

## Aim for sustainable growth

The presidency of the Republic of Belarus in the Commonwealth of Independent States, which aims to implement the long-term elements of the development strategy of this integration association in the post-Soviet space, will come to an end in 2022. The measures taken in 2021 under the auspices of Belarus' presidency, combined with the efforts of the states at the national level, made it possible to ensure the growth of the most important macroeconomic indicators. The achievement of positive dynamics is largely facilitated by the Commonwealth's free trade zone for goods, which provides favorable conditions for the development of the countries' economies. In 2021, thanks to Belarus' chairmanship in this international organization, active work on the draft agreement on free trade in services, which is designed to provide additional opportunities for sustainable economic development in the post-Soviet space, was continued together with other states. The result here should be the signing of the document in May 2022. These facts show that Belarus is seriously committed to the development of cooperation with partners, both in the post-Soviet space and other vectors.



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*Collection of articles*

**Boris Zalesskij**

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## Table of contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table of contents .....   | 1  |
| Commonwealth of Independent States: and free trade in services, .....                             | 2  |
| Belarus - Russia:.....  | 4  |
| Belarus - Russia:.....  | 8  |
| Belarus - Kazakhstan:.....  | 15 |
| Belarus-Tajikistan: Priority of regional cooperation - implementation of specific projects .....  | 19 |
| Belarus - Austria: .....  | 21 |
| Belarus - Asia: .....   | 23 |
| Belarus-China: Regions as a Factor in Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.....                    | 29 |
| Minsk - Changchun: twinning with a view to the future.....  | 35 |
| Belarus-Pakistan: Business Cooperation Council .....  | 36 |
| Belarus and the Republic of South Africa: regions update partnerships.....                        | 38 |
| Belarus - Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries Fund for International Development: ..... | 41 |
| Belarus: the goal is to maintain multi-vector foreign trade.....                                  | 42 |
| Belarus: food export grows, geography of supplies expands.....                                    | 44 |
| Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange: Multi-vector approach is the main priority .....         | 46 |
| Great Stone Industrial Park: On the Way to the Medical Cluster .....                              | 50 |
| Free Economic Zone "Grodnoinvest".....  | 53 |
| Literature .....  | 55 |

## **Commonwealth of Independent States: and free trade in services, and innovation cooperation**

The presidency of the Republic of Belarus in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which is based on the principles of continuity and aims to implement the long-term elements of the development strategy of this integration association in the post-Soviet space in various fields, will end in 2022. The measures taken in 2021 under the auspices of the Belarusian presidency, combined with the efforts of states at the national level, made it possible to ensure the growth of the most important macroeconomic indicators in the CIS in January and August. "Thus, the increase in industrial production was 4.3%, cargo transportation (excluding pipeline transport) - 5.2%, retail trade turnover - 8.5%.<sup>1</sup> The achievement of such positive dynamics is largely due to the CIS free trade zone, which provides favorable conditions for the development of the economies of the CIS countries. In 2021, thanks to the chairmanship of Belarus in the CIS, active work on the draft agreement on free trade in services, which is designed to provide additional opportunities for sustainable economic development in the post-Soviet space, continued together with other states. An important detail here is that "work on the preparation of this agreement has been going on for nine years, since 2012" <sup>2</sup>. The result of this work should be the signing of this document in May 2022. Its particular relevance lies in the fact that trade in services today accounts for about half of the gross product of the CIS countries. The removal of barriers in this matter will allow for an even greater increase in economic cooperation in the post-Soviet space, where stable processes of restoration of integration ties are already being observed. "So, for the first half of this [2021] year, mutual trade has grown by almost 27%, foreign trade turnover by more than a quarter, the volume of gross domestic product in the whole Commonwealth has increased by almost 4.5%, cargo transportation and the production of industrial products are growing."<sup>3</sup>

Another very important document, which was worked on during the year of Belarus' chairmanship of this international organization, The complex plan of measures for 2021-2025 on realization of the Interstate program of innovative cooperation of the CIS states for the period till 2030, which was approved by the Council of Commonwealth Heads of Government in November 2021. Here it is appropriate to recall that at the October (2021) meeting of the Council of CIS Heads of State, a statement was adopted on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Commonwealth, in which, considering trade and economic cooperation to be a key factor in further deepening economic integration and sustainable development of CIS member states, the leaders of these states declared the need "to focus efforts on sustained economic growth through The development of a green economy, digitalization, industrial cooperation, wide application of innovation<sup>4</sup>..." . Recall that the Interstate Program of Innovation Cooperation until 2030 was signed on November 6, 2020. Its peculiarity is that it takes into account the requirements of modern forecasting theory, strategic planning and national programming for the development and implementation of long-term strategic decisions within the framework of interstate cooperation on the regulation and development of the market economy. Another feature of the program is the presence of initiatives that are aimed at ensuring the functioning of a coherent, comprehensive and transparent system of effective and coordinated international innovation, science and technology and industrial cooperation, as well as facilitating access to the program opportunities for a wide range of researchers, engineers and scientists, business structures and other stakeholders. Successful implementation of the provisions of this program "would allow to achieve the expected effect in 14 directions at once, including: increasing the number of breakthrough technologies, discoveries and promising developments by providing promotion of research results in the market; formation of potential to increase the number of companies in the CIS area - world technological leaders; expansion of scientific-technical and innovative cooperation as a basis for creation of joint competitive products, including to the markets of

third countries<sup>5</sup>

As for the approved Comprehensive Plan of measures for 2021-2025, which contains specific activities, initiatives and projects with indication of responsible executors and deadlines, they are structured into five main directions concerning normative-legal, organizational, informational, financial and personnel provision of program implementation. It is expected that successful fulfillment of this plan will allow strengthening the CIS positions in the new architecture of world economic system as well as will create conditions for achieving such results as "development of interstate innovation collaboration, creation of scientific-technical and technological reserves for organization of large-scale production of science-intensive competitive goods and services within the common innovation space of the Commonwealth"<sup>6</sup>. Complementing these provisions, within the framework of this integration association it is also supposed to work out a program of development of industrial complexes until 2025, which will be another step in the development of the CIS.

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## **Belarus - Russia: Forum of Regions as a generator of new ideas**

The Eighth Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia, held in late June - early July 2021, focused on five thematic sections on such topical issues of the Union State development as: 1) Russian-Belarusian cooperation in science and education in the era of "big challenges" and digital technologies; 2) the role of digitalization in the formation of a common scientific and technological space of the Union State; 3) interaction between Belarus and Russia on the implementation of Union programs and scientific and technological projects under international treaties; 4) law and digitalization in the Union State: prospects and directions; 5) young people online: the digital environment of the future. The Forum participants' attention to the topic of interaction of the parties in science, technology and innovation spheres is explained by the fact that large-scale cooperation in these fields is implemented via the Union State programmes, the use of which "allows increasing the integration level of our economies, developing cooperation between enterprises, increasing competitiveness of jointly produced goods" and which today should be aimed not only at supporting individual enterprises and industries, but rather at creating and developing advanced directions of development. The following technologies were mentioned as such at the VIII Forum of the regions of Belarus and Russia: 1) intellectual systems of information analysis; 2) supercomputers, neural networks and artificial intellect; 3) space instrument engineering and technology; 4) new technologies for the analysis of information on the newest economic laser materials; 5) microelectronics; 6) electric transport; 7) multifunctional unmanned systems; 8) nuclear power; 9) information security. Formation of the common scientific and technological space of Belarus and Russia, which provides harmonization of national legislation in science and technology, is necessary to create equal opportunities for Belarusian and Russian scientists to work in the Union State and perform joint research and development in priority areas for both countries, among which were also mentioned at the forum "new materials and chemical procedures, ecology and environmental management, technology of living"<sup>8</sup>

Recall that during the existence of the Union State "more than 60 Union programs have already been implemented in the economy, space, security, agriculture, and 41 billion Russian rubles have been spent for this purpose"<sup>9</sup>. In particular, scientific and technical programs relating to the development of remote sensing of the Earth, the production of fodder and genetic research have been implemented. In 2020, such a landmark scientific and technical program of the Union State as "Autoelectronics" was completed, which provided for the "development of a new generation of electronic components for control and safety systems of special and dual-purpose vehicles. The results of the program are used to create robotic unmanned mine dump trucks BELAZ, which are already operating in the pits of the Siberian Coal Energy Company"<sup>10</sup>.

But today the task is to be even more actively involved in the preparation of proposals for new programs not only to the federal and republican executive authorities, but also to the representatives of the regions of the two countries. It should be noted that "eight scientific and technical programs are currently being implemented in the Union State, and three more are being prepared"<sup>11</sup>. Another six new drafts of program concepts are in a high degree of readiness:

- 1) "Overcoming" - development of modern technologies for detecting and overcoming resistance of microorganisms to drugs;
- 2) "Soyuzbiomembranes are new medical cellular products;
- 3) "Additivity" - creating technologies, materials and equipment for 3D printing;
- 4) "Accelerator-SPR" - development of a complex based on superconducting resonators;
- 5) "Component I" - creation of innovative technologies for the development of the Union State's photonic component base; 6) "Complex-SG" - a new program in the field of space.In

addition, a project is being prepared for implementation to expand the research computer network by connecting leading centers and universities not only in Belarus and Russia, but also in the entire Eurasian Economic Union, which will allow scientific and educational organizations of the participating countries to interact effectively, including through remote access to research infrastructure. And the State Committee for Science and Technology of Belarus, the Association of Clusters and Technoparks of Russia, and the Standing Committee of the Union State are creating an IT platform for a unified register of technoparks of the two countries with the subsequent development of a data storage, systematization, analysis, and graphical visualization system. Recently, the Union State also began preparing a common basic research program and a roadmap for cooperation, which identified goals and priorities such as "capacity building in space research, expansion of nuclear research topics, informatics and robotics, development of quantum research, research to create cutting-edge nanomaterials" <sup>12</sup>. All this, of course, will still give its result. The eighth forum also demonstrated a very extensive potential for further development of interaction between specific regions of the two countries that are part of the Union State. If we talk about the contracts signed during this forum, "in the real sector of the economy it is about \$800 million" <sup>13</sup>. Undoubtedly, such high performance of the Belarusian-Russian partnership is facilitated by the fact that about 80 regions are involved in this interregional cooperation on the part of Russia. "The Republic of Bashkortostan, the Samara Region, the Stavropol Territory, the Kursk Region, the Komi Republic, the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic, and the Nenets Autonomous District are actively developing cooperation" <sup>14</sup>. The Moscow Region can also be mentioned, among whose foreign trade partners Belarus ranks second, yielding only to China. There are already "120 Belarusian companies operating successfully in this Russian region, and representative offices of Belarusian companies supplying food and engineering products have been opened" <sup>15</sup>. In 2020, 23 companies from Moscow Region signed export contracts with Belarusian partners, while in the first half of 2021, there were 28.

The role of Russian partners is also high for the Belarusian metropolitan area. First, for five months of 2021 trade turnover with Russia by enterprises of the Minsk region increased immediately by 30 percent, amounting to more than 2.2 billion dollars. In this case, exports from the Belarusian capital region increased by more than a third, and "the balance of foreign trade was formed positive in the amount of \$624.3 million" <sup>16</sup>. Secondly, the volume of foreign direct investment from Russia in 2021. In the first quarter alone, they amounted to almost 95 million dollars. And judging by the available investment plans of cooperation, this value is far from being the limit. Speaking about the Brest region in this context, we note that it "has concluded and is implementing 26 agreements on cooperation with Russian regions, including the Penza, Astrakhan, Belgorod, Bryansk, Irkutsk regions, Kaliningrad, Kaluga, Kostroma, Lipetsk, Novosibirsk, Pskov, Saratov, Smolensk, Tyumen regions, Stavropol Territory, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Buryatia, Udmurtia, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District" <sup>17</sup>. In addition, there are more than 40 agreements on cooperation between cities and districts of Brest region and Russian municipalities. Probably for this reason, the enterprises of the region in the course of preparation for the VIII Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia concluded commercial contracts worth over 120 million dollars with Russian partners. It should be noted that the share of the Russian market in the total volume of supplies from the Belarusian region exceeds 60 percent. Among the main export commodity items are meat and dairy products, cattle meat, ready-made and canned fish, gas stoves, and children's toys. More than 330 enterprises with Russian capital are registered in Brest region. The most famous of them are JV Brestgazapparat OJSC, Vastega FLLC, ANREX FLLC, Belineco LLC, STiM FLLC, RusBelGaz FLLC, Frost & Co. The Russian vector of interaction remains a key foreign trade direction for the Grodno Region as well, as it accounts for more than half of foreign supplies from here. Grodno Region works with 74 regions of Russia, and has signed agreements on trade, economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation with 27 of them. The Republic of Bashkortostan and Tomsk region joined this list of partners at the VIII Forum

of Regions of Belarus and Russia. Activation of interregional ties in Russia allows the enterprises of Grodno Region to increase the range and expand the geography of supplies, which was greatly facilitated by the forum. "The total amount of contracts of the region's producers, especially in the meat and dairy industries, as well as industrial enterprises, with Russian contractors is 12 billion Russian rubles."<sup>18</sup>

Gomel region also successfully develops the Russian direction of foreign economic relations, the trade turnover of which with Russia for five months of 2021 increased almost by The first five recipients of Gomel Oblast goods are the Moscow Oblast, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Bryansk, Bryansk and Smolensk Oblasts. The top five recipients of goods from Gomel Oblast enterprises include the Moscow Oblast, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Bryansk and Smolensk oblasts. The most popular products are rods and wires of iron and unalloyed steel, dairy products, agricultural machinery and spare parts, synthetic fibers, nonwovens, metalware. An equally important area of cooperation is investment. "In January-March 2021, foreign investments from the Russian Federation amounted to \$154.3 million"<sup>19</sup>. This is largely due to the fact that 361 enterprises with Russian capital are already operating in the Gomel region, 12 of which are residents of the Gomel-Raton free zone. In addition, the Gomel regional executive committee signed 22 bilateral agreements on cooperation with Russian regions. Another 78 similar documents were signed at the level of towns and districts of the Gomel region and their partners in the neighboring country. Among the Russian regions actively developing cooperation with Belarusian partners in 2021, Vladimir Region should be mentioned. In May this year a meeting of the working group on cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and this Russian region was held, at which the parties considered the whole range of trade and economic cooperation - in industry, agriculture, construction, housing and utilities, exhibitions and fairs, as well as at the level of districts and cities. The tone for the discussion was set by the fact that in 2020 the trade turnover between the republic and the region "amounted to \$244 million and decreased by 6.7% compared to 2019"<sup>20</sup>. In this regard, the working group outlined ways to remedy the situation in mutual trade. To this end, new points of growth in the development of partnerships with this region of Russia were identified. This is cooperation in light industry, mechanical engineering, construction, agro-industrial complex. Recall that the Agreement on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical, and Socio-Cultural Cooperation between the parties to the were signed in September 2015 as part of the second Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia, which was held in Sochi. This document contained agreements "to create the necessary organizational, financial, economic, and legal conditions for the operation of joint ventures, development and implementation of joint projects and programs of mutual interest."<sup>21</sup> In December 2017, it was supplemented by an action plan for the implementation of this agreement for 2018-2020, which played a positive role in enhancing interaction between the parties. In particular, it was already noted that "products of Belarusian companies are of great interest to the Vladimir region. Among the imported products are binders for the production of molds and cores, fiberglass and fiberglass products, cheese and cottage cheese, tableware and kitchenware"<sup>22</sup>. At that time 34 enterprises were already operating on the territory of this Russian region, with Belarusian investors being fully or partially represented in their authorized capitals. And the search for new areas of cooperation continued all the time. In May 2018, the Belarusian side offered its partners from the Vladimir Region to implement joint cooperation projects in mechanical engineering, energy, construction of social facilities, and apartment buildings. In particular, they talked about the possible construction of the "Belarusian Quarter" in Vladimir, as well as "the possibility and readiness of Belarusian enterprises to meet the needs of the region in The Belarusian proposal to increase the supply of construction products, materials, equipment and machinery, as well as to participate in the construction and repair of roads in the region, to organize the supply of necessary road construction and utility equipment"<sup>23</sup>. In June 2019 a Belarusian proposal was made to expand the volume of mutual trade to include industrial cooperation in food production, as well as "to supply the region with modern domestic

