

## With a focus on collaboration

In November 2020 the Council of Heads of Government of the Commonwealth of Independent States met to approve an action plan to implement the first phase of the Commonwealth's economic development strategy until 2030. The document covers the period from 2021 to 2025 and contains 29 sections, including on trade and economic cooperation, industry, the fuel and energy complex, transport, communications and information technology, the agro-industrial complex, monetary and financial policy and the labor market. The measures contained in the adopted plan and aimed at strengthening and enhancing the competitiveness of the CIS economies, the development of new cooperation and infrastructure projects, the development of the digital economy, the realization of scientific and technological and educational potential should help to make effective use of the integration mechanisms of this international organization. How these tasks are solved in practice is described in the proposed study.



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## With a focus on collaboration

*Chronicle of international interaction in the post-Soviet space*

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## **Commonwealth of Independent States: from integration processes to regional cooperation**

In December 2020, the Council of CIS Heads of State approved a new version of the Concept of Further Development of the Commonwealth and a plan of key activities for its implementation. The new version fixes the main task of the CIS - "to increase the efficiency of its activities, including by ensuring that the states fulfil their obligations and monitor their implementation. Economic cooperation is a key priority of the document<sup>1</sup>. The development of the Commonwealth of Independent States is especially relevant today for Belarus because on 1 January 2021 Belarus assumed presidency in this international organisation. And now it will largely depend on its approach to the strengthening of integration mechanisms in the post-Soviet space if the CIS will be able to cope with the urgent problems caused by globalization and new challenges of our time.

Among the main priorities of Belarus's CIS presidency at the December (2020) meeting of the Council of the CIS Heads of State are trade liberalization, reduction of restrictions and exemptions to a minimum, elimination of technical barriers, unification of rules and procedures for state procurement, formation of common markets of goods and services, as well as intensification of investment activities, expansion of production cooperation, and search for common points of economic growth. This also includes strengthening humanitarian ties, expanding contacts in science, education, healthcare, culture, sports and tourism, youth work, as well as improving the image of the Commonwealth in the international arena with an emphasis on

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<sup>1</sup> 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/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/zasedanie-soveta-glav-gosudarstv-sng-25085/)

strengthening cooperation between CIS member states in the field of information.

The attention to boosting information cooperation in this context can be explained by concerns voiced at the CIS Heads of State Council about the state of affairs in this sphere. 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 is all about, what its importance is. There is a need to make greater use of modern information and communication technologies which are especially in demand among the younger generation. It is advisable to create discussion platforms more actively, to involve the export community and the journalistic corps. We need to think over and adopt a plan of CIS information promotion<sup>2</sup>. We should believe that this proposal will be taken into account in the Concept of the Belarusian Chairmanship and its Action Plan. The proposal sets serious tasks for the information field of all the CIS countries to ensure an adequate media articulation of the integration processes that will be taking place in the CIS during the period of the Belarusian chairmanship there. It goes without saying that representatives of the international segment of the national journalism of the presiding country must play a special role in resolving this creative task; they must set the tone in the media sphere by their address to 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 its presidency, the Belarusian side announced at the highest level that in 2021 it intended to focus on the development

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



of the common economic space of the Commonwealth, with "a special emphasis on bridging the integration processes in the CIS and the EAEU".<sup>3</sup>The intention is to create the same level of cooperation within the Commonwealth as in the Eurasian Economic Union. This intention makes it relevant for members of the media to study the existing experience of integration building in the EAEU, which could be successfully used in the CIS. All the more so as the economic union of Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia has such experience.

It should be recalled that in November 2020, the CIS Council of Heads of Government met via videoconference to approve an action plan to implement 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 those devoted to trade and economic cooperation, industry, fuel and energy complex, transport, communications and informatization, the agro-industrial complex, monetary and financial policy, and the labor market<sup>4</sup>the competitiveness of the CIS economies, development of new cooperation and infrastructure projects, development of the digital economy, realization of the scientific, technological and educational potential should help effectively use the integration mechanisms of this international organization to restore the positive dynamics of the scale of interaction. After all, in the seven months of 2020 the value of foreign

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<sup>3</sup> On the meeting of Foreign Minister V. Makei with the Chairman of the CIS Executive Committee - CIS Executive Secretary [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: [https://mfa.gov.by/press/news\\_mfa/b824e89c5996ccf3.html](https://mfa.gov.by/press/news_mfa/b824e89c5996ccf3.html)

<sup>4</sup> 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/sledujushee-zasedanie-soveta-glav-pravitelstv-sng-projdet-v-minske-28-maja-2021-goda-414460-2020/>.

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 decreased by 4% compared to the same period last year. Freight traffic decreased by 4.8 per cent and passenger traffic by more than a quarter, down 28 per cent"<sup>5</sup>.

Of course, these figures do not look very convincing against the performance of the Eurasian Economic Union, where a number of positive trends in economic activity have been observed. For example, "over the past five years, the volume of mutual trade between the countries of the union has grown by 35% to \$62bn (in 2015 it was \$46bn). Aggregate GDP has increased by 21% to \$2 trillion"<sup>6</sup>. And if we take even the year 2020, which was not the best year for epidemiological reasons, agricultural production grew by another two and a half years and there was no decline in industrial production in the manufacturing sector. But the EAEU is well aware that the union must only accelerate the pace of integration of the industrial capacities of the member states. For this reason, strategic directions of development of the Eurasian economic integration were approved in the EAEU just a week before the meeting of the Council of CIS Heads of State, which provides for the rapid pace of this international organization moving forward. "It is necessary to increase by 4.5% of GDP every year in order to reach the indicators

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

<sup>6</sup> Nazarbayev: Volume and sustainability of trade flows within and across borders must be increased

The EEU [Electronic resource].  
-2020 . - URL:

<https://www.belta.by/economics/view/nazarbaev-neobhodimo-naraschivat-objemy-i-ustojchivost-torgovyh-potokov-vnutri-i-za-predelami-eaes-419719-2020/>

laid down in the strategy for the development of integration until 2025<sup>7</sup> capabilities in order to fully ensure the complementarity of the economies. Particular attention will be paid to education, health, and the movement of citizens. In order to implement this peculiar roadmap for the development of integration, "we will have to sign 13 international treaties, over 60 laws and regulations, and make about 25 amendments and additions to the Treaty on the EEU and national legislation"<sup>8</sup>. 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 at the time of the presidency of the Republic of Belarus in the EEU, which allows us to hope for an effective presidency of the Belarusian side in the CIS in 2021 as well.

An interesting experience for the CIS in terms of integration processes with the EAEU may also be the transition currently observed in this economic union from the formative stage to the project integration stage, with an emphasis on investment cooperation and complementary specialisation in the real sector of the economy. The essence of this transition is contained in the maps of industrialisation and agro-industry being formed in the EAEU today. The first of these is intended to identify import-dependent technological areas and import-substituting potential of manufacturers, as well as areas for possible industrial cooperation and specific major industrial projects underway and planned in the EEU. "The current version of the draft map includes 177 major investment

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

<sup>8</sup> EEU Strategy 2025 contains 330 measures and mechanisms to promote 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/>.

and significant for the relevant industries projects worth \$194.5 billion in 21 sectors"<sup>9</sup>. As for the map of agro-industry development, it will also include areas on which it is planned to implement projects involving the formation of cooperative chains for the development of import-substituting industries. The experience of implementing these components of project integration in the post-Soviet space should, of course, already be in the focus of attention of the Belarusian media, as well as of all the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The EAEU's experience in expanding science, technology and innovation cooperation, including through the formation of Eurasian technological platforms, whose main objective is "to ensure systematic work to accumulate advanced national and global achievements of scientific and technological development, mobilize the scientific potential of member states to solve applied problems in developing innovative products and technologies, and their implementation in industrial production"<sup>10</sup> may also be very useful for the CIS. The fact is that "the Treaty on EAEU lacks basic provisions on science and technology cooperation, which would allow to regulate innovative cooperation between the countries of the union"<sup>11</sup> the Republic of Belarus initiates the inclusion of a separate article in the Treaty on the EEU, which would define the areas of

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<sup>9</sup> Brewer, E. Industrialisation and agro-industry maps will contribute to import substitution in

EEU - Malkina / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL:

<https://www.belta.by/economics/view/karty-industrializatsii-i-agroindustrii-budut-sposobstvovat-importozamesheniju-v-eaes-malkina-419027-2020/>

<sup>10</sup> Eurasian Technology Platforms [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL:

<https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-vystupaet-za-rasshirenie-nauchno-tehnicheskogo-sotrudnichestva-v-eaes-shumilin-397579-2020/>

<sup>11</sup> Belarus advocates 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/>

cooperation of the member states of the union in the science, technology and innovation spheres.

Back in April 2016, the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council decided to create a list of Eurasian technological platforms, which included 14 areas: 1. Medical and medical biotechnology, pharmacy. 2. Information and communication technologies. 3. Photonics. 4. Aerospace technology. 5. Nuclear and radiation technologies. 6. Energy. 7. Transportation Technology. 8. Metallurgical Technology and New Materials. 9. Natural Resource Extraction and Oil & Gas Refining. 10. Chemistry and Petrochemicals. 11. Electronics & Mechanical Engineering Technology. 12. Environmental Development. 13. Industrial Technology. 14. Agriculture, food industry, biotechnology.

In January 2019, the EAEU formed the 15th Eurasian Platform - Energy and Electrification - founded by nine enterprises and scientific institutions from Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia, which outlined such main areas of activity as "energy engineering, electrification, and the creation and distribution of smart grids - electrical installations that ensure parallel operation of different energy sources in the grid. In addition, it is planned to develop and use renewable sources to save energy for remote consumers"<sup>12</sup>. In August 2019, the Council of the Eurasian Economic Commission approved already the 16th Eurasian technological platform - "Technologies of maintenance and repair of industrial equipment", which is designed to solve such tasks as "development of industrial partnership and import substitution, reengineering of

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

obsolete units and assemblies based on technical re-equipment and modernisation of production facilities, implementation of breakthrough technologies"<sup>13</sup> . At the same time, the Eurasian Machine Tool Centre was established to maintain a unified register of machine tools produced in the EEU countries, which will make it possible to determine what competences and production capacities they have.

For the Republic of Belarus, participation in the implementation of these Eurasian technological platforms is important already for the reason that the focus here is on the implementation of highly innovative projects that have not only economic but also political as well as social significance. In particular, this is characteristic of the participation of the Belarusian side in the implementation of the technological platform relating to space and geoinformation technologies. "Work in this direction allowed us to create our own satellite, as well as a whole sector of the economy, which deals with the sphere of space, and to declare itself in the international arena as a space power."<sup>14</sup> . Important addition: in April 2020, the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission approved a global cooperation project in the provision 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 operating and prospective constellations of EEU countries' satellites are to be united. At the second stage, a unified information portal will

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<sup>13</sup> A new Eurasian technological platform for industrial equipment maintenance and repair technologies is formed in the EAEU [Electronic resource]. - 2019.

- URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/13-08-2019-1.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> Nikitina, Y.F. Prospects of technological platforms: Synergetic effects / Y.F. Nikitina // Designing the future. Problems of digital reality: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference (February 7-8, 2019, Moscow). - Moscow: Keldysh Institute of Applied Mechanics, 2019. - C. 88-89.

be created<sup>15</sup>.

Other interesting areas of Belarus' participation in the Eurasian technological platforms include the EurasiaBio technological platform, which envisages the development of joint projects in biotechnology for effective use in science, education, the economy, social sphere and state needs, as well as the LED lighting equipment production organisation project, whose participants include Belarusian, Russian, Armenian, Kazakh and Kyrgyz organisations

Another important area that seems to be actualized by the Belarusian side in the CIS in 2021 and on which representatives of the media sector should focus is related to the topic of interaction between the regions of the Commonwealth, as Minsk expects "a noticeable effect from the implementation of the Interstate Innovation Cooperation Program, the Concept of Interregional and Cross-Border Cooperation and Priority Areas of Cooperation in the Sphere of Transport"<sup>16</sup>. Note that over the years of the existence of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the regions have become an effective tool for interstate dialogue and an integral part of economic interaction. The concept of inter-regional and cross-border cooperation approved at the November (2020) meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of Government should introduce new effective elements into this priority of development of this integration structure. It should be reminded that this direction of interaction between the

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<sup>15</sup> The EAEU countries intend to create a Eurasian space constellation [Electronic resource]. - 2020. URL : [https://www.tvr.by/news/obshchestvo/strany\\_eaes\\_namereny\\_sozdat\\_evraziyskuyu\\_ko\\_smicheskuyu\\_gruppir\\_ovku/](https://www.tvr.by/news/obshchestvo/strany_eaes_namereny_sozdat_evraziyskuyu_ko_smicheskuyu_gruppir_ovku/)

<sup>16</sup> Igor Petrishenko named the most important tasks facing the CIS at the current stage: overcoming the economic recession, increasing mutual and foreign trade. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9678>

countries of the Commonwealth includes "a complex of legislative, administrative and economic measures that contribute to the most rational distribution of productive forces and equalization of living standards of the population, covering all the most important sectors of material production, health protection, law enforcement and security, employment, placement of services, stimulation of tourism"<sup>17</sup>.

As far as interregional cooperation is concerned, developing this area of interaction, 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 refers to coordinated actions of the parties "aimed at strengthening and developing friendly relations, trade, economic, social, cultural, legal and humanitarian cooperation between the regions of the Parties"<sup>18</sup>. And among the priorities of activities contributing to the achievement of the set goals, more than twenty areas have been identified, among which we should mention the establishment of free economic zones in the regions, implementation of investment projects, trade and fair activities.

As far as cross-border cooperation is concerned, the relevant convention of the CIS Member States was adopted back in October 2008. It defines "cross-border cooperation" as "concerted actions aimed at strengthening and promoting good-neighbourly relations between border territories, concluding, in accordance with the

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<sup>17</sup> The State of Interregional and Cross-Border Cooperation in the CIS Member States (Informational and Analytical Report). - M.: CIS, 2017. - C. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Convention on Interregional Cooperation among the States Parties to the Commonwealth of Independent States

States [Electronic resource ]. -2020 .  
URL :

[https://pravo.by/upload/docs/op/N01600091\\_1585774800.pdf](https://pravo.by/upload/docs/op/N01600091_1585774800.pdf)



legislation of the Parties, agreements necessary to achieve these objectives"<sup>19</sup>. Among the more than twenty activities mentioned here that contribute to the development of cross-border cooperation, we note the creation of special or special economic zones in the border areas, cross-border trade, industrial and technical cooperation.

The Republic of Belarus is among those CIS countries that pay special attention to regional cooperation. Thus, at the IX meeting of the Council for Interregional and Cross-border Cooperation of the CIS Member States, held by videoconference in September 2020, it was noted that in the Belarusian regions "more than 600 documents on cooperation in trade, economic, scientific, technological and - humanitarian spheres with the regions of the CIS member states remain in force"<sup>20</sup>. Although over 430 of these agreements are concluded with Russian regions, active efforts have been recently made to expand partnerships between the regions and other countries. For example, 26 such documents were signed during the preparation and holding of the first Belarus-Uzbekistan Forum of Regions in July 2019 alone. Almost 15 agreements have been concluded with the regions of Armenia. And a draft such document between Minsk and Yerevan is ready to be signed. There are 23 cooperation agreements with the regions of Kazakhstan, 18 with Moldova, and 5 with Kyrgyzstan. As for Azerbaijan, partnership relations have been established between the cities of Minsk and Baku, Mogilev and Sumgayit. Belarusian-Turkmen interregional cooperation is based on

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

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

the existing agreements between Minsk and Ashgabat, Mogilev region and Mary velayat. Vitebsk, Gomel, Minsk and Mogilev regions and Minsk actively cooperate with the regions of Tajikistan.

As you can see, the potential for partnership is not insignificant. How it is reflected in the national media today is not an easy question. In any case, this diversity of regional ties will have to be fully disclosed in 2021, primarily by Belarusian regional mass media based on the provisions of the CIS Information Promotion Plan discussed at the December (2020) meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of State in order to reflect this area of integration in the post-Soviet space in their publications, programmes and broadcasts as adequately as possible, thereby contributing to the successful presidency of the Republic of Belarus in this international body

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## **Eurasian Economic Union: A focus on international cooperation**

A meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council was held in Yerevan in early October 2019, where the leaders of the five member states of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) discussed economic interaction, financial policy, energy, as well as key areas for international activities and development of cooperation with third countries. Noting the serious intensification of this integration association's engagement with such international formats as the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, President Lukashenka pointed out that "to expand the international agenda of the Eurasian Economic Union we should pay special attention to the 'far arc' countries, where our goods and services are not yet recognizable"<sup>21</sup>

By the time of the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in Yerevan, the EEU 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 EEU countries to the free trade regime with Vietnam, transition periods of five to ten years were established for certain goods, during which import customs duty rates would be gradually reduced. As of 2017 alone, the Eurasian Economic Union "zeroed out import duty rates for Vietnam in respect of 43% of the total number of tariff lines of the Common Customs

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<sup>21</sup> 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-soviet-22132/>

Tariff (CCT EEU). Within 10 years, the duty-free entry of goods into the common union market for Vietnamese exporters will be expanded to cover 90% of the EEU tariff lines<sup>22</sup> .

And in June 2019, the two sides began discussing ways to expand trade and economic cooperation, as the free trade area agreement quickly proved its effectiveness. "Already in the first full year of the agreement - 2017 - there was a 36% (USD 5.6 billion) increase in trade turnover. Meanwhile, Union exports to Vietnam increased by 40% (from USD 1.6 billion to USD 2.3 billion) and imports of goods from Vietnam increased by 35% (from USD 2.7 billion to USD 3.7 billion) ." <sup>23</sup> . In 2018, the existing trend has continued. Perhaps for this reason, too, the Vietnamese economy grew by more than seven per cent in 2018, the highest since 2008, the trade surplus exceeded seven billion dollars and the amount of foreign investment attracted was 19 billion dollars. At the same time, as Vietnamese researchers point out, "it's not only Russia that takes advantage of the agreement: more and more joint ventures are being launched in Vietnam by Belarus, too<sup>24</sup>. In particular, the joint venture MAZ Asia is implementing a project for the production of trucks by Minsk Automobile Plant in the province of Hung Yen. In the same province, work is underway to set up a joint venture to produce dairy products from Belarusian raw materials. This is why the Vietnamese side said at the June (2019) talks with the Eurasian Economic Commission that it would like to maximise relations with the EEU

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<sup>22</sup> EAEU Free Trade Zone Vietnam [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.economy.gov.by/ru/zst-vietnam-ru/>.

<sup>23</sup> EEU and Vietnam discuss opportunities for expanding trade and economic cooperation [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/13-06-2019-4.aspx>

<sup>24</sup> Nguyen, K.T. Benefits of Vietnam-EEU Free Trade Zone / K.T. Nguyen // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://eurasian-studies.org/archives/11237>

and consider all opportunities to step up cooperation, including in the areas of financial and tourism services.

Apparently, the positive example of the development of relations between the EAEU and Vietnam played no small part in the fact that on 1 October 2019, an agreement was signed in Yerevan in the framework of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council to establish a free trade zone between the Eurasian Economic Union and **Singapore**. 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 Singapore goods - have been undertaken by this integration association. In addition, the signed agreement fixed obligations of the parties to comply with: international standards for licensing procedures; bans and quantitative restrictions; technical regulation of sanitary and phytosanitary standards; transfers and payments for the supply of products; fees associated with procedures at the border; application of anti-dumping, compensation and special protective measures. It also formulates "a significant margin for improvement and development of cooperation 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 technology transfer issues"<sup>25</sup>. Interestingly, the agreement has been more than two years in the making. When signing it, the Singapore side particularly stressed the prospects of the Eurasian market - "it is a large market at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. It has huge

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<sup>25</sup> Pivovarov, E. In EEC told details of agreement on free trade zone with Singapore / E. Pivovarov // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/v-cek-rasskazali-podrobnosti-soglasheniya-o-zone-svobodnoj-torgovli-singapurom-364247-2019/>.

potential for economic growth, especially in the areas of logistics and digital. These are all areas of interest to Singapore"<sup>26</sup>, so the creation of a free trade zone "will facilitate the development of industry in the EAEU member states, investment, and the establishment of contacts between people, business representatives"<sup>27</sup>.

In the second half of October 2019, Moscow hosted a meeting of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council, at which the heads of government of all five member states of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) focused on developing sectoral areas of interaction, as well as on strengthening the organisation's position in the international arena, emphasising that "international cooperation has a special place in the development of Eurasian integration"<sup>28</sup>. Indeed, in October 2019 alone, this Eurasian integration structure took a number of concrete steps to develop interaction with states located both in Europe and Asia.

Specifically, the same meeting of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council saw the signing of the agreement on a free trade zone between the EEU and **Serbia**, which, according to the parties, should give new impetus to the expansion of trade and economic cooperation between its members. Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan had already had bilateral agreements on free trade with Serbia before the document was signed. Nevertheless, new agreements with the Serbian side, first of all, "open a fundamentally

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<sup>26</sup> The Prime Minister of Singapore notes the 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-growtha-v-evrazijskom-ekkonomiche-som-sojuze-364128-2019/>.

<sup>27</sup> EAEU and Singapore sign free trade area agreement [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/economics/view/eaes-i-singapur-podpisali-soglashenie-o-sozdanii-zony-svobodnoj-torgovli-364131-2019/>.

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

new market for Armenia and Kyrgyzstan - with immediate duty-free access for the overwhelming majority of their exports - and, secondly, create new export opportunities for Belarusian, Kazakh and Russian producers<sup>29</sup> the parties to the agreement receive economic benefits not only in the short term in the form of immediate savings on customs duties on existing exports, but also in the medium term in terms of realising export opportunities while expanding the free trade regime. In addition, the document guarantees the stability, predictability and transparency of trade relations, as well as compliance with international standards with regard to licensing procedures, prohibitions and quantitative restrictions, technical regulations, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, application of anti-dumping, compensation and special protective measures, and protection of intellectual property rights.

Another example of the EAEU's expanding international cooperation concerns **Iran**, with which a temporary 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 product coverage, but includes almost all major products, which account for 55% of total EAEU exports - agricultural and industrial product groups. <...> Preferential import coverage is 49% of Iran's total supplies to the EEU" . More specifically, the list of goods for which exporters of EEU countries, including Belarus, have received preferential coverage includes meat and oil products, certain types of confectionery and chocolate, electronic and mechanical equipment, as well as metals and cosmetics. Importantly,

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<sup>29</sup> EEU and Serbia sign free trade agreement [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eaes-i-serbiia-podpisali-soglashenie-o-svobodnoi-torgovle-367118-2019/>.



the parties will now have to secure most-favoured-nation treatment for all goods traded between the EEU and Iran. And all charges related to imports of goods must no longer exceed the cost of customs clearance services. And unjustified tariff, trade-restrictive measures should no longer be applied to goods listed in the agreement. Besides, welcoming any cooperation with the EAEU in the banking, financial and investment spheres, the Iranian side suggested creating a working group for the development of joint economic projects, the potential for which could be very extensive. For example, "Iranian ports in the Caspian Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, railways and roads in the country and a safe environment enable the transit of goods through Iran to neighboring countries"<sup>30</sup>

Finally, on the day of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council meeting - 25 October 2019 - the Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation between the EAEU and **China**, signed on 17 May 2018, entered into force. This document is not a free trade agreement, as its provisions do not provide for the reduction or elimination of import duties. The aim of the agreement is different: "to increase the transparency of regulatory systems, to simplify trade procedures, and to develop cooperative links"<sup>31</sup>. In particular, it establishes a much higher level of transparency in the parties' systems of sanitary and phytosanitary measures and technical regulation. In the sphere of customs procedures, the agreement includes an agreement on the release of goods without undue delays, and on the speedy clearance

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<sup>30</sup> Tehran proposes to create a working group on economic projects between Iran and the EAEU [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/tegeran-predlagaet-sozdat-rabochuj-u-gruppu-po-ekonomicheskim-proektam-irana-i-eaes-364137-2019/>.

<sup>31</sup> Heads of Governments of EEU 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 EEU and the PRC [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9074>

of perishable goods. There are also significant guarantees for Belarusian, Russian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Armenian exporters with regard to protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights. For Belarus, which is currently in the accession process to the World Trade Organization, the document is also important as it establishes "legal guarantees of compliance with key WTO principles"<sup>32</sup> in its relations with China.

According to the development strategies of the EAEU member states, industry and the agro-industrial complex are priorities for cooperation with China. With this in mind, the parties have identified three most important areas for cooperation: 1) creation of a single digital space; 2) localisation of technologies; and 3) effective cooperation in science, technology and innovation. For all of these areas to be successfully implemented, an industrialization map is now being created in the EAEU, which "will identify those areas in which it will be most appropriate to attract foreign investment and technology"<sup>33</sup>. At the same time, the creation of common digital platforms and solutions will remove barriers to the movement of goods, services, capital and data. And the key competencies that will form the basis of this industry of the future include electric transport, additive manufacturing, and unmanned technologies.

As for the second area of EAEU's cooperation with China, an important strategic task here is to ensure the transition from localization of production to localization of competencies, where the

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<sup>32</sup> The EAEU-China trade and economic cooperation agreement has entered into force [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/soglashenie-o-torgovo-ekonomicheskomsotrudnichestve-eaes-i-kitaj-a-vstupilo-v-silu-367082-2019/>.

<sup>33</sup> Pivovar, E. EEC has identified three main areas of industrial cooperation between the EAEU and China / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/EEK-opredelila-tri-osnovnyh-napravlenija-promyshlennogo-sotrudnichestva-eaes-s-kitaem-365900-2019/>.

starting point should be the prediction of EAEU's unique competitive advantages in the global arena, which can be realized by creating technoparks, clusters and technological platforms. It should be noted that the first steps in this direction have already been taken. For instance, Belarus, together with China, has already implemented a project to create the Great Stone Industrial Park, which received the status of a territorial special economic zone in 2019, endowing the residents of the industrial park with the maximum customs advantages possible in this integration association in the post-Soviet space and where investments in projects are already over one billion dollars.

In Russia, the Haier Industrial Park opened in Naberezhnye Chelny in August 2019, with Chinese support, as well as a "smart factory" for washing machine production, where refrigeration, freezing and kitchen equipment and TV sets will also be produced using smart technology. In Kazakhstan, under a contract with China's China National Chemical Engineering Company, Kazakhstan Petrochemical Industries, is building an integrated gas-chemical complex to produce half a million tonnes of polypropylene a year, and will establish production of polyamide materials from grain using Chinese technology. Speaking of strengthening scientific and technical cooperation, we should emphasise the EAEU's interest in interacting with China in the agricultural sector, in introducing advanced agricultural technologies and innovations, as well as in energy efficiency and productivity of processing facilities.

Another important aspect of the theme in question is that on 1 January 2020, the Republic of Belarus will assume the presidency of the Eurasian Economic Union, and on 1 February the same year the Belarusian representative will chair the Eurasian Economic

Commission. The Belarusian side intends to use these formats of activity "to give a new impetus to the integration processes and the formation of common policies by the member states<sup>34</sup> to foreign markets and that consumers receive safe, high-quality and inexpensive goods, the union plans to "speed up the signing of an agreement on the procedure and conditions for removing technical barriers in mutual trade with third countries, which will establish an effective mechanism for the barrier-free movement of goods in the EEU and third countries"<sup>35</sup>. In fact, as early as autumn 2019, the EEU began a new cycle of forming a list of priority countries with which the integration association will conclude free trade area agreements. In particular, procedures are being finalised with Israel, "at the beginning of next [2020] negotiations with India. There is also a list of 12 states with which we would like to work within about 2-3 years. This list could be supplemented by other countries<sup>36</sup>.

**Indonesia**, one of the key economies in the Asia-Pacific region, is among the countries 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 cooperation with the government of that country. The document is

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<sup>34</sup> Grishkevich, A. Belarus as chair in the EAEU will seek to create a full-fledged economic union - MFA / 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/>.

