

The focus is on partnership

The Work Programme of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for the period until 2025 sets the task to reach the level of innovation development of the leading countries in the Eastern Europe region in five years. To achieve this goal, it is planned to create new points of growth of the Belarusian economy, including through implementation of complex "projects of the future" - new innovation projects in the following areas: electrical industry, electric transport, bioindustry, pharmaceuticals, robotics, instrumentmaking, production of composite materials, and development of a line of experimental models of principally new equipment for Belarus and organization of mass production on their basis. The solution of this problem should and will be based on the certain experience of the previous years. All the more so because there is a lot to build on. Suffice it to say that over the past five years Belarus has increased production of innovative products by half, up to almost seven and a half billion dollars. Much hope in this respect is pinned today on international cooperation with foreign partners and international organizations. How are these issues being solved today? This study is about that.



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*International engagement in the face of
Uncertainty and volatility*

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Partnerships in Focus

International cooperation in the context of

Uncertainty and volatility

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From the conjugation of integration processes - to regional cooperation

In December 2020, the Council of Heads of State of the CIS approved a new version of the Concept of further development of the Commonwealth and a plan of main activities for its implementation. The new version fixes the main task of the CIS - "to increase the efficiency of its activities, including by ensuring the implementation of the commitments made by the states and monitoring their implementation. Economic cooperation is defined as a key priority in the document¹. The development of the Commonwealth of Independent States is especially relevant today for the Belarusian side because on January 1, 2021 Belarus assumed presidency in this international organization. And now it largely depends on its approach to the strengthening of integration mechanisms in the post-Soviet space to what extent the CIS will be able to cope with the current problems caused by globalization and new challenges of our time.

At the December 2020 session of the CIS Council of Heads of State, Belarus identified liberalization of trade, reduction of restrictions and exemptions to a minimum, elimination of technical barriers, unification of rules and procedures for state procurement, formation of common markets for goods and services, as well as intensification of investment activities, expansion of industrial cooperation, and the search for common points of economic growth as among the main priorities of its presidency in the CIS. This also includes strengthening humanitarian ties, expanding contacts in science, education, health, culture, sports and tourism, and youth work, as well as improving the image of the Commonwealth in the international arena, with an emphasis on strengthening cooperation between CIS member states in the field of information.

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

Attention to intensifying information cooperation in this context can be explained by concerns voiced at the Council of CIS Heads of State. Participants of the summit recognized "the insufficient awareness of the people of our countries, their level of awareness of what the Commonwealth does, what its importance is. There is a need to use modern information and communication technologies, which are especially in demand among the younger generation. It would be reasonable to create more active discussion platforms and involve the export community and journalists. We need to think over and adopt a plan for the CIS information promotion². We have to believe that this proposal will be taken into account in the Concept of the Belarusian presidency and the Action Plan for its implementation. The proposal sets serious tasks for the information field of all CIS countries to ensure adequate media articulation of integration processes that will take place in the CIS during the presidency of the Republic of Belarus there. It goes without saying that representatives of the international segment of 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 must 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 of the common economic space of the Commonwealth, while "a special emphasis will be placed on bridging the integration processes in the CIS and the EAEU".³ to create the same level of cooperation within the Commonwealth as in the Eurasian Economic Union. This intention actualizes the study of the existing experience of integration building in the EAEU, which could be successfully used in the

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

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

CIS. Especially since the economic union of Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia has such experience.

Recall that in November 2020, the CIS Council of Heads of Government held a meeting in the format of a videoconference, at which the participants approved an action plan for the implementation of the first phase of the CIS economic development strategy for the period up to 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 market⁴. The measures contained in the adopted plan, 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, technological and educational potential, should help to 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 trade turnover of goods between the CIS countries has decreased by almost 17 percent. 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 percent, and passenger traffic decreased by more than a quarter, by 28 percent⁵.

Of course, these indicators do not look very convincing against the background of the results of the Eurasian Economic Union, where a number of positive trends in economic activity are observed. For example, "over the past five years, the volume of mutual trade of the Union's countries increased by 35% and amounted to \$62 billion (in 2015 it was \$46 billion). Aggregate GDP has

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

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

increased by 21% and reached \$2 trillion⁶. And if we take even the year 2020, which was not the best year for epidemiological reasons, agricultural production grew by two and a half years and there was no drop in industrial production in the manufacturing sector. But the EAEU is well aware that the union should only accelerate the pace of integration of the industrial potential of the member states. For this reason, just a week before the meeting of the Council of CIS Heads of State, the EAEU approved the strategic directions of development of the Eurasian economic integration, which provide for an accelerated 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 laid down in the strategy for the development of integration until 2025. The adopted strategy, which includes eleven areas and 332 mechanisms of implementation, provides for a fuller use of the industrial potential of the EAEC, its logistics capabilities to fully ensure the complementarity of economies. Particular attention will be paid to education, health care and the movement of citizens. In order to implement this peculiar road map of the integration development, "we will have to conclude 13 international treaties, over 60 normative legal acts, and to make about 25 amendments and additions to the Treaty on the EEU and the national legislations⁷⁸. 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.

6 Nazarbayev: it is necessary to increase the volume and sustainability of trade flows within and outside the EAEU [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/>.

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

8 EEU Strategy 2025 contains 330 measures and mechanisms to develop integration - Malkina [Electronic resource]. 2020. URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/strategija-eaes-do-2025-goda-soderzhit-330-mer-i-mehanizmov-po-razvitiyu-integratsii-malkina-419802-2020/>.

The transition of the CIS from the stage of formation to the stage of project integration, where the emphasis is placed on investment cooperation and complementary specialization in the real sector of the economy, currently observed in this economic union, can also be an interesting experience for the CIS in terms of conjugation of integration processes with the EAEU. The essence of this transition is contained in the maps of industrialization and agroindustry currently being formed in the EAEU. The first of them is designed to identify import-dependent technological areas and import-substituting potential of manufacturers, as well as areas for possible industrial cooperation and specific ongoing and planned major industrial projects in the EAEU. "The current version of the draft map includes 177 major investment and significant for the relevant industries projects worth \$194.5 billion in 21 sectors"⁹. As for the map of agro-industrial development, it will also include the directions, on which the implementation of projects involving the formation of cooperative chains for the development of import-substituting industries is planned. The experience of implementation of these components of project integration in the post-Soviet space should certainly be in the focus of attention of Belarusian mass media and all the countries of the Commonwealth today.

The EAEU's experience in expanding scientific, technological and innovative 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" may also be very useful for the

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

CIS¹⁰. The fact is that "the Treaty on EAEU lacks basic provisions on scientific and technological cooperation, which would allow to regulate innovative interaction of the Union's countries"¹¹. For this reason, the Republic of Belarus initiates inclusion of a separate article in the Treaty on EAEU, which would determine the directions of cooperation of the member states of the union in the science, technology and innovation spheres.

It should be recalled that back in April 2016 the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council formed 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 technologies. 5. Nuclear and radiation technologies. 6. Power engineering. 7. Transportation technologies. 8. Metallurgy technologies and new materials. 9. Extraction of natural resources and oil and gas processing. 10. Chemistry and Petrochemicals. Electronics and mechanical engineering technologies. 12. Environmental development. 13. Industrial technologies. 14. Agriculture, food industry, biotechnologies.

In January 2019, the EAEU formed the 15th Eurasian Platform - "Energy and Electrification," whose founders were nine enterprises and scientific institutions from Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, which outlined such main activities as "energy engineering, electrification, and the creation and distribution of smart grids - electrical installations that provide parallel operation in a network of different energy sources. In addition, it is planned to develop and use renewable sources to save energy for remote consumers"¹². In August 2019,

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

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

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

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 obsolete units and assemblies on the basis of technical re-equipment and modernization of production facilities, implementation of breakthrough technologies"¹³ . At the same time the Eurasian Machine-Tool Center was created to keep a unified register of machine-tool equipment 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 for the reason that attention is focused on the implementation of highly innovative projects that have not only economic, but also political and social significance. In particular, it is characteristic for the participation of the Belarusian side in the implementation of the technological platform concerning 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."¹⁴ . 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 the EEU countries' satellites are to be united. At the second stage - to create a single information portal"¹⁵ .

13 A new Eurasian technological platform for industrial equipment maintenance and repair technologies has been formed in the EAEU [Electronic resource]. - - 2019. - URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/13-08-2019-1.aspx>

14 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.

15 The EAEU countries intend to create a Eurasian space constellation [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. URL:

Other interesting areas of Belarus' participation in the implementation of Eurasian technological platforms include the EurasiaBio technological platform, which involves the development of joint projects in the field of biotechnology for effective use in the interests of science, education, the economy, social sphere and government needs, as well as the project "Organization of production of LED lighting equipment," whose participants include Belarusian, Russian, Armenian, Kazakh and Kyrgyz organizations

Another important direction, which, apparently, will be actualized by the Belarusian side in the CIS in 2021 and on which representatives of the media sphere should focus, is related to the topic of interaction between the regions of the Commonwealth, because Minsk expects "a noticeable effect from the implementation of the Interstate program of innovation cooperation, the Concept of interregional and cross-border cooperation and the Priority areas of cooperation in the field of transport¹⁶. It should be noted that during the years of the existence of the Commonwealth, the regions have become an effective tool for interstate dialogue and an integral part of economic interaction. The Concept of Interregional and 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 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,

https://www.tvr.by/news/obshchestvo/strany_eaes_namereny_sozdat_evraziyskuyu_kosmicheskuyu_gruppirovku/

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

health protection, law enforcement and security, employment, placement of services, stimulation of tourism"¹⁷.

Speaking about interregional cooperation, 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"¹⁸. And among the priorities of activities contributing to the achievement of the set goals, more than twenty directions were identified, among which we should mention the creation of free economic zones in the regions, implementation of investment projects, trade and fair activities.

As for cross-border cooperation, the relevant convention of the CIS member states was adopted back in October 2008. This document defines the notion of "cross-border cooperation" as "concerted actions aimed at strengthening and promoting good-neighborly relations between border territories, the conclusion, in accordance with the legislation of the Parties, of agreements necessary to achieve these goals"¹⁹. Among the more than twenty directions of activities that contribute to the development of cross-border cooperation mentioned here we should mention 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, which

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

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

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

was held 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 are still in force"²⁰. And although more than 430 agreements account for regions of Russia, recently active steps have been taken to expand partnerships between regions and other countries. Thus, only during the preparation and holding of the first Forum of Regions of Belarus and Uzbekistan in July 2019 26 such documents were signed. Almost 15 agreements were concluded with the regions of Armenia. And a draft of such a document between Minsk and Yerevan is ready to be signed. There are 23 cooperation agreements with the regions of Kazakhstan, 18 with Moldova, and 5 with Kyrgyzstan. As for Azerbaijan, partnership relations are established between the cities of Minsk and Baku, Mogilev and Sumgait. Belarusian-Turkmen interregional cooperation is based on 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 we can see, the potential for partnership is not insignificant. How it is reflected in the domestic media today is not an easy question. In any case, in 2021 this variety of regional ties will have to be fully disclosed by Belarusian regional mass media based on the provisions of the CIS Information Promotion Plan discussed at the December (2020) meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the CIS in order to reflect this direction of integration in the post-Soviet space in their publications, programs and broadcasts as adequately as possible, thereby contributing to the successful presidency of the Republic of Belarus in this international body

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

Innovative collaboration is the key to success

One of the priority areas of the presidency of the Republic of Belarus in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 2021 is the further development of the common economic space, international cooperation and integration for a comprehensive and balanced economic and social development of the member states of this international organization. Belarus sees the most important task in the field of science and technology as "facilitating the creation of effective mechanisms for joint efforts of the CIS member states in science, technology and innovation spheres, strengthening the innovation component of economic growth through the creation of national innovation systems in the implementation of interstate innovation projects"²¹. They intend to solve it on the basis of the experience of interaction in this sphere that already exists in the Commonwealth.

