friendly ties with **Fujian** Province. In official language, "the document outlines important areas of interregional complementary cooperation - trade, investment, logistics, culture"³⁷⁹. It can be added that the fact that the Chinese province has a well-developed industrial sector - electronics, machine building, and agriculture - and the Belarusian region has a well-developed agricultural sector, contributed to the rapprochement of the regions. And this is "just one of the areas of complementary cooperation that can be established in the trade and economic sphere"³⁸⁰. In addition, Belarusian flax and woodworking products are in demand in the Chinese market, and the Chinese side has declared its readiness to increase investments in Grodno region in a wide range of areas: from nuclear power plants to high technologies. The parties are now working on the implementation of the agreements reached.

In short, the People's Republic of China has become a strategic partner for the Belarusian western region, as evidenced by the figures. In the first 10 months of 2020, Hrodna Region's enterprises exported more than \$160 million worth of goods to the Chinese market. These are mainly foodstuffs and oil refining products. The emergence of new Chinese partners, namely Hainan Province, means for the Grodno side the actualisation of cooperation in other

³⁷⁷ Yanka Kupala GrSU develops joint scientific projects with Chinese universities [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/grgu-im-janki-kupaly-razvivaet-s-kitajskimi-vuzami-sovmestnye-nauchnye-proekty-344391-2019/>

³⁷⁸ 4 investment projects with Chinese capital are being implemented in Grodno region [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/v-grodnenskoj-oblasti-realizujutsja-4-investproekta-s-kitajskim-kapitalom-344505-2019/>

³⁷⁹ On the establishment of regional ties of Grodno region with the Chinese province of Fujian [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: http://shanghai.mfa.gov.by/ru/o_generalnom_consultsv/news/b1e61ad9861a3f9c.html

³⁸⁰ Grodno region and Fujian province of the People's Republic of China will develop co-operation more actively [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/grodnenskaja-oblast-i-provintsija-kr-futszjan-budut-aktivnee-razvivat-sotrudnichestvo-313085-2018/>

areas - in the sphere of high technologies, production of electrical engineering, as well as the implementation of more global and ambitious projects. Such projects include "construction of a logistics centre on the basis of Grodno airport, opening of direct flights between Grodno and Hainan province. This will allow, firstly, to develop tourism and cooperation in the humanitarian sphere more actively, and secondly, to promote mutual deliveries of products"³⁸¹. At the same time, the logistics centre may become a transport hub and a gateway to promote Chinese goods not only to Belarus, but also to the nearest European countries. Besides, one can say with confidence that the establishment of twinning ties between Grodno Region and Hainan Province will contribute to the development of cooperation between the cities of the Belarusian and Chinese regions. Thus, agreements between such cities as **Lida** and **Sanya**, **Astravets** and **Qionghai** are already at the stage of elaboration. The administrative centres of **Hrodna** and **Haikou** will not be left out of this process either.

Another interesting example is **Homiel Region**, which signed an agreement with the Chinese province of **Sichuan** in April 2021 to establish twinning ties, which envisages expanding cooperation in the economic, social, and cultural spheres. Recall that the Belarusian and Chinese regions established friendly relations six years ago, when in May 2015 they signed an agreement on cooperation, which provided for "the organisation of cooperation on the principles of partnership, equality, trust and mutual benefit in such areas as economy, agriculture, health and culture, education, sports and tourism"³⁸², as well as agreed to establish direct contacts and twinning ties between the cities of the region and the province. And already three years later - in August 2018 - the agreement to establish twinning relations was adopted by the administrative centres of the regions - the cities of **Homel** and **Chengdu**.

By this time, interregional cooperation of Gomel region on the Chinese vector was developing in three more directions - with the autonomous regions of **Inner Mongolia** (2011) and **Xinjiang Uygur** (2016), as well as **Jiangsu** Province (2016). This allowed the region's enterprises to increase exports of goods to China almost three and a half times in 2018, from \$3.9 million to \$13.5 million. The main export positions then were dairy products, flax, wool, sawn timber. At that time, the list of accredited companies to supply dairy

³⁸¹ Grodno region and the Chinese province of Hainan signed an agreement on twinning ties [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/grodnenskaja-oblast-i-kitajskaja-provintsija-hainan-podpisali-soglashenie-o-pobratimskih-svjazjah-421086-2020/>

³⁸² Zalesky, B. Potential of multi-vectorality. Chronicle of international co-operation / B. Zalesky. - LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2020. - C. 63.

products to the Chinese market already included "five Homiel producers: Milkavita, Rogachev Dairy Canning Plant, Turov and Kalinkovich dairy plants, Mozyr Dairy Products"³⁸³.

The next two years showed even more impressive growth of export supplies from Gomel region to China, convincingly demonstrating how much these products are in demand in the Chinese market. In particular, "in 2020, with an increase of 32%, goods worth \$91 million were sent to this country"³⁸⁴. The basis of these supplies was already wood pulp, timber, meat and dairy products, confectionery. And it should be assumed that the current level of interaction with Chinese regions is far from exhausting its potential, as "Homiel producers are ready to meet the needs of the Chinese side in flax, confectionery, chocolate, alcoholic beverages, carbon threads, non-woven carbon fibre, sawn timber, furniture"³⁸⁵. In addition, there is considerable interest in expanding supplies of Gomselmash's cob harvesters and forage harvesters to the Celestial Empire.

It should be noted that great development reserves exist for Homiel Region in cooperation with almost every Chinese region - partner or twin, the agreements reached earlier with which need to be updated today. For example, in the same province of Sichuan, where more than 90 million people live, in its administrative centre - Chengdu, in November 2019, the Belarusian National Pavilion was opened, divided into seven zones, where Belarusian goods, including food and beverages, agricultural products and handicrafts, were sold. At the same time, the Belarusian and Chinese sides declared their readiness to use the pavilion to "create a comprehensive bilateral platform of ties that will cover such areas as economy, culture, education, tourism, investment and services"³⁸⁶. Let's hope that the agreement on establishing twinning ties between Homiel Oblast and Sichuan Province, signed in April 2021, will become another real tool to fulfil this task.

Interesting opportunities may open up in 2021 in the interaction between Gomel Region and the Chinese Autonomous Region of **Inner Mongolia**. After

³⁸³ Enterprises of Gomel region in 2018 increased the export of goods to China almost 3.5 times [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/predpriyatija-gomelskoj-oblasti-v-2018-godu-uvlechili-eksport-tovarov-v-kitaj-pochti-v-35-raza-338253-2019/>

³⁸⁴ Enterprises of Gomel region increased the export of products to the PRC by one third [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/predpriyatija-gomelskoj-oblasti-na-tret-uvlechili-eksport-produktov-v-2021-434841-2021/>

³⁸⁵ Gomel region and the Chinese province of Sichuan signed agreements on twinning ties [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/gomelskaja-oblast-i-kitajskaja-provintsija-sichuan-podpisali-soglasenie-o-pobratimskih-svjazjah-436511-2021/>

³⁸⁶ Mozgov, E. The Belarusian National Pavilion opened in Chinese Chengdu / E. Mozgov // [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.sb.by/articles/v-kitajskom-chendu-otkrylsya-belorusskij-natsionalnyy-pavilon.html>

all, in 2019, the regions already adopted a cooperation programme for 2020. And they reinforced this document at the same time with the Agreement of Intentions on the establishment of twinning ties between the administrative centres of the region and the autonomous region - the cities of **Gomel** and **Huh-Hoto**, which envisaged the development of cooperation in the field of economy, trade, science, technology, ecology, culture, education, sports, tourism, health care. The fact that Inner Mongolia is an area rich in "natural resources: forests in the east, iron ore in the west, cattle breeding is developed in the north, grain is grown in the south"³⁸⁷. At the same time, Huh-Hoto named "mechanical engineering, particularly the production of agricultural machinery"³⁸⁸, as well as the food industry and construction among the priority areas of co-operation. The seriousness of the intentions of Gomel enterprises to enter the market of Inner Mongolia with their products is evidenced by the fact of their participation in the Belarusian-Chinese regional forum held in Huh-Hoto in June 2019, where "separate presentations were made on the investment potential of the Gomel region, <...> Gomel meat and dairy company, JSC "Spartak"³⁸⁹. It should be assumed that all these intentions of the parties on co-operation are now entering the phase of implementation of specific joint projects.

In the end, we would like to emphasise that all the above facts once again confirm the correctness of the course chosen in Belarus for the establishment and development of various twinning and partnership relations between Belarusian regions and their colleagues from other countries. The existing experience of their implementation shows that this is "an important and effective sector of international cooperation, the peculiarity of which is openness, mutual trust, tolerance and good-heartedness"³⁹⁰, with the consistent and steady development of which the partners move to the promotion of international cooperation.

³⁸⁷ A letter of intent has been signed [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: http://gomel.gov.by/ru/news/podpisano-soglashenie-onamereniyakh/?NEWS_FILTER_TYPE=sotrudnichestvo

³⁸⁸ The authorities of the Chinese city of Huh-Hoto intend to develop relations with Gomel in industry [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/vlasti-kitajskogo-goroda-huh-hoto-namereny-razvivat-otnosheniya-s-gomelem-v-promyshlennosti-366222-2019/>

³⁸⁹ Grishkevich, A. Belarusian-Chinese regional forum was held in the city of Huh-Hoto / A. Grishkevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belarus.by/ru/business/business-news/belorusko-kitajskij-regionalnyj-forum-proshel-v-gorode-xux-xoto-i-99900.html>

³⁹⁰ Batura, B. Twinning - small links of a great friendship / B. Batura // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/interview/view/pobratimskoe-dvizhenie-malenkie-zvenija-bolshoj-druzhby-7603>

Velikiy Kamen Industrial Park: a project that will shape the future

May 2020 marked five years since the visit of the leaders of the two countries - A. Lukashenka and S. Jinping - to the China-Belarus Industrial Park "Great Stone". Jinping. This event became a kind of starting point in the history of the park for its rapid development. And, indeed, in such a short period of time roads were laid here, water, electricity, heating and gas were supplied, more than 60 thousand square metres of standard production buildings were erected, the first office building, residential building and research centre were built, about 60 investment projects were attracted here, the declared volume of investments exceeding one billion dollars. All this allows us to agree with the conclusion that "in five years, the China-Belarus Industrial Park has become a good testing ground for bilateral cooperation, promoted mutual understanding between China and Belarus and ties between their enterprises, and facilitated cultural exchange. That is why the Great Stone, as a comprehensive strategic platform for trade and economic cooperation between China and Belarus, has attracted the attention of potential partners from both our two countries and from other countries, and has become a model of cooperation on the Belt and Road"³⁹¹.

It should be noted that it is not only in Belarus or China that such high praise for the Great Stone is voiced. In November 2019, the World Federation of Free and Special Economic Zones (FFEZA) held a summit in Monaco, the main topic of which was strengthening cooperation and transforming the successful experience of free economic zones (FEZs) into working tools. More than 400 representatives of FEZs from the UK, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland, Latvia, Poland, Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Asia and Africa, as well as chambers of commerce and industry, public authorities and potential foreign investors took part in this large-scale event. It should be reminded that FEMOZA is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation supported by the United Nations, which was founded in 1999 in Geneva to support and promote free and special economic zones all over the world, especially in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, to assist in bringing projects of FEZ residents to the international market and attracting foreign investment. FEMOZA functions include elaboration of

³⁹¹ Zheng, H. "The Great Stone" symbolises the firm friendship between Belarus and China / H. Zheng // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/comments/view/velikij-kamen-simvoliziruet-verduju-druzhbu-belarusi-i-kr-hu-chzhen-7289/>

norms, rules and directions of FEZ development, providing them with technical, legal and economic assistance, training of specialists. Statistics state that "today there are 3,500 free zones in 130 countries, accounting for more than 70 million jobs"³⁹². But, "despite the benefits and preferences given to them in all countries, <...> only 300-400 are effective. All this is due to the technological lag that prevents FEZs from becoming part of the global economy"³⁹³.