<sup>35</sup> Pivovar, E. ECE proposes to speed up the signing of an agreement on the removal of technical barriers with  
by third countries / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. -  
2019 . -  
URL:  
<https://www.belta.by/economics/view/cek-predlagaet-uskorit-podpisanie-soglashenija-o-porjadke-ustraneniya-tehbarjerov-s-tretjimi-stranami-364105-2019/>

<sup>36</sup> Belarus counts on export growth thanks to EAEU and FTAs with third countries [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-rasschityvaet-na-rost-eksporta-blagodarja-soglashenijam-eaes-o-zst-s-tretjimi-stranami-365828-2019/>.

expected to help build an effective infrastructure for developing trade and economic cooperation. On this basis the parties have already established a working group, whose first meeting will be held in the first quarter of 2020 in Moscow and which will focus "on issues of supranational competence of EEC, such as trade facilitation, customs and technical regulations, development of financial markets"<sup>37</sup> Islands, Cuba Thailand, Bangladesh and Moldova in the form of memoranda, and with the government of Greece in the form of a declaration.

This list also includes such South American country as **Chile**, with which the Eurasian P5 has significantly expanded its cooperation 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 by EEAS countries to Chile increased by 54.8% and imports by 28.7%"<sup>38</sup>. A free trade agreement between the EAEU and Chile could open up great opportunities for Belarus, because at the moment Belarus-Chile trade turnover is only about ten million dollars, 90% of which comes from this South American country. The reason for this phenomenon lies in "the existence of some problems with duties, which are so far significantly higher for Belarusian goods than for other foreign products entering Chile"<sup>39</sup>

Another country with which negotiations on the establishment of a free trade zone have already entered an active phase is **Egypt**.

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<sup>37</sup> Pivovar, E. EEC and Indonesia signed a memorandum of cooperation / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/economics/view/eeek-i-indonezija-podpisali-memorandum-o-sotrudnichestve-366253-2019/>.

<sup>38</sup> 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/>.

<sup>39</sup> Grishkevich, A. Chile interested in long-term cooperation with Belarus - Benitez / A. Grishkevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/politics/view/chili-zainteresovana-v-dolgosrochnom-sotrudnichestve-s-belarusju-u-benites-365275-2019/>.

This African state will be the first to host a joint industrial infrastructure with the EAEU, the creation of which will "become a window for the promotion of our industrial products in Africa and the Middle East"<sup>40</sup> for the countries of the integration association. Apparently, a memorandum of understanding signed between the Eurasian Economic Commission and the African Union Commission on 24 October 2019, according to which "the parties intend to interact in infrastructure and agriculture, trade, investment and business development, regional economic integration and other areas of mutual interest"<sup>41</sup>, will significantly complement the EAEU's African engagement vector. Under this document, a cooperation 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 interaction look impressive. After all, the African Union is an international intergovernmental organization that unites 55 states of the Black Continent with a population of about one billion people. The EAEU's trade with them has grown almost 2.7 times since 2010, reaching \$21.7 billion in 2018. At the same time, just five African countries - Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria and Tunisia - account for more than 80 per cent of the Eurasian Five's exports. So the potential for partnership development here is indeed considerable.

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<sup>40</sup> Pivovar, E. EEU countries intend to create a joint industrial infrastructure in Egypt / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/economics/view/strany-eaes-namereny-sozdat-sovmestnuju-promyshlennuju-infrastrukturu-v-egipte-364924-2019/>

<sup>41</sup> ECE and the African Union Commission sign a Memorandum of Understanding [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/24-10-2019-5.aspx>

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## **Eurasian Economic Union: the path to the future will be determined by the development strategy**

On 1 January 2020, the Republic of Belarus took over the presidency of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), thus opening another five-year cycle of development of this integration 42formation in the post-Soviet space. The agenda of Belarus's presidency within the framework of the Union promises to be quite intense. Particularly, it is planned to focus joint efforts of the EEU member countries on the complete removal of barriers, the maximum reduction of exceptions and restrictions in their markets, and the prevention of new types of barriers to the free competition environment. In addition, the Belarusian side will initiate additional measures for the global and regional positioning of the union with the development and implementation of a common or unified information policy, which "requires the development of a common information policy concept, a strategy for its implementation and action plans for their implementation. <...> The most important thing is to ensure broad support for Eurasian integration among the citizens of our states. The successful achievement of this task undoubtedly depends on a number of factors, including the adequate media articulation of the Eurasian integration theme by the international segment of national journalists in the EEU member states, which requires, above all, a competent approach by international journalists to covering it in the media sphere.

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<sup>42</sup> Appeal of the President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko to the Heads of the Eurasian Economic Union Member States [Electronic resource ]. 2020

URL:

[http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/obraschenie-prezidenta-respublika-belarus-aleksandra-lukashenko-k-glavam-gosudarstv-chlenov-evrazijskogo-22827/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/obraschenie-prezidenta-respublika-belarus-aleksandra-lukashenko-k-glavam-gosudarstv-chlenov-evrazijskogo-22827/)



Recall that the new composition of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), chaired by Belarus' representative M. Myasnikovich, also began its work on 1 February 2020. Myasnikovich. And already at the first meeting of this formation the main priorities of the EEC's work were voiced.

First, by 2025, the EAEU should have real working markets, and more effective measures need to be taken in this direction.

Secondly, a quick refinement of the strategic The main directions of development of Eurasian economic integration until 2025.

Third, the urgent task is to increase the union's international standing, for which "it is planned to intensify cooperation between the EAEU and international organisations and associations, jointly develop transport and logistics infrastructure, including participation in Belt and Road Initiative projects"<sup>43</sup>.

Fourth, there is a need to ensure that there are real benefits to the countries of the union in carrying out mutual trade. In the meantime, as noted at the first meeting of the new EEC, "new barriers have not yet been eliminated by the countries, and the task of the commission is to improve the mechanisms for monitoring the rights of the union and to fully implement them"<sup>44</sup>. The statistics is as follows: four years ago, the list of barriers, restrictions and impediments in the EEU comprised 60 items; at the end of January 2020, it will comprise 71 items. As a result, the pace of development of mutual trade within the union cannot be called rapid. Suffice it to

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<sup>43</sup> Participation in the meeting of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9245>

<sup>44</sup> Pivovar, E. Common markets, fight against obstacles, infrastructure projects - Myasnikovich named EEC priorities / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/obschie-rynki-borba-s-prepiatstviiami-infrastrukturnye-proekty- mjasnikovich-nazval-priorityty-eeek-378306-2020/>.

say that "the volume of mutual trade in goods between EAEU states in 2019 was \$55.3 billion, or 100.2% of the 2018 level"<sup>45</sup> .

In the light of the set objectives for the Union's development, a great deal should certainly be taken into account in the Strategic Framework for Eurasian integration until 2025, which is currently being drawn up within the EAEU. As of mid-February 2020, "the parties have agreed on 318 positions in this complex document; the remaining differences concern only 15 mechanisms of interaction"<sup>46</sup>. At the February EEC meeting, the parties were able to agree on several more positions of the draft strategy. "In particular, they agreed on formulations for the application of special protective, anti-dumping and countervailing measures, for sanitary, veterinary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures, and on conceptual approaches to the formation of mechanisms to promote the economic development of the EAEU"<sup>47</sup>

The key points that are built into the strategy relate to:

- a )the complete removal of obstacles in the union market;
- b ) improving customs regulations;
- c ) shaping the digital space of the union;
- d )building a system for the management and financing of joint cooperation projects.

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<sup>45</sup> Pivovar, E. Industrial production and retail turnover have grown in EAEU in 2019 / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/v-eaes-v-2019-goda-vyrosli-promizvodstvo-i-roznichnyi-tovarooborot-380320-2020/>.

<sup>46</sup> Pivovar, E. Myasnikovich: work on the draft strategy of Eurasian integration until 2025 is completed / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/mjasnikovich-rabota-nad-proektom-strategii-evrazijskoj-integratsii-do-2025-goda-zavershaetsj-a-380272-2020/>

<sup>47</sup> Pivovar, E. Vice-Premiers agree on SPS measures in Eurasian integration strategy / E. Brewer // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/vitse-premjery-soglasovali-sfs-mery-v-strategii-evrazijskoj-integratsii-380580-2020/>.

New areas that should be reflected in the strategy include the development of green technologies, renewable energy sources, economic aspects in healthcare, tourism, education and science. At the same time, the fact that the Scientific Council of the Russian Academy of Sciences adopted a decision in February 2020 to provide scientific support and assistance for the implementation of the Strategic directions of Eurasian economic integration until 2025 should have a positive impact on the quality of the developed policy document. It only remains to add that this document, in its finalised form, should be approved at a meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in May 2020.

In addition, the plans of Belarus' presidency of the EAEU include the adoption of a unified import substitution programme of the union based on national programmes, the elaboration of a long-term strategic programme for innovative development, and the strengthening of cooperation in the science, technology and innovation spheres.

## Belarus-Russia: regions continue cooperation

In September 2020, Minsk and the Minsk Region are to host the seventh Belarus-Russia Forum of Regions, which will be attended by about five hundred participants, and the programme includes sessions on various topics, including agriculture, construction and industry. In addition, a Business Cooperation Council will be held, "signing of agreements on cooperation between the regions, conclusion of commercial contracts are planned"<sup>48</sup>. The very fact of this event in the current difficult epidemiological situation testifies to the enormous creative potential of the partnership between the regions of Belarus and Russia, "the expansion of which allows solving such important tasks as import substitution, promotion of export-oriented industries, bridging the technological gap with Western countries"<sup>49</sup>.

We should remind that the Republic of Belarus currently cooperates with Russian regions under 78 agreements on trade, economic, scientific, technical, and cultural cooperation with 71 Russian regions. Plus, "some 400 agreements have been concluded between Belarusian regions, Minsk and Russian constituent entities, as well as between Belarusian districts, cities and Russian municipalities as part of interregional cooperation"<sup>50</sup>. In 2019, the top ten importing Belarusian goods, which accounted for more than 70

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<sup>48</sup> VII Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia to be held in September [Electronic resource]. -

2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/vii-forum-regionov-belarusi-i-rossii-planiruetsja-provesti-v-sentjabre-393483-2020/>

<sup>49</sup> Zalesky, B. Vector of post-Soviet integration. A view from Belarus / B. Zalesky. - Palmarium Academic Publishing, 2019. - C. 59.

<sup>50</sup> Pivovar, E. Embassy named the top 10 Russian regions importing Belarusian goods / E. Pivovar // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/posolstvo-nazvalo-top-10-rossij-skih-regionov-importirujuschih-belorusskie-tovary-3-88334-2020/>.

percent of Belarus' exports to Russia, included the Moscow Region, Moscow Region, Smolensk Region, St. Petersburg, Bryansk Region, Republic of Tatarstan, Kemerovo Region, Kaliningrad Region, Leningrad Region and Sverdlovsk Region.

Among the Belarusian regions that actively cooperate with partners in Russia, the **Vitebsk region** should be mentioned, which has 25 agreements on cooperation with Russian regions. More than a hundred more documents have been signed by districts and cities of the Vitebsk Region with the relevant territorial entities of Russia's regions. In 2019, the volume of exports of Vitebsk enterprises to the Russian market approached close to one billion dollars. Remarkably, these supplies have increased to the regions of six of Russia's eight federal districts. The increase by a factor of one and a half and more was achieved in cooperation with partners from 16 regions of the neighboring country. "Exports to remote Russian regions grew most dynamically: to the Magadan Region, North Ossetia-Alania and Khakassia - more than three times; to the Amur, Irkutsk, Khabarovsk and Primorsky regions - 2.5-2.8 times; to the Krasnoyarsk and Stavropol Territories - 1.5 times. Shipments of Vitebsk commodities to the Republic of Ingushetia, Kamchatka Territory, and the Jewish Autonomous Region were resumed after a break<sup>51</sup> three times, supplies of veterinary drugs doubled, export of polyethylene, flax fiber, linen fabrics, metal structures, medical instruments increased markedly. The leading suppliers here are the Vitebsk Concern Myasolokolotoi Produkty, Naftan, Prodexim, VIK-Zdorovye Zdorovye Zdorovye, Energokomplekt Production Association,

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<sup>51</sup> Exports of Vitebsk Oblast enterprises to Russian regions grew by 4.2% in 2019 [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/eksport-produktsii-predpriyatij-vitebskoj-oblasti-v-rossijskie-regiony-vyros-na-42-v-2019-godu-385596-2020/>.

Allianzplast LLC, Vitebsk Carpets OJSC, Vityaz OJSC, Natrix JLLC, Polotsk-Steklovolokno OJSC, Soyuz-Kabel FLLC, Novopolotsk Technological Metalware Plant JLLC.

Among the Russian regions actively developing trade and economic ties with partners in Belarus is the **Kirov Region**, where trade turnover with the latter came close to ten million dollars in the first quarter of 2020. In January-March, "Belarusian companies increased their exports to Russia's Kirov Region by almost a quarter compared to the first quarter of 2019<sup>52</sup> machines and devices for lifting, moving, loading or unloading, unalloyed steel wire, vegetables, ready-made knitted or textile products, paints and varnishes based on synthetic polymers in a non-aqueous medium, fur and fur raw materials. New types of Belarusian tractors and tractor trucks, first shipments of unreinforced glass made by Gomelglass, metalware made by the Gomel Casting and Normal Plant, as well as supplies of lift equipment made by Mogilevliftmash have started this year to this Russian region.

In 2020, cooperation between the regions of Belarus and Russia continues to develop using new formats of cooperation. Thus, for instance, this spring the Belarusian Cement Company opened its representative office in **Kaliningrad region** - the trading house "BCC-Kaliningrad" - to provide even more effective partnership relations with construction companies in the region. The fact is that Kaliningrad region is one of the most promising Russian regions for the Belarusian cement company where almost all products of the holding are in demand. The opening of the representative office will

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<sup>52</sup> Belarusian enterprises increased export of goods to the Kirov region of the Russian Federation by almost a quarter in the first quarter [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/beloruskie-predpriyatija-v-i-kvartale-uvelichili-eksport-tovarov-v-kirovskuju-oblast-rt-pochti-na-393710-2020>

"boost work with both large clients and small companies, which are more interested in calibrated cement and delivery of building materials in small batch, to order"<sup>53</sup>. Undoubtedly, this step will only strengthen the ties of Belarusian producers with the consumers in this Russian enclave and allow the cooperation of the regions to reach a new level.

### **Belarus-Pskov region: a plan to return to a growth trajectory**

The 7th Forum of the Regions of Belarus and Russia, which was held in September 2020, set the goal of intensifying joint activities of the parties in a wide range of areas in politics, economy, social sphere, education, culture, and also actualized "improvement of work in the media space and strengthening of economic cooperation on an equal footing"<sup>54</sup>. The **Pskov Oblast is one of the** Russian regions that are taking concrete measures to achieve the goal in cooperation with the 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 between the Belarusian regions and the Pskov Oblast to the trajectory of sustainable growth. After all "the goods turnover between Belarus and the Pskov Oblast in January-September 2020

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<sup>53</sup> A Belarusian cement company has opened a representative office in the Kaliningrad region [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belorusskaja-tsementnaja-kompanija-otkryla-predstavitelstvo-v-kaliningradskoj-oblasti-385897-2020/>

<sup>54</sup> Roman Golovchenko: Belarus and Russia need to intensify cooperation in politics and economy [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9593>

amounted to \$77 million which was 17.3% less compared to the same period last year. The balance for Belarus is positive - \$16.6 million<sup>55</sup>.

As a reminder, the basic agreement between the parties was signed back in October 2000. Later, it was backed up by more than 20 other agreements between the municipalities of the Pskov Region and the Belarusian regions. This contributed to the fact that in 2017 the trade turnover between the parties amounted to almost two hundred million dollars, and "more than 100 enterprises with Belarusian capital are registered on the territory of the region"<sup>56</sup>. It is true that already "in 2019 the trade turnover between Belarus and the Pskov region amounted to \$121 million and increased by 12% compared to 2018"<sup>57</sup>. Nevertheless, all these facts allow the leadership of the Russian region to state with good reason that "Belarus is our key foreign economic, foreign trade partner. This partnership accounts for 35% of trade turnover"<sup>58</sup>.

The three-year action plan to develop cooperation, which was adopted in early December 2020, envisages the implementation of a large potential for cooperation in a wide range of areas. In particular, the document "includes measures for the participation of Belarusian companies in the construction of social facilities and housing construction projects<sup>59</sup> blocks, as well as schools, kindergartens and

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<sup>55</sup> 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-hozijstva-v-pskovskoj-oblasti-418071-2020>

<sup>56</sup> Priority directions of regional cooperation development as a key factor of union building: informational-integration project / coauthored and interviewed by: K. Gusev, B. Zalesky, Gusev, B. Zaleski. - Minsk: Biznesofset, 2018. - C. 287.

<sup>57</sup> Roman Golovchenko suggested that the governor of the Pskov region should intensify cooperation in various sectors [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9588>

<sup>58</sup> Meeting with Mikhail Vedernikov, Governor of Russia's Pskov Oblast [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/vstrecha-s-gubernatorom-pskovskoj-oblasti-rossii-mixailom-vedernikovym-24596/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/vstrecha-s-gubernatorom-pskovskoj-oblasti-rossii-mixailom-vedernikovym-24596/)

<sup>59</sup> The Pskov region plans to build social facilities with the participation of Belarusian



hospitals, with the use of credit resources of the Belarus Development Bank. The point is that the sides already have good experience in cooperation in this field, because "it was the Belarusian construction companies that built the biggest school in Pskov. And we are satisfied with this experience, because the quality is very high<sup>60</sup>.

Another promising area for cooperation is to provide this Russian region with Belarusian passenger, freight, road-building and municipal vehicles. In this regard, the Belarusian side proceeds from the understanding that "Pskov Region is facing the issue of cardinal renewal of its fleet of city buses, primarily in the regional capital<sup>61</sup>. In September 2020, the dealer of the Minsk Automobile Plant won the tender to supply 11 extra-large and 6 large buses to Pskov. A pilot operation of a gas-powered bus from Belarus was also successfully carried out there.

Investment cooperation between the parties should also get additional impetus for development in the next three years. This will be facilitated by the agreement on cooperation signed in September 2020 between the Belarusian National Agency for Investment and Privatization and the Pskov Oblast Investment Development Agency. In this document the parties agreed, among other things, to "create favourable conditions for mutual investment attraction, development and implementation of joint projects, exchange information about business conditions, investment opportunities and proposed projects,

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companies [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/v-pskovskoi-oblasti-planirujut-stroit-sotsobjekty-s-uch-belorusskih-kompanij-418082-2020>

<sup>60</sup> The Pskov region is interested in Belarusian agro-towns, machinery and construction services [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/pskovskaia-oblast-zainteresovalas-belorusskimi-agrogorodkami-tehnikoi-i-stroitelnyimi-uslugami-408508-2020/>

<sup>61</sup> 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>

as well as take joint participation in thematic seminars, conferences, forums and other investment-related events"<sup>62</sup>.

Finally, another new vector of cooperation that will be developed in the near future is in the field of education. The point is that Belarus is starting to train medical personnel for the Pskov Oblast. In this regard, "an agreement on cooperation and strategic partnership was signed between the Pskov State University and three Belarusian universities"<sup>63</sup>. Relevance of this topic for the Russian region can be expressed by one figure: the shortage of medical personnel in the Pskov region today - almost 50 percent. So assistance of the Belarusian partners is more than necessary here and now.

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<sup>62</sup> The Investment Agencies of Belarus and the Pskov Region signed an agreement on cooperation [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/agentstva-po-investitsiiam-belarusi-i-i-pskovskoi-oblasti-podpisali-soglashenie-o-sotrudnichestve-408584-2020/>.

<sup>63</sup> Belarus will train medical personnel for the Pskov Region [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: [https://www.belta.by/society/view/belarus-budet-gotovit-meditsinskie-kadry-dlia-pskovskoi-oblasti-408501-2020/?utm\\_source=belta&utm\\_medium=news&utm\\_campaign=accent](https://www.belta.by/society/view/belarus-budet-gotovit-meditsinskie-kadry-dlia-pskovskoi-oblasti-408501-2020/?utm_source=belta&utm_medium=news&utm_campaign=accent)

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## Belarus-Ukraine: regions intend to cooperate

In the fall of 2020, Grodno is scheduled to host the Third Forum of Regions of Belarus and Ukraine, an event aimed at accelerating the "creation of new and implementation of joint industrial productions, implementation of joint projects to modernize road and transport - infrastructure, and introduction of innovative technologies"<sup>64</sup>. The very fact that Grodno Region, which now has cooperation agreements with eight Ukrainian regions, is hosting the forum can be explained by the fact that "Ukraine today is the region's third external partner in terms of trade turnover, which reached \$379 million last [2019] year"<sup>65</sup>. At the forthcoming forum, two more agreements, with Lviv and Kherson regions, are expected to supplement the existing contractual and legal framework for cooperation of **the Grodno region** with partners in Ukraine. It should be noted that other Belarusian regions are making active preparations for the third forum, focusing the attention of their business entities on the implementation of joint projects with Ukrainian partners today.

In particular, **Brest Region**, whose delegation took part in the Third Lviv Export Forum in March 2020, aims to strengthen all-round cooperation with the Lviv Region. As a reminder, the parties signed an agreement on cooperation back in 2004. And today, "in terms of export supplies, the Lviv Region is the second most important Ukrainian region for the Brest Region (Kyiv Region is in first place). Over the past [2019] year, Brest region has almost doubled its exports

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<sup>64</sup> Zalesky, B. Vector of post-Soviet integration. A view from Belarus / B. Zalesky. - Palmarium Academic Publishing, 2019. - C. 151.

<sup>65</sup> Grodno, Lviv and Kherson regions plan to sign an agreement on cooperation [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/soglashenie-otrudnichestve-planiruj-ut-podpisat-grodnenskaj-a-lvovskaj-a-i-hersonskaj-a-oblasti-382199-2020/>

to this region in western Ukraine. A total of \$9.4 million worth of Brest-branded goods were delivered to the Lviv region, with a 195% growth rate<sup>66</sup>. By the third Forum of Regions in Grodno the parties plan to work out a cooperation road map in order to supplement the 2004 agreement with new specific projects. The main focus will be on cooperation between regional centres. After all, Brest is interested in Lviv's experience, first of all, in tourism industry. And "our Ukrainian partners are interested in the best practices of Brest waste processing plant and products of peat processing plants<sup>67</sup>

Among the specific business entities in the Brest region that are set to significantly increase their activities in the regions of Ukraine in 2020 is the Bobruiskagromash Holding Management Company, which plans to organise the assembly production of tractor trailers in the neighbouring country with a implementation date in the first half of this year. An agreement to that effect was reached with PrJSC Nizhinselmash in March 2020. "About 60 sets of tractor trailers will be delivered to Nizhynselmash in the next six months in order to implement the agreements reached<sup>68</sup>.

Brest Region's business entity, 69Brest Road Construction Trust No. 4, also feels confident in the Ukrainian regions, whose exports of services to Ukraine in 2019 increased at once by times and amounted to 11 million dollars. The trust carried out work "in the

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<sup>66</sup> A delegation from the Brest Region will take part in the III Lviv Export Forum [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/delegatsija-brestskoj-oblasti-primet-uchastie-v-iii-lvovskom-eksportnom-forume-3-82618-2020/>.

<sup>67</sup> Brest and Lviv regions will develop a roadmap for cooperation [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/brestskaja-i-lvovskaja-oblasti-razrabotajut-dorozhnyu-kartu-sotrudnichestva-383502-2020/>.

<sup>68</sup> "Bobruiskagromash plans to assemble tractor trailers in Ukraine [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/bobrujskagromash-planiruet-sobirat-tractornye-pritsepy-v-ukraine-382499-2020/>.

<sup>69</sup> Brest road workers plan to work in four regions of Ukraine this year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/brestskie-dorozhniki-v-etom-godu-planirujut-rabotat-v-chetyreh-oblastj-ah-ukrainy-3-82563-2020>

Rivne, Kiev, Zhytomyr and Volyn regions on both national and local roads. Employees of almost all <...> branches from Brest Drohiczyn, Pinsk, Baranovichy were involved" . In 2020, the Trust's business interests may again touch four Ukrainian regions. Firstly, back in 2019, Brest, together with Gomel colleagues, signed a major contract to build a bypass road around Rivne, and today they have already started work to finish the project by the end of 2021. Secondly, in early April 2020, Brest road builders will resume repairs on a section of the road in the Kiev region. Third, Brest DST No. 4 is actively participating in tenders held by the road service of Zhytomyr region. Fourth, in 2020, Brest will participate in the selection of the general contractor for the project in the Kherson region and hope to show their best qualities in this tender.

The **Gomel Region's** business entities also intend to increase their presence in Ukraine's regions, where there is significant growth potential. In particular, this is the Belorusneft Production Association, whose specialists, in cooperation with customers, were able to reduce the cycle of drilling wells on Ukrainian soil from 6-7 to 3-3.5 months in 2019. The reputation of a reliable partner has already enabled the association to sign contracts for 2020 "with Ukrgazdobycha JSC - for hydraulic fracturing and coiled tubing technologies, with DTEK Neftegaz - for well construction at gas-condensate fields"<sup>70</sup> . And today two Belarusian well drilling teams are already working in Ukrainian regions to bring up to five facilities into operation by the end of 2020, with another four planned for sidetracking.

Finally, the Belarusian Railways also plans to seriously expand

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<sup>70</sup> "Belorusneft intends to increase its presence in the service market in Russia and Ukraine [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belorusneft-namerena-naraschivat-prisutstvие-na-rynke-servisnyh-uslug-v-rossii-i-ukraine-3-81445-2020>

cooperation with Ukrainian regions in 2020. The fact is that a total of five pairs of trains have so far been organised in communication with Ukraine.

Of course, this is not enough. That's why the parties are already considering "the issue of assigning either a train or non-stationary wagons to run from Vitebsk to Belgorod-Dnistrovsky. 71<...> There are also plans to extend the connection to Lviv by organising parity traffic" . For the time being, only one train of the Belarusian train operates to Lviv.

### **Belarus-Uzbekistan: Agriculture as priority for cooperation**

The roadmap for cooperation between Belarus and Uzbekistan, adopted in November 2018 and comprising 158 measures, is the basic document for trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. By May 2020, more than a third of them had already been implemented. This had an immediate impact on the state of the Belarus-Uzbekistan partnership: "At the end of 2019, the volume of trade turnover between the countries reached \$239 million and increased 1.5 times over 2018 <sup>72</sup>. This means that the parties intend to achieve the goal, which the two heads of state had outlined in 2018, of increasing bilateral trade turnover to one billion dollars as quickly as possible. "The goal is expected to be achieved in three to four years by mainstreaming all possible areas of cooperation," he said. One <sup>73</sup>of

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<sup>71</sup> Markovich, E. BJD plans to expand communication with Ukraine / E. Markovich // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/bzhd-planiruet-rasshirjat-soobschenie-s-ukrainoj-380946-2020/>.

<sup>72</sup> Vladimir Dvornik held talks with Sardor Umurzakov, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Uzbekistan [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9423>

<sup>73</sup> Zalesky, B. Vector of post-Soviet integration. A view from Belarus / B. Zalesky. - Palmarium Academic Publishing, 2019. - C. 223.

the most promising areas is agriculture.

The fact is that the main trend in the development of Uzbekistan's agro-industrial complex today is the formation of a cluster production system. In other words, clusters should unite producers of agricultural raw materials and its processors into industrial enterprises. The Belarusian experience in this regard is viewed by Uzbek partners as very positive, so they 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 dollars 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 this year, despite restrictions caused by the spread of the coronavirus. "In the four months of 2020, Belarusian exports of such goods [agricultural products and foodstuffs] increased by 3.2 times. During this period, 16.1 million worth of products were exported"<sup>74</sup>.