electric transport"<sup>24</sup> . In the construction sector, Belarusian design and production organizations could participate in the housing programs implemented in the region, based on the principle of integrated development with the construction of social facilities, construction and repair of public roads, the supply of necessary road construction and municipal equipment. In October 2020, when a representative Belarusian delegation visited Vladimir, the parties had a detailed conversation about ways to expand cooperation. Then a number of joint projects in terms of cooperation between industrial enterprises of the republic and the region were outlined. "It is Kovrov Electromechanical Plant and Minsk Motor Plant in terms of manufacturing loaders using the internal combustion engine, which will be produced in Belarus. Now the samples are being tested" <sup>25</sup>. In addition, interesting projects were proposed by and other business entities on both sides. They include the Vladimir company Betal, which produces water tanks, as well as the Minsk Tractor Plant, Mogilevliftmash, and Novy Resource from Kovrov. In December 2020, the Vladimir Investment Congress approved a new action plan - for 2021-2023 - to implement the cooperation agreement aimed at "The project is aimed at expanding direct ties between business entities of both sides," <sup>26</sup> and is aimed at increasing trade turnover between Belarus and the Vladimir region. We must assume that it will reflect the theme of further development and expansion of the movement of twinning of cities and districts of the parties, which already has its own considerable history. Back in 1998, the twinning agreement between the cities of Vladimir and Bobruisk was adopted. For the last time "they have developed mutually beneficial partnership relations in economy and business, science, culture, education, sports ..."<sup>27</sup>. Since 2006, Kovrov and Brest have been twinned. And in 2016 an agreement on cooperation in trade and economic, scientific and technical, humanitarian and cultural spheres was signed between the Vladimir Region Administration and the Gomel Regional Executive Committee. All these facts show that the parties have a good foundation for further movement forward in terms of implementation of the set objectives to increase mutual trade turnover. Another region of Russia to focus on in this context is the Novosibirsk region. In June 2021 The fifth meeting of the Business Cooperation Council of the Republic of Belarus and the Novosibirsk Region was held on the fifth day of the year, where the results of the Program of measures for the development of interaction between the parties for 2019-2021 were reviewed. It should be recalled that the Agreement on trade and economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation was signed by the government of the republic and the administration of the region back in 1998. In 2020, the trade turnover between the parties exceeded 150 million dollars. This allowed the Novosibirsk region to become the third in terms of bilateral trade with Belarus among the subjects of the Siberian Federal District after the Krasnoyarsk and Altai territories. The wide range of trade and economic interaction between the parties is evidenced by Belarusian supplies to this Russian region, the basis of which are tractors and tractor trucks, trucks, spare parts for cars and tractors, trailers and semi-trailers, ferrous metal structures, aluminum bars and profiles, furniture, TV sets, monitors and projectors, meat, cheese and cottage cheese, sugar, fresh and canned fruit vegetables, hosiery, footwear. It is also important that more than 40 enterprises with the participation of Belarusian legal entities and individuals are registered today in Novosibirsk region. In general, the region cooperates with the Belarusian side not only within the framework of the above-mentioned agreement of 1998, but also within a number of others - with the Mogilev, Grodno and Brest regions, which gives its specific benefits in industry, agriculture and transport. In particular, cooperation between the parties in the transport sector has recently intensified. For example, in 2020 Novosibirsk purchased from its Belarusian partners "15 gas-engine buses of large class, this year [2021] plans to buy more.50 city-type buses, 20 trolleybuses with large autonomous running and 10 low-floor streetcars. It was also decided in principle to purchase a large batch of 150 buses under leasing programs"<sup>28</sup>.

But perhaps even more promising is the intention of the parties to develop cooperation in science, technology, innovation, and education. An interesting fact: during more than 20 years

of the cooperation agreement between Belarusian and Novosibirsk universities 28 direct agreements on the development of partnerships were signed, within which scientific projects are implemented, experience is exchanged and joint activities are carried out. Another 11 contracts and agreements were signed during the fifth session of the Business Cooperation Council. Thus, "the development of a joint program between the Department of Digital Economy of the Belarusian State Economic University and the Faculty of Information Technology of Novosibirsk State University seems promising. The Science and Technology Park of BNTU "Polytechnic" is ready for further cooperation with the Novosibirsk colleagues in implementation of the Belarusian-Russian project for the production of medical products for cardiac surgery<sup>29</sup>. The Belarusian party also suggested continuing the practice of exchanging undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students and inviting leading scientists as part of the "Visiting Professor" program. A number of Belarusian universities are included in the implementation of the project "University 3.0" - the trinity of science, education and technological innovations, the platform for the implementation of which are technology parks, interdisciplinary laboratories, technology transfer centers. Among the active participants of the Belarusian-Russian cooperation in education is Novosibirsk State Technical University (NSTU), which develops partnerships with Belarusian universities based on the Agreement on cooperation in science, technology, culture, sports, student and academic mobility NSTU for 2016-2021, which was signed with the Belarusian State University, for 2017-2022 - with the Belarusian-Russian University, agreements on cooperation for 2018-2023 - with the Brest State University, with the Belarusian-Russian University for 2018-2023 - with the Russian University. Another promising project in this regard is the International Russian-Belarusian Center for Interregional Cooperation in Education, Science, and Culture, which was founded by Novosibirsk State Technical University, the Belarusian-Russian University, the Novosibirsk Center of Belarusian Culture, and the social and cultural public association "Heritage". "Among the main objectives of the center - the establishment and development of effective mutually beneficial partnerships between scientific, educational, social, cultural, youth and sports organizations of the Mogilev and Novosibirsk regions, the organization of participation in international scientific, educational, sports, cultural and public events held on the basis of the founders of the center, the familiarization of citizens of Belarus and Russia with the history, culture and traditions of the peoples, their achievements in the economy and science, culture and sports"<sup>30</sup>. In 2020 it helped to organize an interethnic cultural online dialogue "Russia and Belarus - 2020", which became an important educational and cultural platform to support and strengthen the Union State. At the meeting of the Business Cooperation Council the task was set to intensify the work of the center to promote the ideas of the Union State, patriotic education, involvement of young people in the development of civic initiatives aimed at supporting and strengthening the statehood. All these facts show that the reserves of interaction between the regions of the two countries are truly enormous. And there is good reason to believe that they will definitely be used in the very near future.

**Belarus - Russia:**  
**direct regional partnerships as a factor to strengthen economic cooperation**

In September 2021 the Council of Ministers of the Union State of Belarus and Russia approved the guidelines for the implementation of the provisions of the Treaty on the Union State for 2021-2023 and 28 Union Programs to implement major tasks to strengthen the Belarusian-Russian integration. At that the parties especially noted that "the direct partnership ties between the regions are becoming an increasingly important factor in strengthening of mutual trust and economic cooperation."<sup>31</sup> This is confirmed by the concrete practice of Belarus-Russia interregional cooperation in 2021, which is implemented in a variety of formats. Let us consider some of them. One of the important trade and economic partners of the Republic of Belarus in the Central Federal District of the Russian Federation is the **Voronezh region**. The parties signed an agreement on trade and economic, scientific and technical, humanitarian and cultural cooperation within the framework of the V Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia, held in October 2018. The trade turnover between them in the first half of 2021 increased by almost 15 percent and amounted to nearly 160 million dollars with the share of supplies from Belarus in the amount of almost 102 million dollars. "The basis of Belarusian exports consisted of steel structures made of ferrous metals and other metal products; parts and accessories for automobiles and tractors; cheese and cottage cheese; frozen beef; soybean oil products; butter."<sup>32</sup> In addition, in addition to trade in goods, other areas of cooperation are actively developing here, in particular construction services. The fact is that the Voronezh region, along with the Kaluga, Pskov, and Leningrad regions, is among those Russian regions where "the scheme for the construction of social facilities, which is acceptable to both Belarusian builders and customers, has been worked out"<sup>33</sup>. Back in February 2021 a delegation of the Belarusian Ministry of Architecture and Construction visited the region and discussed with the Voronezh partners the possibilities of "implementation of a joint pilot project in the urban village Strelitsa of Semiluki district to build a school for 520 pupils, participation of Belarusian companies BelenginiringstroyInvest LLC and Stroitelny Trest OJSC".No.12" in the construction of pre-school and general educational institutions in the Semiluki district, as well as the prospects for the use of Belarusian prefabricated houses in the implementation of the regional program for the development of housing construction in the Voronezh region."<sup>34</sup> And on the eve of the new school year - at the end of August 2021 - a secondary school was opened in Strelitsa, which became a pilot project for the development of cooperation in the construction sphere between Belarus and Voronezh region on the investment and construction principle - with the export credit. The construction of the school was carried out by the Development Bank of the Republic of Belarus, as well as by such Belarusian manufacturers of building materials and equipment as "Mogilevliftmash", "Gomelstroymaterialy", "Keramin". The general contractor for the construction of this school in a fairly short time - less than a year - was Mogilev Construction Trust #12, which has already earned a good image outside of Belarus. In the Voronezh region "even at the stage of construction the customers are more than satisfied with the quality and progress of work and invite Mogilev residents to participate in the tender for the construction of several more facilities"<sup>35</sup>. The experience gained in Strelitsa using the investment-construction principle of works has shown that it is beneficial to all participants in the project. The Russian side has received stable financing and a two-year deferral of payments, as well as high quality of work at an acceptable cost. The Belarusian side sees its benefit in the fact that the loan is tied to a number of conditions - from the obligatory participation of Belarusian companies in the construction, receiving their profits, to the delivery of construction materials and equipment from Belarus. An important detail: a similar scheme will now be applied to the construction of other social facilities with Belarusian participation in Voronezh Region. One of such new facilities will be a mega-school in



Voronezh for 2,560 places. In August 2021 StroyEngineering LLC, established with the participation of the Belarusian side, received the right to build it. This facility is a building with a variable number of floors and two to four stories, the construction of which is estimated at three and a half. The megashop will be one of the largest educational institutions in Russia. "The megashop will have 110 classes, studying in one shift, taught by 220 teachers. <...> The project envisages isolated learning units, a barrier-free environment, conditions for the development of children's creative potential and sports activities"<sup>36</sup>. In addition, it is assumed that the Belarusian specialists will reconstruct the region's main sports ground. The reconstruction of the Fakel soccer stadium is estimated at 812 million Russian rubles.<sup>37</sup> Another school and a kindergarten are planned to be built with the Belarusian participation in the village of Semiluki. It should be noted that Belarus and the Voronezh Region have a number of other areas for cooperation: supplies of machinery, food, waste recycling, and industrial cooperation. In particular, the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange "plan to provide a single sales and procurement channel for agricultural producers, since it is the products of the agro-industrial complex that have all chances to become a driver of exchange trade with this Russian region."<sup>38</sup> This can be explained by the fact that oilseed meal, fodder supplements, cereals and grains are traditionally in demand in the Belarusian market, and Voronezh Region is known to be one of the leaders in this segment. In 2022 the Republic of Belarus and Voronezh region "plans, based on bilateral projects, to increase the volume of trade turnover by 7-9% by the level of 2021"<sup>39</sup>. The concrete plans outlined show that the parties have everything they need to solve this problem. In the North Caucasian Federal District (NCFD) of the Russian Federation the interaction between the Republic of Belarus and **the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic (KBR)** is developing in an interesting way. In October 2021, a meeting of a joint working group on interaction between the parties was held, at which an action plan was signed to implement the Agreement on cooperation in trade and economic, scientific and technical and socio-cultural spheres, adopted at the VII Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia, which was held in September 2020. It will be recalled that at the end of 2020 the trade turnover between the parties decreased by more than a quarter and amounted to \$8.6 million. At the same time, "the balance is positive for the Republic of Belarus - "plus" 3.1 million dollars."<sup>40</sup> As a matter of fact, these trends determined the desire of both sides to return interaction in the economic sphere to the growth trajectory. The more so because "Belarus and Kabardino-Balkaria are united not only by longstanding traditions of friendship and mutual assistance, but also by multilateral economic partnership".<sup>41</sup> which the two sides are determined to further develop. This trend is characteristic of the whole North Caucasian Federal District, one of the key factors of its development being its integration into the Eurasian economic space. "At the same time. The Republic of Belarus can be one of the effective partners of the subjects of the North Caucasus Federal District"<sup>42</sup>. As for the partnership between Belarus and the CBD, it is based on various economic ties of specific enterprises on both sides. Thus, the products of the diamond tools manufacturer JSC "Terekalmaz" are well known both at Minsk plants - tractor, automobile and motor works, and at Baranovichy Auto Aggregate Plant, Borisov Auto Aggregate Plant, as well as at the enterprises "Avtogydrousilitel", "Belcard", "Machine-Tool Plant Krasny Borets", "Belgran", "Belgeo". The Belarusian market was actively developed by Kavkazkabel and Nalchik Plant of High-Voltage Equipment. Another interesting example in this regard: "Prokhladnensky plant of semiconductor devices" OJSC (production of integrated voltage regulators) has been a partner of "Integral" OJSC for more than 20 years, buying transistor and microchip crystals"<sup>43</sup>. In order to actively develop partnerships in the agricultural sector back in 2014, the first international "Prokhladny Fair" was held in the territory of the urban district of Prokhladny, which included an exhibition of Belarusian agricultural equipment for crop, horticultural and livestock production and organized a demonstration of energy-saturated machines of the Minsk Tractor Plant. Since then, activities for the cultivation of original seeds zoned in Belarus have also been implemented hybrids of different ripeness groups, which will allow