The Republic of Belarus has been a very active participant in FEMOZA activities for a number of years. The summit in Monaco was truly significant for the Belarusian side, as it was there that the China-Belarus Great Stone Industrial Park was honoured with the FEMOZA Awards 2019, winning in the category "The Fastest Growing Industrial Park". The peculiarity of this nomination is that "the key factors in determining the winner were Velikiy Kamen's prospects for global investment and the rapid pace of its development"³⁹⁴. Indeed, today in Velikiy Kamen the Belarusian side has created solid privileges for residents - both tax and land ownership privileges, as well as a favourable regime in which the registration of companies is carried out in the shortest possible time according to the "one window" principle. As a result, "today this park is showing tremendous growth, with investors coming to us from all over the world"³⁹⁵.

The facts show that Great Stone has already become an international platform for the creation of high-tech enterprises. At the beginning of November 2019, 57 residents were registered here. And there is every reason to believe that the number of them "may grow to 80 by the end of 2020"³⁹⁶. A project to create the production of solar panels is already underway here. In July 2019, the construction of a Belarusian-Chinese plant for the production of

³⁹² Barcelona will become the capital of free zones in 2019 [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: https://ru.wikinews.org/wiki/%D0%91%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B%D0%B0_%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%82_%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B5%D0%B9_%D1%81%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BD%D1%8B%D1%85_%D0%B7%D0%BE%D0%BD_%D0%B2_2019_%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D1%83

³⁹³ Grigorieva, V. President of the World Federation of Free and Special Economic Zones (Femoza) Juan Torrents Tolosa visited Gomel [Electronic resource]. - 2015. - URL: <https://www.sb.by/articles/vse-sezy-v-gosti-k-nam.html>

³⁹⁴ "Great Stone" recognised as the fastest growing industrial park in the world [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/velikiy-kamen-priznan-samym-bystrorastuschim-industrialnym-parkom-v-mire-369159-2019/>

³⁹⁵ Megalgalis in "Great Stone" and IT records - Rumas spoke about opportunities to invest in Belarus [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/megalgoty-v-velikom-kamne-i-rekordy-it-rumas-rasskazal-o-vozmozhnostjakh-investirovat-v-belarus-370269-2019/>

³⁹⁶ The number of residents of "Great Stone" may increase to 80 by the end of 2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/kolichestvo-rezidentov-velikogo-kamnja-k-kontsu-2020-goda-mozhet-uvlichitsja-do-80-365696-2019/>

mechanical gearboxes with an investment of \$17 million started in the industrial park. In October 2019, the engine production plant MAZ-Veichai LLC opened here, where they produce "small-unit assembly of engines of Euro-5 and Euro-6 standards for trucks, special vehicles and buses." The production capacity at one-shift operation mode will amount to 10 thousand engines per year"³⁹⁷ . But even more impressive plans are accepted here for realisation in the near future.

At the end of October 2019, the 12th meeting of the Working Group on the China-Belarus Industrial Park "Great Stone" was held in Beijing, during which its participants focused on such areas of development of this special economic zone as: improving the legal environment of the park; establishing additional comfortable conditions for attracting investment in the creation of competitive industries; creating a sustainable engineering and transport infrastructure; digital construction; and developing the park as a smart city. Among the tasks for the development of the industrial park in 2020 were highlighted "priority export orientation, attraction of anchor investors with high-tech projects, expansion of international activities"³⁹⁸ . At the same time, they intend to continue to be guided by four main principles of development: "Firstly, it is globalisation, as the industrial park is not Chinese or Belarusian, but international. Secondly, industrialisation. The main task is to attract international industry clusters. Thirdly, it is digitalisation, which should give great advantages to the development of the park. <...> Fourthly, ecologisation. Environmental protection and compliance with environmental requirements are the key to sustainable development"³⁹⁹ .

It should be recalled that as of the beginning of 2020, 60 residents from 15 countries were already registered in Veliky Kamen, including: 33 - from the People's Republic of China; 15 - involving companies from Austria, Canada, Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Switzerland and the United States of America; 12 - created by Belarusian business entities. By this time, in less than five years, 32 kilometres of roads have been built here, about 400 kilometres of water and gas pipelines, electric lines, sewage branches have been laid, 25 buildings with a total area of about 300 thousand

³⁹⁷ Opening of the plant for the production of engines of LLC "Maz-Veichai" in the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park "Great Stone" [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9051>

³⁹⁸ The Great Stone industrial park will be presented at the Chinese international import exhibition in November [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/industrialnyj-park-velikij-kamen-v-nojabre-predstavjat-na-kitajskoj-mezhdunarodnoj-vystavke-importa-367476-2019/>

³⁹⁹ Zheng, H. "Great Stone" becomes a strategic platform for Belarusian-Chinese cooperation / H. Zheng // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/interview/view/velikij-kamen-stanovitsja-strategicheskoy-platfomoy-dlja-belorussko-kitajskogo-sotrudnichestva-7152/>

square metres have been completed. And the total volume of contracts and investments exceeded one billion dollars from 11 countries of the world.

Speaking about the trends observed in the industrial park today, there are several main ones. One of them is the development of Veliky Kamen as a smart city with innovative industry and high quality of life. To achieve this goal, in February 2020, the Ministry of Communications and Informatisation of the Republic of Belarus, the Industrial Park Development Company and the Veliky Kamen administration signed an agreement on the development of 5G technology in the industrial park. It was noted that one of the most promising areas of 5G technology development here is unmanned transport. As a result, the China-Belarus Industrial Park should become "the first model base in Belarus for the introduction of 5G technologies"⁴⁰⁰.

It should be noted that the priority areas of Veliky Kamen's development remain mechanical engineering, electronics and telecommunications, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, new materials, and logistics. At the same time, emphasis is placed on the innovative activity of residents. And about 20 projects are already yielding results. Among them is the commercial and logistics company China Merchants, which received a certificate for the operation of the only bonded bonded bonded warehouse for general use in Belarus. In November 2019, Veliky Stone hosted the opening of the production building of Hess Great Stone LLC, a subsidiary of the Swiss company Garrosserie Hess AG, to produce electric passenger transport. "This type of transport will be characterised by zero carbon emissions and quiet running. The rooftop batteries will be charged at the terminus in minutes."⁴⁰¹. This resident of the industrial park plans to reach the full production cycle in 2021, when up to fifty bus bodies will already be produced here.

The following fact also speaks volumes in terms of innovative activity of the park residents: in March 2020, the manufacturer of medical devices of a wide range of products Assomedica LLC, registered in Veliky Kamen as a resident in 2017, "mastered a new production of respiratory masks and bacterial-virus filters of single use for adults, children and newborns"⁴⁰² -

⁴⁰⁰ Nemankova, Y. Pilot project for the development of 5G will be implemented in Velikiy Kamen / Y. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/pilotnyj-proekt-po-razvitiyu-5g-realizujut-v-velikom-kamne-381000-2020/>

⁴⁰¹ Alexander Turchin: Belarusian-Swiss co-operation has a serious potential [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9136>

⁴⁰² Production of breathing masks is opened in the industrial park "Velikiy Kamen" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/proizvodstvo-dyhatelnyh-masok-otkryto-v-industrialnom-parke-velikij-kamen-383799-2020/>

products that provide maximum respiratory protection from the ingress of germs and viruses, which can be used for 12-24 hours.

The industrial park is also thinking about the future. This is evidenced by the fact that in March 2020, the Chinese company Sinomach registered as a resident of Veliky Kamen with a project to create a zone for scientific and technological cooperation and innovative developments, within the framework of which it is planned to build a complex of administrative buildings for scientific research and auxiliary infrastructure. In the first phase, the company intends to "implement four research and development projects related to such developments as optical devices, automotive sensors, semiconductors and new materials". The company also plans to realise the second phase of the project"⁴⁰³.

In terms of expanding the international activities of the Veliky Kamen Industrial Park, one of the most effective tools can be such a form of attracting new residents as the creation of subparks, which means "the arrival of not one investor, but a pool of significant companies under the leadership of a separate management company. This opens up broad prospects for large corporations"⁴⁰⁴. It should be added that the park administration addresses this proposal not only to Chinese provinces, "but also to investors from Europe, in particular Switzerland, and Japan"⁴⁰⁵. The main condition for future residents, which must be fulfilled, is the creation of high-tech enterprises in the industrial park. And there is enough space and opportunities for building technological clusters and subparks on a national basis for everyone.

It should be noted that the subpark format is already used in practice in Veliky Kamen. Back in May 2017, the first stage of the trade and logistics subpark was opened here, spread over 29 hectares. This is one hundred thousand square metres of real estate, half of which was taken up by warehouses and another almost a quarter by an exhibition centre. "About \$120 million has been invested in the construction of the sub-park. In the near future it is planned to start the construction of the second stage. In total, the subpark

⁴⁰³ New resident with Chinese capital registered in "Great Stone" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/novyj-rezident-s-kitajskim-kapitalom-zaregistrirovan-v-velikom-kamne-384192-2020>

⁴⁰⁴ Konoga, P. Alexander Yaroshenko told about the new residents of the industrial park "Velikiy Kamen", satellite town and plans for 2019 / P. Konoga // [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.sb.by/articles/vysech-pribyl-iz-kamnya.html>

⁴⁰⁵ "Velikiy Kamen" offers foreign partners to create subparks [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/velikij-kamen-predlagaet-zarubezhnym-partneram-sozdavat-subparki-365694-2019/>

will occupy an area of more than 90 hectares, the volume of investments is \$500 million"⁴⁰⁶.

At the 11th meeting of the Working Group on the China-Belarus Industrial Park, held in November 2018 in Beijing, it was noted that in the near future the necessary support would be provided for the practical implementation of the subparks of Harbin city, which is in Heilongjiang province, and Guangdong province in the Great Stone. It was also planned to "substantively work out the establishment of sub-parks in the industrial park with Sichuan and Shaanxi provinces and Hangzhou city by the end of 2019"⁴⁰⁷. As for Guangdong province, back in January 2017 in its administrative centre - Guangzhou city - "the signing ceremony of the agreement on the establishment of the China (Guangdong) LED products subpark in the Great Stone Industrial Park"⁴⁰⁸, as well as five more documents on the intention to join this subpark of specific companies.

Another document, which is significant in the context of this topic, was signed in November 2018 at the first Chinese exhibition of imported goods and services in Shanghai. This is an agreement on the establishment of the Chengdu-European Industrial Subpark on the territory of the Great Stone. The fact is that Chengdu - the administrative centre of Sichuan province - has a significant industrial potential, including developed automotive and aerospace industries, which corresponds to the priorities of the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park. In addition, "Chengdu is the most economically close city in China to Europe"⁴⁰⁹.