The cooperation between Belarus and Uzbekistan is certainly not limited to the mutual supply of food products, but also includes a wide range of interaction, including in the development of joint scientific approaches and modern technologies. In particular, "promising areas of cooperation in the agricultural sector include the Belarusian side's participation in the construction of dairy complexes, organization of milk processing, establishment of JVs to produce

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<sup>74</sup> Markovich, E. Cooperation in the sphere of agro-industrial complex is a priority direction of Belarusian-Uzbek cooperation - Ambassador / E. Markovich // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/sotrudnichestvo-v-sfere-apk-prioritetnoe-napravlenie-belorussko-uzbekskogo-vzaimodejstviya-posol-394939-2020>



veterinary drugs, cooperation in breeding, organization of training and retraining of Uzbek specialists on the basis of Belarusian agricultural educational institutions<sup>75</sup>

The first Belarus-Uzbekistan Agrarian Forum held in February 2020, which brought together over seven hundred participants, demonstrated this diversity of effective partnerships. The business part of Belarusian delegation comprised about 150 representatives of exporters of agricultural and food products, academic and educational institutions of Uzbekistan. In particular, an active participant of the forum was Gomselmash OJSC, which signed an agreement with the Tashkent Agricultural Machinery Plant in autumn 2019. "The document envisages the establishment of an assembly plant for combines in the capital of Uzbekistan."<sup>76</sup> Delegations from all regions of the country, as well as from relevant ministries and organisations of the agro-industrial complex were represented on the Uzbek side. As a result, "Belarusian exporters have signed over 30 agreements and contracts with their Uzbek partners"<sup>77</sup>. In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Belarus and the Ministry of Agriculture of Uzbekistan adopted a Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation.

At the same time as 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

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<sup>75</sup> On the outcome of Vladimir Dvornik's visit to Uzbekistan [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9301>

<sup>76</sup> "Gomselmash will present its potential at an agricultural forum in Uzbekistan [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/gomselmash-predstavit-svoj-potentsial-na-agrarnom-forume-v-uzbekistane-380486-2020>

<sup>77</sup> More than 30 agreements and contracts signed as a result of the Belarus-Uzbekistan Agrarian Forum [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/bolee-30-soglashenij-i-kontraktov-podpisano-po-itogam-belorussko-uzbekskogo-agrarnogo-forum-381350-2020/>.

technologies for agriculture in Uzbekistan. Among the novelties of the Belarusian scientists from the Scientific and Practical Center of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus for Food, vegetable marmalade aroused great interest. "The range includes marmalade made of sweet corn, red carrot, ripe pumpkin, juicy tomato and spicy celery. The marmalade contains prebiotics and no artificial colourings"<sup>78</sup>. The Institute of Soil Science and Agrochemistry demonstrated a range of complex mineral fertilizers with a balanced ratio of nutrition elements for cultivated crops. The S.N. Vyshel'sky Institute of Experimental Veterinary Medicine showed vaccines for the prevention and treatment of viral and bacterial diseases in farm animals. Scientists from the Centre for Identification Systems and Electronic Business Operations have proposed technologies for digital identification and traceability of animals and animal products. The Scientific and Practical Centre for Potato Growing interested visitors in new potato varieties - Manifest, Uladar, Palac - resistant to a range of diseases. As we can see, even this brief list of novelties presented in Tashkent clearly showed what tempting prospects are opening up for the development of Belarusian-Uzbek agricultural partnerships in the near future.

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<sup>78</sup> The National Academy of Sciences of Belarus presented more than 60 innovative developments for agriculture in Uzbekistan [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-Kyrgyzstan: trade, cooperation, regional cooperation**

In February 2020, Minsk hosted the ninth meeting of the intergovernmental Belarus-Kyrgyzstan Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation, which addressed pressing issues of development and strengthening of systemic mutually beneficial partnership relations. In Minsk and Bishkek, the meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission, where the status of the co-chairs has been raised to the level of deputy prime ministers, was viewed as "a new impetus for the development of relations between our countries"<sup>79</sup>. We should remind that the Belarusian side is traditionally interested in the closest partnership with this state in Central Asia, the more so because "trade and economic cooperation between Belarus and Kyrgyzstan has been considerably stepped up lately. Our trade turnover over the last three years has not dropped below \$100 million."<sup>80</sup> Indeed, in 2019, Belarusian-Kyrgyz trade amounted to more than \$105 million with a surplus for the Belarusian side of more than \$90 million, which was ensured by deliveries from Belarus of dairy products, tractors and tractor units, poultry meat and by-products, medicines, furniture and woodchip boards. However, according to the parties, "the current volume of mutual trade between Kyrgyzstan and Belarus does not correspond to the economic potential of the countries"<sup>81</sup>. For this reason, at the regular meeting of

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<sup>79</sup> A meeting of the Belarus-Kyrgyzstan intergovernmental commission will be held in Minsk on 21 February [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/zasedanie-belorusko-kyrgyzskoj-mezhpravkomissii-projdet-v-minske-21-fevralja-378085-2020/>.

<sup>80</sup> Sergey Rumas: Belarus is interested in increasing mechanical engineering supplies to Kyrgyzstan [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9292>

<sup>81</sup> Kyrgyzstan proposes Belarus to create an agro-cluster for milk processing [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/kyrgyzstan-predlagaet->

the Intergovernmental Commission the attention of the parties was focused on priority directions of cooperation: 1) **increase of** mutual trade; 2) **deepening** of industrial cooperation and creation of joint assembly productions; 3) **expansion of** interregional cooperation.

In terms of **increasing the volume of mutual trade**, the Belarusian side made specific proposals to increase supplies of passenger, cargo and municipal vehicles to Kyrgyzstan, which is quite in line with the plans of the Kyrgyz side to upgrade, for example, the fleet of passenger vehicles in Bishkek and other cities. In addition, in promoting its products on the Kyrgyz market, the Belarusian side intends to continue its practice of actively participating in exhibition events in Kyrgyzstan in 2020. For instance, in April the exposition of Belarusian exporters will be presented for the third time at the FoodExpo international food industry exhibition in Bishkek, where visitors will be able to get acquainted with products and beverages from Belarus. "The focus will be on healthy food and Halal-certified products. For the first time, food additives, casings for meat and sausage products, and baby food will be presented at the domestic exposition<sup>82</sup>

When it comes to **the deepening of production cooperation**, the Kyrgyz side proposed to intensify cooperation in agriculture and agro-industry. This is, first of all, the establishment of a joint agricultural cluster for milk processing in Kyrgyzstan using

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[belarusi-sozdat-agroklaster-po-pererabotke-moloka-380586-2020/](https://www.belta.by/economics/view/ekspozitsija-belorusskih-proizvoditelej-budet-predstavlena-na-vystavke-foodexpo-v-bishkeke-378791-2020/)

<sup>82</sup> Nemanikova, Y. An exposition of Belarusian producers to be presented at FoodExpo in Bishkek / Y. Nemanikova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020

URL:

<https://www.belta.by/economics/view/ekspozitsija-belorusskih-proizvoditelej-budet-predstavlena-na-vystavke-foodexpo-v-bishkeke-378791-2020/>

Belarusian technologies, as well as "the construction of dairy - complexes with the necessary equipment produced in Belarus and the supply of pedigree livestock<sup>83</sup>. An agreement on cooperation in agriculture and food between the Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Belarus and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Reclamation of Kyrgyzstan was signed at a meeting of the Interstate Commission in order to establish these agreements in the legal field. As for industrial cooperation, the plans announced in Minsk to set up assembly factories look quite realistic: transformers - with the Kozlov Minsk Electromechanical Plant; lifts - with Mogilevliftmash; gas meters - with the Belarusian Optical and Mechanical Association. The seriousness of these intentions of the parties is evidenced, in particular, by the signing of an agreement on cooperation between the V.I. Kozlov Minsk Electromechanical Plant and Maselektrosnab Ltd following the meeting of the intergovernmental commission.

Speaking about **the expansion of interregional cooperation** between Belarus and Kyrgyzstan, we should remind that so far it is the capitals of Minsk and Bishkek that "in 1997 they signed the Agreement on economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation and in 2008 they established sworn brotherhood relations"<sup>84</sup>. At a meeting of the intergovernmental commission in Minsk the Agreement on cooperation in trade and economic, scientific and technical, humanitarian and cultural spheres was signed by the Gomel Regional Executive Committee and the Office of the Plenipotentiary Representative of the Kyrgyz Government in the Chui

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<sup>83</sup> Vladimir Kukharev: Belarusian electric buses may appear on the streets of Bishkek [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9293>

<sup>84</sup> Zalessky, B.L. Belarus-Kyrgyzstan: from trade to cooperation / B.L. Zalessky // *Materialy XIII Miedzynarodowej naukowo-praktycznej konferencji "Nauka i inowacja - 2017"*, Volume 3. Przemysl: Nauka i studia. - C. 10.

region. Although this was the first agreement for the Belarusian region with its Kyrgyz partners, the enterprises of the Homiel Region were already present in the market of the Central Asian country before that. Suffice it to say that in 2019, the region's trade turnover with Kyrgyzstan exceeded ten million dollars. "At that, exports amounted to \$8.5 million. 26 enterprises of the region supplied their goods, including Gomselmash OJSC, Multipak IPUP, MozyrSol OJSC, manufacturers of doors and wallpaper. The promotion of Turovsky Dairy Plant products, in particular, soft cheeses, to the Kyrgyz market has started<sup>85</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> The Gomel region will develop cooperation with the Chui oblast of Kyrgyzstan [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/gomelskij-region-budet-razvivat-sotrudnichestvo-s-chujskoj-oblastju-kyrgyzstana-381123-2020>

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## **Belarus: The Sustainable Development Goals and the 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, consisting of the agency's media specialists and representatives of TV and print media. The aim of the group is to raise awareness of the Belarusian society on the implementation of the SDGs in our country.

It should be recalled that in September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", in which it fixed 17 Sustainable Development Goals aimed, inter alia, at eradicating poverty and hunger, combating inequality and injustice, and addressing the challenges posed by climate change. This event demanded that all states of the planet, including the Republic of Belarus, undertake to create mechanisms to achieve the SDGs.

A year and a half later, in May 2017, the institutional framework for managing the implementation of the SDGs was already in place: first, the post of National Coordinator for the Sustainable Development Goals was established; second, a national SDG governance architecture was built, including a Sustainable Development Council, a parliamentary, regional and partnership groups for sustainable development that ensure effective interaction between the public sector and civil society organisations. The Council for Sustainable Development, which began its work, assigned each of the 17 SDGs to a governmental body in Belarus with responsibility for addressing the respective issues. As a result, "all of the



government bodies involved fall into four sectoral blocks: economy, environment, social sphere and monitoring"<sup>86</sup> .

Following the recommendation of the United Nations to conduct a three-tiered - global, regional, national - analysis of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, Belarus presented its voluntary report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the international level in 2017, then participated in the presentation of the Eurasian Economic Union report on sustainable development at the UN Headquarters, and in 2018 itself organized a regional forum of national coordinators dedicated to building a partnership of countries and organizations, in which Belarus was ranked 23rd. As a result, in the 2018 Global Sustainable Development Goals Index, which was calculated for 156 countries based on one hundred SDG-related indicators, Belarus ranked 23rd, with a "score above the average for the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region" <sup>87</sup>.

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. These include laws on specially protected natural territories and on the production and circulation of organic products. In 2019, draft laws related to health care and the rights of persons with disabilities were considered. The Sustainable Development Goals are also expected to become an organic part of the country's socio-economic development in order to reach a gross

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<sup>86</sup> Shchetkina, M. Sustainable development depends on each of us / M. Shchetkina // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/interview/view/ustojchivoerazvitiiezavisitotkazhdogoiznas6646/>

<sup>87</sup> Belarus ranked 23rd among 156 countries in achieving the SDGs in 2018 [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/politics/view/belarus-zanjala-23-emestostredi-156-stran-v-dostizhenii-tsur-za-2018-god-333890-2019/>.

domestic product of one hundred billion dollars by 2025 and "join the group of countries with an average per capita income at purchasing power parity above the world average"<sup>88</sup>.

Another important condition for the successful achievement of the SDGs is the synchronisation of the work of regional groups, since 'the sustainable development of a country as a whole is only possible if the development of all its regions is sustainable'<sup>89</sup>. This is why territorial development plans should be proposed not only by the national government, but also, and above all, by representatives of local government, 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, elaborated in August 2019 by the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Belarus together with regional executive committees, whose implementation would allow to bring these territories up to the average national level, seems extremely important in this context. Suffice it to say, "A package of 280 projects has been put together so far. Some 54 projects will be created from scratch, 80 will be investments in existing production facilities, and 140 projects will be in the infrastructure sector (30% - industrial infrastructure, the rest - social facilities)<sup>90</sup>projects, there are another 224 investment proposals. Also important is the fact that some of the projects in this comprehensive plan will be financed by "foreign investors as well as

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<sup>88</sup> Belarus sees Agenda 2030 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-dlj-a-novoj-globalnoj-politiki-mj-asnikovich-333892-2019/>.

<sup>89</sup> 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>

<sup>90</sup> 280 projects are proposed for inclusion in the development plan for Belarus's lagging regions [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/v-plan-razvitija-otstajuschih-regionov-belarusi-predlagaetsja-vkljuchit-280-proektov-359816-2019/>.

international financial institutions that have prioritised the development of infrastructure, such as the construction of water de-ionising plants, conversion of boiler houses into local fuels and development of alternative forms of energy. World Bank funds will be used to renovate schools and hospitals"<sup>91</sup> .

In January 2019, the first National Forum on Sustainable Development was held in Minsk, where more than four hundred participants considered the national experience of Belarus in achieving the SDGs, the implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of the country until 2030, as well as the features of the preparation of the National Sustainable Development Strategy for the period until 2035. The positive experience of the Brest and Mogilev Regions in this regard was highlighted. And today, it is a question of overcoming the variability of the movement to organise this work in other Belarusian regions.

At the first National Forum on Sustainable Development it was also noted that an important role in the implementation of the key provisions of the 2030 Agenda into national strategic documents, sectoral and regional programmes should be played by the country's media, which "still have a lot to do to ensure a broad public understanding of the SDGs and the role of each individual in their achievement"<sup>92</sup>. This is why, in August 2019, the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus set up a working group made up of journalists who are deeply immersed in the topic, in the national

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<sup>91</sup> Shchetkina: the work of regional SDG groups in Belarus needs to be synchronised [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/schetkina-rabotu-regionalnyh-grupp-po-dostizhenij-u-tsur-v-belarusi-nuzhno-sinhronizirovat-333887-2019/>.

<sup>92</sup> The media will form a separate group in the work to achieve the SDGs in Belarus - Shchetkina [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/smi-sostaviat-otdelnuju-gruppu-v-rabote-nad-dostizheniem-tsur-v-belarusi-schetkina-333874-2019/>.

SDG management architecture, to inform on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. But it is already clear that the efforts of one working group in implementing such an ambitious media project will not be enough. That is why, in August 2019, the Ministry of Information, with the support of the National Project Coordinator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) "Supporting the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals Management Architecture", announced a national competition "From Global Goals to Local Actions" to involve Belarusian society in the SDG implementation process and enhance the work of journalists

Until 1 December 2019, essays, interviews, articles, television and radio programmes, publication cycles and broadcasts were accepted for this competition in seven categories comprising such areas as: 1) environmental; 2) social topics, including gender equality and youth issues; 3) economic; 4) topics related to vulnerable populations, including people with disabilities, and implementation of the No One Left Behind principle; 5) inter-agency collaboration on the SDGs; 6) SDG-focused projects implemented by businesses, including impact investment projects; 7) community initiatives aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The results of the competition showed that it was a good test of the level of competence, first of all, of Belarusian journalists and another opportunity for them to unleash their creative potential. Thanks to this format of creative competition, the Belarusian press had a very diverse discussion of the main areas and objectives of sustainable development, and possibilities for their implementation and realization. It was not only leading journalists who took part. The

competition also interested a wide audience of readers, TV and radio listeners, once again confirming the conclusion that "mass media is 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"<sup>93</sup>.

An important detail: in 2020, the Republic of Belarus should significantly strengthen the work on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, primarily at the regional level. At the same time, regional media should have a say in this matter, because, according to M. Shchetkina, the national coordinator of the SDGs, "without informing the population, without involving it in the work on the achievement of the SDGs, almost nothing can be done"<sup>94</sup>. This means that the range of publications on this topic in the regional media should be very broad, concerning practically all 17 Sustainable Development Goals and taking into account the priorities of socio-economic development of the country until 2030. It is worth recalling here that the work of the media is very closely linked to Goal 16, which is to promote peaceful, inclusive societies and partnerships.

As for the other SDGs, Goal 5: 'Decent Work and Economic Growth', which aims to develop the economy of the Belarusian regions at an accelerated pace, is of particular relevance to Belarus in the current environment. A characteristic detail in this regard is that

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<sup>93</sup> The editorial teams of 7 Days and Belaruskaya Dumk G won the competition for coverage of the SDGs [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/society/view/kollektivy-redaktsii-7-dnei-i-belaruskai-dumki-pobedili-v-konkurse-po-osvescheniju-tsur-373180-2019/>

<sup>94</sup> Belarus will strengthen work on the SDGs at the regional level in 2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/v-belarusi-v-2020-godu-usiliat-rabotu-po-dostizhenij-u-tsur-na-regionalnom-urovne-373167-2019/>

"the traditional economy has practically exhausted its growth reserves, and further development is only possible with the creation of new industries, including those involving foreign investors"<sup>95</sup> relevant legislation and review the entire investment agenda"<sup>96</sup>. At the same time, the focus will be on regional policy. In particular, the Belarusian government is already actively working on three large pilot projects: Orsha District of Vitebsk Region, working with areas lagging behind in terms of socio-economic development, and 11 major cities.

In addition, critical investment projects were underway in 2019 in areas such as the automotive, metals and construction, pulp and paper, wood processing and light manufacturing industries, the oil refining, petrochemical and energy complexes. In total, as of mid-December 2019, "out of 34 high-profile investment projects, 22 have already been commissioned".<sup>97</sup>, 12 of which have reached design capacity. But it is not only these major projects that should be in the spotlight of the regional media.

At the regional level, the Vitebsk Region is showing a positive trend in attracting foreign investment, particularly from Latvia. In three quarters of 2019, the volume of foreign investments from Latvian investors increased by three and a half times, exceeding two million dollars. There are already 90 companies registered in Vitebsk Oblast in trade, woodworking, motor transport services, tailoring services, and plastic products manufacturing. The fact that "33

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<sup>95</sup> 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>

<sup>96</sup> Sergei Rumas introduced the First Deputy Prime Minister to the team [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9155>

<sup>97</sup> Sergei Rumas: 22 out of 34 especially important investment objects have been commissioned. [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9174>

cooperation agreements have been concluded between the districts and cities of the Vitebsk region and Latvian municipalities"<sup>98</sup> certainly plays a significant role in strengthening these positive trends.

The Brest Oblast, which plans to attract at least \$90 million in net foreign direct investment into its economy in 2020, has an even stronger performance in this context. Half of it is expected to go to the Brest Free Economic Zone. As for specific cities of the region, "the target for Brest is about \$15 million of direct foreign investments, and for Baranovichi and Pinsk - over \$6 million<sup>99</sup>. A little less than half of these funds will be used to purchase machinery, equipment, vehicles, so that about six and a half thousand new jobs can be created through modernization and technical upgrading of the existing enterprises and creation of new production facilities.

At the level of specific business entities, an interesting experience of working with foreign investments is demonstrated by the company with an almost 60-year history - the Goryn Agricultural Combine OJSC, located in the working settlement of Rechitsa, Stolin District, Brest Region, which only in August 2019 got out of the reorganization procedure by signing 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. The modernization of the existing production facilities allowed the

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<sup>98</sup> Shcherbitsky, A. The volume of Latvian investments in Vitebsk region for 9 months increased by 3.5 times / A. Shcherbitsky // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/objem-latvijskih-investitsij-v-vitebskuj-u-oblast-za-9-mesjatsev-vyros-v-35-raza-371103-2019/>.

<sup>99</sup> Foreign direct investment in the Brest Oblast economy in 2020 will be at least \$90 million [-Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/prjamyje-inostranye-investitsi-v-ekonomiku-brebstskoj-oblasti-v-2020-godu-sostavjat-nee-menee-90-mln-374236-2019/>.

company to expand the range of products. In particular, the company "launched the production of a new type of product - boiled sterilized vegetables in vacuum packaging. It is a completely natural product without the addition of preservatives, even such innocuous ones as sugar and salt. These packaged vegetables have a shelf life of six months, and retain their colour, quality and flavour<sup>100</sup>experience of attracting foreign investment can be considered doubly successful. And it can be the subject of a detailed study not only in the Brest regional press, but also in the media of other Belarusian regions.

All of the above facts eloquently illustrate the conclusion that the implementation of each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG #5 related to the topic of attracting foreign investment and its effective use in Belarusian regions, should be firmly fixed on the front pages of regional, district and city newspapers and reflect the experience already accumulated in this regard by specific economic entities as fully as possible. It is important to increase the work of the media in this direction because "the media not only fix our perception of reality but they actually model reality itself, the scenario and dynamics of events..."<sup>101</sup>. At the same time, the task of the media is to reflect reality, with all its problems, complexities and contradictions, "in the future to influence a change for the better"<sup>102</sup>.

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<sup>100</sup> . A Polish investor has invested Br1.6 million in the production of the Horyn agrocomplex [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/polskij-investor-vlozhit-v-proizvodstvo-gorynskogo-agrokombinata-br16-mln-373083-2019/>.

<sup>101</sup> Kuntsevich, A. Public responsibility distinguishes the journalist from other actors Information creation / A. Kuntsevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/opinions/view/otvetstvennost-pered-obschestvom-otlichaet-zhurnalista-ot-drugih-subiektov-sozdaniya-informatsii-? 110/>

<sup>102</sup> Karliukevich, A. The main task of mass media is to reflect reality with all its problems and difficulties / A. Karliukevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://news.21.by/other-news/2019/12/11/1940593.html>



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## **Belarus: Directions for stepping up parliamentary diplomacy**

At the end of January 2020, the Council of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus approved the Plan of International Interparliamentary Cooperation for 2020, which indicated that the Belarusian "parliamentary corps will continue active interaction at the level of working groups on cooperation with foreign countries"<sup>103</sup>. This document provided for visits to Belarus by parliamentary delegations from Germany, Italy, Romania, Latvia, Moldova, Pakistan, and Switzerland. The 13th - session of the Inter-Parliamentary Commission for Cooperation between the National Assemblies of Belarus and Armenia was scheduled for spring 2020. Visits of Belarusian parliamentarians to Egypt and Serbia, participation in the Fifth World Conference of Speakers under the aegis of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and a meeting of Eurasian and Indonesian speakers were also expected. Furthermore, the Belarusian parliamentarians declared that they aim to establish and develop constructive relations with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, the Nordic Council, as well as with parliaments of other foreign countries. The subsequent development of the epidemiological situation with the coronavirus infection has, however, significantly altered these plans. However, at the opening of the fourth session of the seventh Council of the Republic in early October 2020, it was stated that parliamentary diplomacy is extremely

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<sup>103</sup> A German parliamentary delegation will visit Belarus on 3-6 February [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/parlamentskaja-delegatsija-germanii-posetit-belarus-3-6-fevralja-377773-2020/>

important in the current circumstances. And for this reason, "in the near future, interaction with our foreign colleagues within the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member States, the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly, the Inter-Parliamentary Union".<sup>104</sup>The aim is to use these platforms to promote the foreign policy and foreign economic interests of the Belarusian state by parliamentary means. In addition, it is planned to update contacts with such structures as the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations , parliamentary formations of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe. To this end, the task is to "intensify the activities of inter-parliamentary commissions and working groups of the National Assembly on cooperation with parliaments of foreign states"<sup>105</sup>.

We should remind that there are now 72 working groups in the Belarusian parliament, as well as four inter-parliamentary commissions, three of which are between the upper houses of the parliaments. They are an important tool of parliamentary diplomacy with considerable potential that is yet to be actively used. At the same time, apart from traditional forms of interaction, Belarusian MPs are going to look for new ways to communicate. "Among other things, the potential of foreign parliamentarians should be used to the maximum extent possible to implement interstate agreements reached

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<sup>104</sup> The importance of parliamentary diplomacy is increasing enormously in the modern context - Kochanova [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/v-sovremennyh-usloviyah-znachenie-parlamentskoj-diplomatii-chrezvychajno-vozhrazaet-kochanova-409255-2020/>.

<sup>105</sup> Andreichenko: parliamentarians will continue contacts with partners on the principles of equality and mutual respect [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/andrejchenko-parlamentarii-prodolzhat-kontakty-s-partnerami-na-printsipah-ravnopravija-i-409192-2020/>

at the highest and highest levels. This includes monitoring the implementation of plans, protocols and roadmaps for cooperation, implementation of international treaties and agreements, and participation in meetings of bilateral intergovernmental commissions<sup>106</sup>

All this shows that the Belarusian side sees parliamentary diplomacy as an important component of full-fledged trade and economic cooperation, in which meetings with representatives of authorities and business circles of foreign countries are seen as an additional channel through which to help domestic business entities discover new opportunities to promote Belarusian brands.

Furthermore, "parliamentary dialogue should seek to find solutions to issues in a spirit of respect for opinion and multi-vectorism".<sup>107</sup> To contribute to global and regional stability, to promote constructive cooperation, interaction at international parliamentary platforms and to enhance inter-parliamentary exchanges. Representatives of the Belarusian parliament are taking concrete steps in this direction.

Thus, at the Fifth 108World Conference of Speakers of Parliament organised by videoconference in August 2020, the Belarusian side, noting the complexity and contradictory nature of the

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<sup>106</sup> Rachkov: it is important to make the most of inter-parliamentary links for implementation

country arrangements [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/rachkov-vazhno-maksimalno-zadejstvovat-mezhparlamentskie-svjazi-dlja-vypolnenija-dogovorennostej-stran-394359-2020/>

<sup>107</sup> Andreichenko: Belarus' position should be heard in international parliamentary structures [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/andrejchenko-pozitsija-belarusi-dolzha-zvuchat-v-mezhdunarodnyh-parlamentskih-strukturah-3-82141-2020/>

<sup>108</sup> Andreichenko: trust deficit requires more parliamentary engagement in peacemaking [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/andrejchenko-defisit-doverija-trebuje-bolee-aktivnogo-uchastija-parlamentariev-v-obespechenii-mira-403397-2020/>

processes taking place in the world and the growing lack of trust, stated the need to bring to the fore the task of greater involvement of parliamentarians in ensuring peace, harmony and sustainable development, while pointing out that its solution "is only possible in conditions of dialogue and mutual understanding, mutually beneficial trade and economic relations, ensuring equal access to all kinds of information". In this context, official Minsk invited the Speakers of Parliament to support Belarus' unification initiatives - the restart of the Helsinki process and the creation of a "digital good neighbourhood belt".

And at the 41st General Assembly of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, held in September 2020 by videoconference, the Belarusian side, noting the role of parliamentary diplomacy in bringing 109the countries of the region closer together politically, economically and socially, expressed support for the aspiration of the countries of South-East Asia to sign a free trade - agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union and expressed readiness to "assist in this task entailing the growth of trade and the creation of new

## **Belarus: exporting as a response to challenges**

Sustained economic growth at an annual rate of three to four per cent is the specific objective set today in the Republic of Belarus to ensure stable socio-economic development of the country in the medium term. For its successful implementation, it is necessary to "ensure the efficient work of each enterprise, the equitable and

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<sup>109</sup> Belarus pursues independent foreign policy for peace and stable development - Andreichenko [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/belarus-osuschestvljaet-nezavisimuju-vneshnjuju-politiku-radi-mira-i-stabilnogo-razvitija-andrejchenko-405902-2020/>.

sustainable development of the country's regions; create conditions for attracting foreign and domestic investment; and increase exports, including to new markets"<sup>110</sup>. The presence of the export theme in this list of essential 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'<sup>111</sup>. Among the Belarusian companies that are active in the current difficult conditions in foreign markets, we should mention, first of all, the largest global manufacturer of dump trucks and transportation equipment for the mining and construction industries, which occupies about one-third of the global market for heavy-duty dump trucks - the **Belarusian Automobile Plant**, whose export in 2020 is developing in several major vectors at once.