"to supply up to 15 thousand tons of corn seeds to the Belarusian market"<sup>44</sup>. Among the Belarusian regions that plan to intensify their cooperation with the KBR is Brest region, which is "working on the successful development of business initiatives, implementation of projects aimed at producing competitive products, introduction of innovations, expansion of sales markets, as well as the creation of joint ventures"<sup>45</sup>. To effectively develop partnerships with this Russian region, the Brest branch of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry signed a cooperation agreement with the union "Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic" in April 2018. This structure is one of the centers of business activity in the Russian region, "created to support and assist businessmen and to develop business contacts both in the Republic, and with other regions, as well as with the countries of the CIS and far-abroad countries"<sup>46</sup>. We must assume that with the appearance of the action plan, the results will not be long in coming. An important area of partnership with the Kabardino-Balkaria is social and cultural. After all, it is in this Russian region that the only Belarusian center in the North Caucasus Federal District - the Kabardino-Balkarian public movement "For Unity - "Syabry" - operates, which annually holds a number of events to strengthen cultural ties between the parties. For example, in February 2021 this center organized in The Kabardino-Balkaria Cultural Foundation held a meeting "Syabry Gathers Friends" with the participation of other national-cultural centers, at which the following speeches were given "the young winners of the International Youth Festival-competition of poetry and poetic translations "Shores of Friendship", there were paintings and works of arts and crafts, there were heard poems and songs"<sup>47</sup>. Speaking of other priorities in the socio-cultural sphere, we should also remember such an interesting format as the annual international summer school at the local state university "The Roots of Friendship of Our Peoples - in Our History" with the participation of students, graduate students and young scientists from Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan. In August 2019, as part of the fourth such summer school, the master class "Patriotic education of youth through the prism of projects of the Union State of Belarus and Russia", which "was held by Tatiana Senkevich, PhD, dean of the Faculty of Philology of A.S. Pushkin Brest University, and Alla Senkevich, Deputy Head of the Educational Work of the Main Department of Education of Brest Regional Executive Committee" <sup>48</sup>aroused special interest in the students. All these facts show that the necessary prerequisites for successful cooperation are in place. There are various opportunities for cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the regions of the Far Eastern Federal District. This is evidenced by the fact that in the first decade of October 2021 in Vladivostok for the first time Days of the Republic of Belarus in **Primorsky Krai**" took place, the participants of which from the Belarusian side were 160 representatives of various spheres of activity - trade and economic, investment, cultural. The most important events within the framework of these days were: 1) meeting of the working group on cooperation of the Republic of Belarus with Primorsky Krai; 2) Fair-sale of Belarusian goods and equipment exhibition with the participation of 18 largest Belarusian enterprises; 3) Business forum of Belarusian and seaside business circles to expand cooperation with existing partners and search for new ones. A good background for all these events was the fact that in 2021 the export of Belarusian enterprises to this Russian region has already grown by 43 percent and amounted to \$13 million. However, judging by how keenly and concretely the working group discussed in Vladivostok the prospects of further interaction between the parties, this value is only a starting point in terms of the implementation of new joint projects. Let us name some of them. In particular, a full-fledged exhibition and service center for the sales and maintenance of Belarusian equipment is planned to be established in Primorskiy Krai, which will allow not only selling machinery, but also its maintenance and on-site presentation to a wide range of consumers in Primorskiy Krai. In the field of industry the implementation of the project to promote the products of JSC "Mogilevliftmash" is expected. "It concerns both elevators and elevator equipment, as well as rotary and carousel-type parking lots - a new direction mastered by the enterprise." <sup>49</sup>. In the field of agriculture the promotion, testing and



implementation in of Belarusian potato varieties in Primorsky Krai, expert support and scientific support in the cultivation of orchards, as well as the conversion of agricultural machinery to caterpillar drive. As for the exhibition of products of Belarusian enterprises, the main square of Vladivostok displayed municipal, agricultural and construction machinery of machine-building plants of Belarus. Another number of enterprises - holding "Babushkina krynka", Kobrin butter and cheese plant, company "Domochay", JSC "Krasny Pischevik", JSC "Kommunarka", Brest, Bobruisk, Mogilev and Pinsk meat processing plants - presented Belarusian confectionery, dairy and meat products, which are well known here and traditionally in high demand. Suffice it to say that in 2020 "Belarusian food products worth \$2.1 million were supplied to Primorye. Compared with 2019, this was an increase of 63%. This year, only at the end of 8 months, supplies increased by 34%, already traded for \$2 million"<sup>50</sup>. The business forum held as part of the "Days of the Republic of Belarus in Primorsky Krai" demonstrated a high interest of local retail chains in increasing supplies of Belarusian food products. Negotiations held by representatives of business circles to increase the range of products supplied allow us to really expect a multiple increase in their volume in the near future. The Belarusian holding AMKODOR, which includes 30 legal entities, should be mentioned among those companies that worked very successfully in Vladivostok, including 21 plants in Belarus, Russia, Uzbekistan, and Lithuania. Specifically, "A contract was signed for the supply of another 15 units of the holding's machines to one of the economic organizations. In addition, another dealer contract was signed, the needs of Primorsky Krai in special machines "AMKODOR" for 2022 and the volume of their supplies were specified"<sup>51</sup>. It is interesting that a few weeks later - at the end of October 2021 - in Vladivostok there was also a presentation of a wide range of the same "AMKODOR" machines, which allows "to realize complex supplying of the forestry sphere, which in its turn increases productivity and efficiency of the consumer purchased machinery at each stage of the production process"<sup>52</sup>. Apparently, new contracts are not far off. The fact that Primorsky Krai is seriously interested in Belarusian machinery is also confirmed by the fact that JSC "Managing Company of Bobruiskagromash Holding" signed a dealer agreement with "Utes" LLC with the right to sell machines for application of pulverized chemical meliorants in Primorsky Krai. An important detail: "For 22 years LLC "Utes" has been a developer of the "Gora Glubinnaya" quarry and has proved to be a reliable producer of mineral fertilizers: limestone dolomite flour, limestone grit and mineral powder for asphalt and concrete plants"<sup>53</sup>. Now this Russian company uses as the main machines for applying mineral fertilizers The company's machines have a good prospect in the seaside market. So there are good prospects for Bobruiskagromash machines in the seaside market. We remind that the VIII Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia held in the summer of 2021 demonstrated "extensive potential in terms of further development of cooperation between specific regions of the two countries, members of the Union State".<sup>54</sup> This potential should be used to the fullest extent in the near future. This is exactly the approach we see today in the example of cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and Primorsky Krai. A very effective tool for the development of Belarusian-Russian interregional relations is also the twin-cities movement. In October 2021 the Belarusian city of Zhodino hosted their 10th meeting, which was attended by representatives of 52 cities of the two countries - Moscow, Kaluga, Grozny, Novorossiysk, Zaslavl, Mogilev, Vileika, Kolomna, Smolensk and many others. Recall that the previous nine meetings were held since 1998 in Gomel, Mytishchi, Vitebsk, Bryansk, Novopolotsk, Smolensk, Minsk, Podolsk and Mogilev. And almost all of them "became an eloquent illustration to the conclusion that the Belarusian-Russian town twinning creates a unique environment for productive trade and economic interaction, as well as for the spiritual component of the brotherhood of the two peoples and the development of public diplomacy"<sup>55</sup>. In particular, the 9th meeting, held in March 2017 in Mogilev, brought together representatives of 24 Belarusian and 35 Russian cities, including Moscow, Vologda, Tula, Smolensk, Volgograd, Penza, Pskov, and Vyazma. The topic of the meeting in Zhodzina was

"Twinning as an important potential for strengthening the Union State of Belarus and Russia and the unity of peoples. The Belarusian public organization "Twin Cities" (BOPG) suggested such specific areas for discussion as the economy and business, promotion of mutual investment, expansion of industrial cooperation, "interaction in the social sphere, infrastructure development, as well as cultural, educational cooperation and twinning as a platform for improving work with youth"<sup>56</sup>. Note that at the end of 2020, the BOPG consisted of 36 cities that have established twinning and partnership ties with more than 450 cities in 38 countries, with Russia being the clear leader. Belarus assumes that such bilateral meetings of the twin cities are important for the development of the twinning movement as a whole, as they represent new opportunities for expanding cooperation in the implementation of investment, trade and economic relations, cultural and educational programs. After all, "twin cities are an important and effective sector of international cooperation, the peculiarity of which is openness, mutual trust, tolerance and kind-heartedness"<sup>57</sup>. In the Union State these relations are even more pronounced and should be used within the framework of the Union integration as an effective tool of local authorities for the development of constructive dialogue and the implementation of various cooperation projects. The main goal of interaction between the cities in this regard is "the comprehensive development of the urban environment, infrastructure, social sphere, culture, education, sports, leisure and recreation in order to improve the welfare of the population, strengthen tolerance, deepening of business cooperation"<sup>58</sup>. One of the concrete results of this twinning meeting in Zhodino was the signing of a cooperation agreement between the cities of Grodno and Ukhta from the **Republic of Komi**. The first agreement on the establishment and development of trade and economic, scientific, technical and cultural relations between them was adopted in September 2017 during the International Investment Forum "Grodno Region at the Crossroads. The new document implies, first of all, trade and industrial cooperation. The fact is that today Grodno has many twins and partners in Russia. Among them are Dzerzhinsk (2005), Khimki (2005) and Moscow's Shchukino municipality (2005), Vologda (2007), Cheboksary (2009), the Tuapse region of Krasnodar Krai (2012), and Tambov (2015). As we can see, few of them are located in the northern part of the neighboring country. Thanks to the new contract, supplies from Grodno are expected to intensify, not only of meat and dairy products, but also other products. "Among the enterprises whose products may soon appear in large quantities in the Russian city [Ukhta], OJSC "Molochny Mir", OJSC "Grodno Meat Factory", JLLC "Quinfud", JLLC "Conte Spa"<sup>59</sup>. Activation of partnership between Grodno and Ukhta is an interesting form of deepening of cooperation between Grodno region and the Republic of Komi on the municipal level. The fact is that back in April 2021 the Grodno Oblast Executive Committee noted that this Russian region is interested in cooperating in wood processing and furniture production. "For this purpose it is planned to establish relations with the business community of Grodno region. The Russian side is ready to adopt the experience of Grodno residents in this area. It is also possible to establish a joint venture to produce furniture"<sup>60</sup>. In September 2021 the Belarusian and Russian regions held the second meeting of the working group on cooperation in which they discussed specific areas of work. The partners from Komi are going to adopt the experience of Grodno region in agricultural business from design and construction of agricultural facilities to implementation of technologies for processing of raw materials; they also assume cooperation in construction. "Great potential lies in cooperation in education, culture, tourism and sports."<sup>61</sup> It goes without saying that Grodno and Ukhta are planning to make their considerable contribution to the development of all these business ties between the Republic and the region, which will fully correspond to the content of the agreement signed during the 10th meeting of the twin-cities in Zhodino. Another driver of interaction with Russian regions in 2021 is the activities of the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange (BUCE). Suffice it to say that from January to August 2021 the commodity turnover between Belarus and Russia increased by half and reached 375 million dollars. This is the highest figure among 68 countries represented on the BUCE. It is also

confirmed by the fact that more than a half of all foreign exchange clients - over 2,600 - are Russian non-resident companies. At the same time, "the largest volume of transactions falls on representatives of the Leningrad, Moscow and Smolensk regions."<sup>62</sup> In many respects all these positive tendencies are explained by the fact that "today there are no obstacles for the use of technological and intellectual potential of commodity exchanges as a tool of implementation of integration programs of the Union State"<sup>63</sup>. Russian partners are also attracted by the possibility to use the BUTB as a kind of a springboard to enter the markets of third countries. "For eight months of 2021 the sum of transit transactions made by the traders from the Russian Federation was \$5.5 million. These were mainly supplies of woodworking products, petrochemicals, construction industry, as well as equipment and machinery" <sup>64</sup>. All this was successfully sold through the BUTB to Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Estonia. In particular, about 30 companies from Smolensk, Moscow, Leningrad and Bryansk regions used this mechanism. And, judging by all appearances, already in the near future, these areas of Belarusian-Russian exchange cooperation will get new impulses for development in other regions of Russia as well. Thus, there is a great interest in interaction with the BUTB in the **Samara region**, which is one of the leaders in terms of exports of agricultural products in the Volga Federal District. In November 2021 30 production and trade enterprises of the region expressed their readiness to use the potential of the BUTB to expand the volume and geography of their exports, including "sales of agricultural products of the Samara region to the European Union countries. In particular, the BUTB has already formed a pool of regular buyers of vegetable oils from the Baltic States, Poland and Switzerland who could purchase Samara sunflower oil in the framework of transit deals"<sup>65</sup>. Note that so far mainly Belarusian oilseed products are shipped to these countries, the volume of which may exceed 70 million dollars in 2021. The Russian region also sees considerable potential in attracting metallurgical enterprises to the BUTB to sell ferrous and nonferrous rolled metal products, which are annually used in considerable quantities in the Belarusian industry. At the moment, "as a rule, the way of Samara metal to the Belarusian buyer is through intermediaries, which makes it more expensive and less competitive."<sup>66</sup>.. The development of exchange trade with Belarus in **Stavropol Krai** is regarded as a factor contributing to the growth of mutual trade turnover and diversification of its structure. In November 2021, when updating contacts with the BUTB, representatives of the Regional Export Support Center expressed confidence that this exchange platform "will become "one window" for Stavropol companies, through which they will get access not only to the Belarusian market, but also be able to successfully trade with countries in Europe, Asia and the Middle East, where it is quite difficult to do business without having their own distribution network"<sup>67</sup>. As for the **Pskov region**, they see the prospects for the active use of the BUTB potential in the sale of products of the region's timber industry enterprises. This is evidenced by the fact that 30 Pskov Oblast companies participated in the business forum held in October 2021, where it was described in detail how "the exchange mechanism will allow Pskov companies to supply their goods not only to the Belarusian market, but also to European and Asian countries, where the exchange has already formed a network of business partners who are ready to purchase timber products in almost any volume"<sup>68</sup>. The **Republic of Karelia** also has an interesting project at the BUTB, which is primarily interested in the possibility of applying the exchange mechanism for selling raw milk from neighboring Russian regions in the region. It should be assumed that this initiative to sell raw milk from Vologda, Kaliningrad, Pskov and other regions The Belarusian market of the Northwestern Federal District has all the chances of success, since the BUTB considers raw milk to be a commodity position with great potential, which has yet to be revealed in the exchange trades. Moreover, in November 2021 the Belarusian exchange confirmed its readiness "to organize separate trading sessions specifically for participants from the Republic of Karelia, which will allow <...> enterprises to get the maximum economic effect from the application of the exchange mechanism"<sup>69</sup>. So here too, hopefully, the results will not be long in coming.