It should be reminded that in 2020 the implementation of the Interstate program of innovation cooperation of the CIS countries, which was approved in October 2011 and in which the main task was formulated - "creation of interstate space, uniting the possibilities of national innovation systems, giving a stable system character to innovation development, contributing to the effective use of scientific and technological developments and inventions" was completed²². During its implementation certain results have been achieved. Among them - the current mechanism of realization of interstate projects was formulated, the normative legal base for successful interaction of participants was created, and the innovation infrastructure is being formed.

As regards the participation of the Republic of Belarus in the implementation of the provisions of the completed program, Belarusian

21 Presidency of the Republic of Belarus in the Commonwealth of Independent States in 2021 [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.by/multilateral/belaruscischairmanship2021/>

22 Interstate program of innovation cooperation of CIS member states for the period up to 2020 [Electronic resource]. - - 2011. - URL: <https://cis.minsk.by/page/19142>

organizations became executors in nine out of ten interstate projects. Among the most significant of them is the development and implementation of a comprehensive information system for aerospace forecast monitoring of natural emergencies, which makes it possible to reduce damage from such situations and the cost of dealing with their consequences by up to 20 per cent through timely measures. Another interesting example in this context is the development of a highly sensitive test system to detect hepatitis E in humans, wild and domestic pigs, rabbits and deer.

The continuation of systematic work in this direction was the decision on the Interstate program of innovative cooperation of CIS member states for the period up to 2030 adopted at the meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of CIS countries in November 2020. This document is "a system of interconnected activities in terms of objectives, resources and timing, which takes into account the accumulated experience. In particular, much attention is paid to attraction of extra-budgetary sources of financing of interstate innovation projects"²³. The main task of the new program is organization of large-scale production of knowledge-intensive competitive goods and perspective developments on the common Eurasian innovation space. One of the innovations, by which the new document differs from the previous one, is that the new program has become more flexible in its implementation. If earlier there was a rigid condition of participation in the innovation project of representatives of at least three countries of the Commonwealth, now "it is possible to start implementation of projects with participation of two CIS member states, and other interested countries can join further"²⁴ .

23 On the results of the meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of the Commonwealth of Independent States [Electronic resource]. -- 2020. - URL: <https://e-cis.info/page/3758/89205/>

24 The program of innovative cooperation of CIS countries became more flexible and adaptive - Shumilin [Electronic resource]. -- 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/programma-innovatsionnogo-sotrudnichestva-stran-sng-stala-bolee-gibkoj-i-adaptivnoj-shumilin-421456-2020/>

The focus of attention on measures to increase the efficiency of innovation activities is dictated by the fact that in the future until 2030 the world economic processes will be characterized by increased uncertainty and instability, even possible radical changes under the influence of geopolitical factors. But the most important trends, which in the nearest decade can really influence the development of world processes, will remain new technologies, innovative solutions in economy, creation of a big number of own hi-tech productions. And in this respect the Commonwealth still has a lot to do to get rid of those obstacles in innovative sphere, which even today the CIS member states continue to face, where "there is still certain inertness, the time factor is not taken into account, the level of strategic planning in spheres of innovative development and international scientific and technical cooperation is low, measures to support small and medium, including youth, scientific and technical and innovative entrepreneurship are not effective enough".²⁵ Successful realization of provisions of the new program would allow to achieve the expected effect in 14 directions at once, including: increase in number of breakthrough technologies, discoveries and perspective developments by providing promotion of research results to the market; formation of potentials to increase the number of companies - world technological leaders in the CIS; expansion of scientific-technical and innovation cooperation as basis for creation of joint competitive products, including to the third countries markets.

²⁵ Interstate program of innovation cooperation of CIS member states for the period up to 2030. -- M., 2020. -- C. 8.

Toward a Common Educational Space

The concept of Belarus' presidency in the Commonwealth of Independent States in 2021 assumes that one of the priorities of the presidency in this international organization will be further strengthening of humanitarian ties and expansion of contacts in the field of education and science. In this case, we are talking about the continuation of work on the development of the legal framework aimed at the formation of a common educational space of the Commonwealth, promotion of "partnership ties between educational organizations of the CIS member states, the implementation of joint educational projects and programs²⁶.

It should be recalled that the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Education between the member states of the Commonwealth was signed in May 1992 in Tashkent. In this document, the parties agreed to support joint scientific research, "to fully facilitate the maintenance and development of direct partnerships in the field of education between the territories and educational institutions of the member states^{27,28} and created the Council for Cooperation in the Field of Education of the CIS Member States. Since then, at the initiative of this coordinating body in the CIS adopted about forty documents. Among them: the decisions on the concepts of development of adult education (2006) and distance learning (2007); agreements on coordination of work in the field of informatization of educational systems (2007), on professional development of teachers of educational organizations (2007), on mutual recognition of documents on higher/higher professional education (2013); Regulations on the Congress of teachers and education workers (2018). In addition, within the

26 Presidency of the Republic of Belarus in the Commonwealth of Independent States in 2021 [Electronic resource]. 2020. - URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.by/multilateral/belaruscischairmanship2021/>

27 Agreement on Cooperation in Education [Electronic resource]. - - 1992. - URL: <https://cis.minsk.by/page/7570>

28 Agreement on Cooperation to Form a Common (Common) Educational Space of the Commonwealth of Independent States [Electronic resource]. - - 1997. - URL: <https://cis.minsk.by/page/7552>

Commonwealth 17 higher educational institutions were given the status of basic organizations in various areas of educational activities, including Belarusian universities: the International State Environmental Institute named after A.D. Sakharov of the Belarusian State University - basic in the CIS in environmental education; the Republican Institute of Professional Education - basic in training, retraining and professional development in vocational and technical and secondary education systems.

Another interesting project in the educational sphere of the Commonwealth is the CIS Network University, which was created in 2009 by a consortium agreement signed by the rectors of 11 leading universities of the Commonwealth in order to train highly qualified personnel and develop a unified educational space in the CIS. Initially it was planned to train personnel in humanitarian and social disciplines. But since 2010, the technical vector begins to develop, and such areas as oil and gas and construction appear. The essence of specialist training here is that "when students of the Commonwealth countries study in a network university they have an opportunity to get an education certificate of two countries and in this way they automatically increase their competitiveness in the labor market"²⁹. Note that from 2010 to 2019, 1,100 master's students studied here. And today 38 universities from nine CIS member states "participate in this project."³⁰The Belarusian State University and the Belarusian National Technical University are among them. In particular, undergraduates of the Belarusian State University are trained in international law in the field of "Management," "Economics," "Philology," "International

29 More than 800 people were trained at the CIS Networking University [Electronic resource]. - - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/bolee-800-chelovek-proshli-obuchenie-v-setevom-universitete-sng-337497-2019/>

30 Information on the activities of the Council for Cooperation in the field of education of the Commonwealth of Independent States to form a common educational space of the CIS [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://e-cis.info/cooperation/3063/79383/>

Relations. And "upon successful passing the state exam and defense of a master's thesis a graduate receives two diplomas: Russian and Belarusian"³¹

In May 2020 during the meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of Government the Agreement on the Establishment and Operation of the CIS Network University was signed, which actually legalized at the governmental level the interuniversity project that existed for more than ten years. In December 2020 the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus ratified this document, which should give a new impetus to the development of educational cooperation in the Commonwealth. The entry into force of this agreement, signed in order to improve the quality of training in higher education institutions, the implementation of priority for the participating countries joint scientific and technical projects, support the learning of languages, culture and traditions of the peoples of the CIS countries, "will create the necessary conditions for the expansion and deepening of contacts between the countries in the humanitarian and educational sphere".³²It will allow to strengthen cooperation and inter-university ties in the sphere of higher education in the Eurasian space. As a result, it will contribute to the realization of the task of creating a common educational space in the CIS.

31 CIS Network University [Electronic resource]. - – 2020. - URL: <https://ums.bsu.by/ru/am/cis-net-university>

32_Deputies ratified the agreement on the establishment and functioning of the CIS Network University [Electronic resource]. - – 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/deputaty-ratifikatsirovali-soglashenie-ob-uchrezhdenii-i-funktsionirovanii-setevogo-universiteta-sng-420406-2020/>

Investment and export drivers of regional development

The five-year development program and the target forecast for the next three years, currently being elaborated 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 the number of residents exceeding 450 business entities at the beginning of autumn 2020. High potential of free economic zones is also confirmed by the fact that "today free economic zones account for almost 17% of the volume of industrial production, 20% of direct foreign investments and almost 20% of export of the country"³³. And there is every reason to believe that in the current difficult conditions of development of the Belarusian economy FEZs can and should become the main investment engine, on the basis of which innovation, production and export potential of the territories in which they are located could develop. The more so because "our neighbors form zones with absolutely different conditions of incentives and functions"³⁴. In Belarus, we should continue to actively develop free economic zones not only in terms of improving legislation, land relations and infrastructure development, but also in terms of ways to increase the inflow of investments and economic efficiency. Moreover, Belarusian FEZs have already gained some experience in dealing with these issues. Suffice it to say that in the first half of 2020 alone, the number of residents in Belarus' free economic zones increased by more than 60 economic entities. And in the first quarter of the same year, foreign investors invested nearly three billion dollars in the real sector of the country's economy. "The main investors in Belarus were

33_More than 60 residents registered in FEZ of Belarus in the first half of the year [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/bolee-60-rezidentov-zaregistrirovano-v-sez-belarusi-v-i-polugodii-405375-2020/>

34_. FEZ should become the main investment engine - Nikitina // [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/sez-dolzhen-stat-osnovnym-investitsionnym-lokomotivom-nikitina-405379-2020/>

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"³⁵ . These facts clearly show that Belarus has a lot of examples of successful solution of the investment problem, contributing to the socio-economic development of the country as a whole.

In particular, high rates of development in 2020 was demonstrated by **FEZ Minsk**, which by the beginning of September had 118 resident companies, 69 of which - with foreign investment, and which in the first half of the year received more than \$ 118 million from abroad. At the same time "foreign direct investment on a net basis in January-June amounted to almost \$ 70 million, which is 76% more compared to the same period last year. The key investors were the Swiss Confederation, the Republic of Cyprus and the People's Republic of China"³⁶.

This influx of investment had a very positive effect on the exports of FEZ residents, which in the first half of 2020 came close to \$560 million. The main part of it consisted of electronic products and components, medical equipment, cable products, metal structures, auto and electric vehicles, railway and streetcar cars, parts and equipment for cars, and electrical equipment for passenger cars. We must assume that the range of export items of the metropolitan free economic zone in the near future will only expand, since a number of significant investment projects are now being implemented 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 passenger cars of locomotive traction, paper packaging, as well as the assembly of structures and products from ferrous and nonferrous metals.