The first vector is **Russia's regions**. For example, 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 under** an agreement signed in September 2019. Three 130-tonne vehicles have already arrived in this Russian region in February 2020. In total, at least 50 dump trucks will go there in the next three years, which will be used to develop the apatite-nepheline deposits in the Khibiny. It is expected that the 180-tonne dump trucks "will be

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<sup>110</sup> Speech by Ms 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/>

<sup>111</sup> Zalesskii, B.L. Export Culture and Mass Consciousness / B.L. Zalesskii // JournalEtyka-2016: Status, Problems and Prospects: Materials of the 18th International Scientific and Practical Conference marking the 95th anniversary of Belarusian Diplomatic Academy, 10-11 years. 2016. Mshsk / edited by: S.V. Dubovsh (ed.) [i.s.]. - Vyp. 18. - Mshsk : AAT "Pal^afkambshat i imya Ya. Kolas", 2016. - C. 234.

subsequently modified into smart dump trucks and will acquire new technical characteristics. The additionally installed equipment will make it possible to control them over long distances. A pilot site for unmanned operation of quarry machinery is planned to be set up in the Nyorpakha open pit of the Vostochny mine"<sup>112</sup>.

Also in April 2020, another six dump trucks from the Belarusian manufacturer started operating in the **Krasnoyarsk Territory** at the Achinsk Alumina Refinery, part of JSC Rusal Achinsk. The upgrading of the mining fleet at the Mazulsky mine will make it possible to increase productivity and cut costs in the technological process of raw material extraction. A typical detail: in 2020 Russian Aluminum, one of the world's largest aluminium producers, plans to buy several dozens of Belarusian machines, as "these machines have high performance characteristics, they are more economical in fuel and lubricant consumption. The driver's cabs have improved visibility and control systems, and are equipped with comfortable seats and climate control systems"<sup>113</sup>

Another Russian region, where the second 130-ton dump truck BELAZ-75131 was delivered this spring since the beginning of 2020, is **Sverdlovsk Region**, where the mining and processing enterprise JSC Uralasbest is already operating eleven 130-ton trucks, each of which transports up to fifteen hundred tons of mined rock per shift. How important it is for the Russian side is proved by such figures.

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<sup>112</sup> BELAZ has delivered another batch of dump trucks to Russia's Apatit [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belaz-postavil-ocherednuju-partiju-samosvalov-rossijskomu-apatitu-386828-2020/>

<sup>113</sup> Nemankova, Y. BELAZ dump trucks started to work in Krasnoyarsk Krai / Y. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/karjernye-samosvaly-belaz-pristupili-k-rabote-v-krasnojarskom-krae-386202-2020/>.

BELAZ trucks work "on the base of Bazhenovka deposit, proven reserves of which are enough for more than 150 years. The field is developed by the open-pit method. The quarry is 8km long, 2.5km wide and 350m deep"<sup>114</sup>.

The second vector is the countries **of the Eurasian Economic Union**. In particular, **Armenia**, where three 90-tonne BELAZ-75585 dump trucks were sent in the spring of 2020. They have filled up the park of technics of Sotk mine - the gold mine, the largest in the territory of Armenia on pure gold mining, which stocks are estimated more than in 120 tons. It should be noted that the 130-ton Belarusian machines are already operating here with high efficiency. The new dump trucks are equipped with diesel engines capable of producing up to 1,200 horsepower. "To improve the reliability of the main load-bearing elements of the dump truck, new high-strength steels have been used, and in the most stressed areas, cast elements have been used."<sup>115</sup> .

Vector three is **far-abroad** countries, whose share in the exports of the Belarusian Automobile Plant has almost doubled by half since the beginning of 2020 and reached 40 percent. In April, eight 130-tonne dump trucks BELAZ-75131 started working at a coal mine on the island of Kalimantan in **Indonesia**. Their configuration takes into account all the wishes of the Indonesian partners and climatic conditions. These include tropical options such as "appropriate rubber, air conditioning and a special cooling system"<sup>116</sup>.

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<sup>114</sup> Nemankova, Y. Another 130-ton dump truck BELAZ will start work at 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/>.

<sup>115</sup> Nemankova, Y. BELAZ sent dump trucks to Armenia / Y. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belaz-otpravil-v-armenij-u-karjernye-samosvaly-385547-2020/>.

<sup>116</sup> Eight BELAZ dump trucks have started work in Indonesia [Electronic resource]. -



The Belarus Automobile Plant is actively expanding its presence on the African continent in **Algeria**, where in the spring of 2020 another batch of five front loaders BELAZ-78221 was delivered. The company plans to "participate in specialized exhibitions and conduct direct negotiations with interested consumers of quarry equipment in the region"<sup>117</sup>.

Belarusian companies that are active in foreign markets even under such difficult conditions as we see today include **118Gomselmash Holding**, a manufacturer of grain and forage harvesters, corn harvesters and potato harvesters, mowers and other agricultural equipment, which is already operating on the fields of Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Chile, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Argentina, China, South Korea, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In the first quarter of 2020, the holding's enterprises shipped more than 400 machines to its customers. "At the same time 278 self-propelled combine harvesters and machine sets have been exported outside Belarus. The list of countries to which the vehicles have been shipped includes Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Moldova. <...> In total, shipments to the same period in 2019 increased by 373%.

Another enterprise that is actively promoting its products in foreign markets is the **Minsk Tractor Works**. More than 250 tractors have been shipped to Pakistan alone since the beginning of 2020. This is an eloquent testimony to the fact that "even despite the crisis in many Asian countries and the restrictive measures introduced in

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2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/vosem-karjernih-samosvalov-belaz-pristupili-k-rabote-v-indonezii-387074-2020/>.

<sup>117</sup> Nemankova, Y. A batch of BELAZ loaders shipped to Algeria / Y. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/partija-pogruzchikov-belaz-otgruzhena-v-alzhir-385911-2020/>.

<sup>118</sup> "Gomselmash delivered more than 270 harvesters and machine sets to foreign markets in Q1. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/gomselmash-v-i-kvartale-postavil-na-vneshnie-rynki-bolee-270-kombajnov-i-mashinokomplektov-388443-2020>

connection with the complicated epidemiological situation, supplies remain at the planned level"<sup>119</sup>. In total, since 1955, Minsk tractor builders have shipped more than 120 thousand of their machines to this country in Southern Asia. The company does not forget about other export directions. In particular, in the first quarter of the current year, about five hundred units of machinery and tractor kits have been exported to European countries. The following fact speaks for itself: "Export of production of JSC "MTW" to countries of Africa for the 1st quarter of 2020 has grown by 70 %" <sup>120</sup>. For one of the countries of this continent - Sudan - in April of this year the next "shipment of more than 100 tractors <...> was formed. This is the second shipment in 2020"<sup>121</sup> . The following figures complete the picture very convincingly. "Since the beginning of the year the company has increased the supplies to Russian regions by 20 percent. Export of Belarusian agricultural equipment to Uzbekistan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia has also increased<sup>122</sup> more than a hundred tractors and tractor kits shipped there in the first three months of the year. Much of this growth can be explained by the fact that "since January 2020, spare parts and components imported into the territory of Tajikistan for the assembly of agricultural machinery

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<sup>119</sup> MTZ has delivered more than 250 tractors to Pakistan since the beginning of the year. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/mtz-s-nachala-goda-postavit-v-pakistan-bolee-250-traktorov-388294-2020/>.

<sup>120</sup> Nemankova, Y. Exports 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/>.

<sup>121</sup> 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-partiiu-tehniki-v-sudan-386164-2020/>.

<sup>122</sup> MTZ has a good export performance: deliveries to Russia are up 20% and deliveries to Africa are up 70% [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://ont.by/news/u-mtz-horoshie-pokazateli-po-eksportu-na-20-vyrosli-postavki-v-rossiyu-na-70-v-afriku>

are not subject to VAT and customs duties<sup>123</sup>. In the first quarter of this year, Minsk Tractor Works products were shipped to the markets of over 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 by almost two and a half times. An important component in achieving this figure was the fact that at the beginning of this year, the enterprise, together with Borisov Pozhsnab LLC, signed a contract to supply 73 units of fire and rescue vehicles to the Mongolian Agency for Emergency Situations. And MAZ has already "started fulfilling the contract to supply chassis and assemble passenger vehicles for export to Mongolia. The joint project will be implemented during this year"<sup>124</sup>.

In the spring of 2020, **Amkodor-DOMZ**, a unitary enterprise based in Dzerzhinsk, Minsk Region, seriously updated its export plans by shipping its first batch of products to the Russian region, the Republic of Karelia, in April. There, these seven gantry cranes with carrying capacity from 3.2 to 16 tons will be used for the implementation of an investment project, which the Government of Karelia attaches great importance to - "to create on the premises of the former Onega tractor factory high-tech import-substituting production of a full cycle timber machinery: harvesters and forwarders of medium and heavy class<sup>125</sup>. A typical detail: the overhead travelling cranes sent to Karelia are state-of-the-art

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<sup>123</sup> MTZ has doubled its exports to Tajikistan [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/mtz-uvelichil-eksport-produksii-v-tadzhikistan-v-2-raza-387386-2020/>.

<sup>124</sup> Nemankova, Y. MAZ in Q1 increased exports to far abroad almost 2.4 times / Y. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/maz-v-i-kvartale-uvelichil-eksport-v-dalnezarubezhje-pochti-v-24-raza-387079-2020/>.

<sup>125</sup> "Amkodor-Onego in Karelia has received the first batch of overhead cranes [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/amkodor-onego-v-karelii-poluchil-pervuiu-partiiu-mostovykh-kranov-3-88008-2020/>

machines which are controlled from the floor by means of a radio signal, ensuring high safety standards for the staff. Importantly, a second batch of equipment is due 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**. In the first three months of this year it assembled 5,059 vehicles, and sold a total of 5,230. At the same time, "deliveries to the Russian market increased 2.5-fold; 2,705 vehicles were exported there in the first quarter<sup>126</sup> shipped to Russia.

Belarusian agricultural and food producers also continue to increase their deliveries abroad. In the first quarter of 2020, their exports to 83 countries grew by another almost 10 percent, amounting to nearly \$1.5 billion. An important detail: the increase in supplies was observed in almost all directions. Specifically, "exports to Russia increased by 4.4 percent, to CIS countries excluding Russia by 24.7 percent, to Asia and Oceania by 2.2 times, to the Americas and the Caribbean by 52.4 percent and to the EU by 54.3 percent. The Chinese direction has shown a 2.4-fold increase<sup>127</sup>. In the first three months of 2020, deliveries of Belarusian meat and meat products, milk and dairy products, and potatoes to foreign markets grew particularly strongly. These positive trends were largely a continuation of the strong export performance that the Belarusian agro-industrial complex demonstrated in 2019.

As a reminder, supplies of agricultural products and foodstuffs

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<sup>126</sup> "BELJI has increased exports to Russia by 2.5 times in Q1 / Yu. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/beldzhi-v-i-kvartale-velichil-eksport-v-rossiju-v-25-raza-386430-2020/>.

<sup>127</sup> Belarusian agricultural exports grew by 9.8% in the first quarter [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-belorusskoj-selhozproduksii-v-i-kvartale-vyros-na-98-389760-2020/>.

to 104 countries exceeded five and a half billion dollars in monetary terms then, accounting for virtually one sixth of the Republic of Belarus' merchandise exports in 2019. A number of positive trends contributed to the achievement of this level. First, "supplies of milk and dairy products, rapeseed oil, prepared or canned fish, canned fruits and vegetables, soybean oil, poultry meat, eggs, chocolate and other finished products containing cocoa, and potatoes have increased<sup>128</sup>. Secondly, the geographical diversification of Belarusian exports increased. The 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 was illustrated by the following examples. Thus, supplies of whey and skim milk powder were launched to Afghanistan, malt to Angola and Burkina Faso, skim 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.

Thirdly, Belarusian exports of agricultural products and food to Belarus' strategic partners - Russia and China - increased in 2019. Specifically, to Russia, its volume increased by three percent and amounted to \$4.3 billion. It should be noted that "the main driver of growth in supplies to Russia was dairy products. Its export revenues increased by 23%. Supplies of eggs, flax fiber, gelatin, seeds and

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<sup>128</sup> Belarusian agricultural exports exceed \$5.5 billion in 2019 [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-belorusskoi-selhozproduksii-v-2019-godu-prevysil-55-mlrd-378531-2020>

rapeseed oil have also increased<sup>129</sup>

As for China, deliveries from Belarus increased by almost 60 percent and amounted to \$131.5 million. This brought the share of Belarusian exports to the Chinese market in the structure of total exports to the countries of Asia and Oceania to 68 percent. At the same time, "the volume of deliveries of high value-added processed meat products (beef and poultry) increased by \$53.3 million, reaching 44.1 percent of the total food exports to China<sup>130</sup> flax fiber, chocolate, alcoholic beverages, mineral water, skimmed milk powder and whey powder to the Celestial Empire have increased.

Even more ambitious plans for the development of agricultural and food exports were adopted in Belarus for 2020 - "to increase supplies by 4.2% compared to 2019 and reach an amount exceeding \$5.7 billion"<sup>131</sup>. At the same time, hopes were pinned not only on dairy products, but also on crop and meat products. In particular, 3.6 million tons of dairy products and 316 thousand tons of meat products will be shipped to Russia alone. There are also interesting prospects for China, where another 14 new producers of meat products from Belarus were accredited in January 2020. These include 11 new beef producers - Pinsk, Brest, Zhlobin, Gomel, Grodno, Vitebsk, Slonim, Volkovysk meat packing plants, Brest Traditions, Vakhavyak Plus,

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<sup>129</sup> Nemankova, Y. Belarus plans to supply more than 3 million tonnes of dairy and 316,000 tonnes of meat to Russia in

2020 / Y. Nemankova //

[Electronic resource].

2020

URL:

<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>

<sup>130</sup> The first container train with meat products is scheduled to depart for China this year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/pervyj-kontejneryj-poezd-s-mjasnoj-produktsiej-planirujut-otpravit-v-kitaj-v-etom-godu-378553-2020>

<sup>131</sup> Belarus plans to increase food exports by 4.2% in 2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-planiruet-uvlechit-eksport-prodovolstvija-na-42-v-2020-godu-378535-2020>

Miron, as well as three chicken meat producers - Belorusneft-Osobino and two sites of the Rassvet poultry farm. The range of products available for export to the Chinese market has been expanded for five more companies, "including chicken legs, wing tips and by-products"<sup>132</sup>.

All these facts demonstrate that whoever does not give up in the most difficult circumstances wins in the end, contributing to overcoming the consequences of the adverse epidemiological situation in the world.

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<sup>132</sup> 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-produkcii-v-kitaj-akkreditovany-esche-14-proizvoditelej-375197-2020/>.

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## **Belarus: a factor in the development of tourism exports - participation in trade fairs**

The National Programme for the Support and Development of Exports of the Republic of Belarus for 2016-2020 states that one of the main areas of optimization of the national export support and development system is the "use of the potential of exhibition, trade fair and congress activities"<sup>133</sup>. Representatives of the tourism industry are particularly active in using this tool to promote Belarusian interests in foreign markets, which enables them to achieve good results in the development of tourism services exports, "the volume of which in 2019 increased by almost 15 percent more and exceeded 250 million dollars"<sup>134</sup>. In 2020, Belarus' tourism potential will be showcased at 17 international tourism exhibitions, where our country will be represented by a single national stand.

Thus, in mid-January 2020, the Belarusian side has already taken part in the largest tourism exhibition in Northern Europe Matka 2020 in the capital of Finland, which annually gathers about 20 thousand tourism industry professionals, as well as about 50 thousand visitors. This time, more than 350 companies from 70 countries were represented in Helsinki. At the stand of the Belarusian National Tourism Agency, BelAgroTravel demonstrated its offers to potential foreign partners, "Vneshinturist", "Prime Tour" as well as "Holiday Studio" from

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<sup>133</sup> National Programme of Support and Development of Exports of the Republic of Belarus for 2016-2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2016. - URL: <http://www.government.by/upload/docs/fileaff83a3fc04eb9c0.PDF>

<sup>134</sup> Zalessky, B.L. Export of services: among priorities - tourism / B.L. Zalessky // Materialy XVI Mezinarodni vedecko-prakticka conference "Veda a technologie: krok do budoucnosti - 2020". Volume 4: Prague. Publishing House "Education and Science". - C. 23.

Grodno"<sup>135</sup> .

In the last decade of January 2020 the opportunities for health resort treatment in Belarus, as well as business, medical, sports tourism were presented at the Belarusian national stand in the framework of one of the largest specialized international tourism events in the United States of America - The New York Times Travel Show 2020. The presentation of the tourist potential of Belarus over the ocean was attended by "the Novogrudok District Executive Committee's Department of Sports and Tourism together with the Novogrudok Museum of History and Regional Studies, Prime Tour travel company"<sup>136</sup>

At the end of January 2020, an exposition under the single brand name Belarus opened at the 27th International Travel Trade Fair Balttour 2020 in Riga. It "focuses on inbound medical tourism".<sup>137</sup> Therefore the stand presented the leading Belarusian sanatoriums and health resorts, hotels and hotels, the Mir Castle complex as well as an information portal on medical services. In February 2020 the tourism potential of Belarus was widely presented at the 29th International Tourism Fair Tourest-2020 in the capital of Estonia. The participants of this Belarusian stand were the National Tourism Agency, departments of sports and tourism of Gomel, Grodno and

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<sup>135</sup> Gryshkevich, A. Belarusian stand presented at the largest Nordic travel fair in Helsinki / A. Grishkevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2020  
URL:

<https://www.belta.by/society/view/beloruskij-stend-predstavlen-na-krupnej-shej-turvystavke-severnoj-evropy-v-helsinki-376158-2020/>

<sup>136</sup> Belarus presented at the New York Tourism Expo [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-predstavlena-na-turisticheskoi-vystavke-v-niiu-i-orke-377104-2020/>

<sup>137</sup> Nemankova, Y. Tourist potential of Belarus presented at Balttour-2020 exhibition in Riga / Y. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/turisticheskij-potentsial-belarusi-prezentovan-na-vystavke-balttour-2020-v-rige-377966-2020/>.

Minsk regional executive committees, Zhlobin Olympic Reserve Center, tourist companies - Centre-Kurort, BelAgroTravel LLC, Dietrib LLC, Vetliva portal, sanatoriums - Mashinostroitel, Raduga, Zhemchuzhina, Krinitisa, Sosny, Belorusochka, Narachanka, Narochansky Bereg. The attention of visitors to the Belarusian exposition showed "the high interest of citizens and travel industry entities of Estonia in health tourism in Belarus, as well as the possibility of visa-free entry into the Republic of Belarus through the national airport "Minsk-2" and the visa-free territory "Brest-Grodno"

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Another inbound tourism destination with great export potential is hunting and fishing. The potential of this tourist destination, which is actively developing in Belarus, was widely presented in late January and early February 2020 at one of the world's largest exhibitions in the field of hunting and fishing tourism JACD & HUND 2020 in Dortmund, Germany. Among more than six hundred exhibitors from different countries have demonstrated their capabilities and the organization of the Belarusian Ministry of Forestry - unitary enterprise "Belgosohota", Vitebsk, Grodno and Mogilev State Forestry Enterprise, as well as Pruzhany, Telekhany and Kopyl Forestry. Promoting their hunting and tourism product in Dortmund not for the first time, the Belarusian exhibitors informed foreign hunters about the provided services and types of hunting taking into account their interests: "Hunting for wood grouse, bison, wolf, male elk and red deer is the most attractive for the citizens of the European Union"<sup>139</sup>.

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<sup>138</sup> About the 29th International Tourism Exhibition "Tourest 2020" [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://estonia.mfa.gov.by/ru/embassy/news/c3677b38082f08c4.html>

<sup>139</sup> Hunting and fishing tourism opportunities in Belarus presented at an exhibition in

As we can see, the beginning of 2020 has been quite busy for the international segment of the Belarusian tourism industry. The continuation will be no less intense, as the unified national stand of Belarus will still be presented at international travel fairs in Berlin and Moscow, Beijing, Baku and Dubai, Guangzhou, Nur-Sultan and London. And "a forum in Barcelona will complete the year of exhibitions<sup>140</sup>. One must believe that each of these exhibitions will not only become an additional impetus for increasing the number of foreign tourists coming to Belarus, but will also contribute to further upgrading of the Belarusian tourism industry to the world's best examples.

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Germany [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/vozmozhnosti-ohotnichje-rybolovnogo-turizma-belarusi-predstavleny-na-vystavke-v-germanii-377905-2020/>

<sup>140</sup> Belarus' tourism potential in 2020 to be presented in New York, Dubai and London [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/turisticheskij-potentsial-belarusi-v-2020-godu-predstavj-at-v-nj-j-u-jorke-dubae-i-londone-3745-21-2019/>.

## **Belarus: free zones and special economic zones as regional growth points**

The Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Free Economic Zones", adopted on December 7, 1998, defines as one of the main objectives of establishing FEZs the attraction of "investments in the creation and development of export-oriented and import-substituting productions based on new and high technologies"<sup>141</sup>. More than 20 years of experience in the activity of FEZs established in the territory of the country show that during this period this model of economic relations in the regions has demonstrated many positive trends, and in the future it can turn into an even more effective instrument of socio-economic development of the Belarusian state.

The **Minsk FEZ**, which was established in Belarus in 1998, is making good progress towards this goal. By early February 2020, it had already incorporated 116 resident enterprises, 57 of which were foreign investors. The Minsk Free Economic Zone has more than 20 years of history and has attracted more than \$2 billion worth of investments, including from investors from over 20 countries. Occupying an area of about three thousand hectares, it now comprises 23 sites in Minsk and the capital region, including in such towns as Molodechno, Zhodino, Fanipol, Borisov, where mechanical engineering and metalworking, chemical and petrochemical, timber and construction industries are successfully operating. Such well-known manufacturers, not only in Belarus, but also abroad, as "Stadler-Minsk" are the peculiar business card of FEZ "Minsk":

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<sup>141</sup> Law of the Republic of Belarus On Free Economic Zones [Electronic resource]. - 1998. - URL: [http://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=H\\_19800213](http://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=H_19800213)

"Stadler-Minsk" - electric trains and trams; "Alutech" group of companies - components for security shutters, gate systems; "Adani" - X-ray equipment; "BELJI" - cars and light trucks; "S.A. Europe Industries Bisov" - bimetal 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 was Belagromash OJSC, which intends to set up production of specialised steel railway containers at the Molodechno Metal Works, whose innovative properties will increase the speed of loading and unloading of goods due to the fact that new containers can be lifted from one mode of transport to another - from a railway platform to a road platform and vice versa. The project is also attractive due to the fact that "the main customer for the containers is a foreign company, so the new production facility will be as export-oriented as possible. At least 130 jobs will be created"<sup>142</sup>

On the eve of 2020, BelMetr Limited Liability Company became a FEZ resident and plans to implement an investment project in Zhodino for the production of anti-vandal water meters with improved characteristics. These include: anti-magnetic protection; anti-fraud device against external influences on the lid; high sensitivity of the meter; elimination of fogging of the upper part of the body. And let "production will initially take place on leased premises, with a new production building planned for the future"<sup>143</sup>.

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<sup>142</sup> Production of freight containers will be set up in Molodechno [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/proizvodstvo-gruzovyh-kontejnerov-naladjat-v-molodechno-372673-2019/>.

<sup>143</sup> An investment project for the production of water meters will be implemented in Zhodino [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL:

The ranks of Minsk FEZ residents began to expand quite intensively in 2020. In mid-January, Techno-Express JLLC, one of the leading Belarusian manufacturers of passenger car life support systems, was registered here. The company plans to carry out an investment project in the FEZ to produce electrical equipment for passenger cars of locomotive traction. In particular, we are talking about the production of air conditioner converters - "devices designed to power asynchronous motors of air conditioning units in railway passenger cars as part of electrical and life support complexes"<sup>144</sup>. This project has both import-substituting and export-oriented potential, because the main consumer of these products will be not only the Belarusian Railways, but also interested companies in the countries of the near abroad.

A week later, a second resident of the FEZ, Bel-Doser Ltd. appeared in 2020. It plans to build a plant in Fanipole 145 to produce a wide range of specialised machinery for earthmoving, construction and transportation work. The plant will "produce backhoe-loaders, multipurpose machines for construction and renovation work, as well as graders, efficient special machines widely used in the construction and maintenance of roads and airfields. <...> The investment in the project will amount to more than EUR 1 million.

Another new resident of the Minsk Free Economic Zone, Empil Ail LLC, registered here in early February 2020, will also be located there, in Fanipole. A distinctive feature of its investment

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<https://www.belta.by/special/economics/view/investitsionnyj-proekt-po-proizvodstvu-schetchikov-vody-budet-realizovan-v-zhodino-374581-2019/>

<sup>144</sup> 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-zaregistrirovannyy-sez-minsk-376013-2020/>.

<sup>145</sup> A new FEZ Minsk resident will build a special machinery plant in Fanipole [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/novyj-rezident-sez-minsk-postroit-v-fanipole-zavod-poizvodstvu-spetstehniki-376899-2020/>

project will be a pronounced export orientation of products. The fact is that "the company plans to establish production of dedusting as well as chemically active filtering elements for air purification, on the basis of which the production of innovative high-tech equipment will be organised".<sup>146</sup>The company is planning to set up production of dedusting and chemically active filter elements for air purification, on the basis of which the production of innovative high-tech equipment will be organised.

Finally, a very recent example. In May, the seventh resident of the Minsk FEZ - Zaslavskie Kraski LLC - was registered in the FEZ in 2020. It intends to set up production of special paint materials for road markings in Zhodino. "The cost of the investment project is estimated at \$10 million"<sup>147</sup>. As we can see, with 2020 coming, the Minsk Free Economic Zone is not reducing its growth rate, contributing to the socio-economic development not only of the capital region, but also the country as a whole.

**The Free Economic Zone "Brest"** was the first to be established in the Republic of Belarus. It took place in 1996. And today it is a diversified economic territory, where manufacturing, technological, logistical activities can be developed. In addition, part of it is adjacent to road and rail border crossing points and can be used as a logistics component. Since the creation of the FEZ, total investment here has exceeded one and a half billion dollars. This investment is certainly paying off. In three quarters of 2019, residents

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<sup>146</sup> 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>

<sup>147</sup> A plant to produce paint 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>



of Brest FEZ have almost doubled their payments to the budget - from 20.9 million Belarusian rubles in 2018 to 41 million now. Today, there are already 73 companies from 20 countries operating on its territory. Remarkably, in 2018 they "exported goods worth \$700 million, the geography of exports includes 70 countries of the world"<sup>148</sup>. A year later - at the beginning of 2020 - "FEZ entities have exported goods worth \$718 million, and the geography of exports includes 75 countries"<sup>149</sup>

Among foreign countries, Germany leads in terms of investment in FEZs. German investors account for a third of total foreign investment here. And companies with German capital show high economic efficiency. Among them are Santa Bremor, Discom, and Salamander Window and Door Systems, whose products are well known both in Belarus and abroad. In particular, in April 2019, a new paint and varnish production facility, Discom, opened 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 around 20 additional jobs for the people of Brest."<sup>150</sup>

Italian entrepreneurs are very active in the Brest FEZ, who "have already invested EUR 3 million in new projects and created 150 jobs. In 2018, a new production facility of the Italian-Belarusian company Frieza Industry was opened at the Aeroport site. It

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<sup>148</sup> Brest FEZ residents have doubled their contributions to the budget [Electronic resource]. - 2019. -

URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/rezidenty-sez-brest-vdvoe-uvlechili-otchislenija-v-biudzhet-367876-2019/3>

<sup>149</sup> History [Electronic resource]. -2020. - URL: <https://fezbrest.com/history>

<sup>150</sup> Discom's new production opening [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://fezbrest.com/otkrytie-novogo-proizvodstva-%C2%ABdiskom%C2%BB>

manufactures energy-saving devices for refrigeration equipment"<sup>151</sup> and shows one of the highest export growth rates among FEZ enterprises. As a reminder, back in 2010 the Italian Ministry of Economic Development, the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Brest Regional Executive Committee signed a declaration on the creation of the Italian industrial region in the FEZ with the area of 26 hectares. A year later, a Memorandum of Understanding on the development of this industrial area was adopted in Trieste, which envisaged the creation of maximum favorable conditions to attract Italian investors and envisaged "development of the Italian industrial zone in Brest as a transport and logistics centre that would ensure transshipment and transit between the European Union, the Customs Union and, in the long term, China"<sup>152</sup>. So, the prospects for Italian business in the Brest FEZ are enormous.