## **Belarus - Kazakhstan: plans for the future - in the roadmap**

In May 2021, the 16th session of the Belarus-Kazakhstan intergovernmental commission on trade and economic cooperation was held, at the end of which the parties adopted a "road map" or a program of measures for 2021-2022. The results of interaction between the two countries in the first quarter of 2021 became a kind of tuning fork for this meeting. "The trade turnover amounted to \$215 million and increased by 12% compared to the corresponding period of 2020.<sup>70</sup> The surplus for the Belarusian side amounted to \$133.5 million. The main activities of the adopted roadmap include the development of Belarusian-Kazakh cooperation in industrial cooperation and supplies of machinery, agriculture and construction, as well as in the interaction between the regions of the two countries. Another important event in Belarus-Kazakhstan cooperation took place in late June 2021, when a Belarusian government delegation led by Prime Minister R. Golovchenko visited Kazakhstan, where the two sides made serious progress in the development of bilateral **trade and economic relations**. The visit took place against the backdrop of a very positive dynamic in mutual trade between the two countries. Suffice it to say that "in 2020, the trade turnover between Belarus and Kazakhstan amounted to \$847.9 million. The main Belarusian exports were tractors, combines, beef, and milk, cream, sugar, cheese, cottage cheese, furniture, and medicines"<sup>71</sup>. The following figures also testify to a lot of things. There are 54 companies with Kazakhstani capital operating on the Belarusian soil today, including 13 joint ventures and 36 foreign ones. And 366 companies with Belarusian participation work in Kazakhstan. In addition, there are enterprises with Belarusian technologies operating in different areas of the country at ten production facilities. And now the parties are focused on increasing the localization of machinery produced there - the same tractors and cars, so that in 2021, "to reach new figures in mutual trade - for goods and services totaling more than \$ 1 billion a year."<sup>72</sup> The contracts signed at the end of June 2021 between the economic entities of the two countries should facilitate the achievement of this goal. In particular, Minsk Tractor Plant will supply 590 units of machinery worth ten million dollars to Kazakhstan. "One more contract was signed between OJSC "MAZ" and LLP Hyundai Trans Auto for the supply of machine sets of MAZ trailers for \$1.3 million. Also OJSC "BELAZ" and LLP "ASTANABELAZSERVICE signed a contract to supply BELAZ machinery for \$1.2 million"<sup>73</sup>. In the same list of Belarusian exporters is Bobruiskagromash, a company that has been working closely in the Kazakhstani market for the past five years, where it has an assembly facility for the production of trailers, balers and mowers. In 2020, it increased its exports of agricultural equipment to that country by one and a half times. In 2021, the results promise to be no worse. By The signed contract for the supply of products in the amount of one million dollars with the subjects of the commodity distribution network of Bobruiskagromash in Kazakhstan is aimed at this at least. JSC Gomselmash and JSC AgromashHolding KZ, the only industrial enterprise in this country that produces grain harvesters, tractors and additional products in a wide range and is the exclusive distributor of Gomel's products in Kazakhstan, also signed an agreement to develop cooperation for 2021-2022. But perhaps more than others in terms of the development of **industrial cooperation** with Kazakhstani partners is the Minsk tractor plant, which already has three assembly plants here, has its own trading house and plans to develop another assembly plant in this Central Asian country - with an investment of 50 million dollars - on the basis of the "Composite Group Kazakhstan" in Kostanai. Now the assembly line here is calculated on release of 1200 tractors "Belarus". But already plans on site development, creation of new workplaces, increase of quantity of the carried out technological operations directed on growth of localization of manufacture are generated. In particular, "at the first stage, a workshop for production of cabins will be built together with our Kazakh partners. The next stage is the construction of another 25,000 square meter building for the assembly of all types of engines

and radiators. It is also planned to produce a new product - diesel pumps<sup>74</sup>. It is quite possible that this enterprise will become an important element of the industrial zone of Kostanay of the Belarusian industrial center. "It will be a multidisciplinary structure that will combine not only production facilities, but also scientific and technical activities and training of specialists."<sup>75</sup> And there is every reason to believe that such a center could become the core of innovative development. Among other areas of Belarus-Kazakhstan cooperation that should receive accelerated development in the near future is **agriculture**. For Belarusian agrarians, the market of this Central Asian country is important because it ranks second after Russia in terms of food supplies from Belarus. By the end of 2021, the Belarusian side plans to "reach 120% of our exports to Kazakhstan as compared to the previous year: in 2020 it was over \$300 million"<sup>76</sup>.

In this regard, it is important to recall the results of 2020, which showed that even with the restrictions associated with the spread of coronavirus infection, the agro-industrial complex of both countries continued to grow in 2020. In particular, data from the Eurasian Economic Commission showed that "agricultural production in the territory of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) member states increased by 2.3% in 2020 and amounted to 114.3 billion US dollars. The highest production growth among the EAEU countries was registered in Kazakhstan (by 5.6%) and Belarus (by 4.9%)."<sup>77</sup> Positive trends in the growth of interaction between the two countries in the agro-industrial complex were also recorded at the second meeting of the joint Belarusian-Kazakh working group on the development of promising areas of bilateral cooperation in agriculture, which was held in Minsk in February 2021. The meeting focused on the issues of trade in foodstuffs, crop and livestock production, veterinary medicine, breeding and selection, taking into account that "in 2020, trade turnover of agricultural products and food between Belarus and Kazakhstan increased 1.2 times by 2019 and reached \$ 307.2 million. Export was amounted to \$ 289.9 million (more than 20% growth)"<sup>78</sup>. The parties noted the serious potential for further stable growth of trade turnover and consolidation of positive trends in mutual trade.

From the Belarusian side, these prospects are seen in the supply of equipment for the construction of dairy farms, introduction of new technologies, expansion of procurement of agricultural machinery, retraining of personnel for the agro-industrial complex. Kazakhstan is particularly interested in the Belarusian experience in the development of the dairy and sugar industries, as well as in other areas of agricultural production. The nature of this interest lies in the fact that "the coronavirus has shown how much demand there is for all agricultural products now. New niches are opening up"<sup>79</sup>.

In particular, the parties are pinning great hopes in 2021 on the continuation of cooperation between the Belarusian Gomselmash OJSC and Kazakhstan's largest company for the production of agricultural machinery, AgromashHolding KZ, which in 2020 increased its output by 1.7 times. The joint assembly of grain harvesters by these enterprises on Kazakh soil began back in 2007. "In 2019, the organization produced 429 harvesters and tractors, and in 2020 - 730 units of equipment"<sup>80</sup>. Including the first harvester ESSIL KZS-790, which has already passed tests in the Karaganda region and showed good results. The new machine has increased engine power and cleaning area, and the threshing is combined: drum and rotor. In 2021 it is planned to start serial production of this model. In addition, the production of self-propelled mowers will also increase, which is explained by the growing demand for them among farmers of Kazakhstan. We would also remind you that more than 70 sets of the KZS-10 MAX were sent from Gomel to Kazakhstan in the summer of 2020. "The innovations introduced on this harvester model, mainly concerning the more comfortable work of machine operators, were liked by farmers in Kazakhstan. This prompted them to order another 30 such harvesters"<sup>81</sup>. And in the second half of December 2020, this additional batch of 30 sets of machines was sent to the Kazakh partners. Among the events that should have a positive impact on the development of cooperation between Belarus and Kazakhstan in agriculture in 2021, let us mention a few more. First, an interesting result could be the idea discussed at the

meeting of the Belarus-Kazakhstan Business Council in November 2020, which was attended by representatives of more than 160 enterprises of the two countries. Given the fact that one of the most important issues in the development of relations between the two former Soviet republics is holding exhibitions, "Belarus and Kazakhstan are considering the possibility of holding a visiting agricultural exhibition "Belagro" in Kazakhstan.<sup>82</sup> This could be another concrete step towards intensifying bilateral cooperation and increasing mutual trade turnover. Second, back in November 2020, the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange (BUCE) offered Kazakhstani companies to buy Belarusian meat and dairy products and sugar on the exchange trades. At the same time, BUTB could provide assistance to Kazakh companies in selling their products on the Belarusian market. As a follow-up to this proposal, in January 2021, the FTUB agreed to intensify cooperation in electronic trade with the "Astana" Universal Commodity Exchange, which "will create a single database with commercial offers of Belarusian and Kazakh companies and will facilitate the growth of mutual trade"<sup>83</sup>.

Another important area of cooperation between Belarus and Kazakhstan, which should receive intensive development in the very near future, is **the construction sector**, as the parties are seriously interested in this interaction. This is explained by the fact that "today in Belarus and Kazakhstan work multifunctional construction complexes, which are continuously carrying out their activities, increasing their pace every year"<sup>84</sup>. Among the priorities of cooperation in this area, the parties see such areas of cooperation as the construction of industrial enterprises, housing and dairy complexes, production and supply of building materials, as well as the establishment of a trading house of Belarusian building materials in Kazakhstan and the expansion of supplies to this Central Asian country of sanitary faience, insulation and roofing materials, flooring. As far as industrial construction is concerned, even at the 16th meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission it was noted that "an important step in the cooperation will be the construction of JSC "MTZ" in Kazakhstan plant for the production of cabins for tractors and front axles."<sup>85</sup> We would like to add that the works on the mentioned production facilities in Kostanay city of Kazakhstan have already started. "About 7 million dollars of investments will be spent on the implementation of the project. And in total it is planned to invest about 50 million dollars in the development of productions"<sup>86</sup>.

In addition, today the parties are working on the creation and construction of a joint venture for the production of ceramic tiles in Kazakhstan. This project will be implemented in reality, if there will be enough raw materials for the production of these products in the subsoil of this country. That is why "now geological, environmental services of Kazakhstan are studying the volume of available resources"<sup>87</sup>.

Another interesting construction project that is being worked out by the parties concerns the construction of the "Belarusian quarter" in Nur-Sultan. By its example, the Belarusian side could demonstrate its ability to design and build residential complexes. The peculiarity of this project lies in the fact that it does not exclude "the possibility of completing the constructed housing with Belarusian furniture and household appliances, because some construction companies in Kazakhstan have such a practice of selling completely finished housing"<sup>88</sup>.

The next project discussed by the parties looks logical in this regard - the opening of a trading house in Kazakhstan, which will include such Belarusian enterprises of the construction industry as Keramin, Berezastroyaterialy, Belarusian Glass Company. It is possible that later on, according to the Belarusian Ministry of Architecture and Construction, the Bellesbumprom Concern will join their ranks. The fact is that only in the first four months of 2021, its enterprises increased their exports to the Kazakh market by almost 30 percent - up to more than seven million dollars. "This is primarily furniture: it was supplied for more than \$2 million. In Kazakhstan, the Belarusian upholstered furniture and solid wood furniture are especially popular. Also exported to this country are wood chipboard and fiberboard, plywood, wooden windows and doors, wallpaper, paper, cardboard, lumber"<sup>89</sup>...". There is every reason to believe that sales of Belarusian woodworking products in the Kazakh market



will continue to grow steadily. Using the potential of the specialized trading house can only open up new additional sales opportunities in this regard. Finally, as for the construction of agricultural facilities, the Kazakhstani side is particularly interested in this issue. At the end of June 2021 it was even agreed to meet with partners from Kazakhstan in Belarus, where "we will show them our capabilities to build fairly large farms for 2,400 heads"<sup>90</sup>. If this Belarusian experience finds a positive response from the Kazakh side, then in the future we can talk about the implementation of a similar turnkey project of the Belarusian farm in Kazakhstan with its further expansion throughout the country. The term "turnkey" in this case includes design, construction by Belarusian companies, supply of equipment and breeding stock. An important place in the development of Belarus-Kazakhstan partnership is also occupied by **interregional interaction**. Suffice it to say that there are about 30 agreements on cooperation between the regions of Belarus and Kazakhstan. In particular, the relevant documents have been signed by the executive committees of the Minsk, Brest, Gomel and Vitebsk regions, Mogilev region and the akimat of Karaganda region. Gomel and Vitebsk regions have a cooperation agreement with North Kazakhstan region, Brest region - with East Kazakhstan region. Grodno region interacts with Aktobe, Kostanay and Mangistau regions, Gomel region - with Almaty and Atyrau regions. These partnerships between the regions of the two countries are complemented by documents on cooperation between such cities as Minsk and Nur-Sultan, Brest and Semey, Bobruisk and Ust-Kamenogorsk, Mogilev and Shymkent. But due to the fact that "in 2020, the development of regional cooperation was somewhat hampered by quarantine restrictions related to the spread of the coronavirus infection COVID-19," the aim in 2021 is to increase cooperation with the cities of Minsk, Nur-Sultan, Brest, Semey, Bobruisk, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Mogilev and Shymkent. In <sup>91</sup>2021, the task is not only to intensify existing partnerships, but also to work on the establishment of new ones. In particular, Gomel region demonstrates serious intentions in this regard, offering its Kazakhstani partners to expand cooperation, including through joint ventures, small businesses, transport infrastructure and tourism. In 2020, the region's foreign trade with Kazakhstan exceeded \$115 million. "The growth rate of trade turnover in January-April [2021] reached 161% compared to last year's four months." <sup>92</sup>The main suppliers are Gomselmash and the meat and dairy company. In June 2021 Gomselmash signed a cooperation development agreement for 2021-2022 with Kazakhstan's SC "Agromashholding". The essence of the issue is that "the Kazakh side requested 570 units [combine harvesters] this year - for \$60 million. In the next three years the goal is to produce up to 1,000 units of harvesters per year. <sup>93</sup>The parties are also discussing other areas of cooperation. In particular, there are prospects for mutually beneficial partnerships in the chemical and glass industries. Also noteworthy is a proposal by the head of Kazakhstan's diplomatic mission in Belarus, A. Beisenbayev, who was in Gomel, suggested that a forum of the regions of the two countries should be held. Brest region is going to actively develop cooperation with the Kazakhstani side, the volume of its foreign trade turnover with Kazakhstan in 2020 exceeds \$130 million. Nine enterprises with Kazakhstani capital are now registered in the Brest Region. But there are certainly reserves and potential for continued cooperation. And today we are talking about "deliveries of products with added value, primarily in such sectors as woodworking and food industry"<sup>94</sup>.

A real breakthrough in the development of cooperation between the two countries could be the appearance of the Belarusian Industrial Center in the Kostanai region, which was agreed by the parties in June 2021. "This will be a multidisciplinary structure, which will combine not only production facilities, but also scientific and technical activities and training of specialists. <sup>95</sup>This center will be located in the industrial zone "Kostanay", which was opened in 2017 and is an industrial area of 400 hectares, provided with communications, which are already placed enterprises of mechanical engineering, food and light industry, production of building materials and structures, agricultural equipment. Interestingly, the first "swallow" of this zone was the "factory for the production of tractors under the "Belarus" brand of the company-

holding "Composite Group Kazakhstan". It was opened in 2018, and now it is successfully developing. <sup>96</sup>So the foundation for the appearance of the Belarusian industrial center is already here. As we can see, Belarus and Kazakhstan have great prospects for cooperation in various areas, and a good groundwork has already been laid for long-term cooperation between industrial, agro-industrial and construction complexes, as well as at the level of the regions of the two countries. Let us hope that all of these plans mentioned above will be successfully implemented.

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## **Belarus-Tajikistan: Priority of regional cooperation - implementation of specific projects**

Tajikistan is one of those states in Central Asia, with which the Republic of Belarus has been developing its trade and economic relations especially intensively in the past year and a half. For example, if in 2020 the volume of mutual trade between them increased "almost threefold and exceeded \$111 million," then only in January-August 2021 the trade turnover between the two countries was close to \$200 million.<sup>97</sup> Only in January-August 2021, the trade turnover between the two countries was almost \$110 million, "including Belarusian exports - \$107.5 million."<sup>98</sup> Such supplies from Belarus as tractors and tractor trucks, sugar, cars designed to transport ten or more people, oil products, insulated wires, cables, paper and cardboard stationery and tires played a decisive role in achieving those figures. The fact that there are already "about 20 dealers of Belarusian manufacturers - in Tajikistan - speaks volumes. We are talking about assembly of tractors, Bobruiskagromash and Gomselmash machinery. Joint projects are also being prepared in the dairy industry."<sup>99</sup> In each of them, the interaction of specific regions of the two countries should play a decisive role. Recall that the topic of intensifying interregional cooperation was discussed back in April 2021 at the 14<sup>th</sup> The meeting of the Tajik-Belarusian Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation considered "topical issues of cooperation in industry and production cooperation, agriculture and transport, health and education, investment and information technology."<sup>100</sup> An important detail: today such regions of Tajikistan and Belarus are developing trade and economic, scientific, technical and cultural ties within the framework of the signed agreements on cooperation, as: Sughd region - with Vitebsk, Minsk and Mogilev regions, Khatlon and Gomel regions, the cities of Minsk and Dushanbe, Khujand and Mogilev, Yavan and Uzden regions. One of the most active participants in Belarusian-Tajik interregional cooperation is **Minsk Region**, whose foreign trade turnover with Tajikistan increased more than threefold and exceeded 22 million dollars in the first eight months of 2021. Implementation of the cooperation agreement with **Sughd Region**, signed in 2014, played a key role in achieving such indicators. At the same time, the parties do not intend to stop there, outlining new plans for mutually beneficial partnerships. In particular, at the meeting of regional leaders A. Turchin and R. Ahmadzoda in early November 2021 they talked about a number of new promising areas of cooperation. One of the obvious priorities is the Belarusian light industry, for which Tajik cotton can be a raw material. The Belarusian side also expressed its interest in establishing joint ventures to process cotton in Tajikistan. As for Tajik partners of the Belarusian capital region, they are interested "in supplying vegetables and fruits to Belarus, as well as receiving high-quality Belarusian potato seeds. Within 3-4 years, the region plans to increase the volume of potatoes to 1 million tons"<sup>101</sup>. On the whole, the parties intend to seriously expand their bilateral ties in the near future. This is evidenced by the fact that at the business meeting in November 2021, "representatives of more than 30 Tajik and Belarusian companies held talks about possible cooperation in mechanical engineering, health care, woodworking, food and processing industry."<sup>102</sup> The memorandum on cooperation between the cities of Zhodino and Gulistan, signed in November 2021, should also help expand cooperation between the two regions. **Mogilev Oblast** intends to actively develop partnerships with Sughd Oblast. The parties signed a cooperation agreement in 2017. And in the three quarters of 2021, the turnover between them increased by almost a third. And in this case we are talking about an active search for new opportunities for cooperation. One of the priorities is the creation of joint productions. Given the fact that Mogilev is the largest Belarusian manufacturer of textile products - Mogotex OJSC - they are seriously interested in supplying cotton from Tajikistan. And the Tajik partners, who annually increase the cultivation area of this crop, have their own interest: to organize with the Belarusian The joint venture to process cotton is a joint venture between the two sides. "This will allow us [in Sughd Oblast] to create several thousand new jobs"<sup>103</sup>. Mogilevliftmash also plans to establish

joint production of elevators in the Tajik region. This is just a part of the proposals voiced in November 2021 at a business meeting in Mogilev, where the cooperation agreement was signed by the Mogilev branch of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Sughd region. In addition,"Mogilev plant "Strommashina" and CJSC "Nord Asia Metal" agreed to sign a letter of intent to implement a project for the manufacture and supply of technological equipment for the production of asbestos-cement sheets.<sup>104</sup> And representatives of other Mogilev enterprises of a number of industries have established contacts for trade in finished products and raw materials. And this is encouraging.