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

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

Each of these projects already makes it possible to open 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. For example, in October, it registered the 14th resident in 2020. (There were 17 in the whole of 2019!). This is the company "BASISPRO-GROUPP", which intends to implement an investment project "for the production of aluminum spacer frames for translucent enclosing structures".³⁷ consumers of which will be not only Belarusian construction companies, but also from neighboring countries. After all, fences made with an aluminum frame are now widely used in the construction of modern buildings. And in November 2020 in the FEZ was registered 15th resident this year - the company MKtrade, which specializes in the manufacture of products from galvanized steel with various types of polymer coatings. Its arrival here is due to the fact that it plans to open a new production facility for the production of fence and roofing elements of cottage-type structures, for which it "intends to expand its own facilities and organize a new workshop at the production facilities in Fanipole"³⁸.

The investment project of InCata to create a science and technology park in the capital's FEZ to provide services to technological start-ups also looks very promising. For its successful implementation, fast-mounted airframe buildings will be built near the village of Privolny, Minsk Region, which "will house a design bureau, a research engineering (R&D) center, and a prototyping center. Offices will be set aside for production consultants, investors and business mentors"³⁹ . It will allow actualizing in FEZ "Minsk" the development of innovative entrepreneurship in such areas of science and technology as

37_A new resident of FEZ "Minsk" will build a plant to produce aluminum products [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyj-rezident-sez-minsk-postroit-zavod-po-proizvodstvu-izdelij-iz-aljuminija-411877-2020/>

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

39_A science and technology park to help startups will be built on the territory of FEZ Minsk [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/nauchno-tehnologicheskij-park-v-pomosch-startupam-postrojat-na-territorii-sez-minsk-411305-2020/>

nanotechnology, microelectronics, aerospace technology, power electronics, robotics, so that due to additional competitive advantages help the residents of this science and technology park to eventually successfully enter the international market.

In terms of investment cooperation, the capital's free economic zone could cooperate with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. In June 2020, it became known about the intention of this international financial institution to allocate a loan of almost 15 million euros "for the construction of the Cherkasy substation to supply electricity to the free economic zone "Minsk"⁴⁰. It is expected that this loan will be attracted in 2020-2022 for a period of 15 years.

As for **FEZ "Brest"**, in 2021, it will be 25 years old. Today it is located on more than ten thousand hectares. Its borders include 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 thousand people are already employed. In 2019, the FEZ attracted \$107 million in investments, and the exports of its residents to 75 countries reached almost \$730 million. These positive trends continued in 2020, in the first quarter of which the FEZ attracted foreign direct investment on a net basis of almost 50 million dollars, four times the target. The dynamics of FEZ development today are such that all 2019 performance indicators in 2020 could be exceeded. The prerequisites for this were serious. So, if in 2018 721 jobs were created due to the opening of new industries by residents in the FEZ, and in 2019 - 890, then in 2020 it was planned to open at least one thousand of them. With such potential for development, five new residents with Polish and German capital are coming here, whose areas of activity are focused on light industry, woodworking, cosmetology, the production of metal products, units and assemblies for the automotive industry.

⁴⁰Belarus wants to attract 14.11 million euros from the EBRD to build a substation for FEZ Minsk [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-hochet-privlechi-ot-ebrr-1411-mln-evro-na-stroitelstvo-podstantsii-dlja-sez-minsk-394602-2020/>

It should be noted that at the end of April 2020, two more land plots with a total area of over one hundred hectares located in Ivatsevichi and Ivatsevichi District and intended for investment projects with foreign capital were included in FEZ Brest. Already in June 2020 there was registered a new resident of the FEZ - LLC "Polipol Mebel Bel", which is part of the well-known in the European market holding Polipol Produktions Verwalfund GmbH, which has been producing upholstered furniture for 30 years. Its ten factories employing over seven thousand people are located not only in Germany but also in other European countries. At the industrial site in Ivatsevichi a new resident intends to build a workshop for the production of upholstered furniture and a number of other related facilities. "The project implementation is designed for six years. The company will invest over €25 mln in the furniture production during this period and create over 1 thousand jobs. And 90% of the production will be exported⁴¹. An important detail: LLC "Polipol Mebel Bel" is already the seventh company in the FEZ with German capital. And in general, entrepreneurs from Germany occupy the first place here by the level of investment, as their share is more than a third in the total investment portfolio of the FEZ.

Other new residents also come here with interesting projects. For example, Savantdrev LLC, an enterprise with Belarusian capital, registered as a FEZ resident in May 2020, plans to invest half a million euro in the organization of production of lumber - boards, beams, various building structures. The production 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

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

production to foreign markets⁴². The full-scale production cycle will start here in 2021. At least 15 jobs will be created at the new enterprise.

In the same May 2020, LLC "Lady-x" was registered in the FEZ, which plans to locate its production facilities on the unused premises of Baranovichi Automated Line Plant. The Belarusian company plans to "invest about 2 million euros in the project for the production of collectible clothing. <...> When it reaches full capacity in 2024, the company will employ 260 people. In addition, the previously registered residents should start activities in the FEZ. In particular, "BTV-Agro" LLC has built the first complex for growing mushrooms for "Bonshe" LLC, which is engaged in the production of mushrooms. Jobs will also be created there. The issue of organizing the production of car wires and campers on the territory of the FEZ is being worked out"⁴³.

The Italian industrial district, the creation of the infrastructure of which is planned to be completed in the near future, should also make its contribution to solving the problems faced by the FEZ. There, in the "Airport" industrial area, a transformer substation with a capacity of 5 MW and a sewage pumping station have already been built. In addition, the street and road network, water supply and storm sewer are laid. In 2021 the object must be put into operation. Since a large part of this territory has already been provided with the necessary engineering infrastructure, including power, gas and water supply, sewerage and telephone lines, "this allowed the business entities of the FEZ to locate 10 enterprises here. Two more are under construction"⁴⁴.

Let us remind you that the idea of creating such a district in the industrial zone "Airport" sounded about ten years ago, when in June 2011 in Trieste the

42_A new resident of FEZ "Brest" will engage in woodworking [Electronic resource]. - – 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/novyj-rezident-sez-brest-zajmetsja-derevoobrabotkoj-392514-2020/>

43_FEZ "Brest" plans to create 1 thousand jobs [Electronic resource]. - – 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/v-sez-brest-planirujut-sozdat-1-tys-rabochih-mest-380116-2020/>

44_FEZ Brest completes the development of the Italian industrial district [Electronic resource]. - – 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/sez-brest-zavershaet-obustrojstvo-italjanskogo-promyshlennogo-okruga-418092-2020/>

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 Belarus⁴⁵. Today not only Italians, but any investor willing to organize and develop his business here can come to the territory of the region, using the advantages of the free economic zone. That is why two companies with investments from Germany are already working here, as well as companies with Israeli, British, Polish and Russian capital. "In 2018, a new production facility of the Italian-Belarusian enterprise Frieza Industry for the production of energy-saving elements for commercial refrigeration equipment was launched at the site "Airport". Today the joint venture has one of the highest export growth rates among FEZ enterprises."⁴⁶ . All these examples, undoubtedly, make us optimistic when assessing the prospects of development of FEZ "Brest".

An interesting example of development is shown by **FEZ "Grodnoinvest"**, whose residents in the first three months of 2020 have attracted a record amount of foreign direct investment on a net basis - \$59.8 million - out of the total amount 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 United States and the United Kingdom⁴⁷. In total, during 18 years of its existence FEZ "Grodnoinvest" has attracted over \$ 900 million of foreign investments from 40 countries including Japan, Cyprus, Turkey, Canada and Poland.

45 Zalesky, B. Belarus - Europe: Potential of Partnership. The policy of multi-vectorism in the context of global challenges / B. Zalesky. - LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2016. - - C. 43.

46 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-italjjanskom-promyshlennom-okruge-380751-2020/>

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

The growing investment attractiveness of this production site, of course, could not appear out of nowhere. It is largely due to the FEZ administration's attention to the development of the free economic zone's infrastructure. The following statistics is quite eloquent: 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, on the industrial site in the "Severny" district, water supply, sewerage, communication, and electricity networks were laid.

In Smorgon, a large-scale project to reconstruct Industrial 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 at the expense of the same FEZ Development Fund. The project is to result in 4-lane automobile road with stop pavilions and small architectural forms, external illumination, electro- and water supply, rain water drainage and external communication systems. All of this is being done for a single purpose: "The new infrastructure will make the site more attractive to potential investors and participants of the Furniture Cluster in the FEZ Grodnoinvest"⁴⁸.

Here it is necessary to explain that today "an effective furniture cluster has been formed in Grodno region, which includes more than 20 enterprises producing wood products packaging, wood boards, furniture and much more"⁴⁹. It should be noted that the share of woodworking in the FEZ accounts for about

48 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/>

49 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/>

half of all investments. So whether we should be surprised by the fact that in 2019 residents of FEZ Grodnoinvest also attracted \$436 million in investments, which amounted to a fourth of the figure for all FEZs in Belarus. And as a result, this one of the youngest Belarusian FEZs became the leader in terms of attracted investments from foreign investors.

In November 2020 there were already 75 companies with capital from 40 countries of the world. At the same time, 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 create a wood processing plant, and the Belarusian-Russian company EUEkoPak with a topical project to create a paper packaging plant. One more company, IBA Investment is implementing a project as a resident of the special tourist and recreational park "Avgustovsky Channel". Particularly interesting in this series is the project of the Irish investor "Skywatt", investments in which exceed five million euros, to create a network of photovoltaic stations to provide residents of the FEZ with green energy. Its implementation will make it possible, among other things, "to establish cooperative ties with international concerns that have requirements for the use of energy from renewable sources"⁵⁰.

In the middle of December 2020 the first stone was laid by HSBelakon LLC, a subsidiary of the Austrian HS Timber Group, which is one of Europe's leading woodworking companies, on the construction site №12 of Grodnoinvest FEZ in the Svisloch region. The construction is planned to be completed in 2022. "The amount of investment will be about \$84 million. It is planned to process up to 500 thousand cubic meters of conifers per year. The main focus

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

51 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/>

will be on zero-waste production and creation of pellets"⁵² . Plus it will provide jobs for about 230 people, which for such an area as the Svisloch, is not unimportant.

The emergence of new residents in the FEZ "Grodnoinvest" is largely dictated by the obvious advantages of this Belarusian region, among which stands out "the availability of both wide and narrow railway gauge. This allows logistics companies to carry out fast and efficient delivery of goods from Asia to Europe and back"⁵³. That is why in the summer of 2020, the administration of the FEZ invited potential investors to participate in the creation of a multimodal logistics center at the Belarusian-Polish border, which could handle ten pairs of trains a day. We are talking about the implementation of infrastructure subprojects here - the construction of a road, access and exhibition railroad tracks, engineering networks. Let's hope that this proposal will resonate with interested business people. Especially since "since 2018, five companies with investments from Belarus, the Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates, and China have become residents of FEZ Grodnoinvest in the field of logistics"⁵⁴.