Polish businessmen are also showing great interest in the FEZ. Today there are 11 companies with Polish capital operating here, including Stomil Sanok BR. Investors from this European country "rank third after Germany and Russia. Polish investments account for 17 per cent of the total"<sup>153</sup>. In particular, English Windows Ltd. with Polish investments was registered here in March 2019. "There are plans to create at least 20 jobs at the new company"<sup>154</sup>. It is possible that in 2020, the cooperation agreement signed in April 2017 between the Brest FEZ administration and the Lower Silesian Economic

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<sup>151</sup> Discussion of the Belarusian-Italian Business Forum continued in Brest [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://fezbrest.com/obsuzhdenie-voprosov-belorussko-italyanskogo-biznes-foruma-prodolzhiilos-v-breste>

<sup>152</sup> Zalesky, B. International relations and media. A View from Belarus / B. Zalesky. - Palmarium Academic Publishing, 2014. - C. 147.

<sup>153</sup> Strengthening Partnerships [Electronic Resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://fezbrest.com/2-ukreplyaya-partnerskie-svyazi>

<sup>154</sup> A new Brest FEZ resident is registered [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://fezbrest.com/zaregistrirovan-novyyi-rezident-sez-%C2%ABbrest%C2%BB>

Development Agency will be further developed into specific projects.

The interest in cooperation with Brest FEZ is also shown by Israeli entrepreneurs, who have a good example to follow: the current resident of the free economic zone is "a company with Israeli capital Fa-UH, which has established in the FEZ the production of feed additives for agricultural production"<sup>155</sup>. In September 2019, a delegation from the Israeli city of Ashdod, whose port is the largest in Israel and through which 60% of all cargo imported into the Middle Eastern country passes, including that of Santa Bremor, a FEZ resident. It is expected that the dialogue between Brest and Ashdod companies, which has started between the two sides, will develop in the near future.

Swiss entrepreneurs have their own interest in the FEZ. They are attracted, first of all, by the advantageous location of Brest airport, which allows it to be used for flights of private aviation. Further on, they could talk about locating here "production facilities of companies with Swiss capital, connected with mechanical engineering and food production"<sup>156</sup>.

The volume of exports by enterprises-residents of the **Grodnoinvest Free Economic Zone in 2019** came close to one billion dollars, increasing by almost 10 percent compared to 2018. This brought the FEZ's share in total exports of industrial goods in the Grodno Region to 42 percent. Overall, the trade turnover of FEZ residents exceeded one and a half billion dollars with a surplus of

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<sup>155</sup> The administration of FEZ Brest held a meeting with a delegation from Israel [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://fezbrest.com/v-administraczii-sez-%C2%ABbrest%C2%BB-proshla-vstrecha-s-delegacziej-iz-izrailya>

<sup>156</sup> The Brest FEZ administration discussed proposals from the Swiss business community [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://fezbrest.com/v-administraczii-sez-%C2%ABbrest%C2%BB-obsudili-predlozheniya-deloviyx-krugov-shveicarii>

more than 380 million dollars. Two main vectors can be identified in the geography of these export supplies: post-Soviet - Russia and Ukraine; and European - Poland, Lithuania, Romania, and Latvia. The majority of Belarusian exports "were from the wood and furniture manufacturing (30% of total exports), food processing (27%), machine building and metal works sectors"<sup>157</sup>. Companies in the chemical and textile industries, as well as manufacturers of vehicles and equipment, rubber and plastic products, are also worth mentioning. The FEZ sees its development prospects in attracting new residents, which could further increase exports of goods and services through their activities.

It should be reminded that Grodnoinvest FEZ, established in 2002, now has 12 territories not only in Grodno but also in such cities of Grodno region as Mosty, Novogrudok, Slonim, Shchuchin, 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 wood processing and non-metallic mineral products production, with a total declared investment of over 190 million dollars, including fixed assets, 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 competitiveness of manufactured products. They intend to build highly efficient factories in Grodno and Svisloch, creating over 560 new jobs. At the same time, "the majority of the products will be supplied to the European

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<sup>157</sup> Exports by residents of FEZ Grodnoinvest in 2019 approached \$1 billion [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-rezidentov-sez-grodnoinvest-v-2019 - godu-priblizilsia-k-1mlrd-379958-2020>

Union<sup>158</sup>.

The year 2020 has also got off to a very productive start for the FEZ. In particular, in February, the EUECOPAK company was registered here as a resident, which intends to invest more than one million dollars in the creation of production facilities for the production of disposable paper packaging and tableware. The topic is undoubtedly of current interest in Belarus, where measures are being taken at the legislative level to encourage businesses to switch to environmentally friendly packaging, including paper. The new FEZ resident is expected to produce paper Kraft bags with and without handles, Lunchbox-type cardboard packaging, paper cocktail sticks and cups for cold and hot drinks. These products "are expected to be sold predominantly on foreign markets. The share of export sales will exceed 85%. The main markets will be in the European Union<sup>159</sup>. In addition, 25 new jobs will be created.

In February 2020, the ZOV-MARKET company became a FEZ resident and will establish a modern enterprise for the production of dry edged boards, beams and furniture blanks on the basis of an unfinished construction site in Grodno. Characteristically, "70% of production will be exported to the European Union<sup>160</sup>. One of the new residents of FEZ in the near future can become a logistics company

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<sup>158</sup> Four companies with investment projects worth \$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/>

<sup>159</sup> A new resident of FEZ Grodnoinvest will set up paper packaging production [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.beha.by/regions/view/proizvodstvo-bumazhnoi-upakovki-sozdast-novyj-rezident-sez-grodnoinvest-379035-2020/>

<sup>160</sup> ZOV-MARKET Ltd. registered as a resident of FEZ Grodnoinvest [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://grodnoinvest.by/press-center/ooo-zov-market-zaregistrirovano-v-kachestve-rezidenta-sez-grodnoinvest/>

Berango from France, which is interested in implementing on the territory of FEZ "Grodnoinvest" an investment project "on creating a multimodal logistics terminal for handling and cleaning of containers and tanks"<sup>161</sup>. Negotiations on this particular project were held with the FEZ administration in Grodno in February 2020.

The existing BMS residents are also actively expanding the production of export-oriented products. For example, in February 2020, Terrazit Plus LLC demonstrated a new innovative VPC ALPHA Grip of the Constellation series as part of the Virpil Controls innovative project to create devices for virtual control of aircraft, helicopters and prototypes of spacecraft. It is important in this connection that this "product is in demand on the market of Western Europe, almost all production works for export".<sup>162</sup> and the project involves pilots, designers, constructors and software developers.

In 2019, Belabedding FLLC, which has been a FEZ resident since 2006, started producing new products - Boxspringbett continental beds. And now "more than 80% of the company's products are exported to Western European countries"<sup>163</sup>. It is to be assumed that the measures taken in the FEZ will bring even stronger results in terms of increasing exports of products of the residents of the free economic zone "Grodnoinvest" in 2020.

In June 2019, a **special economic zone (SEZ)** regime came into

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<sup>161</sup> A company from France considers establishing a terminal in the FEZ Grodnoinvest [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/kompanii-a-iz-frantsi-rassmatrivaet-vozmozhnost-sozdaniya-terminala-v-sez-grodnoinvest-379266-2020/>.

<sup>162</sup> FEZ "Grodnoinvest" resident LLC "Terrazit Plus" presented new innovative products [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://grodnoinvest.by/press-center/rezident-sez-grodnoinvest-ooo-terrazit-plyus-predstavil-novuyu-innovacionnyu-produkciyu/>

<sup>163</sup> FEZ Grodnoinvest resident Belabedding FLLC launched production of new products [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://grodnoinvest.by/press-center/rezident-sez-grodnoinvest-1000-belabedding-zapustila-vypusk-novoi-produkcii/>.

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 a second economic complex operating in a similar mode. The Sino-Belarusian industrial park Velikiy Kamen was the first in the list of SEZs back in 2015. It should be noted that the Customs Code of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) strictly restricts the possibility of establishing such territorial entities in the member states of the integration association. In particular, only "three such zones may be established in Russia, two in Belarus and one in each of Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan"<sup>164</sup>. As a reminder, the term 'special economic zone' is used to define a territory with 'a special legal status in relation to the rest of the country and preferential economic conditions for entrepreneurs'<sup>165</sup>. SEZs are created to attract foreign direct investment, create new jobs for highly qualified personnel, develop the export base, minimise costs by avoiding export and import duties, bring production closer to the consumer, use cheaper labour, and develop territories.

The Bremino-Orsha SEZ intends to attract investors to it with a number of benefits and tax advantages. In particular, zero tax rates for profits (for 9 years), real estate (for 20 years), and dividends (until 1 January 2033), and zero rates of offshore duty, export value added tax (VAT) when exporting manufactured goods outside the EEU, and VAT when selling, renting or leasing real estate by residents (until 1 January 2033), finally, a special legal regime for a period of 50 years

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<sup>164</sup> The Bremino-Orsha Special Economic Zone started operating in Bolbasovo [Electronic resource].

- 2019. - URL: <https://news.21.by/other-news/2019/06/27/1827049.html>

<sup>165</sup> Special Economic Zone (SEZ) [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: [https://www.audit-it.ru/terms/taxation/osobayaekonomicheskaya\\_zona.html](https://www.audit-it.ru/terms/taxation/osobayaekonomicheskaya_zona.html)

for industrial processing, wholesale trade, e-commerce, logistics and warehousing services, postal services, information and administrative services, and R&D. To this end, two sectors are being created in the SEZ - an industrial sector and a logistics sector. The first sector will house production of household appliances and electronics, pharmaceuticals and preparations, food products - coffee, tea, rice - as well as auto parts, perfumes and cosmetics, household chemicals and jewellery. There will also be ready-made shops, showrooms, warehouses, a business centre and a car park.

As for the logistics sector, it "will include road, rail and air terminals. There will be a 24-hour customs clearance office, phytosanitary and veterinary services, a bank branch, an insurance agent and a customs broker's office within the special economic zone"<sup>166</sup>. The investment in this multi-modal industrial and logistics complex will reach \$200 million by December 2023, the project's completion date. A total of 17,000 square metres of office space, 190,000 square metres of warehouse space and 280,000 square metres of production space are expected to be built there. Plus 1.7 thousand parking spaces for trucks. The railway terminal will handle cargo flows between Europe and Asia, which already now allows us to predict that "between 2018-2022 the total transit flow through Bremino Orsha will be 10 million tonnes, reaching its full capacity of 12 million tonnes of cargo per year is planned for 2026"<sup>167</sup>.

It is important to note that the first steps in the implementation

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<sup>166</sup> The Bremino-Orsha Special Economic Zone has begun operations in Bolbasovo [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/osobaja-ekonomicheskaja-zona-bremino-orsha-nachala-rabotat-v-bolbasovo-352502-2019/>.

<sup>167</sup> Belarus launches second special economic zone with preferential tax treatment regime [Electronic resource]. -2019. -URL : <https://interfax.by/news/biznes/novosti kompaniy/1260614/>



of this project have already been made. Back in February 2019, the first export train with more than forty containers of Belarusian goods departed from here for the Chinese city of Nanchang. Its travel time is ten days. "Transportation by sea would take 40 days. The train will run once a month"<sup>168</sup>. Also in February 2019, the Bremino Group Ltd. opened the first phase of the Bremino-Orsha complex in Bolbasovo, in which some 20 million dollars have been invested. A road logistics terminal with a car park for 212 trucks is now operational and has already transshipped almost two million tonnes of cargo per year. The administrative and amenity building houses the customs, veterinary and phytosanitary inspection services, which are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The infrastructure already in place allows for the picking and handling of cargo and the receipt of the necessary services to support the logistics process.

In early December 2019, Bremino Group signed an agreement with Chinese partner Shaanxi Zhongqiao Silk Road Technology Development Co. Ltd, to establish an international Silk Road Trade City in the SEZ, which, spread over 62 hectares, will be a large-scale trade and exhibition complex, and is expected to "carry out wholesale and small-wholesale trade of consumer goods, delivery of goods and warehousing, e-commerce operations, and exhibitions of products from various Asian countries"<sup>169</sup>. Investments in this project, which is being implemented as part of China's Belt and Road initiative, will exceed 128 million Belarusian rubles.

All of these examples illustrate very eloquently one simple

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<sup>168</sup> Zakrzewski, G. Bremino-Orsha: at the crossroads / G. Zakrzewski // Transport Newsletter. - 2019. - 14 Feb. - C. 9.

<sup>169</sup> An international trade town will appear in the Bremino-Orsha Special Economic Zone [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/mezhdunarodnyj-torgovyj-gorodok-poj-avitsja-v-osoboj-ekonomicheskoy-zone-bremino-orsha-371406-2019/>

truth: despite the difficult situation in the global economy due to the coronavirus pandemic, one must never stop looking for new ways forward. All the more so because the contours of tomorrow are already beginning to emerge today in many ways. The functioning of free economic zones and special economic zones, whose influence on the economic life of the country is becoming more and more prominent, can reasonably be counted among such in Belarus.

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## **Belarus: Investment and export drivers of regional development**

The five-year development programme and the target forecast for the next three years currently being drafted in the Republic of Belarus include free economic zones (FEZ) among the most important segments that should receive new impulses for development in the medium term, with more than 450 economic entities resident in FEZs as of early autumn 2020. The high potential of Free Economic Zones is also demonstrated by the fact that "today free economic zones account for almost 17% of the country's industrial output, 20% of foreign direct investments and almost 20% of exports"<sup>170</sup>. And there is every reason to believe that under the current difficult conditions of the development of the Belarusian economy, it is FEZs that can and should become the main investment engine, on the basis of which the innovative, industrial and export potential of the territories in which they are located could develop. The more so because "our neighbours are forming zones with absolutely different conditions of incentives and functions"<sup>171</sup>. In Belarus, the FEZs should continue to be actively developed not only in terms of legislation, land relations and infrastructure development, but also in terms of ways to increase the inflow of investments and improve economic efficiency. All the more so because Belarusian FEZs have already gained experience in dealing with these issues. Suffice it to say that in the first half of 2020 alone, the number of

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<sup>170</sup> More than 60 residents registered in the FEZ of Belarus in the first half of the year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/bolee-60-zaridentov-zaregistrirvano-v-sez-belarusi-v-i-polugodii-405375-2020/>.

<sup>171</sup> . FEZs should become the main investment engine - Nikitina // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/sez-dolzny-stat-osnovnym-investitsionnym-lokomotivom-nikitina-405379-2020/>.

residents in Belarus' free economic zones increased by more than 60 economic entities. And in the first quarter of the same year foreign investors invested nearly three billion dollars in the real economy of the country. "The main investors in Belarus were entities from Russia (35.7% of all incoming investments), Cyprus (15%) and Austria (8.4%). Foreign direct investments amounted to \$2.1 billion, or 75.1% of all incoming foreign investments"<sup>172</sup>. These facts clearly show that Belarus has many examples of successful investment solutions that contribute to the socio-economic development of the country as a whole.

In particular, **FEZ Minsk**, which by the beginning of September had 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, showed a high rate of development in 2020. At the same time, "foreign direct investment on a net basis in January-June amounted to nearly \$70 million, an increase of 76% over the same period last year. The key investors were the Swiss Confederation, the Republic of Cyprus and the People's Republic of China"<sup>173</sup>

This influx of investment has had a very positive effect on the exports of FEZ residents, which in the first half of 2020 came close to \$560 million. The bulk of it was made up of electronic products and components, medical equipment, cable products, metal structures, auto and electric vehicles, railway and tram cars, parts and

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<sup>172</sup> Foreign investors invested \$2.8 billion in the Belarusian economy in the first quarter [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/inostrannye-investory-vlozhili-v-i-kvartale-v-ekonomiku-belarusi-28-mlrd-390601-2020/>.

<sup>173</sup> More than \$118 million of investments were received from abroad in FEZ Minsk in the first half of the year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/svyshe-118-mln-investitsii-postupilo-v-i-polugodii-v-sez-minsk-iz-za-rubezha-406018-2020/>.

equipment for cars, and electrical equipment for passenger cars. We can assume that the assortment of export items in the metropolitan free economic zone will only expand in the near future, as a number of significant investment projects are currently underway here. These include the production of control valves for the petrochemical industry, innovative high-tech equipment and air filtration systems, special paints for road marking, electrical equipment for locomotive traction passenger cars, paper packaging, and the assembly of structures and products made of ferrous and nonferrous metals. Each of these projects is already creating new jobs in the FEZ. Suffice it to say that in the first six months of 2020, 482 people were hired here.

The facts show that FEZ Minsk was not going to slow down in the second half of 2020 either. Thus, in October, it registered its 14th resident in 2020. (There were 17 in the whole of 2019!). This is the company BASISPRO GROUP, which intends to implement an investment project "for the production of aluminium spacer frames for translucent enclosing structures".<sup>174</sup> consumers of which will be not only Belarusian construction companies, but also from neighboring countries. After all, fences made using the aluminum frame are now widely used in the construction of modern buildings. November 2020 saw the 15th resident of the Free Economic Zone, MKtrade, which specializes in the manufacture of galvanized steel products with various types of polymer coating. Its arrival here is due to the fact that it plans to open a new production facility for the production of fences and roofing elements for cottage-type buildings, for which purpose it "intends to expand its own capacity and set up a

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<sup>174</sup> A new FEZ Minsk resident will build a plant to produce aluminium products [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyj-rezident-sez-minsk-postroit-zavod-po-provodstvu-izdelij-iz-aljuminija-411877-2020/>.

new production facility in Fanipole<sup>175</sup>.

Also very promising is InCata's investment project to set up a science and technology centre in the capital's FEZ park to provide services to technology start-ups. For its successful implementation, fast-mounted airframe buildings will be built near the village of Privolnyi, Minsk Region, which "will house a design bureau, a research engineering (R&D) centre and a prototyping centre. Offices will be set aside for production consultants, investors and business mentors<sup>176</sup>. This will make it possible to actualize the development of innovation in FEZ "Minsk". entrepreneurship in such fields of science and technology as nanotechnology, microelectronics, aerospace technology, power electronics, robotics, to help the residents of this science and technology park to eventually successfully enter the international market through additional competitive advantages.

In terms of investment cooperation, the Minsk Free Economic Zone can cooperate with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. In June 2020, it became known that this international financial institution intends to allocate a loan of almost EUR 15 million "for the construction of the Cherkasy substation to supply electricity to the Minsk Free Economic Zone"<sup>177</sup>. This loan is

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<sup>175</sup> A new resident of FEZ Minsk will produce roofing and facade materials [Electronic resource]. - 20230. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novy-rezident-sez-minsk-budet-proizvodit-krovelnye-i-fasadnye-materialy-415998-2020/>

<sup>176</sup> A science and technology park to help start-ups will be built on the territory of FEZ Minsk [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/nauchno-tehnologicheskij-park-v-pomosch-startupam-postroj-at-na-territorii-sez-minsk-411305-2020/>

<sup>177</sup> Belarus wants to raise EUR 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-ebrr-1411-mln-evrona-stroitelstvo-podstantsii-dlja-sez-minsk-394602-2020/>

expected to be drawn down 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. It includes land plots located not only in Brest and Brest Region, but also in such cities as Baranovichi, Pinsk, Kobrin, and Gantsevichi. As of mid-February 2020, over 70 residents from two dozen countries were registered here, including 47 with foreign capital, where over 21,000 people are already employed. In 2019, the FEZ attracted 107

The first quarter of the year 2020 saw the FEZ attract almost \$50 million in net foreign direct investment, and the exports of its residents to 75 countries reached almost \$730 million. These positive trends have continued in 2020, in the first quarter of which the FEZ attracted almost \$50 million in net foreign direct investment, four times the target. The dynamics of FEZ development today are such that all performance indicators for 2019 could be exceeded in 2020. The prerequisites for this have been serious. For example, while in 2018 721 jobs were created in the FEZ by opening new production facilities by residents, and 890 jobs in 2019, it was planned to open at least one thousand jobs in 2020. With such development potential, five new residents with Polish and German capital are coming here, whose activities are focused on light industry, woodworking, cosmetics, and the production of metal products and units and components 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, located in Ivatsevichi and Ivatsevichi District, were added to FEZ Brest for the implementation of investment projects involving foreign capital. Already in June 2020 a new FEZ resident was registered here - Polipol Mebel Bel Ltd., which is part of Polipol Produktions Verwalfund



GmbH, a well-known holding in the European market, which has been producing upholstered furniture for 30 years. It employs over seven thousand people in ten factories not only in Germany but also in other European countries. The new resident plans to build a furniture plant and several other related facilities on the Ivatsevichi industrial site. "The project will be implemented over six years. The company expects to invest over €25 million in the furniture production during this period and create over 1,000 jobs. At the same time, 90% of the production will be exported<sup>178</sup>. An important detail: OOO "Polish Mebel Bel" has become the seventh company in the FEZ with the German capital. And in general, German entrepreneurs rank first here in terms of investment, as they account for more than a third of the FEZ's total investment portfolio.

Other new residents are also coming here with interesting projects. For example, Savantdrev LLC, a company with Belarusian capital, registered as a FEZ resident in May 2020, plans to invest half a million euro in the production of lumber - boards, timber, and various building structures. The manufacturing site near Krasnogvardeyskaya Street in Brest is expected to produce fuel pellets or pellets from wood waste, which are very popular in the European Union countries. This is why "Savantdrev expects to supply up to 85% of its production to foreign markets<sup>179</sup>. A full production cycle will start here in 2021. At least 15 jobs will be created at the new facility.

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<sup>178</sup> A new FEZ Brest resident intends to invest over EUR 25 million 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/>.

<sup>179</sup> A new FEZ Brest resident will engage in woodworking [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyj-rezident-sez-brest-zajmetsja-derevoobrabotkoj-392514-2020/>.

Also in May 2020, the FEZ registered Lady-IX LLC, which plans to locate its production facilities at the unused premises of the Baranovichi Automated Line Plant. The Belarusian company plans to "invest about 2 million euros in the project for the production of collectible clothes. <...> When it reaches full capacity in 2024, the company will employ 260 people. On top of that, the previously registered residents are expected to start operations in the FEZ. In particular, "BTV-Agro LLC has built the first complex for growing mushrooms for Bonche LLP, which produces mushrooms. Jobs will also be created there. The issue of organising production of car harnesses and campers on the territory of the FEZ is being considered<sup>180</sup>.

The Italian industrial district, whose infrastructure is due to be completed shortly, is also set to make its contribution to the challenges facing the BMS. There, a 5 MW transformer station and a sewage pumping station have already been built in the Aeroport industrial estate. In addition, a street network, a water supply system and a storm drainage system are being laid. The facility should be ready for use in 2021. Since much of the area is already equipped with the necessary utilities, including power, gas and water supply, sewerage and telephones, "this has enabled BMS companies to locate ten businesses here. Two more are under construction"<sup>181</sup>.

We would like to remind you that the idea of creating such a district in the Industrial Zone "Airport" was voiced about ten years

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<sup>180</sup> Brest FEZ plans to create 1,000 jobs [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/v-sez-brest-planirujut-sozdat-1-tys-rabochih-mest-380116-2020/>

<sup>181</sup> FEZ Brest completes development of Italian industrial district [Electronic resource]. -2020 . - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/sez-brest-zavershaet-obustrojstvo-italjanskogo-promyshlennogo-okruga-418092-2020/>

ago, when in June 2011 in Trieste the Memorandum of Understanding on the development of an industrial district in the Brest region was adopted, which provided for "creating the most favorable conditions to attract Italian investors and the implementation of their projects in Belarus<sup>182</sup>. Today not only Italians, but any investor willing to set up and develop business here, can come to the territory of the district, taking advantage of the free economic zone. That is why two companies with investments from Germany are already operating here, as well as companies with Israeli, British, Polish and Russian capital. "In 2018, a new production facility of the Italian-Belarusian company Frieza Industry, which produces energy-saving elements for commercial refrigeration equipment, was launched at the Aeroport site. Today, the joint venture has one of the highest export growth rates among FEZ enterprises."<sup>183</sup> . All these examples are certainly encouraging when assessing the prospects of Brest FEZ's development.

An interesting example of development is also shown by **FEZ Grodnoinvest**, whose residents in the first three months of 2020 attracted a record amount of foreign direct investment on a net basis - \$59.8 million - out of the total of \$157 million of foreign capital received. "The main investor countries were Russia (over \$45 million), Austria (\$39 million) and the Netherlands (\$34 million). Investments came from 15 countries, including the UAE, Germany, the US and the UK<sup>184</sup>. In total, during its 18 years of existence, FEZ

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<sup>182</sup> Zalessky, B. Belarus - Europe: potential for partnership. Multi-vector policy in the context of global challenges / B. Zalessky. - LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2016. - C. 43.

<sup>183</sup> FEZ Brest completes the creation of infrastructure in the Italian industrial district this year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/regions/view/sez-brest-zavershaet-v-etom-godu-sozdanie-infrastruktury-v-italiianskom-promyshlennom-okruge-380751-2020/>

<sup>184</sup> The residents of FEZ Grodnoinvest attracted a record amount of FDI on a net basis in

"Grodnoinvest" has attracted over USD 900 million of foreign investments from 40 countries including Japan, Cyprus, Turkey, Canada and Poland into the economy of Grodno Region.

The growing investment appeal of this production site certainly could not have come out of thin air. It is largely due to the FEZ administration's attention to developing the free economic zone's infrastructure. The following statistics are quite telling: since 2015, about nine million Belarusian rubles have been invested in the infrastructure of industrial sites in Grodno and the Grodno Region, Lida and Smorgon to improve the investment attractiveness of these sites from the FEZ Development Fund. For example, a transformer substation was built at the FEZ site near Grodno in the Novaya Gozha area, which provided electricity for new resident industries and created the necessary reserve for potential investors. In Lida, water supply, sewerage, communication and electricity networks were laid on the industrial site in the "Severny" district.

In Smorgon, a large-scale project to reconstruct Industrialny Avenue, which connects the city with the industrial site of the FEZ, where such residents as Kronospan Group, Smorgon Aggregate Plant, Europlastic Invest and Shinaka Mebel Bel are located, was launched in 2019 with funding from the FEZ Development Fund. The project is to result in a four-lane motor road with stop pavilions and small architectural forms, external lighting, power and water supply, rain sewerage and external communication systems. All this is being done with a single goal in mind: "The new infrastructure will make the site more attractive for potential investors and participants in the Furniture

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the first quarter [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/rezidenty-sez-grodnoinvest-v-i-kvartale-privlekli-rekordnvi-obiem-pii-na-chistoi-osnove-389251-2020/>.

Cluster in FEZ Grodnoinvest" <sup>185</sup>.

Here it is necessary to clarify that today "an efficient furniture cluster has been formed in Grodno region, which includes more than 20 enterprises producing wood products packaging, wood boards, furniture and much more"<sup>186</sup>. It should be noted that the timber processing industry accounts for about half of all investments in the FEZ. So it should come as no surprise that in 2019, too, residents of FEZ Grodnoinvest attracted \$436 million in investments, a fourth of the figure for all FEZs in Belarus. And as a result, this one of the youngest Belarusian FEZs has become the leader in terms of attracted investments from foreign investors.