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### **Belarus - Austria: on the way to mainstreaming regional cooperation**

Interaction between Belarusian and Austrian regions is an important area for the development of bilateral cooperation between the two countries, which Minsk and Vienna appear keen to update in the second half of 2021. This is evidenced, in particular, by the meetings and negotiations held by the parties in September this year in the Austrian federal state of Vorarlberg, which, along with Upper Austria and Styria, is among the most developed regions in this European country, where about 20 thousand enterprises operate, which exported goods and services worth ten billion euros last year. In this case, it was a question of finding additional ways to mutually facilitate direct contacts between the business communities of the two countries. The fact is that Vorarlberg has a number of large industrial companies that already cooperate fruitfully with Belarusian partners and are interested in new joint trade and production projects with them. They include a group of companies Burch Holding, whose leadership discussed with the Belarusian side in September 2021 the preparation for implementation of projects "related to optimization of technological and energy processes at the Belarusian chemical and oil refining enterprises, energy-saving measures in the cement industry, the supply of high-tech equipment for the Belarusian dairy and meat industry.<sup>105</sup> Besides, within the framework of these meetings with Austrian industrialists in the federal land Vorarlberg They talked about the possibilities of organizing high-tech productions in the free economic zones "Brest", "Grodnoinvest", "Minsk", as well as in the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park "Great Stone". Recall that in 2020, the trade turnover between the two countries exceeded \$155 million. At the same time, "the volume of Belarusian exports to Austria increased by a quarter and amounted to \$26.3 million. THE VOLUME OF THE BELARUSIAN EXPORT TO AUSTRIA INCREASED BY A QUARTER AND AMOUNTED TO \$26.3 MILLION<sup>106</sup>. It happened due to deliveries from Belarus of metal products, insulated wires and cables, oil products, potash fertilizers, furniture, and other woodworking products. It is also important that Austria became the third largest investor in the Belarusian economy in 2020. The volume of Austrian investments almost halved over that period and amounted to \$650 million. It goes without saying that today those investments play "an important role in the modernization of Belarusian enterprises in a whole range of industries (energy, transport infrastructure, petrochemistry, machine building, wood and metalworking, food processing, construction, environmental protection, etc.)<sup>107</sup>. In addition, 82 companies with Austrian capital are now operating on the Belarusian land, as well as 20 representative offices of Austrian companies. All this makes Austria an important trade and investment partner of Belarus in Europe. In November 2019, during high-level talks, an agreement was reached to expand business ties between Austrian and Belarusian regions. Note that today it is interaction is particularly interesting within the framework of the cooperation agreement between the Minsk region and Carinthia, as well as within the framework of twinning relations between the October district of Minsk and the city of Linz. The agreement on cooperation between Minsk region and Carinthia Federal Land was signed in 2008. Among the promising areas of cooperation between the parties then named the construction of power sources on local fuels in the Belarusian metropolitan area, which will reduce dependence on natural gas. The fact is that "in Carinthia there are companies involved in generation of heat and electricity from wood, and they not only produce the appropriate equipment, but also operate it. In addition, these companies are investors"<sup>108</sup>. In addition, the parties outlined renewable energy sources, electronics, microelectronics, mechanical engineering, metal and wood processing, and plastic recycling as promising areas for partnership development. In September 2016, all these plans were reinforced at a joint meeting of the governments of the capital region and the federal state with the intention to pay considerable attention to "issues of interaction in the economic direction"<sup>109</sup>. And in June

2019 in the administrative center of Carinthia, the city of Klagenfurt, a presentation of the economic and tourism potential of the Minsk region was held in order to intensify cooperation of business of the two regions and exchange of experience. For this purpose "in the Lakeside Science & Technology Park the Belarusian delegation got acquainted with the Austrian experience of innovation support"<sup>110</sup>. As for cooperation between the Kastychnitsky District of the Belarusian capital and the administrative center of the federal state of Upper Austria - the city of Linz, this project was launched a couple of years ago. It is typical that the first joint initiative in the framework of this partnership was "the establishment of cooperation between educational institutions of Minsk and Linz. On the Belarusian side the gymnasium is involved №56. Contacts with higher educational institutions of Linz have been established at BSU, the Academy of Management, the Belarusian Academy of Arts. In the future cultural exchanges and economic events are planned"<sup>111</sup>. So there is a basis for the activation of relations between the regions.

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## **Belarus - Asia: prospects for effective cooperation**

In June 2021, a Belarusian-Asian forum was held, which was attended by representatives of embassies of those Asian states in Russia and Belarus that do not have their diplomatic missions in Minsk and where there are no Belarusian foreign missions. In particular, the participants included heads of diplomatic missions and other diplomats from Indonesia, Yemen, Cambodia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Nepal, Singapore, Thailand, Afghanistan, Laos, and the Philippines. The attention of the Belarusian side to the Asian region is quite understandable. After all, "there are no political problems on the bilateral agenda here, and the approaches to major international issues are quite similar. This creates a good basis for the development of trade and economic cooperation as the main area for bilateral cooperation."<sup>112</sup>

Suffice it to say that in 2020, the volume of Belarusian exports to the countries of this continent was about two billion dollars. And this, of course, is not the limit. "It is obvious that the Asian market still remains underdeveloped by Belarusian exporters in terms of the promotion there of many types of their products, including those manufactured by mechanical engineering, electronic and petrochemical industries."<sup>113</sup> The experience of this interaction in recent years shows that there are still many opportunities to promote Belarusian trade and economic interests in Asian direction. In order to use them successfully, it is necessary to continue systematic and consistent work, developing mutual interest and initiating new forms of contacts, as is actually happening in the development of partnerships with a number of Asian countries. In particular, the Republic of Belarus has already reached a strategic partnership with **the People's Republic of China**. In the language of figures, it looks as follows. In 2020, the volume of Belarusian-Chinese trade has shown significant growth - more than 10 percent. Even higher dynamics of development of this partnership are characteristic for 2021. "From January to April of this year, the total volume of imports and exports of goods between the countries was China became the second largest trade partner of Belarus. China became the second largest trade partner of Belarus."<sup>114</sup>

A number of projects that have already been successfully implemented and are still being implemented by the Belarusian side can also be seen in other Asian countries. For example, in early June 2021, Minsk Tractor Works and the Indian company Erisha Agritech Private Limited signed a cooperation agreement, which determined that "the Indian partner will purchase at least 200 BELARUS tractors by the end of 2021. Moreover, the parties intend to organize the localization and assembly of tractors under the joint brand DARSH BELARUS in **India**".<sup>115</sup> to then supply them to other countries of the continent - Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Another country of interest in this context in Asia is **Mongolia**. In June 2021, it became known that the Belarusian Development Bank will finance the export of Belarus tractors and agricultural equipment produced by Minsk Tractor Works OJSC for four and a half million euros - to the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry of Mongolia. And this will be the third individual credit line under the general Belarusian-Mongolian intergovernmental export credit agreement concluded in April 2019, aimed at expanding the geography of Belarusian export supplies and strengthening foreign economic and trade relations between specific enterprises. It should be reminded that under this agreement, the Development Bank has already "financed supplies of fire-fighting equipment produced by Pozhsnab LLC to the National Emergency Management Agency of Mongolia, as well as machinery sold by MAZ OJSC - the management company of Belavtomaz Holding - to the Road and Transportation Development Center under the Ministry of Roads and Transportation Development of Mongolia"<sup>116</sup>. These facts testify to the fact that Belarusian industrial enterprises today consider the Asian region as one of the key ones for increasing their export supplies. And they see great potential in it, "because its member countries are

showing very good economic growth. <sup>117</sup>"That makes Belarusian products in demand in this market. And such exporters, such as BelAZ, BMZ, MAZ, MTZ, Amkodor, and Integral, have good opportunities to expand their supply here. Today, the Asian region looks even more promising for Belarusian food exports, which have grown 13(!) times in the last five years. In 2020, it amounted to \$356 million. During the four months of 2021 Belarus shipped foodstuffs for \$167 million to 37 Asian countries, "which is 60% more than last year. A wide range of dairy and meat products, sugar, flax fiber, rapeseed oil..." <sup>118</sup>. It is obvious that both geography and assortment of these supplies will only expand, as evidenced by the interest of the participants of the Belarusian-Asian Forum to the proposals of Belarusian producers, which were voiced in their presentations at the event. In addition, in 2021, the engagement of the Belarusian side with a number of other Asian countries - Iran, Pakistan, South Korea, and Oman - became much more active. As for **Iran**, in April 2021, it became known about the intention of the Belarusian Gomel Region to resume and develop cooperation with the Iranian province of Mazandaran, the document on trade, economic, scientific, technical, and cultural cooperation with which was signed back in 2009, but the plans therein were never implemented. Back then, when they signed the memorandum on cooperation, the parties noted good prospects for organizing exports of agricultural products, metal, and agricultural machines from the Belarusian region. Iranian exporters planned to arrange permanent supplies of citrus fruits and citrus plants to the Gomel market. other southern fruits. "In addition, there are large deposits of solid fuels in Mazandaran province, in the development of which economic entities of the Gomel region could take part. <sup>119</sup>

Among the projects, to the implementation of which the Belarusian region and the Iranian province now intend to return, the parties call "production of copper rod in Rechitsa district, development of the chalk deposit in Vetka district, and mining of rocks in Lelchitsa district. <sup>120</sup> In addition, the Belarusian side offered to supply machine tools, timber, cardboard, cellulose, confectionery products, as well as gas-powered combines to the Iranian market. Noting the great potential in the interaction between the two regions, the Iranian side complemented the possible areas of partnership in such areas as oil production, chemical industry, industry. Concrete steps to implement all these proposals will be discussed during the webinar to be held in the near future. The actualization of partnership ties between the Gomel region and Mazandaran province shows that Belarus and Iran, having survived the coronavirus pandemic, are beginning to return bilateral cooperation to a growth trajectory. As a reminder, the 14th meeting of the Joint Belarusian-Iranian Commission on Economic Cooperation was held in January 2018, which resulted in the signing of the Roadmap for the development of cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The agreement was signed by the Republic of Iran for 2018-2020. The document spoke about the development of bilateral cooperation "in various fields of politics, investments, trade, industry, transport, agriculture, healthcare, education, science, technology, and energy. <sup>121</sup> It also contained the intention to increase Belarusian-Iranian trade turnover to \$500 million. However, American sanctions, which blocked bilateral cooperation between Minsk and Tehran in a number of important areas, became a serious obstacle to the development of economic cooperation between Belarus and Iran. However, "despite the restrictions, the trade turnover between Belarus and Iran amounted to \$24.7 million in 2020 <sup>122</sup>. Tires, wood products, newsprint, and bearings made up the bulk of Belarusian exports to the Iranian market. Currently, the parties are preparing for the 15th meeting of the joint commission, where they intend to develop a roadmap for trade and economic cooperation in order to give an additional impetus to the relationship. The high interest of the parties in such partnership development can be judged by the composition of the participants in the Belarusian-Iranian business forum, which was held in Minsk in July 2019 under the auspices of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture. At that time, Iranian companies interested in cooperating "in the fields of banking, medical and pharmaceutical production, gas equipment, parts and equipment for refrigerators, agricultural

machinery took part in the talks with the Belarusian business circles, building materials and construction equipment, petrochemical and oil refining industry, production and supply of food and spices, textile industry (supply of Persian carpets)" <sup>123</sup>.