Let us note an important detail: recently, a number of important meetings and negotiations have taken place to consider the creation of national subparks of European countries in Veliky Kamen. In particular, in August 2019, this topic was discussed in the Government of the Republic of Belarus with representatives of Swiss business circles, including the management of Ceres Group Holding AG and the Swiss industrial park BUSS, who positively assessed the Belarusian proposal not only to create a Swiss subpark in Veliky Kamen, but also "to act as a developer in it and to both engage in development

⁴⁰⁶ Anatoly Kalinin took part in the opening of the first stage of the trade and logistics sub-park in the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park "Great Stone" [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/7228>

⁴⁰⁷ Minutes of the 11th meeting of the Working Group on China-Belarus Industrial Park [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: http://belaruschina.by/data/fck/file/minekonomiki/protocol_11.pdf

⁴⁰⁸ A sub-park of LED products will be created in the Industrial Park "Velikiy Kamen" [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: <https://industrialpark.by/novosti/2017/v-industrialnom-parke-velikij-kamen-budet-sozdan-subpark-svetodiodnoj-produkcii.html>

⁴⁰⁹ Chinese Chengdu considers the possibility of creating high-tech industries in the "Great Stone" [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: https://interfax.by/news/policy/ekonomicheskaya_politika/1251824/

and attract Swiss business to co-operation with Belarus"⁴¹⁰. It is noteworthy that already in December 2019 the 60th resident was registered in the industrial park - the already mentioned above "Swiss company Hess Great Stone for the production of electric passenger transport"⁴¹¹. And in January 2020, the issue of "possible future creation of an Italian-Belarusian sub-park in Velikiy Kamen"⁴¹² was considered in practical terms at a meeting in Rome with owners and managers of Italian companies interested in investing in the projects of the industrial park.

Undoubtedly, all these facts emphasise the very high dynamics of development of the Great Stone Industrial Park - a project, the role of which in the Belarusian economy will very soon become significant both in terms of innovation and investment and technology.

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⁴¹⁰ Kryzhevich, I. On the territory of the "Great Stone" can create a Swiss subpark / I. Kryzhevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.sb.by/articles/na-territorii-velikogo-kamnya-mogut-sozdat-shveytsarskiy-subpark-.html>

⁴¹¹ The 60th resident appeared in the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park "Great Stone" [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://interfax.by/news/biznes/businesses/1268182/>

⁴¹² Belarus and Italy will consider the creation of a joint subpark in "Great Stone" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-italija-rassmotriat-vopros-sozdanija-sovmestnogo-subparka-v-velikom-kamne-376060-2020/>

Velikiy Kamen Industrial Park: the goal is to introduce innovations

The science and innovation vector occupies an important place among the main areas of trustful comprehensive strategic partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the People's Republic of China. Three priority components can be identified in this segment of bilateral interaction. "The first is in the field of scientific research, where the parties are involved in the implementation of major joint projects. The second is in the sphere of innovation activities, where a network of joint innovation centres and scientific laboratories is being formed and developed. The third is in the field of education, where joint training and mutual internships of specialists, teachers and students take place"⁴¹³. The development of the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park Velikiy Kamen is particularly innovation-oriented, which allows for the creation of competitive production facilities, sustainable engineering and transport infrastructure, and digital construction to transform the park into a "smart city". At the same time, the pace of innovative progress has noticeably accelerated in 2020. Here are just a few examples confirming this observation.

In May 2020, the foundation stone was laid in Velikiy Kamen at the site of the future construction of the scientific and technological cooperation and development zone or Fakel project by the Chinese Sinomach Corporation. It should be reminded that in June 2014, the Belarusian government signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement with this corporation, on the basis of which large-scale investment projects are now being implemented in Belarus. As for the Fakel project, this zone will be "aimed at creating conditions for attracting Chinese and European technologies, introducing and testing them in the park and further exporting them to Europe and China"⁴¹⁴. Here it is planned to build office buildings and premises for scientific developments, where "it is planned to realise four research and development projects - in the field of optical technologies, mechanics, electronics and new materials. It is also envisaged to erect laboratories, office-type co-working spaces, integrated construction of

⁴¹³ Zaleskii, B. On the terms of reciprocity. Chronicle of international co-operation / B. Zaleskyy. - LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2017. - C. 63.

⁴¹⁴ On the development of the SINOMACH zone of scientific and technological cooperation and development in the park "Great Stone" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://china.mfa.gov.by/ru/embassy/news/cf39e9ad1f75824a.html>

educational facilities and high-tech pilot commercial facilities"⁴¹⁵. This project will involve not only research institutes and enterprises of Sinomach Corporation, but also enterprises of the Chinese Zhongguancun Technopark and structures of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus.

The mentioning of the Zhongguancun Technopark in this context shows the very serious attitude of the Chinese side to the Torch project in Great Stone. The fact is that this technopark, founded in 1988 in the north-western part of Beijing, is considered the Chinese analogue of Silicon Valley, is the first in China, one of the largest in the capital and consists of 16 scientific zones. It was here that the first Chinese vacuum cylinder, the first computer, the first switchboard, etc., "appeared in due course. A total of 5,000-plus products were developed, which filled a void in the history of Chinese high-tech"⁴¹⁶. Now the research and development science bureaus of many multinational corporations are concentrated here. China has high hopes for this technology park in terms of "fulfilment of the ambitious Made in China 2025 strategy, which will make the country technologically independent and make it a leader in many fields. The Chinese authorities will spend about \$300 billion to implement the programme"⁴¹⁷. Speaking about this technopark, one cannot but mention such a figure: from January to November 2019, it recorded an increase in revenues by almost 14 per cent. At the same time, "the revenues of leading high-tech enterprises in the technology park reached 5.43 trillion yuan (about \$779 billion) during this period"⁴¹⁸.

Returning to innovative activities at Veliky Kamen, we note that in May 2020, another milestone event took place here, showing that one of the promising facets of the development of the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park is digitalisation. An unmanned, electric-powered bus developed using technology from Singaporean scientists was tested here for the first time. "The maximum speed that the prototype can reach is 40 kilometres per hour. <...> The driving range is about 180 kilometres. A full charge will take no more than

⁴¹⁵ Sinomach "Torch " park will be built in "Great Stone" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/v-velikom-kamne-postrojat-park-sinomach-fakel-390613-2020/>

⁴¹⁶ Wei, W. China's Silicon Valley / W. Wei // Models, Systems, Networks in Economics, Technology, Nature and Society. - 2013. - C. 19.

⁴¹⁷ Krasilnikova, Y. Beijing launches a programme to attract foreign IT-specialists / Y. Krasilnikova // [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: https://hightech.fm/2018/02/28/beijing_lures_talant

⁴¹⁸ Beijing's Zhongguancun Technopark recorded 13.8 per cent revenue growth in the first 11 months of 2019 [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: http://russian.news.cn/2020-01/07/c_138685700.htm?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fyandex.by%2Fnews

4 hours"⁴¹⁹. On the territory of Velikiy Kamen they plan to work out the technology of operation of the novelty, after which, apparently, in the not too distant future commercial operation of this unmanned transport will be possible.

In the same May 2020, the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park registered a new resident - Crownhomes Scientific and Technical Company for Wooden Structures LLC, which will create in Veliky Kamen "a centre for the production of production lines for the woodworking industry based on the principles of Industry 4.0"⁴²⁰. This production centre, which is based on innovative technologies, is expected to be put into operation in 2022.

Moreover, in 2020, the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park Great Stone, despite the alarming epidemic situation, continued to demonstrate quite high rates of development, remaining a landmark project of the Chinese initiative "One Belt, One Road" in Eastern Europe. Suffice it to say that "by the end of October, 66 enterprises from 14 countries were among its residents, and the volume of agreed investments was about \$1.2 billion"⁴²¹. This fact also speaks volumes: in the first nine months of 2020, the revenue of the industrial park's residents increased almost three and a half times compared to the same period in 2019. "At the same time, the revenue from the sale of goods, products, works, services outside Belarus amounted to Br36.8 million (8.7 times growth)"⁴²². And the number of employees employed at Veliky Kamen came close to one thousand - 970 people. And, to all appearances, the industrial park is not going to rest on its laurels, as evidenced by a number of facts from the second half of 2020, which show that this special economic zone is now actively searching for new ways of development in many areas, including optimisation of logistics and introduction of innovations.

Thus, in September 2020, CJSC Eurasian Railway Gateway, a company that "will implement an investment project to build a bimodal railway terminal

⁴¹⁹ The first unmanned electric bus tested in "Great Stone" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/pervyj-bespilotnyj-elektrobus-protestirovali-v-velikom-kamne-390612-2020>

⁴²⁰ The new resident of "Great Stone" will produce woodworking products [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/novyj-rezident-velikogo-kamnja-budet-vypuskat-produktsiju-dlja-derevoobrabotki-390684-2020>

⁴²¹ Xiaoyun, S. China opposes external interference in the internal affairs of Belarus / S. Xiaoyun // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/interview/view/kitaj-vystupaet-protiv-vmeshatelstva-izvne-vo-vnutrennie-dela-belarusi-7572/>

⁴²² Revenues of Veliky Kamen residents in January-September increased 3.4 times to Br126.2 million [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/vyruchka-rezidentov-velikogo-kamnja-v-janvare-sentjabre-vyrosla-v-34-raza-do-br1262-mln-416031-2020/>

in the park," was registered as a resident of Veliky Kamen⁴²³. The list of participants in this project, construction work on which will begin in 2021, is very solid. They include the world's largest inland port Duisburger Hafen from Germany, the leading intermodal transport network operator in Europe Hupak Intermodal SA from Switzerland, the Brest branch of the Belarusian Railway, and the resident of the park China Merchants China Commercial and Logistics Company. It is expected that the terminal reaching its design capacity will bring Veliky Kamen residents to a qualitatively new level of realisation of their logistical opportunities.

Speaking about the innovative perspective of the industrial park's development, it should be recalled that again in September 2020, the China-Belarus Innovation Centre for Industrial Technologies, established by the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, the Guangdong Academy of Sciences, and the Foshan Research Institute of Industrial Technologies, became a new resident of Veliky Kamen. The creators of this centre see it as a platform for "the implementation of scientific and technological achievements between the two countries. The task of this platform is to develop scientific ideas and bring them to industrial realisation"⁴²⁴. It is expected that the research and development work started here today in such areas as new materials, modern industrial technologies, digitalisation in production, bio- and eco-technologies will develop into specific technologies and production in two to three years. In addition to serving as a link for scientific and technological cooperation between institutes of the Guangdong Provincial Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, the centre will provide business consulting and other support services for selected incubated enterprises, including business plan consulting and training. Certain hopes for the successful development of this structure are also related to the fact that "to ensure commercialisation of the results of the research and development work of the industrial technology centre, it is planned to establish a special fund of the Belt and Road Initiative in the amount of \$1.5 million"⁴²⁵, the funds of which will be used to support the commercialisation of selected research projects and incubated enterprises.

⁴²³ The new resident of "Velikiy Kamen" will build a railway terminal [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/novyj-rezident-velikogo-kamnja-postroit-zhd-terminal-407959-2020/>

⁴²⁴ The Chinese-Belarusian innovation centre of industrial technologies appeared in "Veliky Kamen" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/kitajsko-belorusskij-innovatsionnyj-tsentr-promyshlennyh-tehnologij-pojavilsja-v-velikom-kamne-408221-2020/>

⁴²⁵ Innovation Centre in "Velikiy Kamen" is planned to be opened by the end of the year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/innovatsionnyj-tsentr-v-velikom-kamne-planirujut-otkryt-do-kontsa-goda-408059-2020/>

Another innovation centre for the commercialisation of scientific and technological achievements was planned to be opened in Veliky Kamen by the end of 2020. It was in this vein that this issue was discussed in September 2020 at a meeting of the Belarusian part of the commission for scientific and technical cooperation of the Belarusian-Chinese intergovernmental cooperation committee, where the implementation of the programme of scientific and technical cooperation between Belarus and China for 2019-2020 was considered. The centre should become a comprehensive platform for nurturing startups.