In 2020, the activities of FEZ residents continued to be characterized by their active investment policy. For 10 months of this year, they have invested in fixed assets almost a hundred and fifty million Belarusian rubles, most of which - over 60 percent - was spent on the purchase of technological machinery and equipment. The trend is especially noticeable at the enterprises located on the industrial sites of the Free Economic Zone in the Smorgon region, where more than 90 million Belarusian rubles have been invested and where companies with foreign capital, such as Kronospan, Szynaka, Sodrugestvo, are successfully

52_An Austrian investor will build a woodworking enterprise in the Svisloch district [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/avstrijskij-investor-postroit-derevoobrabatyvajushee-predpriatie-v-svislochskom-rajone-420771-2020/>

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

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

operating. Recall that the industrial zone FEZ "Grodnoinvest" in Smorgon district was created in 2015. Now it consists of three sectors. "In just a few years, eight new residents with investments from the Netherlands, Poland, Turkey and Cyprus have appeared here. <...> The residents of the FEZ invested \$425 million in the creation of joint production facilities." As a result, today FEZ residents form over 90% of industry in the Smorgon region, where more than two thousand people work, and the export volume is close to \$500 million. As for the residents of FEZ 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 expanding their production facilities⁵⁵.

The active investment policy of residents of FEZ "Grodnoinvest" allows them to successfully address the export of their products as a result. For 10 months of 2020 they supplied 55 countries for almost \$778 million. At the same time, exports to the U.S. alone increased threefold. In addition, "the supply of products of FEZ residents has grown many times in 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 Afghanistan⁵⁶. But Russia, Poland and Ukraine remain the main export destinations. Two-thirds of all deliveries 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 a tool for economic development, the potential of which is just beginning to be truly realized and can bring even greater results for the benefit of the country.

55 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/>

56 Exports by residents of FEZ "Grodnoinvest" to the U.S. in January-September tripled [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/>

The goal of the strategy is to reduce the number of regions lagging behind

In the Program of activities of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for the period until 2025 it is planned to pay great attention to the implementation of the regional development strategy in order to reduce the number of backward districts in the country to 18 by the end of the new five-year plan. For this purpose it is planned to implement investment projects in towns and districts with the population of 80 thousand or more to prepare industrial sites and create infrastructure for the organization of two or three new enterprises, which have no analogues in the country, as well as to "create in each area 1-2 medium-sized industrial enterprises"⁵⁷. The regions lagging behind will receive a certain set of benefits for the creation of new breakthrough industries, while efficiency will be the cornerstone for the launch of a new investment cycle. In other words, "at least one new effectively operating company should appear in each such area"⁵⁸. And it must be said that concrete steps are already being taken in the Belarusian regions for the successful implementation of the outlined plans.

For example, in the first half of 2021 it is planned to complete an investment project for the production of special electronics for large vehicles in the Braslav District of the Vitebsk Region, which is being implemented by the unitary enterprise Zaryad Special Electronics Plant with Russian capital - a developer and manufacturer of electronic and electromechanical products, including electronic, switching units, key switches and automotive lighting equipment for heavy-duty operation, which already has one production facility.

57 Program of activities of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for the period up to 2025 [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <http://www.government.by/upload/docs/file2635c85fcadb1ca5.PDF>

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

Characteristically, the products of the new "company will be predominantly export-oriented and import-substituting. The main focus is on Russia. We have invested over Br503 thousand into this project⁵⁹. An important detail: this investment project with foreign capital is not the only one for Braslav District. In 2020 a new enterprise for the production of prefabricated metal structures appeared here, in which an investor from Latvia invested more than 370 thousand dollars, and its products are already sold not only in the Belarusian market, but also in the neighboring countries.

Another new production facility with an investment of about two million Belarusian rubles in the same Vitebsk region opened at the end of 2020 in the town of Begoml, Dokshitsky District. This JSC "Factory "Vetraz" - a subsidiary of "Mogilevliftmash" - has organized here an electrical assembly shop, which already employs over 80 people and which "will create together with the Italian company new types of products and increase production in 2021 by 150%. It will also contribute to the opening of new production facilities⁶⁰. In particular, in the near future there will be a plastic molding area, for which two machines have already been purchased.

On the eve of 2021, a new production facility was opened in Zhodino in the Minsk Region. The Minsk Automobile Plant organized the assembly of electric vehicles - trolleybuses of various modifications and the latest electric buses, where they intend to annually assemble at least three hundred vehicles, which will be supplied to Belarusian cities, as well as to neighboring and foreign countries. The project is a result of the public-private partnership between the Minsk Automobile Plant and ETON LLC and has already created more than 130 jobs. It is also important that only half a year has passed from the idea to

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

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

creation of assembly lines (assembly of electric transport in Zhodino is carried out on a full cycle, including welding, adjustment and painting works, adjustment of control systems, diagnostics of electronic systems, control and acceptance of production). At the same time, the large-scale prospects of this project are obvious, as "the development of competences in the field of electric transport construction will make it possible to create a full line of passenger transport and allow us to be present in all segments of the market"⁶¹ .

On the eve of 2021 in Grodno region with an investment project to create wood processing production for the production of wood fuel - pellets - as a resident of the free economic zone "Grodnoinvest" the State experimental forestry institution "Smorgon experimental forestry" was registered. The idea of the project is to organize pellet production in Smorgon, involving in the economic turnover of low-quality wood and sawing waste. The entire volume of the product produced here is expected to be exported. The volume of investments in the new production will exceed two and a half million euros, and the production output is planned for the second half of 2021. As a result, "implementation of the project will expand the range of products, increase the scale of production and export volumes, increase profitability and efficiency of production, create additional jobs and increase payments to the budget"⁶²

It is easy to see that all these examples show that the Belarusian regions intend to successfully solve the tasks of socio-economic development set for them in the new five-year period, relying on their existing experience of investment activities, including in cooperation with foreign partners.

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

62_Smorgon Experimental Forestry became a new resident of FEZ "Grodnoinvest" [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/smorgonskij-opytnyj-leshoz-stal-novym-rezidentom-sez-grodnoinvest-422374-2020/>

Participation in exhibitions as a tool to promote high-tech exports

In 2020, the objective of the Republic of Belarus was to maintain the volume of export of high-tech products at the level of \$15 billion both through supplies of existing items and the emergence of new priorities. It should be reminded that last year such products were supplied abroad in such directions as radioelectronics, instrument making, machine building and medications. "The ICT sector makes a significant contribution to exports. The demand for Belarusian intellectual property is also growing⁶³. Participation of Belarusian developers in international exhibitions held last autumn was a very effective tool to promote Belarusian high-tech products in foreign markets.

Thus, in November 2020, the exposition of Belarusian manufacturers Made in Belarus was presented at the international exhibition and forum of telecommunications and information technologies Cairo ICT in the capital of Egypt, which was attended by more than 400 companies from such countries as Russia, China, USA, France, Germany, Italy, UK, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia. The distinguishing feature of the Belarusian exposition was the latest developments of the research organizations of the National Academy of Sciences and higher educational institutions of the Ministry of Education, which had a high export potential. In particular, the Belarusian State University demonstrated in Cairo a number of developments for medical purposes: a set of medical programs in the field of cardiology, mathematical models for surgical practice, computer modeling for creating drugs against coronavirus SARS-CoV. The Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics presented the developments in the field of information protection for the enterprises of the

63_This year Belarus expects to maintain the volume of exports of high-tech products at \$15 billion [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-rasschityvaet-v-otom-godu-sohranit-objem-eksporta-vysokotekhnologichnoj-produktsii-na-urovne-15-421250-2020/>

banking and customs spheres. The Belarusian-Russian University attracted the attention of the exhibition visitors and forum participants with its information and advertising system "Electronic Guide" designed for public transport. As for the United Institute of Informatics Problems of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, it "demonstrated an intellectual micromodule for onboard recognition of surface and object images, as well as the UIIP-OFFICE cluster personal supercomputer designed for complex scientific calculations, modeling, solution of engineering tasks and teaching parallel programming technologies at universities"⁶⁴.

The national exposition of Belarus within the framework of the Third China International Import Fair in the online format was also a good help for the promotion of Belarusian high-tech exports. Suffice it to say that more than one hundred scientific, technological and innovative developments in the field of information and communication technologies, healthcare, biotechnologies, new materials, and agriculture were presented there by the Belarusian side. Among them we should mention more than actual development of the Republican Scientific and Practical Center of Transfusiology and Medical Biotechnology - "anticovalent immunoglobulin for treatment of patients with severe forms of COVID-19 infection, as well as patients with viral encephalitis and meningoencephalitis"⁶⁵. The Belarusian National Technical University showed here a unique acoustic system for the treatment of skin oncological diseases, which has a higher efficiency compared to traditional methods and at the same time allows a quarter reduction of the patient's radiation dose. The National Academy of Sciences demonstrated at the Imports exhibition an office supercomputer, which has small dimensions and at the same time provides complex scientific calculations and processing of large amounts of data, and the

64_Exposition of Belarusian manufacturers Made in Belarus presented at the international exhibition in Cairo [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/ekspozitsija-belorusskih-proizvoditelej-made-in-belarus-predstavlena-na-mezhdunarodnoj-vystavke-v-kaire-417549-2020/>

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

Belarusian State University demonstrated plant protection preparations based on natural components, which can be used in organic farming. Among the innovative developments of Belarusian State Technological University at the China International Import Expo in Shanghai were presented "the technology of applying nickel-diamond coating, self-cleaning antibacterial composite coatings, radioactive glass, thin-numbered sheet glass and flexible glass films for solar batteries".⁶⁶as well as technology for forming imitation decorative coatings on wood, board, facing and composite materials and dental cements and materials for dental purposes.

Finally, a wide range of Belarusian high-tech scientific and technical developments was presented at the international online industrial exhibition TeMEx, which was held under the auspices of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry for three months, starting from mid-October 2020, and which was attended by more than 70 companies from eight countries. The Minsk Automobile Plant demonstrated its absolute novelty - an electric bus. The "Intelligent Quarry" project was demonstrated by the Belarusian Automobile Plant. All these and a number of other facts confirm the conclusion that "the main pivotal factor in the development of the Belarusian industrial complex is the growth of the innovative component of its products".⁶⁷This, in turn, will inevitably contribute to the growth of Belarusian high-tech exports in the near future.

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

67 Kharitonchik: the main factor of the development of the industrial complex of Belarus is the growth of innovative products [Electronic resource]. 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/kharitonchik-glavnym-faktorom-razvitiya-promkompleksa-belarusi-javljaetsja-rost-innovatsionnoj-410940-2020/>

The goal is to innovate

The scientific and innovation vector occupies an important place among the main areas of trustful all-round 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 bilateral interaction. "The first one is in the field of scientific research, where the parties are involved in the implementation of major joint projects. The second one is in the field of innovation activities, where a network of joint innovation centers and research laboratories is being formed and developed. The third one is in education, where specialists, teachers and students undergo mutual education and internships"⁶⁸. The focus on innovations is especially felt today in the development of the Sino-Belarusian industrial park "Great Stone", which allows you to create here competitive production, 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 that confirm 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, on the basis of which large-scale investment projects are now being implemented in Belarus. As for the Fakel project, this zone will be "aimed at creating conditions to attract Chinese and European technologies, implement and test them in the park and further export to Europe and China"⁶⁹. There are plans to build office buildings and premises for scientific research, where "it is

68 Zalesky, B. Vector of partnership - China. Collection of articles / B. Zalesky. - Palmarium Academic Publishing, 2019. -- C. 115-116.