Cooperation between the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange (BUCE) and the Iranian Commodity Exchange (ITB) may also become one of the promising areas for economic cooperation between the two countries. The parties agreed to actualize their partnership back in October 2019, as "the use of the exchange mechanism will reduce commercial risks and simplify the search for business partners for Belarusian and Iranian business entities" <sup>124</sup>. Moreover, Iranian businessmen are interested in using the BUTB platform to promote ferrous and nonferrous metallurgy products, textiles, nuts and dried fruits to Belarus. Belarusian companies are interested in the exchange platform for the export of lumber, wood slabs, and petrochemical products to Iran. Another promising resource for expanding Belarusian-Iranian trade and economic cooperation is the Interim Agreement leading to the formation of a free trade zone between the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and Iran, which entered into force in October 2019. This document established a list of goods for which exporters of EAEU countries, including Belarus, received preferences in the Iranian market. It "includes meat and fat-and-oil products, certain types of confectionery and chocolate, electronic and The Russian Federation has a lot to offer in terms of mechanical equipment, as well as metals and cosmetics" <sup>125</sup>. So, the parties have a lot of opportunities to solve the tasks set to activate trade and economic relations. It is necessary to use them. **The Islamic Republic of Pakistan** is one of the states in South Asia, in relations with which the Republic of Belarus has created the necessary legal and infrastructural framework over the past five years to strengthen and develop bilateral cooperation aimed at the full-scale implementation of the existing potential of partnership relations. We recall that in 2015, the Islamabad Declaration of Belarus-Pakistan Cooperation was adopted at the highest level, "in which the parties consolidated the basic principles of political dialogue" <sup>126</sup>. At the same time, a bilateral cooperation roadmap for 2015-2020 was signed to make a gradual transition from simple trade to more advanced forms of cooperative interaction. Joint efforts to create a contractual and legal framework for Belarusian-Pakistani cooperation led to the fact that by early 2021 "the parties signed 77 memorandums of understanding and agreements. At the moment, many agreements are under development" <sup>127</sup>. For example, an amended intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in the field of industrial, scientific and technical cooperation. Also in 2015, Minsk and Islamabad created the basic institutional mechanism for bilateral trade and economic relations - a joint Belarusian-Pakistani commission on The joint commission is focused on specific issues of bilateral cooperation. Within the framework of the joint commission, working groups in various areas - industry and agriculture - focus their attention on specific issues of bilateral cooperation. And in December 2020, the first meeting of the Belarusian-Pakistani working group for cooperation in healthcare and pharmaceuticals was held, where "possible areas of mutual cooperation in the export of medical and educational services were identified" <sup>128</sup>, and the prospects of further cooperation were outlined. As for partnerships between the business communities of the two countries, they are structured within the framework of the Joint Belarusian-Pakistani Business Council, the first three meetings of which were held in August 2015, in March 2016 and 2017. In April 2021, the parties held the fourth meeting of this council, which was attended by representatives of more than a hundred Belarusian and Pakistani companies. They discussed not only the development of bilateral trade, but also opportunities to increase investment cooperation, industrial cooperation, and the creation of joint companies and productions, noting among the priority areas of interaction industry, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, as well as education, information technology, and logistics. In addition, they considered "the possibility of doing business by Pakistani enterprises in the framework of the Industrial Park "Great Stone", the main directions of the new policy of automotive development in Pakistan and the existing in connection with it preferences for foreign companies, the prospects for the development of urban electric transport in Pakistan,



as well as the main directions of the chambers of commerce and industry to promote business contacts" 129. The potential for expansion of Belarusian-Pakistani relations is evidenced by the figures. "In 2020, trade turnover between the countries amounted to \$52.2 million, which is 4% more than in 2019. At the same time, 130 the surplus for the Belarusian side exceeded \$20 million. This was facilitated by deliveries from Belarus to Pakistan of such export items as "tractors and spare parts for them, trucks, potash fertilizers, synthetic thread harnesses and synthetic fibers, tires, machine tools, polycarboxylic acids (phthalic anhydride), newsprint, baby food (dry mixtures)" 131. In 2021, the Belarusian side plans to only increase its exports to the Pakistani market, using a variety of tools to promote products from Belarus to Pakistan. One of them is participation in international exhibitions organized in that South Asian country. In particular, "in October [2021], Belarusian companies are planning to take part in the industrial exhibition in Karachi. 132 Note that a year and a half ago, in September 2019, the national exposition of Belarus was organized at the largest exhibition event in South Asia. The International Engineering & Machinery Asia Exhibition (IEMA) in the Pakistani city of Lahore, where "such leading Belarusian enterprises as BelAZ, MAZ, MTZ, Mogilev Metallurgical Plant, and organizations of the Belneftekhim Concern (Belshina, Naftan, Polotsk-Steklovokno) presented their products. 133 Then numerous visitors of this business forum could also get acquainted with the best Belarusian higher educational institutions and advanced scientific developments of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus. The Belarusian State University alone demonstrated in Lahore "more than 20 scientific and technical developments in the field of instrumentation, new materials, metal optics, and tribophatics," and signed a protocol with the Belarusian Ministry of Education and Science. 134 The Belarusian university signed a protocol of intent to develop academic, scientific and technological cooperation with the Ali Power company from Islamabad. It was not a bad experience of participation. Speaking about the development of cooperation with South Korea, it should be reminded that in July 2021, the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Korea International Trade Association established a business cooperation council, putting into practice the agreements reached in December 2020, when the parties signed a cooperation agreement. It is expected that the participants of this new platform to discuss business issues and strengthen economic, investment, and scientific and technical cooperation will be Belarusian and Korean companies that have successful experience of cooperation, which "contribute to the expansion of bilateral business and economic relations, as well as enterprises interested in implementing joint projects in the most promising areas. 135 Judging by the composition of the inaugural session of the Belarus-Korea Business Cooperation Council, these include the Belarusian High Tech Park, the China-Belarus Industrial Park Great Stone, as well as over twenty more leading companies in electronics, machine tools, automotive industry, pharmaceuticals, and information technologies. As a reminder, the year 2022 will mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. And today Minsk and Seoul seek to take concrete steps to intensify bilateral cooperation, as well as to "practical content of cooperation within the framework of the 'New Northern Policy'". 136 This policy means a set of measures to intensify economic cooperation of the Republic of Korea with the states and integration associations of the Eurasian region, including the Eurasian Economic Union. Following this policy, the Korean side divides all the northern space into three main regions: the eastern - Siberia and the Far East, Mongolia, three northeastern provinces of China; the central - five Central Asian countries; the western - the western part of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. It is the western region that Seoul considers to be the most industrially developed and receptive to innovation. For this reason, they consider it "kind of a center of innovative industry in the northern direction of economic cooperation, important also for the creation of new composite materials and the development of information technology" 137.

The Belarusian side is also generally interested in relations with its Korean partners, primarily in expanding industrial cooperation and establishing joint productions in a variety of areas.



Not only in the machine tool and automotive industries, production of automotive components, electronics, and household appliances, but also in the production of tires, medical equipment, and agricultural machinery, as well as "in the financing and implementation of infrastructure projects in innovation, information and communication technologies, industry, and science and technology"<sup>138</sup>. In this regard, one of the topical areas of interaction with Korean partners is as follows. Since 2019, the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Belarus has been implementing a series of international cooperation projects regarding the creation of the infrastructure to support and develop the smart industry in our country. First, a set of works was carried out to assess the readiness of the digital transformation of the national economy, including its real sector. The result of the project was recommendations, which provided for the development of a strategy aimed at cooperation of large manufacturing companies with small and medium-sized enterprises. New instruments of state support were also introduced: digital transformation of organizations of the real sector of the economy. So, this work was carried out with the support of the knowledge exchange program with the Republic of Korea. More specifically, "starting in 2020, this program will provide consulting support for the implementation of a pilot project for the digital transformation of a machine-building enterprise. It is planned that the results and recommendations obtained will be used to organize digital transformation of machine-building enterprises throughout our country."<sup>139</sup> The seriousness of this interaction with the Korean partners is evidenced by the fact that in March 2021, a national seminar-meeting "Studying the experience of the Republic of Korea in digital transformation of the industrial sector of the economy (mechanical engineering)" was held in Minsk; its participants included over 160 representatives of state bodies and organizations, business community of Belarus, free economic zones, scientific and technological parks, scientific and educational sphere. Importantly, with the help of experts from the Republic of Korea, they considered the specific experience of the backbone Korean manufacturing companies, LG and Hyundai, in deploying the process of digital transformation in the machine-building sector of industry. After that, the Belarusian Ministry of Economy expressed confidence that "the results of the discussion of the Korean experience will become a solid basis for the deployment of projects in the field of digital development of organizations of the country's industrial complex and involvement of the SME sector engaged in the production sphere in this process"<sup>140</sup>.

We have to assume that the Belarusian-Korean Council for Business Cooperation will make its contribution to solving all these issues. After all, it has a very wide field of activity. **Oman** is another Asian state with which interaction intensified in 2021. In August 2021, a business forum "Belarus - Oman" was held online. The attention of the Belarusian side to the intensification of business engagement with this Middle Eastern country can be explained by several reasons. First, it exports oil, oil products, and gas. And it always considers buying food and engineering products from its foreign partners. Second, Oman is interesting to Belarus because of its geographic location. Its port infrastructure allows Belarus to seriously consider exports to the entire Arabian Peninsula region. All of this makes Oman one of Belarus's promising trade, economic and investment partners in the Middle East. However, in 2020 the trade turnover between the countries amounted to only 1.15 million dollars with the share of the Belarusian export of 850 thousand dollars, the basis of which was "potash fertilizers and foodstuffs"<sup>141</sup>. It is considerably inferior to the figures of the Belarusian-Omani trade almost ten years ago. Recall that "the highest level of trade turnover between Belarus and Oman was recorded in 2012 - \$12 million"<sup>142</sup>. That is why the task of returning the volume of trade and economic cooperation on the growth trajectory was among the main topics of the business seminar, during which they discussed both the current state and prospects for the development of bilateral partnerships in the fields of industrial production, agriculture and food, the potential for investment cooperation and implementation of joint projects in the two countries, "as well as the possibility of holding a meeting of the Belarusian-Omani Business Council"<sup>143</sup>.

The attention of the parties to the activities of the business council is explained by the fact that it is one of the most actively used tools for the development of trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. Belarus and Oman signed the agreement on its establishment back in 2010, but the first meeting of the Business Council did not take place until August 2015 in Minsk. The Omani side saw its task in coming to the Belarusian capital at that time as determining the most promising areas for expanding trade and economic cooperation here. "If we talk about the investment of Oman in Belarus, the prospects are seen primarily in such areas as the heavy industry and the petrochemical complex"<sup>144</sup>. A few months later, the partners from Oman were interested in investing in the development of Belarusian agriculture, real estate and eco-tourism. proposals and the creation of Belarusian assembly plants in Oman<sup>145</sup>.

In September 2016, for the first time, a representative delegation from Oman came to Minsk to participate in the second meeting of the Belarusian-Omani Business Council. The delegation included over 40 major businessmen from Oman, whose areas of activities and interests included "investment, banking, construction, food and agriculture, industrial production, mining, insurance, financial consulting, transportation services, retail trade, hotel business and tourism"<sup>146</sup>. One of the main topics of this forum was "investments in the production of agricultural products in Belarus in order to increase the volume of production here and supply both to the markets of the Persian Gulf and the Eurasian Economic Union."<sup>147</sup> There was also talk about the possibility to establish a joint venture in Oman for sales, assembly production and after-sales service of Amkodor machinery. In October 2017, Belarus participated for the first time in Oman's largest food industry and hospitality exhibition, Food and Hospitality. The interest in it was fueled by the fact that food production remains a problem in this country, as in the entire Middle East. Up to half of Oman's imports are consumer goods and food products. "At present, Oman is particularly interested in supplying poultry meat, chicken eggs and dairy products: skimmed and whole milk powder, animal butter, milk whey powder, cheeses"<sup>148</sup>. Finally, the third meeting of the Belarus-Oman Business Council was held in Minsk in April 2019. At it, participants considered opportunities for bilateral business cooperation and prospects for implementing investment projects "in the areas of logistics, oil and gas industry, development of security and safety systems, tourism, organization of exhibitions and fairs, business events"<sup>149</sup> "...". In addition, the Omani delegation included "a company that is interested in the development of innovative technologies and the IT-sphere."<sup>150</sup>

All this shows that the parties have considerable potential for the development of business cooperation, which today should be capitalized in specific projects. We must assume that this is what the fourth meeting of the business council, which the parties plan to hold in 2021, will focus on.

## **Belarus-China: Regions as a Factor in Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**

In January 2021, the Republic of Belarus and the People's Republic of China reached an agreement at the highest level on the Year of Regions of the two countries over the next three years - from 2021 to 2023. This decision once again emphasizes the enormous role played in the development of bilateral Belarusian-Chinese relations by the intensification of interaction at the level of autonomous regions, regions, provinces, and cities of the two countries, the potential of which is only beginning to be truly explored by both sides. This is evidenced by the results of 2020, when the trade turnover between Belarus and China exceeded 4.5 billion dollars, and Belarusian exports increased by almost 10 percent. At the same time, "agriculture and wood processing products became the driver of Belarusian exports to China, with deliveries doubling. 151It is also important that more than a hundred Belarusian agricultural producers have already been accredited in China, and the overwhelming majority of them are located in the regions of our country. The facts show that the parties are now taking a variety of measures to unlock the full potential of the bilateral cooperation between Belarus and China. Particular attention in this regard is paid to resolving issues related to the access of Belarusian goods to the Chinese market. In particular, at the meeting of the Belarusian-Chinese Intergovernmental Committee on Cooperation that took place in December 2020, a practical platform was created to work out all the issues of access to the Chinese market, as well as veterinary issues. The Chinese Ministry of Commerce and the Belarusian Ministry of Economy will be responsible for the simplification of trade procedures and the creation of a framework for active trade. A working group formed at the end of 2020, including specialists from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce and the Belarusian Ministry of Economy, will also simplify trade procedures and create a basis for active trade. With its help an agreement on trade in services and investments is to be developed," the implementation of which will change the essence and depth of joint development, simplify the provision of mutual investment without restrictions and prohibitive lists. Simplification of trade in services at the present stage is the basis for active trade, because modern goods are 80% of services" 152 . At the same December (2020) meeting of the intergovernmental cooperation committee, there was also a need to involve as soon as possible in the economic turnover in Belarusian regions the rest of Chinese credit resources in the amount of about \$4 billion for specific projects to develop social and transport infrastructure. As we can see, the tasks set at the interstate level are ambitious and specific. Certainly, it will hardly be possible to solve them without the most interested participation of the regions themselves. It is here that regional media should have a say in promoting the ideas of the Belarusian-Chinese comprehensive strategic partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation in the next three years. Especially since they are now facing no less ambitious tasks to update both their form and content. It should be reminded that at the February 2021 board meeting of the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus, regional print media, which constitute a significant segment of the Belarusian media sphere and cover almost the entire territory of the country, were named among the most important issues of developing the information field of our country that must be elaborated and solved as a matter of priority. The priority of their activities should be the creation of a high-quality media product. At the same time, they "should meet the challenges of time, be able to quickly adapt to the needs of the reader". 153 and contribute to the creation of a positive image of Belarus. In this regard, the most active participation of the Belarusian regional press in covering the implementation of the "three-year plan" of the regions of Belarus and China can and should become a very important step in the formation and development of its international segment. Especially since the thematic focus of publications devoted to the cooperation between the regions of the two countries can and should already be very diverse. In particular, such form of cooperation between the regions of the two countries as twinning and partnership relations should receive an especially powerful impetus for development in the next three years. Their current level is eloquently demonstrated by the

following fact: every Belarusian region and Minsk have already become twinned or partnered with two or more Chinese regions, which ensures coverage of almost all provinces in the Celestial Empire. For example, the Brest region is the province of Hubei (since 1994), Qinghai (2015), Anhui (2016) and Shanxi (2019); the Vitebsk region is Shandong Province (2004), Heilongjiang (2005), Guizhou (2015), Jiangxi (2018); Gomel - the autonomous regions of Inner Mongolia (2011) and Xinjiang Uygur (2016), Sichuan (2011) and Jiangsu (2016); for Grodno - Gansu (2007), Fujian (2018), Hainan (2019); for Minsk - Chongqing City (2002), Guangdong (2012) and Zhejiang (2015) Mogilev - Jiangsu (1997), Henan (2008), Hunan (2016), Shaanxi (2018), Tianjin (2019); the Belarusian capital - Changchun (1992), Beijing (1997), Shenzhen (2013), Shenyang (2016), Shanghai (2018). In addition, "more than 20 agreements on the establishment and development of city-town cooperation between regional centers and cities of Belarus and administrative centers and cities of central subordination of China" <sup>154</sup> were concluded. It is typical that the process of expansion and actualization of twinning and partnership relations continues today. Thus, in terms of the development of twinning relations between **the Grodno Region** and **Hainan Province**, "agreements between such cities as Lida and Sanya, Ostrovets and Qionghai are already at the draft stage" <sup>155</sup>. In April 2021 **Gomel** region and **Sichuan** province decided to significantly expand twinning relations in the economic, social and cultural spheres. At the end of March 2021, **Brest** Region and **Hubei** Province discussed the whole range of interaction. As a result, "the parties agreed to agree on a roadmap for the development of cooperation in the near future" <sup>156</sup>. As for the **Mogilev region**, it signed a road map for cooperation with the Chinese province in June 2021

**Henan** to continue cooperation in trade and increase it in the investment sphere. In addition, according to the parties, "among the important issues that need to be worked on is the improvement of transport communication and logistics between our countries" <sup>157</sup>. It should be reminded that Mogilev region signed an agreement on the establishment of friendly relations with Henan province back in 2004. Ten years later, "in July 2014, Zhengzhou, the administrative center of this province, became Mogilev's twin" <sup>158</sup>. Perhaps this is the reason why the development of cooperation with Chinese partners for this Belarusian region has been gaining momentum since then, as evidenced by the figures. In particular, since 2015, the trade turnover of Mogilev Region with the People's Republic of China has increased 13 times, amounting to nearly 95 million dollars in 2020. It should be noted that the Mogilev region, in addition to Henan province, has four more partners among Chinese regions. These are Jiangsu, Hunan, Shaanxi provinces and the city of Tianjin. In addition, friendly relations have been established between the partner cities: Mogilev - Nanjing, Bobruisk - Wuxi, Osipovich - Yangzhou, Krichev - Lianyungang. In September 2019, during the first Regional Belarusian-Chinese Week of Cooperation in Mogilev, it was noted that "with each of these partners relations are developing in several directions: the parties are interested in cooperation in the medical and educational fields, industrial and tourist industries, as well as in terms of interregional exchange" <sup>159</sup>. Back in July 2017, the possibility of implementing investment projects in the free economic zone (FEZ) "Mogilev" and the southeastern region, where there are serious preferences for business, was discussed with the same province of Henan. In particular, in the south-east of Mogilev Region, there is vast free land for "the creation of a joint venture for the production of beef, taking into account the culinary needs and requirements of the Chinese side with the subsequent supply of products to the Celestial Empire" <sup>160</sup>.