Finally, in November 2020, another event took place that can seriously contribute to the introduction of innovations in this special economic zone. It is about the agreement signed by the National Centre for Intellectual Property and the administration of the Chinese-Belarusian Industrial Park Veliky Kamen on the establishment of a Technology and Innovation Support Centre on the territory of the park. This new structure is expected to "facilitate researchers' search for information on existing scientific achievements and activate the scientific work of young scientists and start-up organisations"⁴²⁶. In particular, this centre will provide free access to patent and non-patent databases of the World Intellectual Property Organisation for all employees of the park's residents. So the opportunities for innovation here are considerable.

It should be noted that Veliky Kamen today also tries to maximise the experience of other innovative structures operating in different parts of the world. This is evidenced by the fact that the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park joined the Innovation Alliance of Special Free Trade Zone Special Economic Zones established in autumn 2020 in the Chinese city of Shenzhen. The initiative, whose participants also include 47 counties and regions of the Innovation Alliance of Free Trade Zones of the People's Republic of China, intends to "actively respond to global and regional plans such as the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Belt and Road Initiative, the EU Investment Plan, Africa's Agenda 2063"⁴²⁷. In addition to the Great Stone, the new alliance includes quite a few other foreign participants, whose cooperation may yield interesting results in the future, as each of them is an innovative platform with its own unique creative experience of activity. Among them are Lekki Free Trade Zone in Nigeria, Sihanoukville Special

⁴²⁶ Technology and Innovation Support Centre created in the "Great Stone" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/tsentr-podderzhki-tehnologii-i-innovatsij-sozdali-v-velikom-kamne-415194-2020/>

⁴²⁷ "Great Stone" entered the innovation alliance of special economic zones of free trade [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/velikij-kamen-voshel-v-innovatsionnyj-alijans-osobyh-ekonomicheskikh-zon-svobodnoj-torgovli-405052-2020/>

Economic Zone in Cambodia, Djibouti International Free Trade Zone in East Africa, Hambantota Industrial Park in Sri Lanka, Eastern Industrial Park in Ethiopia, Thailand-China Industrial Park in Rayong, Suez Canal Economic Zone. Let's get to know them better.

For example, the **Lekki Free Trade Zone**, located in the Nigerian state of Lagos, is one of the most promising in this African country. Its project is a universal complex "divided into separate sectors for the oil and gas industry, industrial production, financial and commercial sphere, tourism, health improvement and private housing"⁴²⁸. The FTZ accounts for five kilometres of coastline. Apapa Port, the largest in West Africa, is fifty kilometres away and Murtala Mohammad International Airport is 70 kilometres away.

The Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone is an overseas economic and trade cooperation area in Cambodia, which was established by Chinese companies together with the Cambodia International Investment and Development Group to promote favourable market conditions, where a large industrial centre was built in 2010 in addition to a port. By early 2019, 153 enterprises from China, Europe, America, Southeast Asia and other countries and regions were "registered here. Among them are 139 industrial enterprises, mainly engaged in industries such as textiles and garments, suitcases, bags and other leather goods, machinery and mechanisms, electronics, woodworking"⁴²⁹. In five years, more than 22,000 jobs have been created here.

As for the **Djibouti International Free Trade Zone** in East Africa, it was inaugurated in July 2018 with the active participation of China State Construction. It is expected to "become the largest free trade zone in Africa and <...> a new engine for Djibouti's economic development, helping Djibouti to build a financial, shipping and trade centre in North East Africa" once all stages of construction are completed⁴³⁰. The creators of this FTZ see it as a testing ground for the so-called "Silk Road Station" to replicate China's successful experience in developing global enterprises here.

Creating a transit maritime hub for the entire South Asian region is the goal of a **Sino-Lankan** project to **revamp the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka**, which is located very close to the main international shipping routes.

⁴²⁸ Rendeavour expands the Lekki Free Trade Zone development project [Electronic resource]. - 2016. - URL: <https://www.premnewswire.com/ru/press-releases/ru-584836431.html>

⁴²⁹ Yifeng, H. A new industrial district is being built in Sihanoukville province / H. Yifeng, S. Mengkhoul // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/beltandroad/khm/ruindex.shtml>

⁴³⁰ Heads of State of five countries participated in the opening ceremony of the International Free Trade Area in Djibouti [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: https://ru.cscec.com/xwzx_ru/gsxw_ru/201810/2891561.html

"In the past, there were hardly any ships entering this small fishing town. But that all changed after the launch of a joint Sino-Lankan project to revive the maritime harbour."⁴³¹ . Thousands of new jobs have already been created here as part of China's "port-industrial park-city" model, the essence of which is that once the port is developed, an industrial park will be created to help develop the city. This, in turn, will make the Hambantota port one of the key elements of the 21st century Maritime Silk Road.

Ethiopia's Eastern Industrial Park is another "Chinese overseas trade and economic co-operation zone of national level, it already hosts more than 80 enterprises, most of them Chinese"⁴³² , engaged in pharmaceutical, textile, metallurgical and a number of other industries. It should be noted that this is not the only project implemented by the Chinese side in this African country. "Based on the experience of China's economic growth, 15 industrial parks will be built in Ethiopia in the coming years using Chinese technologies"⁴³³ , which, according to Addis Ababa, will allow this East African country to join the group of middle-income countries in the next ten years.

The Thailand-China Industrial Park in Rayong Province was built back in 2005. This cluster became the only one in Thailand certified by the Chinese government as an overseas trade and economic co-operation area. By 2017, more than 90 enterprises were already operating here, which "brought more than \$2.5 billion worth of investment to Thailand, solved the employment problem for more than 20,000 local residents, and became an industrial centre and export base for priority traditional Chinese industries in Thailand"⁴³⁴ . An interesting detail: based on the experience of the industrial park in Thailand's Rayong province, China's Huali Corporation opened the Beimei Huafushan industrial cluster in Mexico in October 2015 to help other Chinese companies enter and develop the US market.

The Suez Canal Economic Zone in Egypt was established in 2015, when a new 72 kilometre-long channel of the canal was put into operation to attract foreign investment here for the implementation of an international industrial and logistics hub project. It is expected that "with the development of the Suez Canal, the manufacturing and service industries housed there will

⁴³¹ A Sino-Lankan cooperation project is being implemented at the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://newsru.cgtn.com/news/3d3d414e6646444d77597a6333566d54/p.html>

⁴³² Ethiopia-China cooperation is a classic model of China's co-operation with Africa - Ethiopian President [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: http://russian.news.cn/2018-08/14/c_137387915.htm

⁴³³ Stronger the belt of co-operation, shorter the way out of the "backwardness trap" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://finance.rambler.ru/markets/43964485-zhenmin-zhibao-kitay-obedinennye-obschey-tselyu-chast-2/>

⁴³⁴ Corporation "Huali": let's create "industrial Chinese quarter" on "One Belt, One Road" [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: http://russian.china.org.cn/exclusive/txt/2017-04/13/content_40612178.htm

form up to a third of the country's total economy"⁴³⁵. In spring 2019, there were already 77 residents operating in the Sino-Egyptian part of this seven square kilometre zone. In May 2018, an agreement was signed to establish a Russian industrial zone in this region. In February 2020, the Belarusian side also announced its intention to participate in the creation of the Suez Canal Special Economic Zone.

Undoubtedly, the innovative experience in the development of all these special special free trade zones will be very useful for the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park Velikiy Kamen, which, in turn, has something to share with its partners in the new alliance.

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⁴³⁵ The President of Egypt issued a decree on the establishment of the Suez Canal Special Economic Zone [Electronic resource]. - 2015. - URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/2181686>

Vitebsk region: points of growth - in the free economic zone

Vitebsk region is among those regions of Belarus where, in the opinion of the head of the Belarusian state, "it is necessary to take technological and organisational measures to cope with the problems that exist there"⁴³⁶ and to direct the development of the region in an innovative direction. One of the real tools used in the region to solve the task at hand is the free economic zone (FEZ) "Vitebsk", formed twenty years ago - in 1999. Until August 2018, it consisted of 13 sectors, including 7 in Vitebsk, 4 in Orsha, and one each in Vitebsk and Postavy districts.

In August 2018, Decree No. 346 was adopted in the Republic of Belarus to further develop free economic zones and intensify the attraction of national and foreign investments, which stated the need to expand the territory and optimise the existing FEZs in the country - Minsk, Vitebsk, Grodnoinvest, Mogilev, and Gomel-Raton. It was assumed that the measures adopted in the decree "will allow to accommodate residents taking into account the prospects for their further growth, to organise jobs, to make optimal use of free land plots with available engineering and transport infrastructure, as well as to promote investment in the creation of export-oriented and import-substituting industries"⁴³⁷.

It should be noted that in FEZ "Vitebsk" alone this decree defined 16 sectors located not only in the Vitebsk area, but also in other cities and urban settlements of the region - Postavy, Orsha, Baran, Bolbasovo, Novopolotsk, Polotsk district, as well as near the villages of Kosachi and Kopti of Vitebsk district, each of which can and should receive powerful impulses for development. And these plans have already started to be realised in practice. On their territory 48 enterprises with the participation of investors from 14 countries, including Germany, Czech Republic, Russia, Poland, Great Britain, USA, Israel, Cyprus, Estonia, including German "Vitella", Polish "Decorah East", British "LINPAK Pekedging East", Estonian "Soyuz-Kabel", American "CHESS-Bel" and a number of others, which operate in 25 production areas, including mechanical engineering, electronics, veterinary medicine, chemical,

⁴³⁶ Meeting on the development of agro-industrial complex of Vitebsk region [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/soveschanie-po-voprosam-razvitiya-agropromyshlennogo-kompleksa-vitebskoj-oblasti-22434/

⁴³⁷ Belarus will consider the possibility of attracting a loan for the construction of energy infrastructure in FEZ [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-rassmatrivaet-vozmozhnost-privlechenija-zajma-dlja-stroitelstva-energeticheskoy-infrastruktury-330424-2018/>

fuel, food and light industries. And the total number of employees at the resident enterprises was about 11 thousand people.

In December 2018, the FEZ Vitebsk welcomed its first resident with Lithuanian capital - VMG WoodArt LLC, whose production site is located in the first sector of the FEZ on the territory of the former military airfield on the outskirts of Vitebsk, which goes by the name Zhurzhevo. The new resident is part of one of the largest manufacturers and exporters of furniture and particleboard in the Baltic States - the international holding "VMG", whose head office is located in Klaipeda and unites a number of enterprises in Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus. The project proposed for FEZ Vitebsk involves the creation of a sawmill and factories for the production of particleboard and furniture. Its realisation will take place in two stages. "Initially in the period until 2023 it is planned to invest more than 50 million euros in the development of production activities, to create about 200 jobs. The total volume of wood processing at the holding's enterprises will be about 700 thousand cubic metres per year. In total, at least 500 jobs will be created"⁴³⁸.

Among the states with which Vitebsk FEZ residents are successfully developing co-operation is Latvia. For three quarters of 2018, their trade turnover with Latvian economic entities approached close to \$25 million, which was more than a third of the volume of mutual trade of the entire Vitebsk region with this Baltic country. "The following companies are involved in export-import operations with Latvia: LLC BelGigaSint, LLC PO Energokomplekt, OJSC Vityaz, LLC Modern-Expo, LLC Alliansplast, RUPTP Orsha Flax Factory"⁴³⁹.

Even more significant results are characteristic of the interaction of FEZ "Vitebsk" resident enterprises with Russian partners, especially from Moscow and the Moscow region. Thus, only in the first half of 2018, the trade turnover with them exceeded \$60 million, and the leaders of business cooperation with Muscovites include not only JSC "Vitebsk carpets", but also "foreign enterprise "VIK Animal Health", IOOO "Prodexim", SOOO "TransExpedition", CJSC "Pozhtekhnika"⁴⁴⁰ and a number of others.