69 On the development of the SINOMACH science and technology cooperation and development zone in the Great Stone Park [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <http://china.mfa.gov.by/ru/embassy/news/cf39e9ad1f75824a.html>

planned to implement four projects of research and development work - in the field of optical technologies, mechanics, electronics and new materials. It is also envisaged the erection of laboratories, office-type co-working spaces, the complex construction of educational institutions and high-tech pilot commercial facilities ⁷⁰. The project will involve not only research institutes and enterprises of Sinomach Corporation, but also enterprises of the Chinese Zhongguancun Technopark and structures of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus.

The 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, one of the largest in the capital and consists of 16 scientific zones. It was here that the first Chinese vacuum cylinder, the first computer, the first commutator, etc. "appeared at one time. In all, more than 5,000 products were developed here, filling a void in the history of Chinese high-tech⁷¹. The research and development bureaus of many multinational corporations are now concentrated here. China has high expectations for this technology park in terms of "implementing the ambitious Made in China 2025 strategy, which will make the country technologically independent and take it to the forefront in many fields. The Chinese authorities will spend about \$300 billion to implement the program⁷². Speaking of this technology park, we can't help but mention the following figure: between January and November 2019, there was a revenue growth of almost 14 percent. In this case, "revenues of the leading high-tech enterprises in the technology park reached 5.43 trillion yuan (about \$779 billion) during this period⁷³

70 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/>

71 Wei, W. Silicon Valley of China / W. Wei // Models, Systems, Networks in Economics, Technology, Nature and Society. - - 2013. - - C. 19.

72 Krasilnikova, Y. Beijing launches a program to attract foreign IT-specialists / Y. Krasilnikova // [Electronic resource]. - - 2018. - URL: https://hightech.fm/2018/02/28/beijing_lures_talant

73 In the first 11 months of 2019, Beijing's Zhongguancun Technopark recorded a 13.8 percent revenue growth [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <http://russian.news.cn/2020->

Returning to innovative affairs at Great Stone, we should note that in May 2020, another landmark event took place here, showing that one of the promising facets of the Sino-Belarusian industrial park's development is digitalization. Here, for the first time, an electric-powered unmanned bus, developed using technology from Singaporean scientists, was tested. "The maximum speed that the prototype can reach is 40 km/hour. <...> range is about 180 km. A full charge will take no more than 4 hours."⁷⁴ . On the territory of "Great Stone" it is planned to work out the technology of operation of the novelty, after which, apparently, 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 line center for the woodworking industry based on Industry 4.0 principles" in Velikiy Kamen⁷⁵. This production, which is based on innovative technology, is expected to be put into operation in 2022.

In addition, in 2020, the Sino-Belarusian industrial park Great Stone, despite the alarming epidemic situation, continued to demonstrate a fairly high rate of development, remaining a landmark project of the Chinese initiative "One Belt, One Road" in Eastern Europe. Suffice it to say that "as of the end of October, there were 66 companies from 14 countries among its residents, and the amount of agreed investments was about \$1.2 billion⁷⁶. This fact also speaks

01/07/c_138685700.htm?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fyandex.by%2Fnews

74 The first unmanned electric bus was tested in the Great Stone [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/pervyj-bespilotnyj-elektrobus-protestirovali-v-velikom-kamne-390612-2020>

75 The new resident of Great Stone will produce products for woodworking [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/novyj-rezident-velikogo-kamnja-budet-vypuskat-produktsiju-dlja-derevoobrabotki-390684-2020>

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

volumes: in the first nine months of 2020, the revenues of the industrial park residents increased almost three and a half times compared to the same period in 2019. "At the same time, the proceeds from the sale of goods, products, works and services outside of Belarus amounted to Br36⁷⁷.8 million (8.7 times growth) . And the number of employees employed in the "Great Stone" came close to one thousand - 970 people. And, apparently, the industrial park is not going to stop there, as evidenced by a number of facts in 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.

So, in September 2020, Eurasian Railway Gateway CJSC was registered as a resident of Great Stone, a company that "will implement an investment project to build a bimodal rail terminal in the park⁷⁸. The list of participants in this project, construction work on which will begin in 2021, is very solid. They are the world's largest intracontinental port Duisburger Hafen AG from Germany, the leading network operator of intermodal transportations in Europe Hupak Intermodal SA from Switzerland, Brest Department of Belarusian Railways RUE, and the resident of the park China Merchants HCBC 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 realization of their logistics capabilities.

Speaking about innovative prospects of the industrial park's development, we should recall that, again in September 2020, the China-Belarus Innovation Center of Industrial Technologies, created by the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, the Academy of Sciences of Guangdong Province, as well as the Foshan Research Institute of Industrial Technologies, became a new resident of

77_Revenue of the residents of the "Great Stone" in January - September increased 3.4 times to Br126.2 million [Electronic resource]. - -- 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/vyruchka-rezidentov-velikogo-kamnja-v-janvare-sentjabre-vyrosla-v-34-raza-do-br1262-mln-416031-2020/>

78_A new resident of Great Stone will build a railway terminal [Electronic resource]. - -- 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/novyj-rezident-velikogo-kamnja-postroit-zhd-terminal-407959-2020/>

Great Stone. The founders of this center 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"⁷⁹. It is assumed that research and development in such areas as new materials, modern industrial technologies, digitalization in production, bio- and eco-technologies started here today will grow into specific technologies and production in two or three years. In addition to being a link of scientific and technological cooperation between institutes of Guangdong Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, the center will provide business consulting and other support services for the selected incubated enterprises, including business plan consulting and training. There are certain hopes for successful development of this structure due to the fact that "a special \$1.5 million Belt and Road Initiative fund is planned to ensure commercialization of research and development results of the industrial technology center."⁸⁰ This fund will be used to support commercialization of selected research projects and incubated enterprises.

Another innovation center - commercialization of scientific and technological achievements - was planned to open in the Great Stone by the end of 2020. It was in this vein that this issue was discussed in September 2020 at a meeting of the Belarusian part of the commission for scientific and technical cooperation of the Belarusian-Chinese intergovernmental cooperation committee, where the implementation of the program of scientific and technical cooperation between Belarus and China for 2019-2020 was considered. This center should become a comprehensive platform for nurturing startups.

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

80 Innovation center in the "Great Stone" plans 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/>

Finally, in November 2020, there was another event that could seriously promote innovation in this special economic zone. We are talking about the agreement signed by the National Intellectual Property Center and the administration of the China-Belarus Industrial Park "Great Stone" on the creation of the Center for Technology and Innovation Support on the territory of the park. This new structure is expected to "make it easier for researchers to find information about existing scientific achievements and intensify scientific work of young scientists and startup organizations"⁸¹. In particular, in this center all employees of park residents will get free access to patent and non-patent databases of the World Intellectual Property Organization. So there are a lot of opportunities for innovation here.

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 Chinese-Belarusian industrial park joined the Innovation Alliance of Special Economic Free Trade Zones, which was created in the autumn of 2020 in Shenzhen, China. The initiative, whose participants also included 47 counties and regions of the People's Republic of China's innovative alliance of free trade zones, intends to "actively respond to global and regional plans, such as the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Belt and Road initiative, the EU investment plan, the Africa 2063 Agenda"⁸². The new alliance, in addition to the Great Stone, includes many other foreign participants, interaction with which in the future may give an interesting result, as each of them is an innovative platform with its own unique creative experience of activity. 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

81 Technology and Innovation Support Center created in the Great Stone [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/tsentr-podderzhki-tehnologij-i-innovatsij-sozdali-v-velikom-kamne-415194-2020/>

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

Hambantota Industrial Park in Sri Lanka, the Ethiopian Eastern 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 this African country. Its project is a universal complex "divided into separate sectors for oil and gas, industrial production, financial and commercial sphere, tourism, recreation and private housing"⁸³. The FTZ has five kilometers of coastline. Half a hundred kilometers from it is the port of Apapa, the largest in West Africa, and the Murtala Mohammad International Airport is 70 kilometers away.

Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone is a foreign economic and trade cooperation area in Cambodia, which was established by Chinese companies together with the Cambodia International Investment and Development Group to promote favorable market conditions, where a large industrial center was built in 2010 in addition to the port. By early 2019, "153 enterprises from China, Europe, America, Southeast Asia and other countries and regions were registered here. Among them are 139 industrial enterprises, mainly engaged in such industries as textile and garment industry, manufacturing of suitcases, bags and other leather goods, machines and mechanisms, electronics, woodworking"⁸⁴. In five years they managed to create more than 22 thousand jobs here.

As for **85Djibouti's international free trade zone** in East 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

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

84 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>

85 Heads of State of five countries participated in the opening ceremony of the International Free Trade Zone in Djibouti [Electronic resource]. - - 2018. - URL: https://ru.cscec.com/xwzx_ru/gsxw_ru/201810/2891561.html

for Djibouti's economic development, helping Djibouti build a financial, shipping and trade center in Northeast Africa. The creators of this FTZ see it as a testing ground for the so-called "Silk Road Station" in order to replicate China's successful experience in developing global enterprises.

To create a transit maritime 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. "In the past, ships hardly ever came to this small fishing town. But that all changed when the Sino-Lankan joint marina revitalization project was launched."⁸⁶ Thousands of new jobs have already been created through the implementation of China's "port-industrial park-city" model, which essentially means that once the port is developed, an industrial park will be established 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 **Eastern Industrial Park of Ethiopia** is another "Chinese foreign trade and economic cooperation zone of national level, it already hosts more than 80 enterprises, most of them Chinese,"⁸⁷ engaged in the pharmaceutical, textile, metallurgical and other industries. Note that this is not the only project implemented by the Chinese side in this African country. "Drawing on the experience of China's economic growth, 15 industrial parks using Chinese technology will be built in Ethiopia in the coming years."⁸⁸ The Chinese are also the only project being implemented in this African country, which, according to Adis Ababa, will allow this country to join the group of middle-income countries in the next ten years.

86 The Port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka implements Sino-Lankan cooperation project [Electronic resource]. - - - 2018. - URL: <https://newsru.cgtm.com/news/3d3d414e6646444d77597a6333566d54/p.html>

87 Ethiopian-Chinese 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

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

The **Thailand-China Industrial Park in Rayong province** was built back in 2005. This 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 center and export base for priority sectors of traditional Chinese industries in Thailand."⁸⁹ 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 American market.

The Suez Canal Economic Zone in Egypt was established in 2015, when the new 72-kilometer-long canal bed was put into operation to attract foreign investment for an international industrial and logistics hub project. It is expected that "with the development of the Suez Canal, the industries and service enterprises housed there will form up to one-third of the country's total economy"⁹⁰. In the spring of 2019, 77 residents were already operating in the Sino-Egyptian part of this seven-square-kilometer zone. In May 2018, an agreement was signed to create a Russian industrial zone in this region. In February 2020, the Belarusian side announced its desire to participate in the creation of the Suez Canal Special Economic Zone.