As for **Shaanxi** province, its Department of Commerce in April 2019 signed an agreement of intent to promote economic development and friendly cooperation with the Economy Committee of the Mogilev Regional Executive Committee, in which the parties agreed "to provide active support and information assistance to enterprises interested in investing and establishing import-export relations" <sup>161</sup>. In December 2020, the Mogilev Regional Development Agency hosted an online meeting of more than 30 representatives of the parties,

including FEZ "Mogilev", JSC "Red Foodstuffs", Bobruisk meat processing plant, JCS "Oasis Group", JSC "Babushkina krynka", Mogilev Ice Cream Factory, CJSC "Servolux" and the Belarusian State Agricultural Academy (BSAA). One of the concrete results of this meeting was the established partnership "Between the BGSAA and the Northwestern University of Agriculture and forestry. There are already some developments in approbation of Chinese varieties of wheat and other cereals"<sup>162</sup>. Mogilev residents got a concrete result of cooperation with the city of **Tianjin** back in June 2017, when a social house was commissioned in the regional center, the general contractor of which was the Tianjin Electric Construction Company. "The new building of 10 floors with 120 apartments was located in the under-construction neighborhood of Kazimirovka on Grunwaldskaya Street. This is one of three houses which were erected in the Mogilev region thanks to the first stage of the project "Construction of social housing" with the technical and economic assistance of the People's Republic of China. Similar facilities appeared in Bobruisk and Osipovichy"<sup>163</sup>. In May 2019, the parties signed a Memorandum on the establishment of twinning relations. And in November 2020, investment projects of the Belarusian region in tourism, cattle breeding, housing construction were quite thoroughly acquainted with such companies from the Chinese city as Tianjin Constant International Trade Co., Bonyum International Trading Co., Tianjin Mengdong International Trade Co., Zhonggong Huamu (Tianjin) Food Co.**Jiangsu** Province of China, which signed an agreement in 2015 to establish twinning relations with the Mogilev region, was the first region of China, with which the Mogilev people in July 2020 held a contact and cooperation exchange via video conference, the participants of which from the Chinese side were more than 20 companies operating in the meat and dairy industries, flax processing, alcoholic beverages and beverages. Their interest to this event is understandable, because only under previously implemented projects entrepreneurs of Jiangsu province in 2020 "allocated additionally more than \$2 million for further development of their enterprises. Chinese investors are currently implementing and planning to implement projects on the cultivation and processing of flax, the production of mushrooms and various medical products."<sup>164</sup> Finally, the province of **Hunan** in this context is interesting because in January 2018 presented Mogilev with two new electric buses. And the company Zoomlion is implementing a project here to produce special equipment. Speaking about **Minsk** Region in this context, it should be noted that in July 2021, the Minsk Regional Executive Committee and China SAMSE Engineering Corporation JSC signed a memorandum under which large healthcare facilities will be built in the Belarusian capital region with the help of the Chinese side. In particular, the adopted document provides for "construction of an infectious disease hospital in Borisov and a surgical building in the regional hospital, export-import trade in agricultural products, creation of a baby food factory, and solving problems with garbage recycling"<sup>165</sup>. Recall that in our country SAMSE - a subsidiary of China National Machinery Corporation "Sinomach" from Beijing - owns shares of NWAO "Corporation on development of the industrial park", acted as the general contractor for the construction project of a plant for the production of sulfate bleached pulp on the basis of Svetlogorsk Paper Mill and on such objects in the industrial park "Great Stone" as engineering and transport infrastructure, the administrative office building, the plants of LLC "Zumlion Bel-Rus" and LLC "MAZ-Veichai". It should be noted that the Chinese vector of trade and economic cooperation is now playing an increasingly important role in the foreign economic activities of Minsk Region. According to the results of 2020, the People's Republic of China became the second largest trade partner of the Belarusian capital region, accounting for 14.3 percent of the total volume of foreign trade. And there is every reason to believe that this figure will only increase in the coming years, as the Minsk Region "special attention is paid to the Chinese market, which is promising for the supply of food products"<sup>166</sup>. In particular, all milk processing enterprises of Myasomolprom Holding have already received permission to export butter, cheese, milk whey, skimmed and sterilized powdered milk to this country. As for meat processing enterprises and poultry farms of Minsk region, they are actively working on accreditation for

the delivery of their products to China. Velez-Mit LLC, Slutsk Meat Processing Plant OJSC and Stolbtsy Meat Canning Plant OJSC have already received permission to export frozen beef, and Dzerzhinsky Agrocomplex OJSC and Smolevichi Broiler OJSC - to ship poultry meat products. Permission to supply pasteurized milk, cream and dairy products to the Celestial EmpireThe Nesvizh Children's Nutrition Factory Ltd.The already existing twinning arrangements hold great potential for intensifying cooperation with Chinese partners. In particular, back in June 2002, an Agreement on cooperation in trade, economic, scientific, technical and cultural areas was signed between the Minsk Regional Executive Committee and the People's Government of **Chongqing**, where today more than 30 million people live. In 2016, this interaction was resumed at the initiative of the Belarusian capital region. At the same time, a memorandum was signed on the development of twinning relations between the Kopyl district of Minsk Region and the Wanzhou district of Chongqing. A year later, it came to the adoption of the agreement on the establishment of twinning relations between the Belarusian region and the Chinese city.In March 2019, Chongqing hosted the Days of Minsk Region, during which a business forum with more than 225 representatives of business communities from both sides signed the Roadmap for cooperation for 2019-2020, cooperation agreements between the Chongqing International Chamber of Commerce and the Minsk branch of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Chongqing Education Committee and the Main Department of Education of the Minsk Regional Executive Committee, as well as a number of "contracts for the supply of products between business representatives totaling \$24 million" <sup>167</sup>. At the same time a representative office of Veles-Mit LLC was opened in Chongqing. Just two months later, a representative office of the capital region itself also appeared here to assist in finding "potential partners to promoteThe production of the enterprises of the Minsk region to the market of Chongqing. Chongqing"<sup>168</sup>. In August 2019, the two sides signed two investment cooperation agreements within the framework of the "Chongqing Colorful Settlement in Belarus" and "Chongqing Colorful Settlement in Belarus," where the prototypes are, respectively, "Chongqing Bayu rural dwellings and architectural features of eastern Sichuan." <sup>169</sup>In China, one of the dominants of the future settlement will be an exact copy of the Nesvizh Castle.However, the arrival of the pandemic slowed down the implementation of the plan. And in 2020, the interaction between the parties was expressed in the provision of humanitarian assistance to each other at the most critical moments. In particular, last February, when the whole COVID-19 affair was just beginning, a batch of medical masks was sent to Chongqing from Minsk Region in response to an appeal from China. Now opportunities are opening up for a return to the projects of the "pre-coronavirus" era.And this is characteristic of the interaction of the Minsk region and with another Chinese twin region - **Guangdong** province, the road map for cooperation with which for 2020-2021 was signed in November 2019 and included "issues of supply of Belarusian agricultural products to China, the creation of a joint milk processing plant" <sup>170</sup>. Let's hope that here, too, the effective implementation of plans of cooperation between the Minsk region and this Chinese region is not far off.The Belarusian capital also has interesting developments in cooperation with Chinese partners. In November 2019, **Minsk** and **Shanghai** signed an agreement on the establishment of twinning relations. Interestingly, before this document appeared, the Belarusian capital had already "signed 22 cooperation agreements with the cities of China, among which 3 - on twinning (Beijing, Changchun, Shenzhen) . <sup>171</sup>This may be the reason why Chinese companies have already invested about \$30 million in Minsk. By signing a new twinning document, the parties"identified priority areas of cooperation - increase in mutual trade, infrastructure construction, and tourism"<sup>172</sup>. Minsk residents are highly interested in Shanghai's experience in a number of areas. In particular, in the organization of the working process in educational institutions, medical infrastructure, social service centers and rehabilitation centers for people with disabilities. The attention of Minsk administrative and business circles is also attracted by the Shanghai Free Trade Zone, which is used in the People's Republic of China for economic and social reforms.One of the most



effective forms of coordination of trade and economic cooperation between Minsk and Shanghai has already become an annual business forum of business circles of Belarusian and Chinese cities. For example, a similar forum organized in Minsk in September 2018 brought together "more than 130 domestic and Chinese companies interested in cooperating in the areas of The Belarusian capital was also visited by Chinese manufacturers of electronics, household appliances, clothes, fabrics, medical equipment packaging, cosmetics, toys, jewelry, as well as imports of automobiles from China"<sup>173</sup>. The Belarusian capital was also visited by Chinese manufacturers of electronics and household appliances, clothing and fabrics, medical equipment packaging, cosmetics, toys, and jewelry, as well as importers of cars, electrical and welding equipment, and computer equipment interested in finding business partners in Minsk. The Shanghai-Minsk Business Forum, which took place in November 2019 and brought together over a hundred Chinese and more than thirty Belarusian enterprises and companies, was equally broad in scope. The program of the forum provided for discussion of topical issues of cooperation "in specialized three sections: 1) Food, food industry; 2) Tourism and hospitality of Minsk and Shanghai; 3) Industry"<sup>174</sup>. The high practical value of this event is proven by the documents adopted following its results. In particular, the Minsk City Executive Committee signed a Memorandum of Intent to establish cooperation with the Lotusland Shanghai Corporation to introduce heat pump technology and equipment in the construction of industrial and civil facilities in the Belarusian capital. The point is that "the use of heat pump installations for Minsk's satellite cities would allow to refuse laying of many kilometers of heating networks."<sup>175</sup> The memorandum on strategic partnership in the field of tourism exchanges was the result of negotiations of representatives of Belarusian RUE "Tsentrkurort" and Chinese group travel company Shanghai Airlines Tours International (Group) Co. An agreement on cooperation in holding international exhibitions was signed by Minskexpo CJSC and Shanghai industry and commerce exhibition Co. In addition, the Minsk free economic zone and Shanghai Allynay Technology Co., Ltd, as well as JSC "Confectionery Factory "Slodych" and Shanghai Teemo Foods have formalized their intentions to actively cooperate in the near future. Kommunarika is also going to increase supplies of its confectionery products to the Shanghai market, having signed a memorandum with the Chinese Misier Trading and Economic Company LLC. The fact that the market of this Chinese city attracts serious attention of manufacturers of the Belarusian capital is also confirmed by the fact that immediately nine Minsk enterprises took part in the second China International Exhibition of Imported Goods and Services, held in Shanghai in November 2019. Among them were Kommunarika SAO, Minsk Grape Wine Factory CJSC, Krinitisa OJSC, Slodych OJSC, Kristal OJSC, Minsk Kombinat of Bread Products OJSC, Minsk khlebprom KUP and Minsk Refrigeration Plant №2 TICUP. And more. A memorandum on the establishment of friendly relations between the Moscow district of the Belarusian capital and the Jiading district of Shanghai, signed in November 2019, also opens up interesting prospects for interregional cooperation. Just a month later - in December - a delegation from the Jiading district was already in Minsk, where they discussed with the leadership of the Moscow district of the Belarusian capital ways to implement the memorandum in the context of "intensifying bilateral trade and economic cooperation, as well as cooperation in the exchange of students of the two districts."<sup>176</sup> One of the concrete results of this visit was an invitation from the Chinese side to the students of the Moscow district of Minsk to visit a summer camp in Shanghai. Apparently, in the near future, friendly relations between the Soviet district of Minsk and another Shanghai district - Changning - will also be intensified. All these facts indicate that the theme of Belarusian-Chinese interregional cooperation should be firmly and permanently "to gain a foothold in the Belarusian regional press and to reflect as fully as possible the experience already accumulated in this respect"<sup>177</sup>. This will require creative strategies specific to international regional issues, which representatives of this segment of Belarusian journalism should develop in the near future.

## Minsk - Changchun: twinning with a view to the future

One of the positive trends in the development of foreign economic relations of the Belarusian capital in 2021 is the active interaction of Minsk enterprises with Chinese partners. Suffice it to say that "in January-May this [2021] year, trade turnover between Minsk and China amounted to \$730.6 million, while last year it was \$613.8 million during the same period.

<sup>178</sup>The main exporters are RUE Bellesexport, Best Meat Company, Meat and Dairy Company, Mobiora, Integral. The basis of Minsk supplies to China consisted of timber, meat and edible by-products of poultry, milk and condensed cream, rapeseed oil, electronic integrated circuits and micro assemblies, tanned or dressed fur skins, measuring or control devices, collections and collectibles in zoology, equipment for measuring or monitoring electrical quantities, finished media for recording sound. The activation of ties between the Belarusian capital and Chinese twin cities, of which Minsk has four - Changchun (1992), Shenzhen (2014), Beijing (2016), and Shanghai (2019) - seems important in terms of consolidating this trend in the future. Changchun, the administrative center of Jilin Province, located in the northeast of China, where science, automobile manufacturing, optical instrumentation are developed and where about eight million people live, occupies a special place in this list of twin cities. In May 2022 it will be 30 years since the signing of the Twinning Agreement ties between it and the Belarusian capital. In 2010, a Belarusian-Chinese technopark was opened in the high-tech production zone of this Chinese city to become a platform for working on joint projects and further promotion of products not only in the market of China, but also in neighboring countries. Its basis was formed by about 15 companies that were part of the zone and had long-standing stable relations with Belarusian scientific and innovation enterprises. At that time, among the joint projects planned in the technopark was "creation of an enterprise to produce medical laser equipment, an agreement on creation of a joint venture to produce high-precision electric motors. In the first stage about 30 hectares of land were allocated to the project for the construction of office and production facilities, in the future another 30 hectares may be allocated" <sup>179</sup>. Speaking more specifically, the technopark is divided into six functional zones: the Center of research and development, incubator of projects, museum, and three complexes - international cooperation, regional interaction and service. In addition, there are plans to create an art gallery, a bookstore, an exhibition hall, and a concert hall on its territory. But the main thing is that here, "the development is based, among other things, on a fund of 80 Belarusian projects"<sup>180</sup>.