⁴³⁸ Resident with Lithuanian capital registered in FEZ "Vitebsk" [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/rezident-s-litovskim-kapitalom-zaregistrirovann-v-sez-vitebsk-330553-2018/>

⁴³⁹ Participation of FEZ "Vitebsk" administration in the Belarusian-Latvian business forum [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.fez-vitebsk.com/ru/news>

⁴⁴⁰ Participation of FEZ "Vitebsk" administration in the complex presentation of Vitebsk region in Moscow [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.fez-vitebsk.com/ru/news>

Other specific plans of FEZ Vitebsk to expand the geography of international co-operation are also of interest. Thus, the Chinese company "Blue Lotus" planned to launch a project with an investment volume of at least \$300 million in 2019. It is about the creation by the Chinese investor on the territory of the FEZ of "up to ten production enterprises for wood products - from fuel biomaterials to furniture"⁴⁴¹. AL Maya Group, a group of companies from the United Arab Emirates, whose representatives visited Vitebsk in July 2018, saw one of the promising areas of investment cooperation in pharmaceuticals, "as the Middle Eastern partners have extensive experience in this area"⁴⁴². Finally, in September 2018, the administration of FEZ "Vitebsk" signed a cooperation agreement with the Indian company India Advisory, which, according to the parties, "will serve as an impetus for further fruitful cooperation and attraction of Indian investments in Vitebsk region"⁴⁴³.

Residents of FEZ "Vitebsk" demonstrated high growth dynamics in attracting foreign direct investment in 2019 - at once three and a half times, reaching the mark of \$16.5 million. As a result, "the specific weight of FEZ "Vitebsk" in the investment portfolio of Vitebsk region in 2019 amounted to almost 39% and increased by 10 percentage points compared to 2018"⁴⁴⁴. Among the FEZ residents that have shown the greatest investment activity are Natrix JLLC, Chess-Bell LLC, Akitama LLC, and VIK Animal Health. In total, 50 residents have started to implement their projects in the FEZ, of which almost half are foreign capitalised. It should be noted that in 2019, eight organisations created with the participation of investors from Lithuania, Sweden, Spain, Russia and Belarus received the "FEZ Vitebsk resident status". The total volume of investments in new projects exceeds \$52 million, it is envisaged to create at least 270 jobs"⁴⁴⁵. To all appearances, these indicators will only grow in the near future.

In November 2019, a new resident was added to them - Rubovsky Dolomite Quarry LLC with the participation of an investor from Lithuania and a project to create production of building materials based on dolomite. In this

⁴⁴¹ Intentions agreement signed between the administration of FEZ "Vitebsk" and a Chinese company [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.fez-vitebsk.com/ru/news>

⁴⁴² The administration of FEZ "Vitebsk" was visited by businessmen from the UAE [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.fez-vitebsk.com/ru/news>

⁴⁴³ Participation of FEZ "Vitebsk" administration in the Belarusian-Indian business forum [Electronic resource]. - URL: <http://www.fez-vitebsk.com/ru/news>

⁴⁴⁴ FEZ "Vitebsk" residents increased the volume of direct foreign investments by 3.5 times [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/regions/view/rezidenty-sez-vitebsk-uvelichili-objem-prjamyh-inostrannyh-investitsij-v-35-raza-379775-2020/>

⁴⁴⁵ Investors from 4 countries plan to start implementing projects in FEZ "Vitebsk" this year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/investory-iz-4-stran-planirujut-v-etom-godu-nachat-realizatsiju-proektov-v-sez-vitebsk-379788-2020/>

case it is about the organisation of production of hyperpressed bricks of "Lego" type and other decorative building materials from environmentally friendly raw materials. The production will be located on the territory of the former aerodrome on the outskirts of Vitebsk. Apparently, the project is designed for a long-term perspective, as the total reserves of dolomites in the Vitebsk region "are estimated at more than 5 billion tonnes at depths from 2.5 to 38 metres, of which the volume of approved reserves is 878 million tonnes. The Ruba dolomite deposit is one of the largest among the explored deposits in Belarus"⁴⁴⁶. For this reason, the production of construction materials based on natural raw materials is one of the priority areas of economic development in Vitebsk region.

Another very promising area of FEZ "Vitebsk" development is woodworking production. There are already five resident enterprises specialising in this sector. In particular, VMG Wood Art LLC is creating a vertically integrated woodworking complex. Another company - "Akitama" - is building a plant for processing low-grade wood and producing wood-fuel pellets. And the company Karelia Venirs is organising the production of veneer. In addition, two more projects were in the process of registration in the FEZ, including the organisation of production of machine tools and equipment for the woodworking industry.

Given the obvious growing interest of investors in wood processing projects, FEZ "Vitebsk" came up with an initiative to create a wood processing cluster in the region, which implies an association of manufacturers, research centres and educational institutions, which is expected to provide favourable conditions for the introduction of innovations. After all, "this form of co-operation will stimulate scientific developments and their practical application. As a result, it will increase the depth of processing of wood raw materials and create products with higher added value"⁴⁴⁷. The participants of this cluster can be enterprises, institutions of additional education, educational institutions that train specialists for this industry, including Vitebsk State Technical College. The agreement on the creation of the woodworking cluster was planned to be signed in the spring of 2020 within the framework of the International Economic Forum in Vitebsk. It should be assumed that this form of coordination, which implies a synergetic effect at the end, will really help

⁴⁴⁶ A new resident of FEZ "Vitebsk" will create the production of construction materials from dolomite [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyy-rezident-sez-vitebsk-sozdast-proizvodstvo-stroitelnyh-materialov-iz-dolomita-371163-2019/>

⁴⁴⁷ FEZ "Vitebsk" offers to create a woodworking cluster [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/sez-vitebsk-predlagaet-sozdat-derevoobrabatvyvayuschij-klastern-371147-2019/>

to introduce innovations not only in the free economic zone, but also outside it.

It should be noted that the emergence of this cluster in Vitebsk region can continue and complement the innovative development direction of the northern Belarusian region. It should be reminded that in October 2017, the Novopolotsk innovation-industrial petrochemical cluster was already established here, which included the Novopolotsk City Executive Committee, the Polotsk State University, Naftan OJSC, Construction and Assembly Centre No. 16, Novopolotsk, Interservice LLC, and the Novopolotsk Centre for Entrepreneurship and Real Estate. Already in 2020, the number of its participants is expected to almost double, including foreign participants. In particular, these may be Chinese partners from Weihai, in Shandong Province, Novopolotsk's sister city, who are interested in the innovative developments of Polotsk scientists to create new types of petrochemical products and improve the characteristics of the fuel produced. It seems that a company from the Czech Republic, which is interested in entering the Belarusian market, is also among the potential partners of the cluster.

The growing interest of foreign partners in the petrochemical cluster pushes its organisers to optimise the mechanisms of interaction between its participants. For this reason, an association is planned to be established here in 2020, which will act as a coordinating centre and will formulate proposals to improve the regulatory requirements governing the activities of the subjects of this innovation infrastructure. In addition, "the association will also undertake the organisation of activities to develop effective interaction between the participants, the formation of a portfolio of joint orders, promotion of the cluster's image and improvement of personnel support for its activities"⁴⁴⁸. There is every reason to believe that this format of cooperation can also have the most favourable impact on the innovative development of the Vitebsk region's economy.

The first resident registered in the FEZ in 2020 was BelBanka LLC, established with the participation of an investor from Russia. The investment project of this company involves the reconstruction and modernisation of production facilities on the outskirts of Vitebsk and on the site of Vityaz OJSC, as well as the installation of two lines for the production of tin cans for industrial canning of food products. Production activities are planned to start

⁴⁴⁸ The number of participants of the Novopolotsk petrochemical cluster is planned to almost double [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/chislo-uchastnikov-novopolotskogo-neftehimicheskogo-klastera-planiruietsja-uvlechit-pochti-v-dva-raza-371161-2019/>

here already in 2021. Supplies of raw materials - white tinplate - will be provided by the Miorsky Metal Rolling Plant, located in the Vitebsk region, which is scheduled to be commissioned in the second quarter of 2021. As a result, BelBanka LLC "will first produce solid cans, where the bottom and the side surface are a single unit, with only the lid being rolled on. At the second stage, the company will produce prefabricated products consisting of three parts (bottom, body and lid)"⁴⁴⁹. An important detail: when the new enterprise reaches full capacity, the volume of products manufactured here will double. And all of it will be shipped to foreign markets.

The investment picture of 2020 in FEZ "Vitebsk" is significantly complemented by the fact that at least six enterprises created with the participation of investors from Canada, China, Azerbaijan and Russia are already planned to be registered here as residents. The total volume of investments in these projects will exceed \$100 million, and the number of jobs to be created will be at least 300. In particular, in Polotsk FEZ resident - LLC "International Corporation "Belsun" on high technologies" - will create a high-tech production of low-tonnage chemistry products that have no analogues in the post-Soviet space. The Azerbaijani investor will produce innovative products designed "for maintenance of various types of machinery, including in harsh operating conditions. The production is expected to be launched by the end of 2020, and the products will be fully shipped to foreign markets"⁴⁵⁰.

In the same Polotsk, a Belarusian investor intends to set up production of stainless steel containers and create about 20 jobs. The Belarusian-Russian JLLC "Novopolotsk Plant of Technological Metal Structures" is considering the possibility of implementing a project with an investment of about \$10 million in the production of hot-dip galvanising in the village of Farinovo, Polotsk district. A Chinese company intends to invest about \$28 million in a woodworking complex on the outskirts of Vitsebsk. In Postavy, Belmatch LLC, which is being set up with the participation of an investor from Canada, will specialise in the production of match straw. In Orsha, a Belarusian company will try to set up the production of fuel pellets, while Zavod PAK OJSC will initiate a project to organise the production of components for dump trucks.

⁴⁴⁹ In FEZ "Vitebsk" with the participation of a Russian investor will create the production of tin cans [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/v-sez-vitebsk-s-uchastiem-rossijskogo-investora-sozhdut-proizvodstvo-zhestjanyh-banok-377712-2020/>

⁴⁵⁰ Investor from Azerbaijan will create high-tech production of low-tonnage chemistry in FEZ "Vitebsk" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/investor-iz-azerbajdzhana-sozdast-vysokotekhnologichnoe-proizvodstvo-malotonnazhnoj-himii-v-sez-vitebsk-381432-2020>

In 2020, another significant investment event will take place in the FEZ "Vitebsk" due to the fact that the Lithuanian holding company "VMG Group" decided to expand the financing of the investment project already being implemented in the FEZ from 100 to 200 million euros. For this purpose, the investor is ready to additionally organise the production of solid wood furniture to the vertically integrated woodworking complex being created. As a result, the number of jobs created under the holding's projects will increase to 1 thousand⁴⁵¹. This is done in order to start in 2021 at the new furniture production facility the production of new products - tables and chairs, the main buyer of which will be the IKEA concern, which is currently assisting in financing this project.