Undoubtedly, the innovative experience of the development of all these special economic zones of free trade will be very useful for the Chinese-Belarusian Industrial Park "Great Stone", which, in turn, has something to share with its partners in the new alliance.

89 Huali Corporation: Let's create an "industrial Chinese quarter" on the "One Belt, One Road" [Electronic resource]. - - 2017. - URL: http://russian.china.org.cn/exclusive/txt/2017-04/13/content_40612178.htm

90 The President of Egypt issued a decree on the creation of the Suez Canal Special Economic Zone [Electronic resource]. - - 2015. - URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/2181686>

From increasing innovation - to "projects of the future"

The Program of activities of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for the period until 2025 sets a task to reach the level of innovative development of the leading countries in the region of Eastern Europe in five years. For this purpose, it is planned to create new points of growth of the Belarusian economy, including through the implementation of complex "projects of the future" - "new innovative projects in the areas: electrical industry, electric transport, bioindustry, pharmaceuticals, robotics, instrumentation, production of composite materials".⁹¹The project is also based on the development of a line of prototypes of fundamentally new equipment for Belarus and the organization of mass production on their basis.

Note that the solution to this problem must and will be based on certain experience from previous years. All the more so, there is something to build upon. Suffice it to say that over the last five years Belarus has increased production of innovative products by one and a half times, up to almost seven and a half billion dollars. The "share of exports of science-intensive and high-tech products increased from 30% in 2015 to 38% in 2020, the share of innovatively active organizations increased from 19.6% to 26%⁹². In addition, the country has already created a network of 17 technoparks, which cover all Belarusian regions and become the centers of attraction of innovative industries and developments.

The residents of the Chinese-Belarusian Industrial Park "Great Stone", where 68 companies from 14 countries were registered at the end of 2020, have great hopes in this regard. An important detail: 12 residents already belong

⁹¹ Program of activities of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for the period up to 2025. - Minsk, 2020. - - C. 25.

⁹² Belarus has increased the production of innovative products in five years by 1.5 times [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-za-pjat-let-uvelichila-proizvodstvo-innovatsionnoj-produktsii-v-15-raza-415135-2020/>

specifically to the sphere of science, innovation, new, absolutely unique developments. One such business entity is the innovative Chinese-Belarusian enterprise "Aviation Technologies and Complexes," whose products were presented at the Great Stone in December 2020 - unmanned aerial vehicles of multirotor and aircraft type, as well as multipurpose unmanned aerial complexes of hybrid type. It is no secret that the demand for such equipment in the world right now is very high. That is why the manufacturing company has already reached an agreement with the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry "to assist in the active promotion of Belarusian equipment and technologies in the field of remote control in foreign markets"⁹³. Such innovative products, we can be sure, will have no delays in sales in the near and far abroad.

Another promising resident appeared here in December 2020 - the company "Solidpipe System," which will implement a project in the field of new materials related to the production and application of innovative protective coatings on components for equipment used in the mining industry. The point is that "this technology is unique for Belarus and the countries of the Eurasian region. The start of production is scheduled for 2021"⁹⁴

The Sino-Belarusian Center for Cooperation in Science and Technology, which will open here in December 2020, is intended to promote the development of innovative production in the Great Stone Industrial Park, where research laboratories, areas for incubation and acceleration of startups, a testing and small-scale production center, and a hall for demonstration of scientific and technological achievements will be located. It is noteworthy that "among those who will work in the opened center is the Chinese-Belarusian Innovation Center of Industrial Technologies, which was created by the National Academy of

93 In the "Great Stone" presented the company "Aviation Technologies and Complexes" [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/v-velikom-kamne-prezentovali-kompaniju-aviatsionnye-tehnologii-i-kompleksy-421952-2020/>

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

Sciences of Belarus and the Academy of Sciences of Guangdong province (PRC). In the first quarter of 2021, the Spark program will start working here, which will help develop research projects of the two countries⁹⁵⁹⁶

As a whole, in 2021, the priority areas of work at the Great Stone include support for the implementation of resident investment projects, as well as the development of a high-quality development program for the industrial park and a feasibility study for facilities of its second phase, which provides for "further expansion of production sectors to attract investment, active promotion of the creation of a regional research cooperation platform"⁹⁷. To be more specific, during implementation of the second stage of the development of "Great Stone" and development of the area of almost one thousand hectares it is "planned to create a smart city - eco-friendly, with non-standard solutions, the introduction of advanced innovations in the field of telecommunications, information, mobile, pilotless technologies, artificial intelligence, quantum computing"⁹⁸. All these facts indicate that the plans associated with the Great Stone Industrial Park, as an innovative "project of the future," are quite real, specific and feasible, which is especially important in the current difficult conditions for the development of the Belarusian economy.

95 . The Sino-Belarusian center for cooperation in the field of scientific and technological achievements was opened in the "Great Stone" [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/kitajsko-belorusskij-tsentrsotrudnichestva-v-oblasti-nauchno-tehnicheskikh-dostizhenij-otkryt-v-421475-2020/>

96 Construction of the international exhibition center began in the "Great Stone" [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/stroitelstvo-mezhdunarodnogo-vystavochnogo-tsentra-nachalos-v-velikom-kamne-421518-2020/>

97 Yan, G. Will Chinese business continue to invest in Belarus / G. Yan // [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - <https://www.belta.by/interview/view/prodolzhit-li-kitajskij-biznes-investirovat-v-belarus-jan-gan-o-novyh-tsentrakh-prijazhenija-7602/>.

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

Chinese vector of interregional cooperation

In December 2020, the Belarusian region of Grodno and the Chinese province of Hainan signed an agreement on the establishment of twinning relations, which provides for a significant expansion of interaction between the regions in the economic, trade and cultural spheres. This is not the first partner for Grodno Region in the Celestial Empire.

Back in 2007, Grodno residents established twinning relations with Gansu Province. In 2014, "the parties signed a memorandum on cooperation to strengthen economic and trade cooperation and developed the Program of cooperation of the Grodno Region and Gansu Province for 2014-2020, which systematically tried to take into account the most important aspects of the development of bilateral partnership and twinning"⁹⁹ [1, p. 105]. Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno, which has established multifaceted cooperation with 10 Chinese universities, has become an active participant in this interregional cooperation. Today Chinese students study in Grodno "at all levels - from the preparatory department to postgraduate studies. Several joint scientific projects in the field of biochemistry are also being developed. Earlier, a project in the field of mechanical engineering was implemented, now we also count on a project in the field of logistics"¹⁰⁰ [2]. In August 2018, the Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno opened an internship center for Gansu Province employees. In 2019, four investment projects based on Chinese investments were implemented in Grodno. In particular, the former hotel "Grodno" was reconstructed. A Chinese resident registered in the free economic zone "Grodnoinvest," who was planning to implement a logistics project there. In

99 Zalesky, B. Vector of partnership - China. Collection of articles / B. Zalesky. - Palmarium Academic Publishing, 2019. -- C. 105.

100_Yanka Kupala State University develops joint research projects with Chinese universities [Electronic resource]. - -- 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/grgu-im-janki-kupaly-razvivaet-s-kitajskimi-vuzami-sovmestnye-nauchnye-proekty-344391-2019/>

addition, "a center of traditional Chinese medicine and a trade and exhibition center was also opened in Grodno, where goods of the region's partners from China are presented"¹⁰¹ [3].

In 2018, Grodno Region signed a Protocol of Intent to establish friendly relations with Fujian Province. In official terms, "the document outlines important areas of interregional complementary cooperation - trade, investment, logistics, and culture"¹⁰² [4]. It can be added that the rapprochement of the regions was caused by the fact that the Chinese province has a well-developed industrial sector - electronics and mechanical engineering, while the Belarusian region has agriculture. And this is "only one of the areas of complementary cooperation, which can be established in the trade and economic sphere. [5]. In addition, Belarusian flax and wood products are in demand in the Chinese market, and the Chinese side declared its readiness to increase investments in the Hrodna Region in a wide range of areas: from the nuclear power plant to high technology. And now the parties are working on the implementation of the agreements reached.¹⁰³

In short, the People's Republic of China has become a strategic partner for the Belarusian western region, as evidenced by the figures. Grodno Region companies exported more than \$160 million worth of goods to the Chinese market in the first 10 months of 2020. These were mainly food products and oil refinery products. The appearance of new Chinese partners, namely Hainan Province, means the actualization of cooperation for the Grodno side in other areas - in high technology, electrical engineering production, as well as implementation of more global and ambitious projects. These include

101 Four investment projects with Chinese capital are being implemented in the Grodno Region [Electronic resource]. - - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/v-grodnenskoj-oblasti-realizujutsja-4-investproekta-s-kitajskim-kapitalom-344505-2019/>

102 On the establishment of regional ties of the Grodno region with the Chinese province of Fujian [Electronic resource]. - - 2018. - URL: http://shanghai.mfa.gov.by/ru/o_generalnom_consulstv/news/b1e61ad9861a3f9c.html

103 Grodno Region and Fujian Province of the People's Republic of China will actively develop cooperation [Electronic resource]. - - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/grodnenskaja-oblast-i-provintsija-krn-futszjan-budut-aktivnee-razvivat-sotrudnichestvo-313085-2018/>

"construction of a logistics center at Grodno airport and opening of direct flights between Grodno and Hainan province. This will allow, firstly, to more actively develop tourism and interaction in the humanitarian sphere, and secondly, it will contribute to the mutual supply of products"¹⁰⁴ [6]. The logistics center may become a transport hub and a gateway for the promotion of Chinese goods not only to Belarus, but also to the nearest European countries. In addition, it is safe to say that the establishment of twinning arrangements between the Grodno Region and Hainan Province will contribute to the development of cooperation between the cities of the Belarusian and Chinese regions. Thus, agreements between such cities as Lida and Sanya, Ostrovets and Qionghai are already being drafted. The administrative centers of Grodno and Haikou will not be spared from this process.

All these facts once again confirm the correctness of the chosen course in Belarus on the establishment and development of various twinning and partnership relations of Belarusian regions with colleagues from other countries, the experience of implementation of which already shows that this is "an important and effective sector of international cooperation, characterized by openness, mutual trust, tolerance and kindness"¹⁰⁵ [7], with consistent and steadfast development of which partners move to promote mutual investment, expansion of production

104 Grodno region and the Chinese province of Hainan signed an agreement on twinning [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/grodnenskaja-oblast-i-kitajskaja-provintsija-hajnan-podpisali-soglashenie-o-pobratimskih-svjazjah-421086-2020/>

105 Batura, B. Twinning movement - small links of great friendship / B. Batura // [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/interview/view/pobratimskoe-dvizhenie-malenkie-zvenija-bolshoj-druzhyby-7603>

Working group outlines perspectives

In December 2020, the first meeting of the working group on cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and Tomsk Region of the Russian Federation took place. The parties agreed to focus on the expansion of trade turnover, consider opportunities for manufacturing new products, including innovative ones, and open joint ventures of different forms of ownership. The more so because "there are a lot of growth points for the development of cooperation to meet the needs in raw materials, components, finished products and natural resources"¹⁰⁶. In addition, it is planned to strengthen contacts and expand interaction in science, education and culture. This is discussed in the updated plan of joint activities for 2021-2023, which the Tomsk side submitted to the Belarusian partners for approval.