In November 2020, 75 companies with capital from 40 countries were already operating here. However, a number of new residents of the FEZ appeared in 2020. They include the Irish company Skywatt with a project to build a photovoltaic power plant, the Belarusian company ZOV-MARKET with a project to set up a wood processing plant, and the Belarusian-Russian company EUEcoPack with a topical project to set up a paper packaging plant. Another company, IBA Investment is implementing a project as a resident of the special tourist and recreational park Avgustovsky Canal<sup>187</sup> to supply the residents of the free economic zone with green energy. Its implementation will, among other things, make it possible

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<sup>185</sup> 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/>.

<sup>186</sup> Residents of FEZ Grodnoinvest attracted \$436 million in 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/>.

<sup>187</sup> Since the beginning of the year, residents of SMEZ "Grodnoinvest" have paid over Br157 million in taxes [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/s-nachala-goda-rezidenty-sez-grodnoinvest- uplatili-bolee-br 157-mln-nalogov-415012-2020/>.

to "establish cooperative ties with international concerns that have requirements for the use of energy from renewable sources"<sup>188</sup>.

In mid-December 2020, the first stone was laid by HSBelakon LLC, a subsidiary of Austria's HS Timber Group, one of Europe's leading woodworking companies, on site No. 12 of Grodnoinvest FEZ in the Svisloch District. The construction is planned to be completed in 2022. "Investments will amount to about \$84 million and there are plans to process up to 500,000 cubic metres of conifers per year. The main focus will be on recycling and creating pellets"<sup>189</sup>. Plus it will provide jobs for some 230 people, which is not unimportant for an area like 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 gauge railways. This allows logistics companies to deliver goods from Asia to Europe and back quickly and efficiently"<sup>190</sup>. This is why in summer 2020, the FEZ administration suggested that potential investors get involved in the creation of a multimodal logistics centre at the Belarusian-Polish border, where ten pairs of trains a day could be handled. We are talking about implementation of infrastructure subprojects here - construction of a motor road, access and exhibition railway tracks, engineering networks. Let's hope that this proposal

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<sup>188</sup> FEZ resident Grodnoinvest will create a network of photovoltaic stations [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/rezident-sez-grodnoinvest-sozdast-set-fotoelektricheskikh-stantsij-410108-2020/>.

<sup>189</sup> An Austrian investor will build a woodworking plant in the Svisloch district [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/avstrijskii-investor-postroit-derevoobrabatyvaj-ushee-predpriyatie-v-svislochskom-raj-one-420771-2020/>.

<sup>190</sup> An investor from Germany considers building a container terminal near Grodno [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/investor-iz-germanii-rassmatrivaet-vozmozhnost-stroitelstva-pod-grodno-kontejnnerogo-terminala-417507-2020/>.

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 Grodnoinvest in the logistics sector<sup>191</sup>.

In 2020, the activities of FEZ residents continued to be characterized by their active investment policy. During the first 10 months of this year, they invested almost a hundred and fifty million Belarusian rubles in fixed assets, the bulk of which - more than 60 percent - was spent on the purchase of technological machinery and equipment. The trend is especially noticeable at the facilities of the Smorgon-based industrial zone, where more than 90 million Belarusian rubles have been invested and where companies with foreign capital, such as Kronospan, Szynaka, and Sodrugestvo, are successfully operating. As a reminder, the Grodnoinvest FEZ industrial zone in Smorgon district was established in 2015. It now consists of three sectors. "In just a few years, eight new residents with investments from the Netherlands, Poland, Turkey and Cyprus have appeared here. <...> The FEZ residents have invested \$425 million in the creation of joint production facilities." As a result, today FEZ residents account for over 90% of industry in the Smorgon region, employing over two thousand people, while the volume of exports is almost \$500 million. As for the FEZ residents in Grodno and Grodno District, they have invested Br30 million in fixed assets from January to November 2020. At the same time, "the companies Bigan, ZOV, Makey, Gronitex, Belagrofert are actively modernizing and

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<sup>191</sup> Investors are offered a multimodal logistics centre project on the Belarusian-Polish border [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/investoram-predlagaiut-proekt-multimodalnogo-tsentra-logistiki-na-belorussko-polskoi-granitse-396558-2020/>

expanding their production facilities<sup>192</sup>.

The active investment policy of the residents of FEZ Grodnoinvest allows them to successfully address the export of their products as a result. In the first 10 months of 2020, they shipped almost \$778 million worth of goods to 55 countries. Moreover, exports to the U.S. alone increased threefold. In addition, "the supply of products from FEZ residents has grown many times over 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<sup>193</sup>. But Russia, Poland and Ukraine remain the main export destinations. Two-thirds of all shipments to other countries from the FEZ are food and agricultural products, furniture and wood processing products.

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

### **Vitebsk region: points of growth - in the free economic zone**

Vitebsk Region is among those regions of Belarus where, according to the Belarusian head of state, "it is necessary to take technological and organizational measures to cope with the problems

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<sup>192</sup> Residents of FEZ Grodnoinvest invested Br144 million in fixed capital [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/rezidenty-sez-grodnoinvest-vlozhili-br144-mln-investitsij-v-osnovnoj-kapital-417225-2020/>.

<sup>193</sup> Exports by residents of FEZ Grodnoinvest 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/>.



that exist there"<sup>194</sup> and to direct the development of the region in an innovative direction. One of the real tools used in the region to address the task is the free economic zone (FEZ) Vitebsk, established twenty years ago - in 1999. Until August 2018, it consisted of 13 sectors, including seven in Vitebsk, four in Orsha, and one each in Vitebsk and Postavy districts.

In August 2018, in order to further develop free economic zones and intensify the attraction of national and foreign investments, the Republic of Belarus adopted Decree No. 346, which spoke of the need to expand the territory and optimise the country's existing free economic zones - Minsk, Vitebsk, Grodnoinvest, Mogilev, Gomel-Raton. It was assumed that the measures adopted in the decree "will allow to accommodate residents with a view to their further growth prospects, organize jobs, make the best use of available land plots with existing engineering and transport infrastructure, and will also contribute to attracting investment in the creation of export-oriented and import-substituting industries"<sup>195</sup>.

It should be noted that this decree identified 16 sectors in the FEZ "Vitebsk" alone, located not only around Vitebsk, but also in other cities and towns of the region - Postavy, Orsha, Baran, Bolbasovo, Novopolotsk, Polotsk district, as well as around the villages Kosachi and Kopti of Vitebsk district, each of which could and should get a powerful impulse for development. And these plans

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<sup>194</sup> Meeting on the development of the agro-industrial complex of the Vitebsk region [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://president.gov.by/ru/news/ru/view/soveschaniye-po-voprosam-razvitiya-agropromyshlennogo-kompleksa-vitebskoj-oblasti-22434/>.

<sup>195</sup> Belarus to consider borrowing to build energy sector infrastructure in FEZs [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-rassmatrivaet-vozmozhnost-privlecheniia-zaima-dlia-stroitelstva-energeticheskoy-infrastruktury-330424-2018/>

have already begun to be implemented in practice. Forty-eight enterprises with the participation of investors from 14 countries, including Germany, Czech Republic, Russia, Poland, UK, USA, Israel, Cyprus, Estonia, including the German Vitella, Polish Dekora East, UK LINPAK Packing East, have started operating in their territory, The Estonian Union Cable, the American company CESS-Bel and a number of others, working in 25 production directions, including mechanical engineering, electronics, veterinary medicine, chemical, fuel, food and light industries. And the total number of employees at the resident companies was about 11 thousand people.

In December 2018, the first resident with Lithuanian capital appeared in FEZ Vitebsk - 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 is called Zhurzhevo. The new resident is part of one of the largest furniture and chipboard manufacturers and exporters in the Baltics - the international holding VMG, headquartered in Klaipeda, which incorporates several companies in Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus. The project proposed for the Vitebsk free economic zone involves the construction of a sawmill and factories producing chipboard and furniture. It will be implemented in two stages. "Initially, by 2023 over €50 million will be invested in the development of the production activity and about 200 working places will be created. The total volume of timber processing at the enterprises of the holding will be about 700,000 cubic metres per year. In total, at least 500 jobs will be created<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> A resident with Lithuanian capital registered in FEZ Vitebsk [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/rezident-s-litovskim-kapitalom->

Latvia should be mentioned among the countries with which the residents of the Vitebsk FEZ are successfully developing cooperation. In three quarters of 2018, their trade turnover with Latvian economic entities approached close to 25 million dollars, which amounted to 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 transactions with Latvia: BelGigaSint LLC, PO Energokomplekt LLC, Vityaz OJSC, Modern-Expo LLC, Allianzplast LLC, Orsha Flax Mill RUPTP"<sup>197</sup>.

Even more significant results are characteristic of the interaction of FEZ Vitebsk residents with Russian partners, especially from Moscow and the Moscow Region. For example, in the first half of 2018 alone, the trade turnover with them exceeded 60 million dollars, and the leaders of business cooperation with Muscovites include not only JSC Vitebsk Carpets, but also "foreign enterprise VIK Animal Health, IPO Prodexim, SOOO TransExpedition, CJSC Pozhtehnika, and several others"<sup>198</sup>.

Other specific plans of the FEZ Vitebsk to expand the geography of international cooperation are also of interest. For example, the Chinese company Blue Lotus was planning to launch a project here in 2019 with an investment of at least 300 million dollars. The Chinese investor is planning to set up "up to ten manufacturing enterprises for the production of wood products, ranging from fuel biomaterials to furniture"<sup>199</sup> in the FEZ. A group of companies from

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[zaregistrirovan-v-sez-vitebsk-330553-2018/](http://zaregistrirovan-v-sez-vitebsk-330553-2018/).

<sup>197</sup> Participation of FEZ Vitebsk administration in the Belarusian-Latvian Business Forum [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.fez-vitebsk.com/ru/news>

<sup>198</sup> Participation of FEZ Vitebsk administration in a comprehensive presentation of the Vitebsk region in Moscow [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.fez-vitebsk.com/ru/news>

<sup>199</sup> An agreement of intent is signed between the administration of FEZ Vitebsk and a

the United Arab Emirates AL Maya Group, whose representatives visited Vitebsk in July 2018, saw pharmaceuticals as one of the promising areas for investment cooperation, "as the Middle Eastern partners have extensive experience in this field"<sup>200</sup>. 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 the Vitebsk region"<sup>201</sup>.

The residents of FEZ Vitebsk demonstrated a high growth rate in attracting foreign direct investment in 2019 - three and a half times as much, reaching \$16.5 million. As a result, "the share of FEZ "Vitebsk" in the investment portfolio of Vitebsk region for 2019 was almost 39% and increased by 10 percentage points compared to 2018"<sup>202</sup>. Among the FEZ residents who have shown the greatest investment activity are JLLC Natrrix, LLC Chess-Bell, LLC Akitama, FEI VIK-Zdorovye Zdorovye Zdorovye Zdorovye Zdorovye Zdorovye. A total of 50 residents have started implementing their projects in the FEZ, almost half of them with foreign capital. It should be noted that in 2019 the "resident status of FEZ "Vitebsk" was granted to eight organizations created with the participation of investors from Lithuania, Sweden, Spain, Russia and Belarus. The total volume of investments in the new projects exceeds \$52 million,

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Chinese company [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.fez-vitebsk.com/ru/news>

<sup>200</sup> The administration of FEZ Vitebsk was visited by businessmen from the UAE [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.fez-vitebsk.com/ru/news>

<sup>201</sup> Participation of FEZ "Vitebsk" administration in the Belarusian-Indian business forum [Electronic resource]. - URL: <http://www.fez-vitebsk.com/ru/news>

<sup>202</sup> Residents of FEZ Vitebsk increased the volume of foreign direct investments by 3.5 times [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/regions/view/rezidenty-sez-vitebsk-uvlichili-obiem-priamyh-inostrannyh-investitsii-v-35-raza-379775-2020/>.

and at least 270 jobs are expected to be created<sup>203</sup> only grow in the near future.

In November 2019, a new resident was added - LLC Rubovsky Dolomite Quarry, involving an investor from Lithuania and a project for the production of construction materials based on dolomite. This is a project to produce Lego bricks and other decorative building materials made of environmentally friendly raw materials. The production facility will be located on the territory of the former airfield on the outskirts of Vitebsk. Apparently, the project has a long-term perspective, as the total reserves of dolomite in Vitebsk region "are estimated at more than 5 billion tonnes at a depth of 2.5 to 38 meters, of which 878 million tonnes are proven reserves. The Ruba dolomite deposit is one of the largest explored on the territory of Belarus"<sup>204</sup>. In fact, this is the reason why the production of construction materials based on natural raw materials is one of the priority areas of the Vitebsk Oblast economy development.

Another very promising area for the development of the FEZ "Vitebsk" is woodworking production. There are already five resident companies specializing in this sector. In particular, VMG Wood Art LLC is creating a vertically integrated woodworking complex. Another LLC Akitama is building a plant for processing low-grade timber and producing wood-fuel pellets. And Karelia Venirs is organizing veneer production. In addition, two more projects were under registration in the FEZ, including one to set up production of

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<sup>203</sup> Investors from 4 countries are planning to launch projects in FEZ Vitebsk this year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/investory-iz-4-stran-planiruiut-v-etom-godu-nachat-realizatsiju-proektov-v-sez-vitebsk-379788-2020/>.

<sup>204</sup> A new resident of FEZ Vitebsk will create production of construction materials from dolomite [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyj-rezident-sez-vitebsk-sozdast-proizvodstvo-stroitelnyh-materialov-iz-dolomita-371163-2019/>.

machinery and equipment for the woodworking industry.

Given the obvious growing interest of investors in wood processing projects, the FEZ "Vitebsk" has taken the initiative to create a wood processing cluster in the region, involving the association of manufacturers, research centres and educational institutions, which is expected to provide favourable conditions for the implementation of innovations. After all, "this form of cooperation will stimulate scientific developments and their practical application. As a result, it will increase the processing depth of wood raw materials and create products with higher added value<sup>205</sup>, educational institutions that train specialists for the industry, including the Vitebsk State Technical College. An agreement on the creation of the woodworking cluster was planned to be signed in spring 2020 in the framework of the International Economic Forum in Vitebsk. It should be assumed that such form of coordination, which implies a synergetic effect at the output, will really help 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 the Vitebsk region can continue and complement the innovative direction of development of the northern Belarusian region. As a reminder, in October 2017, the Novopolotsk innovation and industrial petrochemical cluster was already established here, which included Novopolotsk City Executive Committee, Polotsk State University, Naftan OJSC, Novopolotsk Construction and Assembly Center No. 16, OJSC, Interservice LLC and Novopolotsk Center of

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<sup>205</sup> FEZ Vitebsk proposes to create a woodworking cluster [Electronic resource]. - 2019.

- URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/sez-vitebsk-predlagaet-sozdat-derevoobrabatvyviuschij-klaster-371147-2019/>

Entrepreneurship and Real Estate. The number of participants is expected to almost double as early as 2020, including foreign participants. In particular, it could be Chinese partners from Weihai in Shandong Province, the twin city of Novopolotsk, who are interested in the innovative developments of Polotsk scientists in creating new types of petrochemical products and improving the characteristics of the fuel produced. A company from the Czech Republic, which is interested in entering the Belarusian market, appears to be among the cluster's potential partners.

The growing interest of foreign partners in the petrochemical cluster pushes its organizers to optimize the mechanisms of interaction between its participants. For this reason, there are plans to establish an association here in 2020, which will act as a coordinating centre and will form proposals for improving the regulatory requirements governing the activities of the subjects of this innovative infrastructure. Besides, "the association will also undertake the organization of events aimed at developing effective interaction of the participants, forming a portfolio of joint orders, promoting the image of the cluster and improving the staffing of its activities"<sup>206</sup>. There is every reason to believe that this format of cooperation can also have the most beneficial effect on the innovative development of the economy of the Vitebsk region.

The first resident registered in the FEZ in 2020 was BelBanka LLC, established with the participation of an investor from Russia. This company's investment project involves the reconstruction and modernization of production facilities on the outskirts of Vitebsk and

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<sup>206</sup> The number of participants in the Novopolotsk petrochemical cluster is planned to be almost doubled [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/chislo-uchastnikov-novopolotskogo-neftehimicheskogo-klastera-planiruetsja-uvlechit-pochti-v-dva-raza-371161-2019/>

at the site of Vityaz, as well as the installation of two lines for the production of tin cans for industrial canning of food products. Production will start in 2021. The raw material, tinplate, will be supplied by the Miorsky metal-rolling plant located in Vitebsk Oblast and will be commissioned in the second quarter of 2021. As a result, BelBanka LLC "will be engaged in the production of one-piece cans, where the bottom and the side surface are one piece, only the lid is rolled. In the second stage, the company will produce prefabricated products consisting of three parts (bottom, body and lid)<sup>207</sup>operating at full capacity, the volume of production will double. And all of it will be shipped to foreign markets.

The investment picture for 2020 in the FEZ Vitebsk is very much complemented by the fact that there are already plans to register as residents at least six enterprises set up with investors from Canada, China, Azerbaijan, and Russia. The total investments in these projects will exceed \$100 million, and the number of jobs created will be at least 300. In Polotsk, for instance, FEZ resident Belsun International High Technology Corporation Ltd will set up high-tech production of low-tonnage chemical products, which has no rivals in the post-Soviet space. The Azerbaijani investor will produce innovative products designed "to service various types of machinery, including in harsh operating conditions. Production is expected to start by the end of 2020, and the products will be fully shipped to foreign markets<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> [A Russian investor will create a production of tin cans in the FEZ Vitebsk \[Electronic resource\]. - 2020. - URL: https://www.belta.by/economics/view/v-sez-vitebsk-s-uchastiem-rossijskogo-investora-sozdadut-proizvodstvo-zhestjanyh-banok-377712-2020/](https://www.belta.by/economics/view/v-sez-vitebsk-s-uchastiem-rossijskogo-investora-sozdadut-proizvodstvo-zhestjanyh-banok-377712-2020/).

<sup>208</sup> [An investor from Azerbaijan will create a 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](https://www.belta.by/economics/view/investor-iz-azerbajdzhana-sozdast-vysokotekhnologichnoe-proizvodstvo-malotonnazhnoj-himii-v-sez-vitebsk-381432-2020)



In Polotsk, a Belarusian investor intends to set up production of stainless steel containers and create about 20 jobs. The Belarusian-Russian JV Novopolotsk Plant of Technological Metal Structures is considering a project with about \$10 million in investments in hot-dip galvanizing in the village of Farinovo, Polotsk District. About \$28 million will be invested by a Chinese company in a wood processing complex on the outskirts of Vitebsk. Belmatch Ltd. in Postavy will specialize in match straw production. In Orša, a Belarusian company will try to set up production of fuel pellets, and Zavod PAK JSC will initiate a project to set up production of components for dump trucks.

Another significant investment development will take place in FEZ Vitebsk in 2020, as the Lithuanian holding VMG Group has decided to expand the financing of an investment project already underway in the FEZ from 100 to 200 million euros. For this purpose, the investor is ready to organize additional production of solid wood furniture in addition to the vertically integrated wood processing complex that is being created. This will increase the number of jobs created by the company's projects to 1,000<sup>209</sup>. The aim is to start in 2021 the production of new products at the new furniture plant - tables and chairs - the main buyer of which will be IKEA, which is now helping to finance the project.

It should be noted that the economy of the Vitebsk Region attracted over one billion dollars in investments in 2019. Thanks to an active investment policy, the first plant for the production of steel seamless cylinders in Belarus was put into operation here. New enterprises and wood processing plants were launched in Rossony,

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<sup>209</sup> Lithuanian holding VMG Group will increase investments in projects in FEZ Vitebsk to EUR 200 million [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/litovskij-holding-vmg-grupp-uvelichit-objem-investitsij-po-proektam-v-sez-vitebsk-do-200-mln-evro-379950-2020/>

Sharkovshchino, Beshankovichi, Grodoki, Polotsk districts. "A grain drying complex of the Vitebsk broiler poultry farm in the urban settlement of Surazh, a soybean processing plant of the Ekomol-Agro enterprise were commissioned"<sup>210</sup>. Besides, construction of the largest in Belarus dairy complex Kupalinka with more than two thousand cows is coming to an end at Yubileyny Agricultural Complex. In the first half of 2020 another two innovative objects of the agricultural enterprise Ustye, a 10 thousand ton grain drying complex for the preparation of agricultural crops and a dairy complex with a robotic milking system, will be put into operation. It is not a complete list. This is the pace set by the investments attracted today to develop just one of the Belarusian regions, encouraging the creation of new points of growth in its territory.

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<sup>210</sup> Bogacheva, O. More than \$1 billion investments attracted in 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/>.

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## **Gomel region: online format as an effective tool for international regional cooperation**

The Gomel region in Belarus has accumulated considerable experience of working at the international level with foreign partners over the past decade and a half to two decades. In doing so, various forms of partnership development are used here. For example, the Gomel Economic Forum, which over the past 15 years "has established itself as a new format of work with foreign investors at the regional level and an efficient tool for the development of international interregional relations. Secondly, it is the international exhibition "Spring in Gomel" that has become a peculiar business card of the Gomel region over the 20 years of its existence. Suffice it to say<sup>211</sup> that "the products of 300 Belarusian and foreign companies were presented there in 2019 on the area of more than 5 thousand square metres".<sup>212</sup> And foreign delegations from 32 countries visited the exhibition at that time.

In 2020, responding to the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic and border closures in most countries, and following the principle that "everything possible must be done in the new realities to further the social and economic strengthening of the region and the well-being of its inhabitants".<sup>213</sup> However, the south-eastern - Belarusian region decided not to cancel the XXI International

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<sup>211</sup> Zalesky, B.L. Economic forum as a tool for the development of international relations of the region / B.L. Zalesky // Materials for XV international scientific practical conference, Innovations of comprehension of European science - 2019, 15 - 22 June 2019. Public administration. : Sofia. "Byal GRAD-BG". - C. 11.

<sup>212</sup> Business contacts, craft festival and online gastrofest - the exhibition "Spring in Gomel" opened [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/delovye-kontakty-prazdnik-remesla-i-gastrofest-otkrylas-vystavka-vesna-v-gomele-392199-2020/>

<sup>213</sup> The new format of "Spring in Gomel" will make it possible to explore the region's potential from anywhere in the world - Nightingale [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyi-format-vesny-v-gomele-pozvolit-iz-ljuboj->

Exhibition "Spring in Gomel" but held it in a new online format. The reasoning was as follows: on the one hand, the participating companies will not be able to hold a dialogue in the usual format within the framework of the virtual exhibition, but, on the other hand, they will get a certain saving of costs associated with the organization of a visit to Gomel and flights. And in the end, "points of contact can also be found by videoconference. When the borders are opened, all markets will return to an active, live dialogue"<sup>214</sup>.

The exhibition, which opened at the end of May 2020, brought together more than 250 companies from 13 countries on its electronic platform, presenting their products in eleven different areas, including food processing, mechanical engineering, wood and metalworking, construction, engineering, chemical and petrochemical, light industry, banking, legal and insurance services. The project was also joined by 13 Chambers of Commerce and Industry, six free economic zones in Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Serbia as well as the Indian Chamber of International Business and the Economic Chamber of Croatia. In doing so, the virtual version of the exhibition included three main venues.

The first, Business Spring, offered webinars, presentations of products and services of enterprises and companies, and online talks. In particular, there was a round table with representatives of chambers of commerce and industry and business unions from six countries and five webinars on topical business topics attended by more than 70 Belarusian and foreign enterprises and organisations. In addition, the

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[tochki-mira-izuchit-potsial-regiona-solovej -392149-2020/](https://www.belta.by/regions/view/onlain-proekty-stimulirujut-predprijatija-ukrepljat-pozitsii-na-internet-plattformah-filonova-392234-2020/)

<sup>214</sup> Online projects encourage businesses to strengthen their position on online platforms - Filonova [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/onlain-proekty-stimulirujut-predprijatija-ukrepljat-pozitsii-na-internet-plattformah-filonova-392234-2020/>

first international online forum R2R (Region-to-Region), organized by the Samara Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which brought together over 50 representatives of exporting companies and chambers of commerce from Belarus, Russia and other countries, was held in parallel to these events. An important detail of the event is that "in the course of negotiations, it was decided that the BelCCI Gomel branch would participate in the summer sessions of the forum with representatives of French, Dutch and Iranian regions in July this year<sup>215</sup>. The second venue, Gomel Spring, was a place of creativity, where craftsmen demonstrated their work. All in all business cards of 74 participants with their contact data and links in social networks were posted there as well as photos of creative works in ten areas: wooden products, children's toys, clothes, decor, ceramics, natural cosmetics, interior items, accessories, jewellery, farm food and ecological products. The third venue, Tasty Spring, presented restaurants, cafes, bars and retailers. Their electronic business cards included information and photos of the interiors and food, a demonstration of which helped to convey the atmosphere of each of the ten participants in this online gastrofest.

In addition, during the online exhibition, the Gomel region presented dozens of investment projects so that potential investors in any corner of the globe could effortlessly familiarize themselves with the tempting offers of this Belarusian region in the field of industry, energy, construction, agriculture, chemical industry, woodworking and tourism. "The proposed projects include setting up a facility for processing wild produce in Pripyat Polesie, as well as blast chilling of

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<sup>215</sup> More than 250 companies from 13 countries take part in the Spring in Gomel exhibition [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/bolee-250-kompanij-iz-13-stran-uchastvujut-virtualnoj-vystavke-vesna-v-gomele-393173-2020>

vegetables and fruits, construction of a pond fish processing plant, opening of drinking and mineral water bottling facilities, cultivation of mushrooms and oyster mushrooms, production of potato flakes"<sup>216</sup>. Foreign investors may also be interested in other proposals: construction of a gypsum plant based on the Brinevskoye deposit in Petrikov district; establishment of a mixed vine snail farm and wind power plant assembly facility in Gomel district; implementation of a biogas power generation project in Svetlogorsk district; organisation of production of fuel pellets from peat in Lechitsy district, where 44 peat deposits with total reserves of about 170 million tons are concentrated.

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<sup>216</sup> From robots to houses on wheels: dozens of investment projects offered online by the Gomel region [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/ot-robotov-do-doma-na-kolesah-desjatki-investproektov-predlagaet-onlajn-gomelskaja-oblast-392685-2020/>.