It should be noted that the economy of Vitebsk region attracted more than one billion dollars of investments in 2019. Thanks to the active investment policy, Belarus' first plant for the production of seamless steel cylinders was put into operation here. New enterprises and wood processing facilities were opened in Rossonsky, Sharkovshchinsky, Beshenkovichi, Gorodoksky and Polotsk districts. "The grain drying complex of the Vitebsk broiler poultry farm in the urban settlement of Surazh, the soya processing shop of the enterprise "Ekomol-Agro" were put into operation"⁴⁵². In addition, the construction of the largest dairy complex in Belarus, Kupalinka, for more than two thousand heads, is being completed at the Yubileiny agro-company. In the first half of 2020, two more innovative objects of the agricultural enterprise 'Ustye' will be put into operation - a grain drying complex for preparation of seeds of agricultural crops for 10 thousand tonnes and a dairy complex with a milking system "robotic carousel". And this is not a complete list. This is the pace that attracted investments set today for the development of only one Belarusian region, stimulating the creation of new points of growth in its territory.

⁴⁵¹ Lithuanian holding "VMG Group" will increase the volume of investments in projects in FEZ "Vitebsk" up to 200 million euros [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/litovskij-holding-vmg-grupp-uvlechit-objem-investitsij-po-proektam-v-sez-vitebsk-do-200-mln-evro-379950-2020/>

⁴⁵² Bogacheva, O. More than \$1 billion of investments attracted to the economy of Vitebsk region in 2019 / O. Bogacheva // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/bolee-1-mlrd-investitsij-privlecheno-v-ekonomiku-vitebskoj-oblasti-za-2019-god-378810-2020/>

Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange: the goal is to maximise the realisation of potential

The year 2020 marks 15 years since the first trading on the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange (BUTB), when the Belarusian company Bellesexport and the Polish company International Paper Kwidzyn S.A. concluded the first exchange deal for the sale of balance timber worth \$189,000. All in all, over the past decade and a half, "3.2 million transactions totalling \$21 billion were made here, and exports amounted to \$5.8 billion"⁴⁵³. These figures show that BUTB has already turned into one of the largest commodity exchanges in Eastern Europe, the main function of which is to assist Belarusian enterprises in exporting products and to help foreign companies to enter the Belarusian market.

This fact also speaks volumes. The market-based pricing mechanism and high concentration of supply and demand on this exchange platform allowed Belarusian traders to receive additional revenue and save almost \$1.5 billion since 2005. It should be reminded that the companies accredited on the BUTB participate in electronic trading in five commodity items: 1) metal products; 2) timber products; 3) agricultural products; 4) industrial and consumer goods; 5) promising exchange commodities. At the same time, round timber, ferrous metal products and oilseed meal are in particular demand in the domestic Belarusian market, while in foreign trade transactions their participants give preference to sawn timber and dairy products. These trends are characteristic for the development of BUTB in 2020.

At the beginning of December 2020, 24815 companies were accredited here, including 4904 from 63 countries. In the period from January to November, the trade turnover grew by 12 per cent and amounted to almost five billion Belarusian rubles. It is estimated that from one and a half to three thousand deals are made here every day. In addition, the export of goods through the exchange is showing positive dynamics. "With the total amount of export transactions of Br1 billion, last year's result was exceeded by 5%. The leaders of sales in the foreign market were sawn timber, wood chips and agricultural crop products"⁴⁵⁴. Interestingly, in October 2020, BUTB recorded a record amount of export transactions this year - \$46.5 million, more than half

⁴⁵³ Deals worth \$21bn concluded at BUTB over 15 years [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/sdelki-na-21-mlrd-zakljucheny-na-butb-za-15-let-393174-2020>

⁴⁵⁴ BUTB turnover in January - November increased by 12% [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/tovarooborot-butb-v-janvare-nojabre-vyros-na-12-420279-2020/>

of which came from wood products - sawn timber and wood chips. The largest buyers of sawn timber were companies from Germany, Latvia and Lithuania, while wood chips were mainly purchased by businesses from Lithuania, Poland and Estonia. Another characteristic detail is that "in October, foreign buyers of cement also became more active. The amount of transactions with this commodity increased 4.3 times, up to \$2.6 million. The main market was Russia"⁴⁵⁵.

It should be noted that cement is not the only item that attracts Russian business people to BUTB. In particular, they are highly interested in Belarusian dairy products, the export of which through the exchange for ten months of 2020 amounted to about thirty million dollars. At the same time, "about 80% of this amount was accounted for transactions with companies from Russia. Predominantly purchased milk powder, butter and whey powder. Butter dominated the sales structure, with sales totalling \$14.9 million"⁴⁵⁶.

These facts indicate quite eloquently the potential of the Russian vector in BUTB's activities, where 2,482 residents from Russia were accredited as of 1 December 2020. And this figure does not seem to be final, as the BUTB in 2020 took energetic measures to develop new business contacts in the eastern direction of interaction, which bring results. Suffice it to say that since the beginning of 2020, 183 new Russian companies have been accredited at the exchange, most of which are active trading participants, which, of course, has a positive impact on the dynamics of exchange turnover. In particular, "deliveries of ferrous rolled metal products for the needs of Belarusian industrial enterprises increased by 68 per cent over 11 months, while exports of dried milk to Russia increased by 53 per cent <...>. Positive dynamics is also characteristic of rapeseed oil, flour, and construction materials"⁴⁵⁷.

The Russian vector is characterised by the following detail: the interest in BUTB is growing particularly fast among business circles in those regions of Russia that border Belarus. An example is the Smolensk region. Today about four hundred Smolensk companies are accredited at the exchange - more than any other region of Russia. At the same time, many of them regularly participate in trading both in imports and exports. But, as it turned out during

⁴⁵⁵ Exports of goods through BUTB in October increased by 22 per cent [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-tovarov-cherez-butb-v-oktjabre-vyros-na-22-415863-2020/>

⁴⁵⁶ About 80% of dairy exports through BUTB are to Russia [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/okolo-80-eksporta-molochnoj-produktsii-cherez-butb-prihoditsja-na-rossiju-414442-2020/>

⁴⁵⁷ BUTB expects to expand co-operation with the Omsk region of Russia [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-rasschityvaet-na-rasshirenije-sotrudnichestva-s-omskoj-oblastju-rossii-420606-2020/>

the pilot webinar held in December 2020 by BUTB together with the Smolensk Export Support Centre, even the enterprises of this Russian region have not yet fully realised the potential of the exchange mechanism. In fact, "among the promising areas are the sale of Russian wood raw materials, grain crops, feed additives, ferrous rolled metal products, as well as the purchase of Belarusian meat and dairy products and construction materials. These commodity items can become the basis for long-term mutually beneficial co-operation"⁴⁵⁸. The Digital Contact Exchange held in December 2020 in the online conference mode showed that BUTB can develop similar mutually beneficial co-operation with more remote regions of Russia. In particular, with enterprises in the Omsk region, for which the exchange can become an effective tool for sales and procurement of materials in the short term.

The fact that in the case of BUTB, the distance between the seller and the buyer no longer plays a decisive role is demonstrated by the experience of the exchange's contacts with Egypt. In December 2020, BUTB reached an agreement with the Egyptian company Sama Al-Jazeera for Import and Export to organise the export of sawn timber to this North African country through the exchange. The intrigue here lies in the fact that up to now "almost all imports of sawn timber products to Egypt are organised through intermediaries, and prices are sometimes very high"⁴⁵⁹. The use of the exchange platform will allow Egyptian companies to buy woodworking products directly from Belarusian producers in almost unlimited quantities and without intermediaries, and Belarusian exporters will be able to enter the very tempting market of Egypt, where the annual consumption of sawn timber is about five million cubic metres. The Egyptian side sees this as an optimal solution, since by participating in the bidding, it gets access to a large number of specialised companies ready to supply the goods it needs on acceptable terms. The benefits of the Belarusian side are no less obvious. Thus, the geography of mutually beneficial contacts of BUTB is developing today in a very diverse and quite effective way. And this is in the conditions of the coronavirus pandemic, which has not had the best effect on the economy of most countries of the planet and which requires all market participants to search for new forms of work with business partners in order to ultimately achieve success.

⁴⁵⁸ BUTB counts on the development of co-operation with the Smolensk region [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-rasschityvaet-na-razvitie-sotrudnichestva-so-smolenskoj-oblastju-421404-2020>

⁴⁵⁹ Through BUTB it is planned to organise deliveries of sawn timber to Egypt [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/cherez-butb-planiruetsja-organizovat-postavki-pilomaterialov-v-egipet-419296-2020/>

BUTB is no exception in this respect. Back in May 2020, the first Belarusian-Canadian-British webinar or online seminar Timber: Doing Business in Belarus was held here, which was attended by more than forty representatives of Canadian and British business circles. It should be noted that 63 companies from the UK and 6 from Canada have already been accredited to the BUTB. The videoconference discussion of the specifics of exchange trading in timber products and the key advantages of the Belarusian exchange platform, including control over the execution of transactions, transparent pricing, absence of intermediaries, and the possibility of using trade finance instruments, led to the fact that "a number of British and Canadian companies expressed interest in accreditation at BUTB to participate in exchange trading in sawn timber and wood chips"⁴⁶⁰.

It should be noted that BUTB also uses the online seminar format to train its prospective business partners. For this purpose, in May 2020, they held the first training webinar for specialists from the Uzbek Republican Commodity Exchange, with which BUTB signed a strategic cooperation agreement back in September 2018. Thanks to this modern format of interaction, Uzbek partners were able to get better acquainted not only with the structure and specifics of the Belarusian public procurement system, but also with the opportunities for foreign suppliers of goods, works, and services to participate in procurement procedures. It is to be expected that the information obtained by the Uzbek side will not only contribute to the intensification of interaction between Belarus and Uzbekistan in the field of e-procurement, but will also "serve as a guide to action for Uzbek companies planning to work in the Belarusian market"⁴⁶¹.

The topic of BUTB's co-operation with Chinese partners deserves a separate discussion in this context. In December 2020, the Belarusian-Chinese Intergovernmental Committee for Cooperation held a meeting, which highlighted positive changes in the trade interaction between the two countries due to changes in the structure of Belarusian exports. First, the product mix of supplies from Belarus to China is expanding. Second, the dependence of bilateral trade turnover on exports of Belarusian potash fertilisers to Chinese consumers is decreasing. The main priorities that will be used to intensify joint actions to expand cooperation include "inclusion of Belarusian products in

⁴⁶⁰ British and Canadian business is interested in purchasing Belarusian sawn timber at the exchange trading [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/britanskij-i-kanadskij-biznes-zainteresovan-v-zakupke-belorusskih-pilomaterialov-na-birzhevyh-torgah-391809-2020>

⁴⁶¹ Belarus and Uzbekistan develop co-operation in the field of electronic procurement [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-uzbekistan-razvivajut-vzaimodejstvie-v-oblasti-elektronnyh-zakupok-390898-2020/>

China's state reserves, establishment of joint production facilities in China to process Belarusian raw materials, simplification of trade procedures and elimination of trade barriers, and optimisation of financial settlements"⁴⁶², as well as the use of electronic trading platforms as a promising mechanism for bilateral trade, where the key role is likely to be given to the use of electronic trading platforms.

Suffice it to say that in the three quarters of 2020, the amount of purchase transactions made by companies from China on the exchange increased more than ten(!) times and totalled two million dollars. At the same time, the commodity structure was dominated by wooden billets and trimmed sawn timber. It should be noted that until recently, most of the Belarusian lumber products reached the Celestial Empire mainly through the Baltic States, which made them more expensive for end consumers and reduced the foreign currency earnings of Belarusian exporters. "Thanks to the joint project with Bellesexport and Beltamozhservice, dozens of Belarusian forestry enterprises were able to sell their products to the high-margin Chinese market without intermediaries"⁴⁶³.