The Republic of Belarus and Tomsk Region signed the Agreement on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical, and Cultural Cooperation in 2016 as part of the plenary session of the Third Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia. In this document, which gave new impetus to the bilateral cooperation between the republic and the region, the parties identified the main priorities of joint work in a very wide range of areas, relying on the already existing experience of interaction. And very soon there were concrete results of the implementation of this agreement.

Thus, "the Agrarian Center of Tomsk Region signed a number of agreements on cooperation with the Scientific and Practical Center of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus on Mechanization of Agriculture, the Grodno State Agrarian University, and the Belarusian State Agrarian Technical

¹⁰⁶ Belarus is ready to cooperate with Tomsk region in economic, humanitarian and scientific spheres - Hudyk [Electronic resource]. - – 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-gotova-k-sotrudnichestvu-s-tomskoj-oblastju-v-ekonomicheskoy-gumanitarnoj-i-nauchnoj-sferah-421752-2020/>

University¹⁰⁷. National Research Tomsk State University, National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University, Tomsk University of Control Systems and Radioelectronics, and Tomsk Scientific Center of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences became participants in joint projects with Belarusian partners related to fundamental and applied research, as well as the development of academic mobility among undergraduates and faculty members.

In particular, within the framework of the Union State Pramen program, scientists from the Tomsk Institute of Atmospheric Optics SB RAS and specialists from the Institute of Physics of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences jointly developed special complexes for monitoring the atmosphere, which allow not only to determine the distance to an object, but also to scan the atmosphere composition on the way. Thus, there is no need for sampling and analysis, because the data appear immediately on the operator's monitor. Another interesting project is the joint work of scientists from the National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University and the Belarusian State University "to develop nanocomposite coatings that are resistant to radiation, which are intended for use in nuclear reactors. The results of the research can be in demand in other areas where operation in extreme situations is expected: for example, in space, in steam turbines of thermal power plants¹⁰⁸

The partnership of this Russian region with the Belarusian manufacturer "Amkodor" is developing very effectively in line with the signed agreement. In June 2016, the Tomsk region approved a medium-term cooperation plan to expand the supply of its equipment. And today this equipment is used in this Russian region in the municipal sector and the timber industry. In particular, in December 2017, Verkhneketsky leskhoz purchased a logging complex, which

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

108 Technologies and Innovations in Cooperation of the Regions of the Union State as an Impulse for the Development of Eurasian Integration: Informational-Integration Project / coauthors, interviewer: B. Zaleski, M. Valkovski, A. Greshnikov. - Minsk: Biznesofset, 2017. - – C. 202.

began to be used in selective and solid sanitary cutting as part of the execution of state tasks. "This is already the third logging complex that Amkodor has supplied to the region's forestries. By the way, it will be easier to service this equipment now, as in the summer of 2017 the company opened its own branded service center in the region."¹⁰⁹ .

All these facts show that the basis for cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and Tomsk Oblast is not bad, but it should be developed, because so far the mutual trade accounts for a small share in the total volume of their foreign economic activity - just over 10 million dollars for 10 months of 2020. The Tomsk party expects to focus on the development of partner relations in such areas as "crop and livestock production, hunting and fishing, industry and consumer market, ecological and rural tourism, additional professional education and advanced training, use of IT systems for state and municipal needs, support for innovative entrepreneurship"¹¹⁰. The Belarusian party sees prospects in supplying a wide range of export goods - buses, trucks, municipal, road construction, logging, agricultural equipment, food, light industry and agro-industrial products. In a word, the potential for partnership is quite solid. And it inspires optimism that the plans for expansion of cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and Tomsk Oblast adopted at the first meeting of the working commission will be successfully implemented.

109 Priority Areas of Regional Cooperation as a Key Factor in Union Building: Informational-Integration Project / coauthored and interviewed by K. Gusev, B. Zalesky. Gusev, B. Zaleskii. - Minsk: Biznesofset, 2018. - - C. 345.

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

New program will expand cooperation

In December 2020, the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) signed a framework cooperation program for five years, aimed at expanding cooperation between the parties, taking into account the priorities of socio-economic development of the Belarusian state. Belarus has been a member of this international organization since 1985. Since then, the Belarusian side, supporting UNIDO's leading role in promoting inclusive and sustainable industrial development of the states of the world, has been consistently "using the export potential and capabilities of the organization to improve the competitiveness and environmental friendliness of its productions, to introduce modern technologies and standards"¹¹¹. It is also important for us that "UNIDO was one of the first international organizations that provided Belarus with technical assistance to minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster"¹¹².

Recall that UNIDO was founded in 1966 to promote and accelerate industrial development in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, as well as to promote international industrial cooperation. The priorities of its activities cover four areas: the achievement of social well-being; the development of economic competitiveness; environmental protection; and the strengthening of knowledge and institutions. Today, the organization, with 170 member countries, "is a leading provider of industrial energy efficiency and renewable energy promotion, and assists developing countries in implementing

111. The program of cooperation between Belarus and UNIDO signed in Vienna [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/programma-sotrudnichestva-belarusi-s-junido-podpisana-v-vene-419594-2020/>

112. UNIDO experts presented the methodology of regional innovation development in Minsk [Electronic resource]. - - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/ekperty-junido-predstavili-v-minske-metodologiju-regionalnogo-innovatsionnogo-razvitija-342956-2019/>

multilateral environmental agreements while pursuing their economic and environmental goals¹¹³

The previous framework cooperation program between Belarus and UNIDO was signed in 2013. It defined the areas of joint work, where among the main areas of cooperation were "highlighted, including resource-efficient and cleaner production, energy efficiency, innovation, investment promotion and technology transfer, development of small and medium enterprises, strengthening of the agro-food and automotive sectors¹¹⁴. And, it must be said, in recent years, Belarus has implemented a number of joint projects with UNIDO, both to modernize enterprises producing components for the automotive sector, and to support food industry enterprises and the processing of crops.

In particular, only the economic effect of the implementation of the international technical assistance project "Institutional development and policy support for the modernization of enterprises-manufacturers of components for the automotive sector in the Republic of Belarus" exceeded 18 million Belarusian rubles. This project was implemented by UNIDO in Belarus in 2015-2019 to improve the competitiveness of enterprises of the automotive sector through the optimization of production processes. As a result: assistance was provided to 44 business entities, including the enterprises of BELAZ Holding, Amkodor, Avtokomponenty, MTZ; a unique UNIDO methodology based on resource-efficient production was developed and adapted to the Belarusian context; over 25 training events were held for managers and specialists of industrial enterprises of Belarus; over 500 specialists were trained in production optimization tools. The main result of this project can be considered the creation of the Production Modernization Center in our country - "the structure, which

113 About UNIDO [Electronic resource]. - – 2020. - URL: www.unido.ru/overview/unido/

114 Belarus is interested in developing cooperation with UNIDO - Myasnikovich [Electronic resource]. - – 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-zainterosovana-v-razvitijsotrudnichestva-s-junido-mjasnikovich-291046-2018/>

will become the center of the concepts of production optimization and transition to Industry 4.0 in Belarus¹¹⁵.

A good example in this context is the implementation by the Belarusian National Center for Resource Efficiency and Cleaner Production together with UNIDO of the technical assistance project "Closed Loop Economy and New Growth Opportunities. Together with UNIDO in Belarus, it is also planned to "establish technical competence centers and demonstration factories"¹¹⁶. The point is that our country is currently creating competence centers where representatives of small and medium-sized businesses could test the implementation of technologies for digital transformation of business processes. This project is being implemented jointly with UNIDO. "Two or three technoparks in the regions are being considered as pilot ones."¹¹⁷ In addition, in 2020 Belarus became a member of a new technical cooperation project with UNIDO, aimed at implementing the potential of the fourth industrial revolution and smart manufacturing at a total cost of one million dollars, the implementation of which in 2021 will be the first practical step of the new framework cooperation program, which was signed in December 2020 in the Austrian capital.

115 Lisatovich, T. The effect of the UNIDO project to support the automotive industry in Belarus exceeded Br18 million / T. Lisatovich // [Electronic resource]. - - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/effekt-ot-realizatsii-proekta-junido-po-podderzhke-predpriyatij-avtoproma-belarusi-prevysil-br18-mln-347529-2019/>

116 Digital transformation projects are planned to be implemented in the areas of pharmacy, instrumentation, and petrochemistry [Electronic resource]. - - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/proekty-tsifrovoj-transformatsii-planirujut-realizovat-v-sferah-farmatsii-priborostroenija-neftehimii-362638-2019/>

117 Competence centers for process automation are planned to open in Belarus on the basis of technology parks [Electronic resource]. - - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/tsentry-kompetentsij-dlja-avtomatizatsii-protsesov-planiruetsja-otkryt-v-belarusi-na-baze-tehnoparkov-362309-2019/>

Prospective e-commerce mechanism on the way to maximum potential realization

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. signed the first stock exchange deal to sell the balance wood to the sum of \$189 thousand. All in all, over the past decade and a half, "3.2 million deals amounting to \$21 billion were made here, and the export volume amounted to \$5.8 billion¹¹⁸. 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 to help foreign companies to enter the Belarusian market.

This fact also speaks for itself. 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 the companies accredited at BUOTB take part in the electronic trading on five commodity positions: 1) metal products; 2) timber products; 3) agricultural products; 4) industrial and consumer goods; 5) prospective exchange goods. At the same time, round timber, ferrous metal products and oilseed meal are especially in demand in the domestic Belarusian market, while in foreign trade transactions 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 and amounted to almost five

118_Deals worth \$21 billion concluded at BUTB over 15 years [Electronic resource]. -- 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/sdelki-na-21-mlrd-zakljucheny-na-butb-za-15-let-393174-2020>

billion Belarusian rubles. It is estimated that from one and a half to three thousand transactions are concluded here daily. In addition, the export of goods through the exchange demonstrates a positive trend. "With the total amount of export transactions of Br1 billion, last year's result was exceeded by 5%. Lumber, wood chips, and agricultural products were the leaders in sales in the foreign market."¹¹⁹ . Interestingly, in October 2020, the BUTB recorded a record amount of export transactions this year - for \$46.5 million, more than half of which came from wood products - lumber 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. One more characteristic detail is that "in October foreign buyers of cement have also notably activated. The sum of transactions with this commodity grew 4.3 times, up to \$2.6 million. Russia was the main market for this commodity"¹²⁰ .

It should be noted that cement is not the only position that attracts Russian business people to the BUTB. In particular, they are very interested in Belarusian dairy products, the export of which through the exchange in the first ten months of 2020 amounted to about thirty million dollars. At the same time, "about 80% of this amount was accounted for by the deals made with companies from Russia. Predominantly milk powder, butter and dry whey were purchased. In the structure of sales prevailed butter, the sales of which amounted to \$14.9 million¹²¹.