## **Great Stone Industrial Park: a project that will shape the future**

May 2020 marked the fifth anniversary of 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 Park's history for its rapid development. And indeed, within such a short period of time it has built roads, supplied water, electricity, heating and gas, erected more than 60 thousand square meters of standard production buildings, constructed the first office building, a residential house, and a research centre, attracted about 60 investment projects, the declared volume of investments exceeding one billion dollars. All this allows us to agree with the conclusion that "over 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, promoted 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 other states, and has become a model for cooperation on the Belt and Road"<sup>217</sup>

Note that such high praise for Great Stone is no longer only voiced in Belarus or China. In November 2019, the World Federation of Free and Special Economic Zones (FEMOZA) held a summit in Monaco with the main theme of strengthening cooperation and

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<sup>217</sup> Zheng, H. "The Great Stone" symbolizes the firm friendship between Belarus and China / H. Zheng // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: [https://www.belta.by/comments/view/velikij\\_-kamen-simvoliziruet\\_-tverduju-druzhbabilarusi-i-i-kr-hu-chzhen-7289/](https://www.belta.by/comments/view/velikij_-kamen-simvoliziruet_-tverduju-druzhbabilarusi-i-i-kr-hu-chzhen-7289/).



translating successful experiences of free economic zones (FEZs) into working tools. The large-scale event brought together over 400 representatives from FEZs of Great Britain, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland, Latvia, Poland, Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Asian and African countries, as well as from chambers of commerce and industry, governmental authorities, and potential foreign investors. It should be noted that FEMOZA is a non-governmental and non-profit organization supported by the United Nations, which was founded in 1999 in Geneva to support and promote free and special economic zones around the world, and in particular - in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, to assist in penetration of FEZ resident projects into the international market and attract foreign investment. FEMOZ functions include drafting norms, regulations and guidelines for FEZ development, providing them with technical, legal and economic assistance, and training specialists. Statistics state that 'today there are 3,500 free zones in 130 countries around the world, accounting for over 70 million jobs'<sup>218</sup>. But, 'despite the incentives and preferences accorded to them in all countries, <...> only 300-400 are effective. This is all because of the technological gap that prevents SEZs from becoming part of the global economy'<sup>219</sup>

The Republic of Belarus has been an active participant in

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<sup>218</sup> Barcelona will become the capital of free zones in 2019 [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: [https://en.wikinews.org/wiki/%D0%91\\_%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%D0BB%D0BE%D0DD0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0BD%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%81%D1%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B5%D0%B9%D1%81%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%D0%B1%D0%B4%D0%B7%D0%D1%D8B%D1%D1%85%D0%B7%D0%B2%D0%D0%B3%D0%D0BBE%D0%B4%D1%83](https://en.wikinews.org/wiki/%D0%91_%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%D0BB%D0BE%D0DD0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0BD%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%81%D1%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B5%D0%B9%D1%81%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%D0%B1%D0%B4%D0%B7%D0%D1%D8B%D1%D1%85%D0%B7%D0%B2%D0%D0%B3%D0%D0BBE%D0%B4%D1%83)

<sup>219</sup> Grigoryeva, 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>

FEMOZA for several years now. The summit in Monaco was a real milestone for the Belarusian side, as the China-Belarus Industrial Park "Great Stone" won the FEMOZA Awards 2019 in the category "Fastest Growing Industrial Park". A special feature of this nomination is that "the key in determining the winner was Great Stone's promise for global investment and the rapid pace of its development"<sup>220</sup>. Indeed, today in Great Stone, the Belarusian side has created solid benefits for the residents - both tax and in terms of acquisition of land ownership, as well as a favourable regime, in which the registration of enterprises takes place in the shortest possible time according to the "one-stop-shop" principle. As a result, "today this park is showing tremendous growth; investors from all over the world are coming to us"<sup>221</sup>.

The facts show that Great Stone has already become an international platform for high-tech enterprises. As of early November 2019, 57 residents had registered here. And there is every reason to believe that this number "could rise to 80 by the end of 2020"<sup>222</sup>. A solar cell production project is already underway here. In July 2019, the industrial park started building a Belarusian-Chinese factory for the production of mechanical gearboxes with an investment of \$17 million. In October 2019, the MAZ-Weichai LLC engine plant opened here, where they produce "small-block assembly

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<sup>220</sup> "Great Stone recognised as world's fastest-growing industrial park [Electronic resource]. - 2019 . - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/velikij-kamen-priznan-samym-bystrorastuschim-industrialnym-parkom-v-mire-369159-2019/>

<sup>221</sup> Megalgos in "Great Stone" and IT records - Rumas talks 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-vozmozhnostiah-investirovat-v-belarus-370269-2019/>

<sup>222</sup> The number of Great Stone residents could increase to 80 by the end of 2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/kolichestvo-rezidentov-velikogo-kamnja-kontsu-2020-goda-mozhet-uvlechitsja-do-80-365696-2019/>

of Euro-5 and Euro-6 standard engines for trucks, special-purpose vehicles and buses. The production capacity will amount to 10 thousand engines per year in a single-shift operation mode"<sup>223</sup>. But even more impressive plans are being made for implementation 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" took place. The participants focused on such areas of development of this special economic zone as: improving the park's legal environment; establishing additional comfortable conditions for attracting investment in creating competitive production facilities; creating a sustainable engineering and transport infrastructure; digital construction; developing the park as a smart city; and implementing projects through technical and economic assistance. The objectives for the development of the industrial park in 2020 included "prioritising export orientation, attracting anchor investors with high-tech projects, expanding international activities"<sup>224</sup>. They intend to continue to be guided by four main development principles: "First, globalisation, as the industrial park is neither Chinese nor Belarusian, but international. Secondly, it is industrialization. The main task is to attract international industry clusters. Thirdly, it is digitalisation, which should give great

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<sup>223</sup> Opening of the Maz-Weichai LLC engine plant in the Sino-Belarusian Great Stone Industrial Park [Electronic resource]. - 2019. URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9051>

<sup>224</sup> Great Stone Industrial Park to be presented at China International in November Import exhibition [Electronic resource]. - 2019. URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/industrialnyi-park-velikii-kamen-v-noiobre-predstaviat-na-kitaiskoi-mezhdunarodnoj-vystavke-importa-367476-2019/>

advantages to the development of the park. <...> Fourthly, greening. Environmental protection and compliance with environmental requirements are the key to sustainable development<sup>225</sup>.

As a reminder, as of early 2020, there were already 60 residents registered in Great Stone from 15 countries, 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; and 12 established by Belarusian business entities. In the last five years, 32 kilometres of roads have been built, 400 kilometres of water and gas pipelines, power lines, sewage pipelines have been laid, 25 buildings with a total area of 300 thousand square meters have been constructed. And the total volume of concluded contracts and investments has exceeded one billion dollars from 11 countries of the world.

Speaking about the trends observed in the industrial park today, there are several major ones. One of them is the development of Great Stone as a smart city with an innovative industry and a 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 SPAO and the Great Stone administration signed an agreement to develop 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 exemplary

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<sup>225</sup> Zheng, H. The Great Stone becomes a strategic platform for Belarus-China cooperation / H. Zheng // [Electronic resource]. -

2020 . -

URL:

<https://www.belta.by/interview/view/velikij-kamen-stanovitsja-strategicheskoi-plattformoj-dlia-belorusko-kitaj-skogo-sotrudnichestva-7152/>

base in Belarus for implementation of 5G technologies<sup>226</sup>.

It should be noted that Great Stone's development priorities remain engineering, electronics and telecommunications, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, new materials, and logistics. At the same time, emphasis is placed on residents' innovative activity. And about 20 projects are already yielding results. Among them is the commercial and logistics company China Merchants, which has received a certificate to operate Belarus' only bonded customs bonded warehouse for general use. In November 2019, a production building of Hess Great Stone LLC, a subsidiary of Swiss company Garrosserie Hess AG, to produce electric passenger transport, was inaugurated at Great Stone. "This type of transport will feature zero carbon dioxide emissions and quiet operation. The batteries on the roof will be charged at the terminus in a matter of minutes." <sup>227</sup>. This industrial park resident plans to reach full production in 2021, when up to fifty bus bodies will be produced here.

The park's resident innovation activity is also evidenced by this fact: In March 2020, a manufacturer of a wide range of medical products, Assomedica LLC, registered as a resident in Velikiy Kamen in 2017, "mastered new production of single-use breathing masks and bacterial and viral filters for adults, children and infants"<sup>228</sup> - products that provide maximum respiratory protection from germs and viruses, which can be used within 12-24 hours.

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<sup>226</sup> Nemankova, Y. Pilot project on 5G development will be implemented in Velikiy Kamen / Y. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/pilotnyi-proekt-po-razvitiyu-5-g-realizuj-ut-v-velikom-kamne-3-81000-2020/>.

<sup>227</sup> Aliaksandr Turchyn: Belarusian-Swiss cooperation has serious potential [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9136>

<sup>228</sup> Production of breathing masks opened in the Great Stone Industrial Park [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/proizvodstvo-dyhatelnyh-masok-otkryto-v-industrialnom-parke-velikij-kamen-383799-2020/>

The industrial park is also thinking about the future. This is evidenced by the fact that in March 2020, the Chinese company Sinomach was registered as a resident of Great Stone with a project to create a zone for scientific and technical cooperation and innovative development, within which a complex of administrative buildings for scientific research and supporting infrastructure is to be built. The first stage will see the implementation of four R&D projects involving optical instruments, automotive sensors, semi-conductors and new materials. The company also plans to implement a second phase of the project<sup>229</sup>.

In terms of expanding the international activities of the Great Stone Industrial Park, one very effective tool could be a form of attracting new residents, such as the creation of sub-parks in the park, which means "the arrival of not just one investor, but a pool of iconic companies under the management of a separate management company. This opens up great prospects precisely for large corporations"<sup>230</sup>. We should add that the park's administration intends to address not only Chinese provinces, "but also investors from Europe, in particular Switzerland, and Japan"<sup>231</sup>. The main condition for future residents, which must be met, is the creation of high-tech enterprises in the industrial park. And there is enough space and opportunities to build technology clusters and sub-parks on a national basis.

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<sup>229</sup> New resident with Chinese capital registered at Great Stone [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/novyi-rezident-s-kitaiskim-kapitalom- zaregistrirovan-v-velikom-kamne-384192-2020>

<sup>230</sup> Konoga, P. Alexander Yaroshenko told about new residents of Velikiy Kamen industrial park, satellite town and plans for 2019 / P. Konoga // [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.sb.by/articles/vyseh-pribyl-iz-kamnya.html>

<sup>231</sup> "Great Stone offers foreign partners to create sub-parks [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/velikii-kamen-predlagaet-zarubezhnym-partneram- sozdavat-subparki-365694-2019/>

It should be noted that the sub-park format is already being used in practice at Velikiy Kamen. Back in May 2017, the first stage of the retail and logistics sub-park was opened here, spread over 29 hectares. It is a hundred thousand square metres of real estate, half of which is occupied by warehouses and almost a quarter by an exhibition centre. "We have invested about \$120 million in the construction of the sub-park. In total, the territory of the sub-park will occupy more than 90 hectares, the volume of investments is \$500 million"<sup>232</sup>

At the 11th meeting of the Working Group on the China-Belarus Industrial Park, held in November 2018 in Beijing, it was noted that the necessary support would soon be provided for the practical implementation of sub-parks in the Great Stone city of Harbin, in Heilongjiang province, and Guangdong province. It was also planned to "substantially work on the establishment of sub-parks in the industrial park with Sichuan and Shaanxi provinces and Hangzhou City by the end of 2019"<sup>233</sup>. As for Guangdong province, back in January 2017, in its administrative centre, Guangzhou City, "a signing ceremony was held to establish the China (Guangdong) LED Sub-Park in the Great Stone Industrial Park".<sup>234</sup> as well as five more documents on the intention of specific companies to join this sub-park.

Another landmark document in the context of this topic was

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<sup>232</sup> Anatol Kalinin took part in the opening of the first stage of the trade and logistics sub-park in the China-Belarus Industrial Park Velikiy Kamen [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/7228>

<sup>233</sup> Minutes of the 11th meeting of the Working Group on the China-Belarus Industrial park [Electronic resource]. - 2018. URL :

[http://belaruschina.by/data/fck/file/minekonomiki/protocol\\_11\\_.pdf](http://belaruschina.by/data/fck/file/minekonomiki/protocol_11_.pdf)

<sup>234</sup> The Velikiy Kamen Industrial Park will create a subpark of LED products [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: <https://industrialpark.by/novosti/2017/v-industrialnom-parke-velikij-kamen-budet-sozdan-subpark-svetodiodnoj-produkcii.html>

signed in November 2018 at China's first import trade fair in Shanghai. It is an agreement to set up a European Industrial Sub-Park at the Great Stone of Chengdu. The fact is that Chengdu, the administrative centre of Sichuan province, has considerable industrial potential, including well-developed automotive and aerospace industries, which corresponds to the priorities of the Sino-Belarusian Industrial Park. In addition, "Chengdu is the most economically closest city to Europe in China"<sup>235</sup>.

An important detail should be noted: a number of important meetings and negotiations have recently taken place to consider the establishment of national subparks of European countries in the Great Stone. In particular, in August 2019, this topic was discussed in the Belarusian government with representatives of the Swiss business community, including the leadership of Ceres Group Holding AG and the Swiss industrial park BUSS, who positively assessed the Belarusian proposal not just to create a Swiss subpark in the Great Stone, but also "to act as a developer in it and both develop it and engage Swiss businesses in cooperation with Belarus"<sup>236</sup> Stone for the production of electric passenger vehicles"<sup>237</sup> - was registered in the industrial park. And in January 2020, the issue of "the possible establishment of an Italian-Belarusian sub-park in Great Stone in the future"<sup>238</sup> was discussed in practical terms at a meeting in Rome with

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<sup>235</sup> China's Chengdu is considering setting up high-tech facilities in the Great Stone [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: [https://interfax.by/news/policy/ekonomicheskaya\\_politika/1251824/](https://interfax.by/news/policy/ekonomicheskaya_politika/1251824/)

<sup>236</sup> Kryzhevich, I. On the territory of "Great Stone" may create a Swiss subpark / I. Kryzhevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.sb.by/articles/naterritorii-velikogo-kamnya-mogut-sozdat-shveytsarskiy-subpark.html>

<sup>237</sup> The Sino-Belarusian Industrial Park Great Stone has its 60th resident [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://interfax.by/news/biznes/businesses/1268182/>

<sup>238</sup> Belarus and Italy will consider setting up a joint subpark at Great Stone [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-italija-rassmotriat-vopros-sozdaniya-sovmestnogo-subparka-v-velikom-kamne-376060-2020/>



owners and executives of Italian companies interested in investing in the industrial park's projects.

All these facts undoubtedly underline the very high development dynamics of the Great Stone Industrial Park, a project whose role in the Belarusian economy will very soon become landmark both in terms of innovation and investment, as well as in terms of technology.

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## **Great Stone Industrial Park: aiming for innovation**

The science and innovation vector occupies an important place among the main areas of trust-based comprehensive strategic partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the People's Republic of China. Three priority components can be singled out in this segment of the bilateral cooperation. "The first one is in scientific research, where the parties are involved in major joint projects. The second is in innovation activities, where a network of joint innovation centres and research laboratories is being formed and developed. The third is in education, where specialists, teachers and students receive mutual training and internships"<sup>239</sup>. The focus on innovations is especially felt today in the development of the Sino-Belarusian Industrial Park "Great Stone", which makes it possible to create competitive production facilities, sustainable engineering and transport infrastructure, to conduct digital construction in order to turn the park into a "smart city". At the same time, the pace of innovation has accelerated markedly in 2020. Here are just a few examples to support this observation.

In May 2020, the first stone was laid at the site of the future construction of the Science and Technology Cooperation and Development Zone, or Fakel project, by the Chinese corporation Sinomach. As a reminder, in June 2014, the Belarusian government signed a strategic partnership agreement with this corporation, which is now the basis for the implementation of large-scale investment projects in Belarus. As for the Fakel project, this zone will "aim to

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<sup>239</sup> Zalessky, B. Vector of partnership - China. Collection of articles / B. Zalessky. - Palmarium Academic Publishing, 2019. - C. 115-116.

create conditions to attract Chinese and European technologies, implement and test them in the park and further export them to Europe and China<sup>240</sup>. They are planning to construct office buildings and facilities for scientific research, where "four research and development projects are to be implemented - in the fields of optical technology, mechanics, electronics and new materials. They also envisage the construction of laboratories, office-type co-working spaces, complex training facilities and high-tech pilot commercial units<sup>241</sup>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 mention of Zhongguancun Technopark in this context speaks to the very serious attitude of the Chinese side to the Torch Project in the Great Stone. The fact is that this technology park, founded in 1988 in the northwestern part of Beijing, is considered the Chinese equivalent of Silicon Valley, is the first in China, is one of the largest in the capital and consists of 16 science zones. It was here that the first Chinese vacuum cylinder, the first computer, the first commutator, etc. "appeared in their day. In all, 5,000-plus products were developed here, filling a void in the history of Chinese high-tech."<sup>242</sup> . The research and development offices of many multinational corporations are now concentrated here. Expectations in China are high for the industrial park to "implement an ambitious

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<sup>240</sup> On the development of a science and technology cooperation and development zone in the Great Stone Park

SINOMACH [Electronic resource]. - 2020 .  
URL :  
<http://china.mfa.gov.by/ru/embassy/news/cf39e9ad1f75824a.html>

<sup>241</sup> Sinomach's 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/>

<sup>242</sup> Wei, W. China's Silicon Valley / W. Wei // Models, Systems, Networks in Economics, Technology, Nature and Society. - 2013. - C. 19.

Made in China 2025 strategy that will make the country technologically independent and a leader in many fields. The Chinese government will spend about \$300 billion to implement the programme<sup>243</sup>. The figure for the technology park is as follows: between January and November 2019, it recorded a revenue growth of almost 14 per cent. In doing so, "revenues of the leading high-tech enterprises in the technology park reached 5.43 trillion yuan (about \$779 billion) during this period"<sup>244</sup>.

Returning to innovative affairs at the Great Stone, another landmark event took place here in May 2020, showing that one of the promising facets of the Sino-Belarusian industrial park's development is digitalisation. An electric-powered unmanned bus, based on technology developed by Singaporean scientists, was tested here for the first time. "The maximum speed the prototype can reach is 40km/h. <...> It has a range of about 180km. A full charge will take no more than 4 hours." <sup>245</sup>. At the Great Stone site, the plan is to test the technology for operating the novelty, after which, it appears, commercial operation of this unmanned transport will be possible in the not-too-distant future.

Also in May 2020, the Sino-Belarusian Industrial Park registered a new resident, the Crownhomes Scientific and Technical Company for Wood Structures, LLC, which will create a "production

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<sup>243</sup> Krasilnikova, Y. Beijing launches programme to attract foreign IT-specialists / Y. Krasilnikova // [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL:

[https://hightech.fm/2018/02/28/beijing\\_lures\\_talant](https://hightech.fm/2018/02/28/beijing_lures_talant)

<sup>244</sup> Beijing's Zhongguancun Technopark recorded a 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](http://russian.news.cn/2020-01/07/c_138685700.htm?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fyandex.by%2Fnews)

<sup>245</sup> 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>

line centre for the woodworking industry based on Industry 4.0 principles"<sup>246</sup> in Velikiy Kamen. The production facility, which is based on innovative technology, is expected to be put into operation in 2022.

Moreover, in 2020, the Sino-Belarusian Industrial Park Great Stone continued to show quite a high rate of development despite the alarming epidemic situation, remaining the landmark project of the Chinese initiative "One Belt, One Road" in Eastern Europe. Suffice it to say that "at the end of October there were 66 companies from 14 countries among its residents and about \$1.2 billion of investments"<sup>247</sup>. The fact that in the first nine months of 2020, the revenues of the industrial park's residents increased by almost three and a half times compared to the same period in 2019 also speaks volumes. "At the same time, revenues from the sale of goods, products, works and services outside Belarus amounted to Br36.8 million (8.7 times growth)<sup>248</sup> Great Stone came close to one thousand - 970 people. And, to all appearances, the industrial park does not intend to stop there, as evidenced by a number of facts from the second half of 2020, showing that this special economic zone is now actively seeking new ways of development in many areas, including optimization of logistics and introduction of innovations.

For example, in September 2020, CJSC Eurasian Railway

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<sup>246</sup> Great Stone's new resident 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>

<sup>247</sup> Xiaoyun, S. China opposes outside interference in the internal affairs of Belarus / S. Xiaoyun // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/interview/view/kitai-vystupaet-protiv-vmeshatelstva-izvne-vo-yrennie-dela-belarusi-7572/>.

<sup>248</sup> Revenue of Great Stone 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-kamnia-v-ianvare-sentiabre-vyrosla-v-34-raza-do-br1262-mln-416031-2020/>.

Gateway, a company that "will implement an investment project to build a bimodal railway terminal in the park,"<sup>249</sup> was registered as a resident of Great Stone. The list of participants in this project, construction work on which will begin in 2021, is quite substantial. They are the world's largest intercontinental port Duisburger Hafen AG from Germany, the leading network operator of intermodal transportations in Europe Hupak Intermodal SA from Switzerland, the Brest Department of the Belarusian Railways RUE, and the resident of the park China Merchants CHANNEL Commercial and Logistics Company. It is expected that when the terminal reaches its design capacity, it will bring the Great Stone residents to a qualitatively new level of implementation of their logistics capabilities.

Speaking about the innovative prospects of the industrial park's development, it should be recalled that, again in September 2020, the China-Belarus Innovation Center of 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 the Great Stone. The founders of the centre see it as a platform for "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 implementation"<sup>250</sup> digitalisation of production, bio- and eco-technologies, which were started here today, are expected to grow

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<sup>249</sup> A new Great Stone resident will build a railway terminal [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/novyi-rezident-velikogo-kamnia-postroit-zhd-terminal-407959-2020/>

<sup>250</sup> The Sino-Belarusian innovation centre of industrial technologies appeared in Great Stone [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/kitajsko-beloruskij-innovatsionnyj-tsentr-promyshlennyh-tehnologij-pojavilsja-v-velikom-kamne-408221-2020/>.

into specific technologies and productions in two-three years' time. In addition to being 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 advice and other support services to selected incubated enterprises, including advice on business plans and training. There are also hopes for the successful development of this structure because "to ensure commercialization of R&D results of the Industrial Technology Centre, a special \$1.5 million fund of the Belt and Road Initiative is to be set up".<sup>251</sup> This fund will be used to support the commercialisation of selected research projects and incubated enterprises.

Another innovation centre - commercialization of scientific and technological achievements - was planned to be opened in the Great Stone by the end of 2020. This is how the issue was discussed in September 2020 at a meeting of the Belarusian part of the commission for scientific and technical cooperation of the Belarus-China intergovernmental cooperation committee, which considered the implementation of the 2019-2020 programme of scientific and technical cooperation between Belarus and China. This centre should become a comprehensive platform for nurturing start-ups.

Finally, in November 2020, there was another event which could seriously promote innovation in this special economic zone. It is an agreement signed by the National Intellectual Property Centre and the administration of the China-Belarus Industrial Park Great Stone to establish a Technology and Innovation Support Centre in the

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<sup>251</sup> The innovation centre at Great Stone is scheduled to open 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/>.



park. The new structure is expected to "facilitate researchers' search for information about existing scientific achievements, and boost scientific work of young scientists and startup organizations<sup>252</sup>offer free access to patent and non-patent databases of the World Intellectual Property Organization to all employees of park residents. So the opportunities for innovation here are considerable.

It should be noted that the Great Stone today is also trying to make the most of the experience of other innovative structures operating in different parts of the world. This is evidenced by the fact that the Sino-Belarusian Industrial Park joined the Innovation Alliance of Special Economic Free Trade Zones, established in autumn 2020 in Shenzhen, China. The initiative, whose members also include the 47 counties and regions of the People's Republic of China Innovation Free Trade Zone Alliance, intends to "actively respond to global and regional plans such as the UN 2030 sustainable development agenda, the Belt and Road Initiative, the EU investment plan, the Africa 2063 agenda"<sup>253</sup>. In addition to Great Stone, the new alliance also includes many other foreign players, with whom collaboration could yield interesting results in the future, as each of them is an innovative platform with its own unique and creative operating experience. These include the Lekki Free Trade Zone in Nigeria, the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone in Cambodia, the Djibouti International Free Trade Zone in East Africa, the Hambantota Industrial Park in Sri Lanka, the Ethiopian Eastern

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<sup>252</sup> Technology and Innovation Support Centre established at Great Stone [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/tsentr-podderzhki-tehnologii-i-innovatsij-sozdali-v-velikom-kamne-415194-2020/>

<sup>253</sup> "Great Stone has joined the innovation alliance of free trade special economic zones [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/velikij-kamen-voshel-v-innovatsionnyj-aljjans-osobyh-ekonomicheskikh-zon-svobodnoj-torgovli-405052-2020/>

Industrial Park, the Thailand-China Industrial Park in Rayong and the Suez Canal Economic Zone. Let's take a closer look at them.

For example, **the Lekki Free Trade Zone**, located in the Nigerian state of Lagos, is one of the most promising in that African country. Its project is a versatile complex "divided into separate sectors for oil and gas, industrial production, finance and commerce, tourism, recreation and private housing"<sup>254</sup>. The FTZ covers five kilometres of coastline. Half a hundred kilometres away is the port of Apapa, the largest in West Africa, and the Murtala Mohammad International Airport, 70 kilometres away.

The **Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone** is a foreign economic and trade cooperation area in Cambodia that was established by Chinese companies together with the Cambodia International Investment and Development Group to promote a favourable market environment, where a major 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, mostly engaged in sectors such as textile and garment industry, manufacturing of suitcases, bags and other leather goods, machinery and mechanisms, electronics and woodworking"<sup>255</sup>. In five years, more than 22,000 jobs have been created here.

As for **256Djibouti's international free trade zone** in East

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<sup>254</sup> Rendeavour expands Lekki Free Trade Zone development project [Electronic resource]. - 2016. - URL: <https://www.prnewswire.com/ru/press-releases/ru-584836431.html>

<sup>255</sup> Yifeng, H. A new industrial district is being built in Sihanoukville province / H. Yifeng, S. Mengkhon // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/beltandroad/khm/ruindex.shtml>

<sup>256</sup> Heads of State from five countries attend opening ceremony of International Free Trade Zone in Djibouti [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: [https://en.cscec.com/xwzx\\_en/gsxw\\_en/201810/2891561.html](https://en.cscec.com/xwzx_en/gsxw_en/201810/2891561.html)

Africa, it was inaugurated in July 2018 with the active participation of the Chinese company China State Construction. Once all phases of construction are completed, it is expected to "become the largest free trade zone in Africa and <...> a new engine for Djibouti's economic development, helping Djibouti build a financial, shipping and trade hub in North-East Africa". The creators of this FTZ see it as a test bed for the so-called 'Silk Road Station' to replicate China's successful experience in developing global enterprises here.

To create a maritime transit hub for the entire South Asian region is the goal of a Sino-Lankan project to **renovate the port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka**, which is located very close to the main international shipping routes. "Previously, ships hardly ever entered this small fishing town. But all that has changed with the launching of a joint Sino-Lankan project to revive the seaport"<sup>257</sup>. Thousands of new jobs have already been created through China's 'port-industrial park-city' model, which, when completed, will create an industrial park to help develop the city. This, in turn, will make the port of Hambantota one of the key elements of the 21st century Maritime Silk Road.

**The Ethiopian Eastern Industrial Park** is another "Chinese overseas trade and economic cooperation zone at the national level, which already hosts more than 80 enterprises, most of them Chinese"<sup>258</sup> engaged in the pharmaceutical, textile, metallurgical and a number of other industries. It should be noted that this is not the

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<sup>257</sup> The port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka implements a Sino-Lankan cooperation project [Electronic resource ]. -2018 . URL : <https://newsru.cgtn.com/news/3d3d414e6646444d77597a6333566d54/p.html>

<sup>258</sup> Ethiopia-China cooperation is a classic example of China's cooperation with Africa - Ethiopian President [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: [http://russian.news.cn/2018-08/14/c\\_137387915.htm](http://russian.news.cn/2018-08/14/c_137387915.htm)

only project implemented by the Chinese side in this African country. "Building on China's experience of economic growth, 15 industrial parks using Chinese technology will be built in Ethiopia in the coming years".<sup>259</sup>This is not the only project being implemented by the Chinese side in this African country, "building on China's experience of economic growth, 15 industrial parks will be built in the next few years using Chinese technology.

The **Thailand-China Industrial Park in Rayong province** was built back in 2005. The cluster was the only one in Thailand certified by the Chinese government as an overseas trade and economic cooperation 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 locals, and became an industrial hub and export base for priority sectors of traditional Chinese industries in Thailand"<sup>260</sup>. An interesting detail: based on the experience of the industrial park in Thailand's Rayong province, the Chinese Huali Corporation opened the Beimei Huafushan Industrial Cluster already 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 72km long canal bed was commissioned to attract foreign investment for 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 form up to

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<sup>259</sup> A stronger belt of cooperation, a shorter way out of the 'backwardness trap' [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://finance.rambler.ru/markets/43964485-zhenmin-zhibao-kitay-obedinennye-obschey-tselyu-chast-2/>.

<sup>260</sup> Huali Corporation: Let's create an "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](http://russian.china.org.cn/exclusive/txt/2017-04/13/content_40612178.htm)

a third of the country's total economy"<sup>261</sup> . In spring 2019, 77 residents were already 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 the region. In February 2020, the Belarusian side also announced its desire to participate in the creation of the Suez Canal Special Economic Zone.