BUTB believes that this sharp increase in interest in exchange trading on the part of Chinese businesses is due not only to the favourable price environment, but also to "convenient logistics that Belarusian exporters were able to offer. In particular, since this [2020] year, it has become possible to buy lumber products on different delivery bases (multi-base lots), which allowed Chinese companies to choose the most suitable point of acceptance of goods. In addition, delivery times have been significantly reduced through the use of railway transport as part of the Chinese government's 'One Belt, One Road' initiative".⁴⁶⁴

After receiving such statistics, BUTB began to consider the possibility of introducing a separate trading session for the sale of timber products to the Chinese market, in which all lots put up for this auction would be maximally adapted to Chinese consumers, and the necessary level of competition would be ensured due to the dense concentration of buyers. Moreover, the increased activity of companies from China has become especially visible since October

⁴⁶² Nikolai Snopkov: Belarus considers agricultural products as a new driver of exports to China [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9682>

⁴⁶³ Belarusian sawn timber for \$5.1 million sold to China through BUTB since the beginning of the year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/beloruskie-pilomaterialy-na-51-mln-prodali-v-kitaj-cherez-butb-s-nachala-goda-400531-2020/>

⁴⁶⁴ More than 10 times the amount of transactions by companies from China on BUTB in January - September [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/bolee-chem-v-10-raz-vyrosla-summa-sdelok-kompanijami-iz-kitaja-na-butb-v-janvare-sentjabre-413129-2020/>

2020, when they purchased more than one million dollars worth of lumber through the exchange. This was also a result of the simplification of the accreditation procedure at BUTB, which now takes no more than three days to complete all the documents. And "in January-November woodworking products totalling over \$9 million were sold through the exchange platform in the Chinese direction"⁴⁶⁵ . A year earlier this figure was only about two hundred thousand dollars. Building on this successful experience, BUTB held the first specialised trading session for the sale of sawn timber to China in mid-December 2020. Let's hope that this new form of work will also open new horizons of interaction with Chinese partners, as there is every reason to believe that in the near future the export nomenclature here will expand significantly, especially due to the products of the agro-industrial complex. After all, "in addition to products of the timber industry complex, the number of promising exchange goods demanded in the Chinese market includes rapeseed oil, beet pulp, meat, sugar and milk products. The number of requests from Chinese companies interested in purchasing these products has recently increased significantly"⁴⁶⁶ .

In particular, interesting prospects in this "Chinese" context are opening up for rapeseed oil, whose exports through the BUTB have tripled in value terms in the first eight months of 2020. This is because rapeseed products are widely used both in the food industry and for the production of biodiesel. Perhaps also for this reason, the largest buyer of these products at BUTB is Switzerland, with transaction volumes from January to August 2020 totalling almost six million dollars. "The top three key markets for Belarusian rapeseed oil also include Lithuania with a transaction value of \$3.5 million and Estonia with \$3.3 million."⁴⁶⁷ .

As for China, where rapeseed oil is also in high demand, its traditional partner for this import item was Canada. "However, due to the protracted trade conflict, supplies of this product have noticeably decreased. The resulting shortage has caused a record price increase. So now China is actively looking

⁴⁶⁵ BUTB to hold the first specialised export bidding for the Chinese market on 15 December [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-provedet-pervye-spetsializirovannye-eksportnye-torgi-dlja-kitajskogo-rynka-15-dekabnja-420090-2020>

⁴⁶⁶ Chinese companies in October purchased lumber at BUTB for more than \$1 million [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/kitajskie-kompanii-v-oktjabre-zakupili-pilomaterialy-cherez-butb-na-summu-bolee-1-mln-417473-2020/>

⁴⁶⁷ Export of rapeseed oil through BUTB increased 3 times, the largest buyer - Switzerland [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-rapsovogogo-masla-cherez-butb-vyros-v-3-raza-krupnejshij-pokupatel-shvejtsarija-406915-2020/>

for alternative procurement channels, and Belarus may become one of them"⁴⁶⁸. The Chinese trading company Shandong Liuqing decided to take advantage of this situation back in September 2020. It declared its intention to pass the accreditation procedure and start working at BUTB. At the same time, the company expressed its readiness to invest in Belarusian forestry. It is also interested in the development of the Belarusian transport and logistics infrastructure. This is the result of a multi-purpose approach, the beginning of which was laid by co-operation with BUTB.

Another important trend in the development of BUTB in 2020 is the growth of exports of metal products by one third at once - up to Br27 million, where the bulk of transactions fell on ferrous and non-ferrous metals, as well as their scrap and waste. Suffice it to say that "in the first half of the year, companies from Germany, Canada, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Ukraine purchased Br24 million worth of these products, exceeding the 2019 figure by 20%"⁴⁶⁹. In the same period, a joint project with the Belarusian Metallurgical Plant was actively developed at BUTB, thanks to which rebar was sold to the Polish market for Br3 million. In the future, the Exchange plans to expand the commodity nomenclature of steel products exports by developing new promising markets in order to increase the share of this section in export transactions from five to twenty per cent in the next five years.

In this regard, BUTB's plans to bring other Belarusian enterprises to foreign markets are of great interest. In particular, the exchange plans to join efforts to achieve this goal with Morsk Metal Rolling Plant, an innovative industrial enterprise in Vitebsk region with a significant amount of foreign investments, which will be able to produce about 240 thousand tonnes of white tin plate per year after reaching its design capacity. It should be noted that only Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works in Russia and ArcelorMittal Temirtau in Kazakhstan produce similar products in the post-Soviet space. For the export-oriented Belarusian company, "Scandinavia is of the greatest interest <...> as a promising sales market. First of all, because of the favourable price environment and consistently high demand for white tinplate"⁴⁷⁰. It should be recalled that white tinplate is widely used in the manufacture of containers for

⁴⁶⁸ . Belarusian pallet board and rapeseed oil will be exported to China via BUTB [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/beloruskuju-palietnuju-dosku-i-rapsovoe-maslo-budut-eksportirovat-v-kitaj-cherez-butb-408061-2020/>

⁴⁶⁹ Export of steel products through BUTB in the first half of the year increased by 33% [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-metalloproduktov-cherez-butb-v-i-polugodii-vyros-na-33-399873-2020/>

⁴⁷⁰ BUTB and Morsk Metal Rolling Plant plan to jointly develop export of white tinplate [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-i-morskij-metalloprokatnyj-zavod-planirujut-sovmestno-razvivat-eksport-belozhesti-400676-2020/>

food and chemical products. At the same time, Miori plans to produce ultra-thin tinplate with a thickness of 0.1 mm. With the help of BUTB, the company hopes to find not only new buyers and in time to establish regular deliveries of white tinplate to Europe, but also to determine partners for raw materials, as the mechanism of exchange trading is effective in both directions - both when exporting finished products and purchasing raw materials.

All these facts show that the pace of development of the BUTB today is such that it can and should soon become a driver of electronic commerce in the Republic of Belarus, which believes that in order to ensure sustainable development and competitiveness of the Belarusian state in the global arena "it is necessary to create its own digital platforms in key sectors of the economy, so that foreign businesses coming to the Belarusian market do not impose their technological solutions, but integrate into the digital infrastructure of the country"⁴⁷¹. In this regard, we can confidently say: the first fifteen years of the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange's activity are evidence that the foundation for solving the set tasks has been laid here.

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⁴⁷¹ BUTB should become a driver of e-commerce in the country - Koltovich [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-dolzha-stat-drajverom-elektronnoj-torgovli-v-strane-koltovich-401009-2020>

Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange: Features of Multi-Directional Partnership

Deepening integration with the Russian Federation will remain the most important task of the Belarusian government in terms of foreign economic activity and international co-operation in the next five years. For this purpose, it is envisaged to implement plans of joint measures by sectors of the economy, as well as "on trade and economic, scientific and technical, and socio-cultural co-operation with the regions of the Russian Federation"⁴⁷². And today in our country many market players are taking active measures to actualise activities in this direction. Among them is the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange (BUTB), for which the Russian vector of interaction has serious potential.

It should be recalled that as of 1 December 2020, 2,482 residents from Russia used the services of BUTB. And this is despite the fact that at the same time "24815 companies were accredited here, including 4904 from 63 countries"⁴⁷³. But the experience of interaction with Russian partners in 2020 showed that even in the regions neighbouring Belarus - Smolensk, Bryansk and Pskov regions - do not yet fully realise the opportunities offered by this e-commerce mechanism. When this perception changes for the better, the result does not take long to come. A good example in this context is the record export sales in January 2021 at BUTB of cement, which increased tenfold to \$5.3 million. This growth was "due to increased attention to the exchange platform from Russian trading and construction companies <...>. After Ukraine introduced an anti-dumping duty and actually closed its market for Belarusian cement, Russia became a priority"⁴⁷⁴. And now at least eight Russian companies regularly participate in these export auctions for cement on BUTB.

Probably for this reason, the BUTB has seriously intensified its activities in the Russian direction with the arrival of 2021. Thus, in February, an agreement was reached with the Trade Representation of the Russian Federation in Belarus on joint actions to increase trade turnover between Belarusian and Russian regions. For this purpose, it is planned to make full use of the trade mission's business contacts to inform Russian business about the

⁴⁷² Programme of Activities of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for the period up to 2025. - Minsk, 2020. - C. 44.

⁴⁷³ Zaleskii, B.L. Perspective mechanism of electronic commerce on the way to the maximum realisation of potential / B.L. Zaleskii // Socio-humanitarian researches. - 2020. - №5. - C. 20.

⁴⁷⁴ Cement exports through BUTB in January increased 10 times [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-tsementa-cherez-butb-v-janvare-vyros-v-10-raz-428027-2021/>

opportunities of BUTB as an effective platform for trade and procurement activities. In addition, the parties will join efforts to organise and conduct events aimed at intensifying interaction between business entities of Belarus and Russia, so that eventually BUTB will become the primary entry point to the Belarusian market for all representatives of Russian business. After all, registration on this trading platform "automatically opens access to 25 thousand companies from 64 countries, which, by the way, is actively used by foreign participants. A recent example is a company from the Kaliningrad region, which sold rapeseed oil worth over €1 million through our trading platform. The buyer was a Lithuanian company"⁴⁷⁵. Indeed, this work to expand business contacts with Russian regions is already beginning to yield results. During one week in February 2021 alone, eight companies from Russia were accredited to BUTB. This shows that strengthening co-operation with Russian regions has indeed become one of BUTB's priorities for the current year, with a wide range of cooperation tools being used.

Thus, in the first decade of February 2021, the possibilities of increasing mutual trade turnover between Belarus and Udmurtia were discussed at an online conference with the participation of representatives of the government of this Russian region. It should be noted that in 2020 "the trade turnover between Belarus and Udmurtia totalled \$184.5 million, or 112.5% of the level of 2019"⁴⁷⁶. In the course of the discussion, the parties agreed that even these relatively good indicators can be significantly improved through the implementation of exchange trade, which can become an effective tool for increasing the volume and expanding the range of goods demanded in the Belarusian and Udmurtian markets. If we take into account that over the last few years Udmurtia has become one of the most export-oriented regions of Russia and today ranks first in the neighbouring country in terms of growth rates of non-energy exports, we can be sure that in the nearest future representatives of Udmurt business will become permanent participants of trading on the BUTB.