These facts indicate quite eloquently the potential of the Russian vector in the activities of the BUTB, where as of December 1, 2020, 2,482 residents from Russia were accredited. And this figure does not seem to be final, since the

119 The turnover of the BUTB 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/>

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

121 About 80% of exports of dairy products through the BUTB account for Russia [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/okolo-80-eksporta-molochnoj-produktsii-chez-butb-prihoditsja-na-rossiju-414442-2020/>

BUTB in 2020 took energetic measures to develop new business contacts in the eastern direction of interaction, which are yielding results. Suffice it to say that since the 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 effect on the dynamics of exchange turnover. In particular, "the supply of rolled steel for the 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 positive dynamics¹²².

The Russian vector is characterized by the following detail: the interest in the BUTB is growing especially fast among business circles of those regions of Russia, which border with Belarus. Smolensk region is an example. Today about four hundred Smolensk companies are accredited to the exchange - more than from any region of Russia. Many of them regularly participate in the bidding for both imports and exports. But, as it turned out during a pilot webinar held in December 2020 by the BUTB together with the Smolensk Export Support Center, even enterprises of this Russian region have not yet fully realized the potential of the exchange mechanism. While "among the promising areas are sales of Russian wood raw materials, grain crops, feed additives, ferrous rolled metal, as well as the purchase of Belarusian meat and dairy products and construction materials. These commodity positions can become the basis for long-term mutually beneficial cooperation¹²³. 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 way. In particular, with the enterprises of

122 BUTB expects to expand cooperation with the Omsk region of Russia [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-rasschityvaet-na-rasshirenie-sotrudnichestva-somskoj-oblastjju-rossii-420606-2020/>.

123 . BUTB counts on the development of cooperation with Smolensk region [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-rasschityvaet-na-razvitiie-sotrudnichestva-somolenskoj-oblastjju-421404-2020>

the Omsk region, for which the exchange can become an effective tool for sales and procurement of materials in the short term.

The fact that in the case of BUTB the distance between the seller and the buyer does not play a decisive role is shown by the experience of the exchange's contacts with Egypt. Also in December 2020, BUTB reached an agreement with the Egyptian company Sama Al-Jazeera for Import and Export on the organization of lumber exports to this North African country through the exchange platform. The intrigue here is that so far "almost all lumber imports to Egypt are organized through intermediaries, and prices are sometimes very high"¹²⁴ . But the use of the exchange platform will allow the Egyptian companies in almost unlimited quantities and without intermediaries to buy wood products directly from manufacturers in Belarus, and Belarusian exporters can enter a very tempting market in Egypt, where the 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 of the BUTB is developing today in a rather diverse and effective way. And this in the conditions of the coronavirus pandemic, which did not affect the economy of most countries of the planet in the best way and which requires all market players to look for new forms of work with business partners in order to succeed in the end.

The BUTB is no exception in this regard. 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 community. It should be noted that 63 companies from Great Britain and 6 from Canada have already been accredited to the

124 It is planned to organize the supply of lumber to Egypt through the BUTB [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/cherez-butb-planirujetsja-organizovat-postavki-pilomaterialov-v-egipet-419296-2020/>

BUTB. The discussion of specificity of exchange trade with forest industry products and key advantages of the Belarusian exchange platform, which was held in the format of a video conference, resulted in the fact that "a number of British and Canadian companies expressed their interest in being accredited to participate in exchange trade with lumber and chips"¹²⁵.

It should be noted that BUTB also uses the format of online seminar to train its prospective business partners. For this purpose in May 2020 they held the first training webinar for specialists of the Uzbek Republican Commodity and Raw Materials Exchange, with which BUTB signed an agreement on strategic cooperation back in September 2018. Thanks to this modern format of interaction, the Uzbek partners were able to get better acquainted not only with the structure and specifics of the Belarusian system of public procurement, but also with the opportunities for foreign suppliers of goods, works and services to participate in procurement procedures. We believe that the information obtained by the Uzbek side will not only contribute to the enhancement of cooperation between Belarus and Uzbekistan in the field of electronic procurement, but also "will serve as a guide to action for Uzbek companies that plan to work in the Belarusian market"¹²⁶.

In this context, the development of cooperation between the Belarusian-Turkish Trade Bank and Chinese partners deserves a separate discussion. In December 2020, a meeting of the Belarusian-Chinese Intergovernmental Committee for Cooperation was held, which noted positive changes in the trade cooperation between the two countries, associated with changes in the structure of Belarusian exports. First, the product range of supplies from Belarus to China is expanding. Second, the dependence of the bilateral trade turnover on the

125_British and Canadian businesses are interested in buying Belarusian lumber on the exchange trades [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/britanskij-i-kanadskij-biznes-zainteresovan-v-zakupke-belorusskih-pilomaterialov-na-birzhevnyh-torgah-391809-2020>

126_Belarus and Uzbekistan develop cooperation in electronic procurement [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-uzbekistan-razvivajut-vzaimodejstvие-v-oblasti-elektronnyh-zakupok-390898-2020/>

export of Belarusian potash fertilizers to Chinese consumers is decreasing. And the main priorities that are planned to intensify joint efforts to expand cooperation are "the inclusion of Belarusian products in the state reserves of China, the creation of joint production facilities in China to process Belarusian raw materials, simplifying trade procedures and eliminating trade barriers and optimizing financial settlements.¹²⁷The BUTB has already accredited 28 Chinese companies as of the beginning of December 2020, 13 of which have been accredited here this year.

Suffice it to say that during the three quarters of 2020 the amount of purchase transactions made by companies from China on the exchange increased more than tenfold(!) and amounted to two million dollars. The commodity structure was dominated by timber billets and edged lumber. We should note that until recently, most of the Belarusian lumber products used to go to the Celestial Empire mainly via the Baltic States, which contributed to its rise in price for the end consumer and reduced the currency earnings of Belarusian exporters. "Thanks to the joint project with Bellesexport and Beltamozhservice, dozens of Belarusian timber companies were able to sell their products to the high-margin Chinese market without intermediaries¹²⁸.

The BUTB believes that this sharp increase in interest in exchange trading on the part of Chinese business is due not only to the favorable price situation, but also to "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 suited them best. In addition, the

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

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

delivery time has been significantly reduced due to the use of rail transport under the Chinese government's One Belt, One Road initiative¹²⁹

After receiving such statistics, the BUTB began to consider the possibility of introducing a separate trading session for the sale of timber products to the Chinese market, in which all the lots put up for these auctions would be adapted to Chinese consumers as much as possible, and the necessary level of competition would be provided by the dense concentration of buyers. Especially since the increased activity of companies from China has become especially visible since October 2020, when they purchased more than one million dollars worth of lumber through the exchange. This was also the result of the simplified accreditation procedure at the BUTB, which now takes no more than three days to execute 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 direction¹³⁰. A year earlier this figure was only about two hundred thousand dollars. Building on this successful experience, BUTB held its first specialized 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 of interaction with Chinese partners, because there is every reason to believe that in the near future the export nomenclature here will noticeably expand, especially due to the products of the agro-industrial complex. After all, "apart from timber products, rapeseed oil, beet pulp, meat, sugar and milk products are among prospective exchange goods demanded in the Chinese market. The number of

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

130 BUTB will hold the first specialized export bidding for the Chinese market on December 15 [Electronic resource]. - – 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-provedet-pervye-spetsializirovannye-eksportnye-torgi-dlja-kitajskogo-rynka-15-dekabrja-420090-2020>

requests from Chinese companies interested in purchasing these products has increased noticeably recently"¹³¹.

In particular, interesting prospects in this "Chinese" context are opening up for rapeseed oil, the export of which through the BUTB as a whole grew three times in value terms in the first eight months of 2020. This can be explained by the fact that rapeseed products are widely used both in the food industry and for the production of biodiesel. Perhaps for this reason, too, the largest buyer of these products at BUTB is Switzerland, with nearly six million dollars in transactions between January and August 2020. "The top three key markets for Belarusian rapeseed oil sales also include Lithuania with \$3.5 million in deals and Estonia with \$3.3 million."¹³² .

As for China, where rapeseed oil is also in high demand, its traditional partner for this import position was Canada. "However, due to the protracted trade conflict, the supply of this product noticeably decreased. The resulting shortage has caused a record price increase. So now China is actively looking for alternative channels of procurement, and Belarus may become one of them¹³³. The Chinese trading company "Shandong Liuqing" decided to take advantage of this situation back in September 2020. It declared its intention to pass the accreditation procedure and to start working at the BUTB. At the same time, the company expressed its readiness to invest in the Belarusian forestry. It is also interested in the development of the Belarusian transport and logistics infrastructure. This is the multipurpose approach, which was initiated by interaction with the BUTB.

131_Chinese companies in October purchased lumber at the BUTB in the amount of more than \$1 million [Electronic resource]. - – 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/kitajskie-kompanii-v-oktjabre-zakupili-pilomaterialy-cherez-butb-na-summu-bolee-1-mln-417473-2020/>

132_Rapeseed oil export through the BUTB has increased 3 times, the largest buyer is Switzerland [Electronic resource]. - – 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/eksport-rapsovogo-masla-cherez-butb-vyros-v-3-raza-krupnejshij-pokupatel-shvejtsarija-406915-2020/>

133_ Belarusian pallet board and rapeseed oil will be exported to China through BUTB [Electronic resource]. - – 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belorussskuju-palletnuju-dosku-i-rapsovoe-maslo-budut-eksportirovat-v-kitaj-cherez-butb-408061-2020/>

Another important trend in the development of the BUTB in 2020 is the growth of exports of metal products by one third at once - up to Br27 million, where the main volume of transactions came from ferrous and nonferrous metals, as well as their scrap and waste. Suffice it to say that "in the first half of the year, companies from Germany, Canada, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Ukraine purchased these products for Br24 million, exceeding the figure for 2019 by 20%"¹³⁴. During the same period, a joint project with the Belarusian Steel Works was actively developed at the BUTB, thanks to which three million Belarusian rubles worth of rebar was sold to the Polish market. In the future the exchange plans to expand the commodity nomenclature of metal products exports at the expense of mastering new perspective markets in order to increase the share of this section in the next five years from five to twenty percent.

In this regard, of great interest are the plans of the BUTB 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 after 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. This is primarily because of favorable pricing conditions and consistently high demand for tinplate steel"¹³⁵. Recall that the white tin is widely used in the manufacture of packaging for food and chemical products. The company plans to produce ultra-thin tinplate starting

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

135 BUTB and Miorsky metal-rolling plant plan to jointly develop exports of white tin plate [Electronic resource]. - - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-i-miorskij-metalloprokatnyj-zavod-planirujut-sovmestno-razvivat-eksport-beloj-zhesti-400676-2020/>

from 0,1 mm. With the help of the BUTB the company hopes not only to find new buyers and in time to establish regular supplies of tinplate to Europe, but also to find partners for raw materials, since the mechanism of exchange trading is effective in both directions - when exporting finished products and when buying raw materials.

All these facts indicate that the development pace of the BUTB 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 own digital platforms in key sectors of the 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"¹³⁶. In this regard, it is safe to say that the first fifteen years of the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange's operation are evidence that the foundation for solving the objectives set here is solid.

136_BUTB should become a driver of e-commerce in the country - Koltovitch [Electronic resource]. - 2020. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/butb-dolzha-stat-drajverom-elektronnoj-torgovli-v-strane-koltovich-401009-2020>

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