There is no doubt that the innovative experience of developing all these special free trade economic zones will also be very useful for the Sino-Belarusian Industrial Park "Great Stone", which, in turn, has something to share with its partners in the new alliance.

### **Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange: aiming to maximise potential**

The year 2020 marks the 15th anniversary of the first trading on the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange (BUCE), when Belarusian Unitary Enterprise Bellesexport and Polish company International Paper Kwidzyn S.A. made their first on-exchange sale of balance wood worth \$189,000. All in all, over the past decade and a half, "3.2 million deals amounting to \$21 billion were made, and exports reached \$5.8 billion"<sup>262</sup>. These figures show that the BUTB has already turned into one of the largest commodity exchanges in Eastern Europe, whose main function is to assist Belarusian companies in exporting products and help foreign companies to enter the Belarusian market.

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<sup>261</sup> The Egyptian president has issued a decree establishing the Suez Canal Special Economic Zone [Electronic resource]. - 2015. - URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/2181686>

<sup>262</sup> Deals worth \$21bn concluded at the BOOTB over 15 years [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/sdelki-na-21-mlrd-zakliucheny-na-butb-za-15-let-393174-2020>

This fact also speaks volumes. The market-based pricing mechanism and high concentration of supply and demand on this exchange platform allowed Belarusian bidders, starting from 2005, to gain additional revenue and save as much as one and a half billion dollars. It should be reminded that companies accredited on BUOTB take part in electronic trading on five commodity positions: 1) metal products; 2) timber products; 3) agricultural products; 4) industrial and consumer goods; 5) prospective exchange goods. In the domestic market, roundwood, ferrous metal products and oilseed meal are in particular demand, while in foreign trade their participants give preference to lumber and dairy products. These trends are characteristic of the development of the BUTB in 2020 as well.

At the beginning of December 2020, 24815 companies were accredited here, including 4904 companies from 63 countries. Between January and November, trade turnover grew by 12 percent to almost five billion Belarusian rubles. It is estimated that between 1,500 and 3,000 transactions are concluded there every day. In addition, the export of goods through the exchange demonstrates a positive dynamic. "With the total amount of export transactions at Br1 billion, last year's result was exceeded by 5%. Lumber, wood chips, and agricultural products are the leaders in foreign market sales<sup>263</sup>. It is interesting that in October 2020, the BUTB recorded a record-breaking amount of export transactions for the year - \$46.5 million,

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<sup>263</sup> The BUTB trade 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/>

more than half of which came from wood products - sawn timber and wood chips. Companies from Germany, Latvia and Lithuania were the biggest buyers of sawn wood, while companies from Lithuania, Poland and Estonia were the biggest buyers of wood chips. Another characteristic detail is that "in October there was also a noticeable increase of foreign buyers of cement. The amount of transactions with this commodity increased 4.3 times, up to \$2.6 mln. Russia was the main market"<sup>264</sup> .

It should be noted that cement is not the only item that attracts Russian business people to the BUTB. In particular, they have a strong interest in Belarusian dairy products, which were exported through the exchange for the first ten months of 2020 for a total of about thirty million dollars. At the same time, "about 80% of that amount was accounted for by deals made with companies from Russia. Predominantly, milk powder, butter, and dry whey were purchased. Butter dominated sales, which amounted to \$14.9 million"<sup>265</sup>

These facts are quite eloquent indications of the potential of the Russian vector in the activities of the BUTB, where 2,482 Russian residents were accredited as of 1 December 2020. And this figure does not appear to be conclusive, as BUTB has taken energetic steps in 2020 to develop new business contacts in the eastern direction of interaction, which are yielding results. Suffice it to say that since the

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<sup>264</sup> Exports of goods through the BUTB increased by 22% in October [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-tovarov-cherez-butb-v-oktjabre-vyros-na-22-415863-2020/>

<sup>265</sup> Russia accounts for around 80% of dairy exports through the BUTB [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/okolo-80-eksporta-molochnoj-produktsii-cherez-butb-prihoditsja-na-rossiju-414442-2020/>.

beginning of 2020, 183 new Russian companies have been accredited to the exchange, most of which are active bidders, which of course has a positive impact on the dynamics of exchange turnover. In particular, "deliveries of ferrous rolled metal for the needs of Belarusian industrial enterprises for 11 months increased by 68%, and exports of milk powder to Russia - by 53% <...>. Rapeseed oil, flour and construction materials also displayed a positive trend<sup>266</sup>.

The Russian vector is characterised by the following detail: the interest in the BUTB is growing especially fast among business circles of those Russian regions which border with Belarus. Smolensk region is an example. Today about four hundred Smolensk companies are accredited to the exchange, more than from any Russian region. Many of them regularly participate in the bidding for both import and export. But, as it turned out during a pilot webinar held in December 2020 by the BUTB together with the Smolensk Region Export Support Centre, even enterprises in this Russian region are not yet fully realising the potential of the exchange mechanism. And "among the promising areas are sales 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 positions can form the basis for long-term mutually beneficial cooperation<sup>267</sup>. The "Digital Contact Exchange", which was also held in December 2020 in the form of an online conference, showed that the BUTB can develop cooperation with more remote regions of Russia in the same mutually beneficial

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<sup>266</sup> BUTB looks forward to expanding cooperation with the Omsk region of Russia [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-rasschityvaet-na-rasshirenie-sotrudnichestva-s-omskoi-oblastiiu-rossii-420606-2020/>.

<sup>267</sup> . BUTB looks forward to developing cooperation with the Smolensk region [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-rasschityvaet-na-razvitie-sotrudnichestva-so-smolenskoj-oblastij-u-421404-2020/>



way. 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 seller and buyer no longer plays a decisive role is shown by the exchange's experience in developing contacts with Egypt. Also in December 2020, BUTB reached an agreement with the Egyptian company Sama Al-Jazeera for Import and Export to organise lumber exports to that North African country via the exchange. The intrigue here is that so far "almost all lumber imports to Egypt are organised through intermediaries, and prices are sometimes very high"<sup>268</sup>. But the use of the exchange platform will allow Egyptian companies to buy wood products in almost unlimited quantities and without intermediaries, directly from manufacturers in Belarus, and Belarusian exporters can enter a very tempting market in Egypt, where the volume of annual consumption of lumber is about five million cubic meters. The Egyptian side sees this as an optimal solution, because by taking part in the bidding, it gets access to a large number of specialized companies that are ready to supply the goods it needs on acceptable terms. The benefits for the Belarusian side are no less obvious. So the geography of mutually beneficial contacts is developing rather diverse and effective. And this in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, which has not best affected the economies of most countries in the world and which requires all market players to find new ways of working with business partners in order to ultimately

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<sup>268</sup> Plans are underway to supply lumber to Egypt through BUTB [Electronic resource].

- 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/cherez-butb-planiruetsja-organizovat-postavki-pilomaterialov-v-egipet-419296-2020/>

succeed.

The BUTB is no exception in this respect. Back in May 2020, it hosted the first Belarusian-Canadian-British webinar or online seminar Timber: Doing Business in Belarus, which was attended by over forty representatives of the Canadian and British business communities. It should be noted, that 63 companies from the UK and 6 from Canada have already been accredited to the BUTB. The specific nature of the exchange trade in timber products and key advantages of the Belarusian exchange platform that were discussed in the format of a videoconference - control over deal execution, transparent pricing, absence of intermediaries, possibility of using trade finance instruments - resulted in the fact that "several British and Canadian companies have expressed their interest in being accredited to participate in exchange trade in lumber and woodchips on the BUOTB<sup>269</sup>.

It should be noted that BUTB also uses the online seminar format to train its prospective business partners. To this end, in May 2020 they held the first training webinar for specialists from the Uzbek Republican Commodity Exchange, with which BUTB signed a strategic co-operation agreement back in September 2018. Thanks to this modern format of cooperation, the Uzbek partners were able to become better acquainted not only with the structure and specific features of the Belarusian public procurement system, but also with the opportunities for foreign suppliers of goods, works and services

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<sup>269</sup> British and Canadian businesses are interested in buying Belarusian lumber on exchange trades [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/britanskij-i-kanadskij-biznes-zainteresovan-v-zakupke-belorusskih-pilomaterialov-na-birzhevyh-torgah-391809-2020>

to participate in procurement procedures. It is expected that the information received by the Uzbek side will not only contribute to the enhancement of cooperation between Belarus and Uzbekistan in the field of e-procurement, but will also "serve as a guide to action for Uzbek companies planning to operate in the Belarusian market"<sup>270</sup>.

The development of cooperation between the Belarusian-Turkish Trade Bank and Chinese partners deserves a separate discussion in this context. The fact is that in December 2020, a meeting of the Belarusian-Chinese Intergovernmental Committee for Cooperation was held, which noted positive changes in the trade engagement between the two countries, associated with changes in the structure of Belarusian exports. First, the nomenclature of commodity supplies from Belarus to China is expanding. Second, the dependence of the bilateral trade turnover on the export of Belarusian potash fertilizers to Chinese consumers is diminishing. The main priorities for Belarus to step up joint efforts to expand cooperation are "the inclusion of Belarusian products in China's state reserves, the establishment of joint ventures to process Belarusian raw materials in China, simplification of trade procedures and removal of trade barriers, optimization of financial settlements. The <sup>271</sup>BUTB is also considering the use of electronic trading platforms as a promising mechanism for bilateral trade, where the key role is likely to be played by the BUTB, which had already accredited 28 Chinese companies as of early December 2020, with 13 of them coming to the BUTB this

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<sup>270</sup> Belarus and Uzbekistan develop cooperation in e-procurement [Electronic resource]. -2020 . - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-uzbekistan-razvivaiut-vzaimodeistvie-v-oblasti-elektronnyh-zakupok-390898-2020/>

<sup>271</sup> Nikolay Snopkov: Belarus sees agricultural products as a new export driver to China [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/9682>

year.

Suffice it to say that in the three quarters of 2020, the amount of buying transactions made by companies from China on the exchange rose more than tenfold(!) to two million dollars. Wood billets and edged lumber dominated the commodity mix. It should be noted that, until recently, the majority of Belarusian lumber products used to go to the Celestial Empire mainly via the Baltic States, which made them more expensive for the end consumer and reduced the foreign exchange earnings of Belarusian exporters. "Thanks to the joint project with Bellesexport and Beltamozhservice, dozens of Belarusian forest enterprises were able to sell their products to the high-margin Chinese market without intermediaries"<sup>272</sup>

The BUTB believes that this sharp increase in interest in exchange trading on the part of Chinese businesses is due not only to the favorable price environment, but also "convenient logistics that Belarusian exporters were able to offer. In particular, starting from this year [2020], it became possible to buy lumber products on different delivery bases (multi-base lots), which allowed Chinese companies to choose the pickup point that suits them best. In addition, delivery times have been significantly shortened through the use of rail transport as part of the Chinese government's 'One Belt, One Road' initiative"<sup>273</sup>

After receiving these statistics, BUTB began to consider the possibility of introducing a separate trading session for timber

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<sup>272</sup> Belarusian lumber worth \$5.1 million has been sold to China through the BUTB since the beginning of the year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belorusskie-pilomaterialy-na-51-mln- prodali-v-kitaj-cherez-butb-s-nachala-goda-400531-2020/>.

<sup>273</sup> More than 10 times the amount of transactions by companies from China on the TSB in January-September [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/bolec-chem-v-10-raz-vyrosla-summa-sdelok-kompanijami-iz-kitaja-na-butb-v-janvare-sentjabre-413129-2020/>.

products sold on the Chinese market, in which all lots put up for sale would be adapted to Chinese consumers as much as possible, and the necessary level of competition would be ensured through a dense concentration of buyers. All the more so because the increased activity of companies from China has been particularly visible since October 2020, when they bought more than one million dollars worth of lumber through the exchange. This is also due to the BUTB's simplified accreditation procedure, which now takes no more than three days to complete all documents. And "in January-November the timber products to the total sum of over \$9 million were sold through the exchange platform in the Chinese direction<sup>274</sup>. A year earlier this figure was only about two hundred thousand dollars. Building on this successful experience, BUTB held its first specialised trading session on sales of lumber to China in mid-December 2020. Let's hope that this new form of work will also open up new horizons for cooperation with Chinese partners, because there is every reason to believe that in the near future the export nomenclature here will noticeably expand, especially at the expense of products of the agro-industrial complex. After all, "in addition to products of the timber industry, rapeseed oil, beet pulp, meat, sugar and dairy products are among the promising exchange goods demanded in the Chinese market. The number of enquiries from Chinese companies interested in buying these products has increased markedly recently<sup>275</sup>

In particular, rapeseed oil offers interesting prospects in this

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<sup>274</sup> BUTB will hold its first specialised export auction for the Chinese market on 15 December [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-provedet-pervye-spetsializirovannye-eksportnye-torgi-dlj-a-kitaj-skogo-rynka-15-dekabrij-a-420090-2020>

<sup>275</sup> Chinese companies bought more than \$1 million worth of lumber at BUTB in October [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/>

"Chinese" context, with exports via BUTB increasing threefold in value terms in the first eight months of 2020 as a whole. This is because rapeseed products are widely used both in the food industry and for the production of biodiesel. Perhaps for this reason, too, Switzerland is the largest buyer of these products at BUTB, with transactions from January to August 2020 amounting to almost six million dollars. "The top three key markets for Belarusian rapeseed oil are also Lithuania with \$3.5 million in deals and Estonia with \$3.3 million"<sup>276</sup>.

As for China, where rapeseed oil is also in high demand, its traditional partner for this import position has been Canada. "However, due to the protracted trade conflict, the supply of this product has fallen noticeably. The resulting shortage has caused a record price increase. So now China is actively looking for alternative procurement channels and Belarus may become one of them"<sup>277</sup> Chinese trading company "Shandong Liuqing" decided to take advantage of this situation in September 2020. It declared its intention to pass the accreditation procedure and to start working at Belarus' BUTB. At the same time, the company expressed its readiness to invest in the Belarusian timber industry. It is also interested in the development of the Belarusian transport and logistics infrastructure. This is the multi-purpose approach that has been initiated by the cooperation with the BUTB.

Another important trend in the development of the BUTB in

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<sup>276</sup> Rapeseed oil exports through BUTB have tripled, with Switzerland as the largest buyer [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-rapsovogo-masla-cherez-butb-vyros-v-3-raza-krupnej-shij-pokupatel-shvejtsarija-406915-2020/>

<sup>277</sup> . Belarusian pallet board and rapeseed oil to be exported to China via BUTB [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/beloruskuju-palletnuju-dosku-i-rapsvoe-maslo-budut-eksportirovat-v-kitaj-cherez-butb-408061-2020/>.

2020 is an increase in exports of metal products by one-third at once to Br27 million, where the bulk of transactions came from ferrous and non-ferrous metals, as well as their scrap and waste. Suffice it to say that "companies from Germany, Canada, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Ukraine purchased these products for Br24 million in the first half of the year, exceeding the 2019 figure by 20%"<sup>278</sup> . During the same period, a joint project with the Belarusian Steel Works has been actively developed at BUTB, thanks to which rebar products worth Br3 million have been sold to the Polish market. In the future, the exchange plans to expand the commodity nomenclature of metal products exports through the development of new promising markets in order to increase the share of this section in export transactions from five to twenty percent in the next five years.

Of great interest in this regard are the BUTB's plans to bring other Belarusian enterprises to foreign markets as well. In particular, the exchange plans to combine its efforts to achieve this goal with the Miorsky metal-rolling plant, an innovative industrial enterprise in the Vitebsk region with a significant amount of foreign investments, which will be able to produce about 240 thousand tons of tinplate per year once it reaches its design capacity. It should be noted that only Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works in Russia and ArcelorMittal Temirtau Joint Stock Company in Kazakhstan produce similar products in the former Soviet Union. For the Belarusian export-oriented company, "Scandinavia is of most interest <...> as a promising market. First of all, because of favorable pricing conditions and consistently high demand for tinplate"<sup>279</sup> . White tinplate is

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<sup>278</sup> Exports of steel products through BUTB grew by 33% in the first half of the year [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-metalloproduktcii-cherez-butb-v-i-polugodii-vyros-na-33-399873-2020/>.

<sup>279</sup> BUOTB and Miory Metal Rolling Plant plan to jointly develop exports of tinplate

widely used in the manufacture of food and chemical containers. The company plans to produce ultra-thin tinplate starting from 0.1 mm. With the help of the BUTB, the company hopes not only to find new buyers and eventually establish regular supplies of tinplate to Europe, but also to find partners for raw materials, since the exchange trading mechanism is effective in both directions - when exporting finished products and when purchasing raw materials.

All these facts indicate that the pace of the BUTB development today is such that it can and should become the driver of e-commerce in the Republic of Belarus in the near future, where they believe that 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 economy, so that foreign businesses coming to the Belarusian market would not impose their technological solutions, but integrate into the digital infrastructure of the country"<sup>280</sup>. In this regard, it is safe to say that the first fifteen years of operation of the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange prove that the foundation for solving the objectives set here is solid.

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[Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-i-miorskii-metalloprokatnyi-zavod-planirujut-sovmestno-razvivat-eksport-beloj-zhesti-400676-2020/>

<sup>280</sup> BUTB should become a driver of e-commerce in the country - Koltovič [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-dolzha-stat-draiverom-elektronnoi-torgovli-v-strane-koltovich-401009-2020>



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## **Concern Bellegprom: exports as a development factor**

Today Concern Bellegprom unites 72 Belarusian enterprises of the textile, clothing, knitting and leather footwear industries, "of which 43 are state-owned. These are all large entities: 43,000 people out of the 62,000 employed in the light industry work at the concern's enterprises"<sup>281</sup>. Despite the current difficult economic conditions because of the global economic instability, the concern manages to maintain the image of Belarusian goods in the international arena, as evidenced by facts. In the first quarter of 2020, its companies exported nearly 60 per cent of their production, worth about \$110 million. Furthermore, "light industry goods were exported to 41 countries of the world"<sup>282</sup>. This generated a trade surplus of about 50 million dollars in goods.

The enterprises of the knitting industry, which are part of Bellegprom Concern, show high rates of development of the export component in 2020. Thus, in the first three months of this year, their exports increased by almost ten percent to reach \$36.5 million. Good growth was shown by such enterprises as Conte Spa, Brest Stocking Mill, Vesnyanka, Kupalinka, Marta 8, Bobruisktricotage, Yunona Sewing Factory, Motex, Fashion Centre, Romgil-Tex. The increase in these exports is largely due to the expansion of their geography. From January to March 2020, the knitting industry enterprises of Bellegprom have shipped their products to 20 countries. Positive

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<sup>281</sup> Lugina, T. What projects our light industry can be proud of / T. Lugina // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.sb.by/articles/svoya-rubashka-blizhe-k-telu11.html>

<sup>282</sup> Nemankova, Y. Enterprises of Bellegprom exported 58.3% of products in the first quarter / Y. Nemankova // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/predpriyatija-bellegproma-v-i-kvartale-eksportirovali-583-produktsii-389618-2020/>.

dynamics was noted in the markets of Russia, Germany, Moldova, Poland, Azerbaijan, Lithuania and Latvia. In several countries, export volumes have increased several times. "Shipments of knitted goods to Kazakhstan increased 2.6 times, to Uzbekistan 3.2 times <...>. Shipments of garments to Uzbekistan increased more than 9-fold, to Kyrgyzstan more than 3-fold, and to Great Britain 2.4-fold"<sup>283</sup>

It should be noted that the concern intends to further develop the export component with even greater concentration of efforts, increasing deliveries even in those vectors that were previously occupied. This is because "the Asian presence in the EU markets is declining, so we need to actively look for new partners and occupy the niches that have been created"<sup>284</sup>. This is why Belleprom is counting today on the growth of exports to the European Union and neighbouring countries. In particular, supplies of protective masks to Germany and Russia are expected to start in the near future. At least, relevant agreements with partners in these countries have already been reached and "contracts have been signed with the Baranovichi Production Cotton Association and the Fashion Centre"<sup>285</sup>. At the same time, one million protective articles are expected to be sent to Germany alone.

Of course, all this should be helped by the implementation of a

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<sup>283</sup> Exports of Belleprom's knitwear enterprises increased by 8.4% in the first quarter [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-trikotazhnyh-predpriyatij-belleproma-v-i-kvartale-vyros-na-84-391971-2020>

<sup>284</sup> Belleprom's textile enterprises plan to seek new partners and increase exports to the EU [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/tekstilnye-predpriyatija-belleproma-planirujut-iskat-novyh-partnerov-i-naraschivat-eksport-v-es-391599-2020>

<sup>285</sup> "Belleprom plans to export protective masks to Russia and Germany in May [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belleprom-planiruet-v-mae-eksportirovat-zaschitnye-maski-v-rossiju-i-germaniju-389972-2020/>.

number of investment projects which will make it possible to upgrade the existing production facilities and increase the quality of the products. In particular, an investment project to set up the production of cloth fabrics is underway at Kamvol OJSC, the only enterprise in Belarus and the largest in the former Soviet Union with a complete production cycle, which produces pure-wool and half-wool suit and dress fabrics, pure-wool, half-wool, polyacrylonitrile knitted and woven yarn. "In 2019, the company increased deliveries to Russia 1.3 times, to Ukraine 1.5 times, to Uzbekistan 3.2 times, to Moldova 1.3 times and to Azerbaijan 16 times. In total, the company exports its products<sup>286</sup> to 17 countries. In the first quarter of 2020, Kamvol started cooperation with other major partners - distributors in Russia, Armenia and Uzbekistan. Plans to enter the American and Canadian markets are also being developed. This was the subject of recent negotiations between the Belarusian company's specialists and representatives of the international trading houses Alliance Apparel Group Inc. from the USA and Les Entreprises Presidentielles Inc. from Canada, which specialize in the production of clothing from wool, cotton and linen fabrics, yarn and synthetic fibers.

The Orsha flax processing plant is also making substantial investments, where work is underway to organise advanced processing of short flax fiber with production of sanitary and medical products and to increase processing of this raw material by 30-40 per cent. The task is to process the whole flax-trunk harvest in the country and sell for export finished flax goods, which are really popular abroad. So, recently a shop of Belarusian linen goods has opened in

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<sup>286</sup> "Kamvol plans to enter the US and Canadian markets [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/kamvol-planiruet-vyti-na-rynki-ssha-i-kanady-389583-2020/>

Japan, where Orsha flax processing factory partners join in the main task of their country for the time being - preservation of the population health. And "the Belarusian linen fabric is used to make protective masks, which are in demand among residents of Tokyo and other cities. Thanks to the natural properties of linen, masks made of this fabric are not only comfortable, but also more comfortable to wear every day<sup>287</sup>. This is not the only example that shows the attractive prospects for Belarusian exports in the light industry.

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<sup>287</sup> Yesin, R. About Belarusian flax in Japan, search of new goods for export and strengthening of e-trade / R. Yesin // [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/interview/view/esin-o-beloruskom-lne-v-japonii-poiske-novyh-tovarov-dlja-eksporta-i-usileni-elektronnoj-torgovli-7276/>.

## Belarus: the future lies in electric cars

In March 2020, President Lukashenko issued a decree "On Encouraging the Use of Electric Vehicles", which envisages measures to stimulate demand for these environmentally friendly vehicles in Belarus, as well as the creation of appropriate charging and service infrastructure in the regions. The emergence of this document was prompted by a number of circumstances. First, recall that "at the 24th United Nations World Conference on Climate Change, held in December 2018 in the Polish city of Katowice, the Belarusian side stated that it considers the green economy and low-carbon sustainable development as a strategic vector"<sup>288</sup>.

Secondly, existing expert forecasts show that "by 2030, one in five cars in the world will be electric. This process is being spurred on by government policies in a number of countries, where restrictions are about to be imposed on cars with internal combustion engines"<sup>289</sup>. Thirdly, the growth of electric cars will help to reduce air pollution in Belarus. Fourthly, "the use of electric vehicles is one of the ways to intelligently increase electricity consumption".<sup>290</sup>, which becomes especially relevant today in light of the expected commissioning of the Belarusian nuclear power plant. Fifthly, the transition to electric cars is the appeal of the general public to new

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<sup>288</sup> Zalessky, B. Points of growth. Peculiarities of sustainable development in the context of global challenges / B. Zalessky. - Palmarium Academic Publishing, 2020. - C. 57.

<sup>289</sup> Measures to be taken will contribute to the creation of electric car production in Belarus -

Ministry of Economy [Electronic resource].

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<https://www.belta.by/economics/view/prinimaemye-mery-budut-sposobstvovot-sozdaniyu-v-belarusi-proizvodstva-elektromobilej-minekonomiki-383056-2020/>

<sup>290</sup> Ecology and smart electricity consumption - what benefits the growth of electric cars in Belarus [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/ekologija-i-gramotnoe-potreblenie-elektroenergii-chem-vygoden-rost-chisla-elektromobilej-v-belarusi-383046-2020>

technologies in line with global best practices, so that by 2025, about 40 per cent of existing cars with internal combustion engines in Belarus could be replaced by electric vehicles.

Turning to the decree, we note some of the measures it contains. For instance, this document exempts owners of electric cars from paying a fee for a permit to participate in road traffic. Individuals will not have to pay value-added tax when importing electric vehicles into our country for personal use. In addition, "owners of electric vehicles will be exempt from paying parking fees in designated spaces in communal car parks until 1 April 2026"<sup>291</sup>.

The decree also contains measures for producers of electric cars and electric charging stations, as well as for organizations operating them. In particular, the charging stations are exempt from value added tax if used in Belarus. The land plots for the construction and maintenance of the charging stations will be leased to the Belorusneft Production Association without the need to hold an auction. This may be the reason why PA Belorusneft plans to open 180 quick-charging stations at once in 2020.

So far, the situation with electric charging stations (EPS) in Belarus is as follows. Since the beginning of 2020, "the EPS network has expanded to 251 such stations (plus 13 facilities)"<sup>292</sup>. And now it can serve up to nine thousand electric cars. The EFS network in Belarus includes two types of stations: Mode 3, where an electric vehicle can be charged for six to eight hours; and Mode 4, where the battery can be recharged in less than an hour. An important detail: at

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<sup>291</sup> Lukashenka signed a decree on incentives for purchases of electric cars [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-podpisal-ukaz-o-stimulirovanii-zakupok-elektromobilej-383041-2020>

<sup>292</sup> "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>

the beginning of 2020, Belarusneft launched a new brand - Malanka - under which 639 charging stations should be operating by 2022. And by 2030, there should be enough of them to serve up to 300,000 electric vehicles.

Speaking about the production of our country's own electric cars, it should be recalled that the first Belarusian sample of such vehicles based on Geely was unveiled back in August 2017. At that time, it was also 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]"<sup>293</sup>. 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. "It is an urgent need today. <...> Many states are already developing this promising direction. Countries like us, which are export-oriented and don't have huge reserves underground, have long focused on electric vehicles"<sup>294</sup>.

It is quite possible that with the decree "On promotion of electric cars" this case will be taken up by BELJI, which is "ready to consider production of electric cars in Belarus under condition of sales of 5-10 thousand cars a year"<sup>295</sup>. So far the company has received four Chinese electric Geely Geometry A models, which will

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<sup>293</sup> Gavrilova, V. Ecological, modern and maneuverable: scientists presented the first Belarusian electric car / V. Gavrilova // [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/reportazh-ekologichnvi-sovremennvi-i-manevrennyj-uchenye-prezentovali-pervyj-belorusskij-elektromobil-262688-2017>

<sup>294</sup> Meeting with the leadership of the Council of Ministers [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <http://president.gov.by/ru/news-ru/view/soveschanie-s-rukovodstvom-soveta-ministrov-23197/>.

<sup>295</sup> "BELJI is ready to consider production of electric cars with sales of 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/>



be tested: one at the plant, while the three - in dealerships. This version of the electric car is attractive because it has a cruising range of 500 km, systems of adaptive cruise control and response to pedestrians and cyclists, as well as an intelligent system of automatic parking. The company's production of the Geely Geometry A will hopefully go much faster with the adoption of the presidential decree.

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