In the second decade of February 2021, an online conference was held on the expansion of BUTB's cooperation with the business community of the Volgograd Region. The participants in this discussion noted a steady trend towards an increase in the number of exchange residents from Russia, which

⁴⁷⁵ BUTB and the Trade Representation of the Russian Federation intend to promote an increase in trade turnover [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-i-torgovoe-predstavitelstvo-rf-namereny-sodejstvovat-uvlicheniju-tovarooborota-428409-2021/>

⁴⁷⁶ Belarus and Udmurtia intend to increase trade turnover through a more active use of exchange trade [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-udmurtija-namereny-uvelichit-tovarooborot-za-schet-bolee-aktivnogo-ispolzovanija-birzhevoj-427781-2021/>

has been observed since the end of 2020. And it is not only the export of Belarusian goods to the Russian market and purchases of Russian products by Belarusian enterprises, but also the increasing frequency of "transit transactions between companies from Russia and third countries. That is, the exchange is used as a tool for insuring foreign trade risks"⁴⁷⁷. And this, of course, expands its opportunities in terms of attracting business partners, which, it is to be assumed, will soon include many more business representatives of the Volgograd Region.

While developing partnerships with the regions of the Russian Federation, BUTB is also planning to seriously expand cooperation with the business community of European countries in 2021, due to the huge and still unrealised potential in this partnership vector. This can be judged on the basis of the data on exchange trading in January 2021, according to the results of which the export of sawn timber through BUTB increased by 27 per cent and exceeded 30 million dollars. At the same time, "the main markets were Germany, Latvia and Lithuania. Companies from these countries purchased Belarusian sawn timber products for a total of \$24.4 million"⁴⁷⁸. The largest buyers of this type of products also included representatives of such European countries as Great Britain, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, and Estonia, where wood billets for export were in the greatest demand. Suffice it to say that during the first export trades on BUTB in 2021, more than one and a half million wooden household stakes were sold to the UK alone, worth more than one million euros, which immediately exceeded the exports to this country in 2020. An important detail: previously, these products were supplied to the British market in much smaller volumes and mainly through intermediaries in the Baltic States. The results of this trading session in January clearly confirmed the high export potential of wood products manufactured in our country, as well as the trend observed last year, when "the amount of exchange transactions for exports of products made of cylindrical and debarked wood in 2020 amounted to 4.2 million euros. The main markets were Germany, Latvia Lithuania and Poland"⁴⁷⁹.

⁴⁷⁷ BUTB expects to expand co-operation with the business community of the Volgograd region [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-rasschityvaet-na-rasshirenie-sotrudnichestva-s-delovymi-krugami-volgogradskoj-oblasti-429055-2021/>

⁴⁷⁸ In January, lumber exports through BUTB increased by 27% [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/v-janvare-eksport-pilomaterialov-cherez-butb-vyros-na-27-429846-2021/>

⁴⁷⁹ British company bought woodworking products for more than 1 million euros through BUTB [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/britanskaja-kompanija-kupila-cherez-butb-produktsiju-derevoobrabotki-bolee-chem-na-1-mln-evro-424714-2021/>

Planning to expand the geography of sales of the same woodworking products on the European vector in 2021, BUTB is already working on the possibility of exporting Belarusian sawn timber, for example, to France. Thus, in February 2021, they outlined the prospects of using the mechanism of exchange trading with the French importer of wood - Bois Import SA. The fact is that this company has been buying sawn timber, including Belarusian timber, in the Baltic countries for a long time. But the coronavirus pandemic has made adjustments to this arrangement, forcing the company to look for alternative markets. Thus, Belarus, where about half of all produced sawn timber - about two million cubic metres - is already sold for export through the mechanism of exchange trading, came into the field of vision of the French buyers. It is clear that the opportunities for importers from France in this connection are considerable. Moreover, the French company was also offered to "not limit itself to sawn timber, but to consider the possibility of purchasing other wood products, including wood pellets. In 2020, six new pellet plants were built and commissioned in Belarus. Another six are planned to be built in the current [2021] year"⁴⁸⁰. As a result, annual exports from Belarus could reach about 250 thousand tonnes of pellets.

The interest of European businessmen in the Nordic Pellets Conference 2021, an online conference organised by the Swedish bioenergy association Svebio at the end of January 2021. Participants in this event included leading bioenergy experts and biofuel producers from the UK, Denmark, France, Germany, Germany, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden and Denmark. They were brought to this conference by the fact that today there is a steady growth in demand for pellets in the countries of the European Union. This, in turn, favours not only the increase of own production capacities of European producers, but also the import of such products from other countries, including Belarus. BUTB believes that "given the low capacity of the domestic market, almost the entire volume of pellets produced in Belarus can be supplied abroad, which will make our country one of the largest exporters in the region"⁴⁸¹. After all, the use of the BUTB platform by European companies will allow them to buy any necessary volume of products directly from Belarusian producers under both one-off and annual contracts. The demand for this type

⁴⁸⁰ BUTB is working on the possibility of exporting Belarusian sawn timber to France [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-prorabatyvaet-vozmozhnost-eksporta-belorusskih-pilomaterialov-vo-frantsiju-430040-2021>

⁴⁸¹ BUTB is ready to facilitate the export of fuel pellets to Northern Europe [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-gotova-sodejstvovat-eksportu-toplivnyh-granul-v-severnuju-evropu-426052-2021/>

of e-commerce is evidenced by the statistics of 2020, when only sawn timber was sold for \$260 million, and companies from 30 countries acted as buyers.

Another type of products in demand in European countries is vegetable oils and feed additives, the export of which grew 2.3 times in the first 10 months of 2020 and reached \$26 million, accounting for more than 40 per cent of agricultural exports through BUTB. "The growth of export supplies was facilitated by the increased demand for Belarusian vegetable oils in the Baltic States: oilseed processing products worth \$14.7 million were sold there. At the same time, Lithuania became the leader in purchases with the amount of transactions of \$6.2 million"⁴⁸². At the same time, in just a month and a half, almost two million dollars worth of beet pulp and molasses was sold through BUTB, the main buyers of which were again the European Union countries. Finally, in January 2021, exports of rapeseed oil through BUTB increased almost tenfold, "reaching \$8.4 million"⁴⁸³. Here, Latvia, Estonia and Switzerland are among the leaders in terms of the amount of transactions. The very dynamics of sales growth in the European direction suggests that the possibilities of expanding Belarusian exports in this external track are far from being exhausted.

Finally, another priority for the BUTB in 2021 is to increase the share of companies from the "far arc" countries - Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America - in the exchange turnover. This is explained by the significant potential that exists in interaction with these partners and the successful realisation of which promises considerable benefits to both Belarusian exporters and foreign importers. Among the countries of the "far arc", the People's Republic of China is one of the most intensively developing business contacts with their representatives. Suffice it to say that "in terms of growth rates of exchange transactions, China has surpassed almost all major markets with which Belarus currently trades on the stock exchange in the first two months of the year [2021]"⁴⁸⁴.

In this context, it is significant that the 5,000th foreign company accredited to participate in trading on the BUTB at the beginning of March 2021 was the Chinese trading and manufacturing company Wenzhou Ruijun

⁴⁸² Vegetable oils and feed additives accounted for more than 40% of agricultural exports through BUTB [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/rastitelnje-masla-i-kormovye-dobavki-obespechili-bolee-40-eksporta-selhozproduktov-cherz-butb-415013-2020/>

⁴⁸³ Export of rapeseed oil through BUTB in January increased almost 10 times [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-rapsovogogo-masla-cherz-butb-v-janvare-vyros-pochti-v-10-raz-426697-2021/>

⁴⁸⁴ The 5,000th non-resident company has been accredited on BUTB [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/na-butb-akkreditovalas-5-tyjsjachnaja-kompanija-nerezident-431246-2021/>

Steel Co. Ltd, which also became the 36th company from China on the exchange. The company is going to use this exchange platform to supply rolled steel and other ferrous metal products to Belarus. At the initial stage it will be the sale of pipe products at the auction, and then, depending on the dynamics of sales and market conditions, the range of products will be gradually expanded. Probably, approximately in the same way as it happens at BUTB with woodworking products.

Recall that special trading sessions for the sale of sawn timber for export with delivery in containers to the destination point in the Chinese market have been held at BUTB since December 2020. "As a result, the volume of supplies of domestic sawn timber products to China has increased significantly and totalled almost \$5 million in monetary terms by the end of January-February"⁴⁸⁵. This is largely fuelled by the fact that almost every month two or three new Chinese companies are added to the BUTB timber products auction. This positively affects the formation of a highly competitive environment here and allows woodworkers from Belarus to sell sawn timber on more favourable terms. In particular, at the first export trading of timber products for the Chinese market in January 2021, more than 11 thousand cubic metres of sawn timber were sold for almost two and a half million dollars. Due to rising prices during the trading session, exporters from Belarus received additional revenue of more than \$90 thousand. And "the whole volume of sawn timber products put up for sale was purchased with delivery to Qingdao - the largest seaport in Shandong province. In this way, the attractiveness of Belarusian goods for Chinese buyers increases, and domestic exporters get an opportunity to expand their sales geography and increase their revenue"⁴⁸⁶.

It is also important in terms of the development of the Chinese vector on the BUTB that in 2021 export deals were launched here for such promising items for Chinese buyers as rapeseed oil, milk powder and sugar. As far as rapeseed oil is concerned, immediately after the start of its delivery to the Chinese market through the exchange platform, according to the results of the first two trading sessions, transactions were made for a total amount of about one and a half million dollars. This allowed China to take the second place in terms of the amount of transactions with this product, displacing the leaders of the whole 2020 - Latvia, Estonia and Switzerland. At the same time, there are

⁴⁸⁵ Belarusian sawn timber for \$2.6 million sold to China through BUTB [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/beloruskie-pilomaterialy-na-26-mln-prodany-v-kitaj-cherez-butb-431434-2021/>

⁴⁸⁶ Belarusian sawn timber for \$2.4 million sold to China at the exchange trades [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/beloruskie-pilomaterialy-na-24-mln-prodany-v-kitaj-na-birzhevyh-torgah-425850-2021/>

prerequisites for further significant increases in other export indicators. "First of all, it is the growth in the number of companies from China accredited at the Exchange"⁴⁸⁷, which contributes to an increase in the level of competition during trading.

In January 2021, the first batch of milk powder was also sold to the Chinese market via BUTB. "Two lots of 300 and 100 tonnes were put up for exchange trading. The total amount of transactions made at the end of the trading session was \$940 thousand."⁴⁸⁸. This happened after global food prices began to rise in the second half of 2020, which significantly increased the attractiveness of Belarusian dairy products not only in China, but also in other countries of the "far arc". This, in particular, is evidenced by the return of one of the world's largest agro-traders, Singapore-based Olam International, to BUTB at the end of 2020. And it shows that the prospects for exporting dairy products from Belarus to the Asian continent through the mechanism of exchange trading are now very significant.

Egypt is another country in the "far arc" whose representatives are beginning to actively engage in BUTB. In early March 2021, the Egyptian company Sama Al-Jazeera for Import and Export made its first deal to export Belarusian goods to this North African country, purchasing a trial batch of Belarusian sawn timber. The company's strategic goal is "to become the largest importer of Belarusian timber products to Egypt and, in the future, to other North African countries. The first step in this direction has already been made"⁴⁸⁹. Its next step in co-operation with BUTB may be the role of a stock broker on this electronic trading platform. And then the market of practically the whole African continent can shine with new colours for Belarusian exporters. With the help of such an export mechanism as the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange.

⁴⁸⁷ Export of rapeseed oil through BUTB in January increased almost 10 times [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-rapsovogo-masla-cherez-butb-v-janvare-vyros-pochti-v-10-raz-426697-2021/>

⁴⁸⁸ A batch of milk powder was sold to China for the first time through the exchange [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/partiju-suhogo-moloka-vpervye-prodali-v-kitaj-cherez-birzhu-424904-2021/>

⁴⁸⁹ The first deal with a company from Egypt was made on BUTB [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/pervuju-sdelku-s-kompaniej-iz-egipta-sovershili-na-butb-431073-2021>

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