Today, "a complex of technopark buildings has already been built there, and one of the current issues is to fill it with joint high-tech projects. <sup>181</sup>And in It has already welcomed its first three residents: The Sino-Belarusian Center for Research and Development of Precision Medical Equipment of BNTU Polytechnic Technopark and the Belarusian-Chinese Technopark in Changchun; the Belarusian-Chinese Center for Joint Development and Application of Carbon-Carbon Composite Materials between SvetlogorskHimvolokno OJSC and Jilin Lenke Company; Belarusian-Chinese center for the development of functional berry crops between the Central Botanical Garden of the National Academy of Sciences, Polesski Zhuraviny LLC and the North-Eastern Institute of Geography and Agricultural Ecology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. To support this growing dynamics of bilateral cooperation, the Belarusian and Chinese sides set a goal to "focus on improving the conditions for mutually beneficial cooperation, expanding and deepening contacts, including among young people"<sup>182</sup>. And today the main thematic areas of the technopark already include such areas as "photoelectronics, laser technology, new materials, construction and energy, agricultural technology and biotechnology, informatics" <sup>183</sup>.

The Belarusian-Chinese technology park in Changchun is not the only area of interaction between Minsk and this twin city. Back in June 2014, the parties agreed to develop business cooperation, for which they planned to hold business forums."During such events businessmen will have an opportunity to agree on the implementation of specific projects. In



addition, the forums will contribute to further strengthening the economic basis of our cooperation<sup>184</sup>. In June 2017, in order to expand twinning relations, Minsk City Executive Committee and the People's Government of Changchun adopted an agreement to establish cooperation in tourism and the development of cultural relations. And within the framework of the bilateral business forum that took place in the Chinese city, "memorandums of cooperation with Chinese partners were signed by Kommunarka Joint Stock Company, Minskkhlebprom PMC, Zapadnaya Wholesale Base PMC, Belryba OJSC, Minotel OJSC"<sup>185</sup>. So, the opportunities for expanding cooperation between the two twin cities are undoubtedly very extensive. It is only necessary to use them without losing time, and with mutual benefit.

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### **Belarus-Pakistan: Business Cooperation Council outlines the prospects for interaction**

In October 2021, the fifth meeting of the Belarus-Pakistan Business Council was held with the participation of representatives of more than 60 companies from Pakistan representing such economic sectors as chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles, food, construction, transport, logistics and tourism. On the Belarusian side the meeting was attended by representatives of almost one hundred enterprises and companies. Such composition of the business council participants eloquently demonstrated the fact that "the relations between Belarus and Pakistan are currently at a high level, especially in trade, investment and industry"<sup>186</sup>. The very extensive contractual and legal base, which already includes more than 80 agreements, contributes to it in many respects. About "another 20 agreements/memorandums of understanding are in the final stage of negotiation"<sup>187</sup>. Formed partnership implementation mechanisms in the form of commissions and working groups, as well as the existing system of interregional cooperation are also active. As for the Business Council, the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry held its fourth meeting in the online format six months ago April 2021. At the meeting, the parties "discussed not only the development of bilateral trade, but also the possibility of increasing Pakistan is interested in strengthening economic cooperation with Belarus [Electronic resource]. - 2021. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/pakistan-zainteresovan-v-ukreplenii-ekonomicheskogo-sotrudnichestva-s-belarusju-462939-2021/>. The Belarusian side has also emphasized the priority areas of cooperation, including industry, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, as well as education, information technology, and logistics."<sup>188</sup> At the fifth meeting of the council, the Belarusian side largely concretized the key areas of cooperation with its Pakistani partners, noting among them "the increase in the volume of mutual sales of traditional products, the establishment of joint productions of Belarusian equipment in Pakistan, as well as joint productions of surgical instruments and leather goods in Belarus. The creation of joint clusters to produce medicines in demand is promising; it can take place both in Belarus and Pakistan"<sup>189</sup>. In addition, the issues of attracting Pakistani capital to implement projects of modernization of Belarusian enterprises of the textile industry, development of joint productions of agricultural products, implementation of joint projects in the scientific and technical sphere with access to the production cycle are topical now. The project to create a university of applied technologies in Pakistan is also relevant, in order to reach a qualitatively new level of professional and technical training of Pakistani specialists using Belarusian educational technologies. Speaking of the priority of interaction, such as agriculture, we note that in 2020 Pakistan sold about three hundred units of Belarusian agricultural machinery - tractors and combines. In 2021, Minsk and Islamabad intend to increase this figure to three thousand units. The fifth meeting of the Business Council discussed the idea of setting up assembly production of Belarusian tractors on Pakistani soil. "We are talking about assembling 10 thousand tractors a year in Pakistan, this project is now in the works and preliminary documents have been signed."<sup>190</sup>

Another promising area for Belarusian-Pakistani business cooperation is the development of exchange trade, which can give new impetus to the development of bilateral trade and economic relations. In particular, the Pakistani side sees considerable potential here "primarily in such areas as agriculture, woodworking, metallurgy and petrochemistry"<sup>191</sup>. The fact is that, according to both sides, the Belarusian-Pakistani trade turnover is not very large yet - a little over \$50 million for 2020. The fact that "Pakistan is one of the world's largest exporters of rice, wheat and other crops"<sup>192</sup> hides a considerable potential for its growth through the exchange mechanism. The textile industry is also developed there. The Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange (BUCE) is ready to save Pakistani companies from most of the problems associated with entering the Belarusian market and minimize their possible

risks. In addition, with the help of the Belarusian exchange platform exporters from Pakistan could supply its goods to the European Union, where the BUTB has about four thousand accredited participants. In turn, Belarusian companies could successfully export chemical and petrochemical products to the Pakistani market, which are traditionally in high demand there. Recall that in the first eight months of 2021 the trade turnover between Belarus and Pakistan has already exceeded \$53 million. At the same time "The export of Belarusian goods amounted to \$44.3 million..."<sup>193</sup> and the trade surplus for the Belarusian side amounted to over \$35 million. The dynamics of these indices prove that the growth potential has not been exhausted yet. Opportunities for expanding trade and economic cooperation are diverse, and the plans for their implementation are concrete and realistic.

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## Belarus and the Republic of South Africa: regions update partnerships

March 2023 will mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of South Africa (RSA). In 2020 the trade turnover between the two countries exceeded 25 million dollars with the share of Belarusian exports amounting to 18 million dollars. This was due to deliveries from Belarus of quarry motor vehicles and spare parts, oversized large tires, potash fertilizers, linen fabrics, X-ray equipment, and certain types of food products. An important point in this case is that "the distribution network of Belarusian enterprises in South Africa includes the Belshina trade house, a dealer (certified service center) of BelAZ."<sup>194</sup>

A characteristic feature of recent cooperation between Belarus and South Africa has been the revival of trade and economic ties. In particular, "in 2020, after a six-year break, supplies of BELAZ mining equipment to South Africa resumed"<sup>195</sup>. And at the end of September 2021, the fleet of these machines in this African country had already 49 dump trucks. This fact is a clear indication that Minsk and Pretoria are beginning to gradually return to the full implementation of the potential inherent in the cooperation between the regions of the two countries. Recall that in 2013, when celebrating the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, the parties spoke about good prospects for "cooperation in the industrial sector, agriculture, interregional development"<sup>196</sup>...". And in 2021 this aspiration became especially noticeable. For example, in late September 2021, the head of the South African diplomatic mission in Russia and Belarus, M.D. Maketuka, was talking at the **Minsk Regional Executive Committee** about intensifying cooperation with partners from the **Free State** province. The meeting resulted in a decision to cooperate in two areas: agriculture and production of machinery. It should be noted that these regions signed a cooperation agreement back in December 2015. In September 2016, a representative delegation from Free State visited the Belarusian capital region, where it was particularly interested in the technology and experience of Minsk Region in processing agricultural products. This was due to the fact that agriculture is central to the economy of the province. In addition, at that time the South African side expressed great interest "in the assistance of the Belarusian partners in personnel training and intends to develop cooperation in construction and health care."<sup>197</sup> And in November 2020 the partners from South Africa confirmed their readiness to cooperate in various areas, including "in the areas of trade in milk and meat, exchange of students for training".<sup>198</sup> as well as in the development of tourism. Apparently, the time has come for all of these plans to work together. Another South African province, which has noticeably increased its interest in cooperation with Belarus partners in 2021 is **KwaZulu-Natal**, which is the second most populous (11.5 million people) in South Africa and ranks second in the country in terms of economic performance. Thus, in April there was a video conference "Opportunities for trade and investment cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the province of KwaZulu-Natal in the textile and clothing sector," at which "From the South African side there were represented companies working in the sphere of linen products supply, sewing of clothes and shoes, designers"<sup>199</sup>. It is likely that as a result of the discussion, such Belarusian enterprises as the Orsha flax processing plant, Kamvol, Mogotex and Luch will soon find reliable business partners in the south of the African continent. This province of South Africa is of interest to Belarus because it is where a project to build an assembly plant for Belarusian tractors is expected to take place in a special economic zone. "The parties to the project are Nqawana Holdings and the Richards Bay Industrial Development Zone (RBIDZ) administration on the South African side, and OJSC MTZ and Round By LLC on the Belarusian side."<sup>200</sup> In August 2021 here have already been discussed the technical details of this project and outlined specific steps to implement the agreements reached. Another example of partner regions from Belarus and South Africa is the **Mogilev** region and **Mpumalanga** province, one of the most powerful in the country in industrial terms, where the

mining industry and telecommunications services are well developed, energy, where about 40 percent of South Africa's forest land is concentrated. The two sides signed a memorandum of cooperation in December 2016. In it they expressed interest in developing partnerships in trade and industry, agriculture, education, sports, tourism and culture. The province was also interested not only in developing projects in the agricultural sector, but also in training specialists in agriculture and forestry, medicine, and information technology in Belarusian universities. In addition, they talked about possibilities of "cooperation in wood processing, creation of joint ventures for processing of agricultural products and food production"<sup>201</sup>. Let's hope that the time has come for these regions to return to the once accepted partnership plans in order to successfully implement them today.

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## **Belarus - Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries Fund for International Development:**

### **The beginning of cooperation has been established**

One of the sources of investments in the Belarusian economy are resources of international financial organizations. Suffice it to say that "over the last four years alone, credit agreements worth more than 1 billion euros have been concluded. These are projects in the field of road reconstruction, energy efficiency, solid waste<sup>202</sup>..." . In 2020 alone, 190 million euros were raised from the World Bank for projects in the social sphere, including support for the health system during the pandemic. Other international financial institutions, on whose support the Belarusian side counts today, include the Eurasian Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, as well as the Fund for International Development of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The OPEC Fund is a new creditor for Belarus, which it has never worked with before, and which Minsk considers "very important in terms of future prospects for diversification of borrowing sources"<sup>203</sup>. This international financial institution was created in January 1976 on the basis of the Solemn Declaration adopted by the heads of the OPEC member states in March 1975 at a conference in Algiers. Its purpose is to promote cooperation in all areas of the economy with other developing states. "The main task of the Fund is to support projects significant for the socio-economic development of countries that are not <sup>204</sup>The fund is usually allocated to projects in the energy, transport, agriculture, and health sectors. As a rule, the fund is allocated for the implementation of projects in the energy, transport, agriculture and health care sectors. The example of other post-Soviet countries shows that this international cooperation makes it possible to attract considerable financial resources to the national economy. For example, **Uzbekistan** has been cooperating with the OPEC Fund since 1999. In recent years funding has been allocated for implementation of two projects in this Central Asian country to the total amount of 26 million dollars. These are the organization of water supply to rural settlements of Kasan and Mubarek districts of Kashkadarya province and development of drinking water infrastructure of Kushrabad district of Samarkand province. And in March 2019, "a project to provide drinking water to 22 settlements of Yangikurgan district and Namangan city for a total amount of \$54 million was approved. USD" <sup>205</sup>. **Armenia** has been cooperating with the OPEC Fund since 2015, when the first loan agreement was signed to promote the development of small and medium-sized enterprises in the wholesale trade, manufacturing, food industry and hotel business. And in June 2019, a new "\$25 million loan agreement aimed at promoting foreign trade in Armenia" <sup>206</sup> was signed. In September 2019 agreement to implement the \$10 million project "Improving Water Management in Khatlon Region" with the OPEC Fund was signed by the Government of **Tajikistan**. "The goal of the project is to improve water resources management taking into account climate change, as well as to promote the growth of agricultural production and increase farmers' income and their access to water supply" <sup>207</sup>. The OPEC Fund currently operates in 135 countries, providing funding as well as grants to support vital projects in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. As of early 2021, it "approved some 4,000 projects, and provided \$1 billion in funding for COVID-19 recovery and remediation activities in developing countries"<sup>208</sup>.

In December 2020, the **Republic of Belarus** also signed its first loan agreement with the OPEC Fund. In June 2021, this document took the form of a law after its ratification by the deputies of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus. The \$20 million loan will be used to finance the first phase of the Emergency Public Health Care Program. It is important that these "funds are allocated on rather comfortable terms - for 18 years, at an effective interest rate of 4%"<sup>209</sup>. Importantly, the loan agreement is not tied to intended use. The loan "must be used to repay budget expenditures on COVID-19.

That is, there is no restriction that it is only for medicines, equipment, or payroll projects" <sup>210</sup>. Having created the necessary legal framework for cooperation with this international financial organization, the Belarusian side plans to continue the dialogue with the OPEC Fund, both to provide additional funding for healthcare projects and to attract credit resources to finance priority infrastructure projects.

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## Belarus: the goal is to maintain multi-vector foreign trade

The Program of Socio-Economic Development of Belarus for 2021-2025 aims to ensure the qualitative growth of exports and their geographical diversification, which will expand markets and ensure the sustainability of foreign trade. To this end, it is necessary to solve two tasks. "The first one is not to allow the presence on traditional sales markets to decrease. The second is to maintain multi-vector foreign trade, increasing export volumes to the PRC, the EU, the U.S. and the far arc countries, mastering new niches of the world market".<sup>211</sup> The statistics of the export component of the Belarusian economy for the five months of 2021 show how these problems are solved today. The volume of exports of goods and services during this period exceeded 18 billion dollars. At the same time, "the foreign trade surplus in goods and services was \$1.247 million (in January-May 2020, the surplus was also \$548.1 million)".<sup>212</sup> An important detail: the export of Belarusian goods during this period grew by almost 40 percent, exceeding \$14 billion.

The **Belarusian capital** demonstrated a high rate of growth in the export component in 2021. For five months "exports of Minsk organizations (with oil) increased by 56.4% and amounted to \$4338.6 million. Trade was conducted with 171 countries, exports - to 130 countries. The main market for Minsk organizations is Russia, as well as Ukraine and the Netherlands (the share is 21.1 percent and 17.6 percent, respectively).<sup>213</sup> As for the export of services of the capital's companies, its volume at the expense of computer, transportation and other business services increased by 17% in January-May 2021 and amounted to about two and a half billion dollars in 206 countries worldwide. As a result, Minsk managed to achieve a positive balance of foreign trade in excess of \$120 million.

Enterprises of **Gomel region**, who increased exports of goods and services by 47.2% up to \$2.3 billion in January-May, are doing well with foreign shipments in 2021. Diversification of foreign sales markets allowed economic entities of the Gomel region to achieve that "according to the results of the five months the share of the European Union countries in the total volume of export of goods was 38%, the Eurasian Economic Union - 34%, other countries accounted for 28% of supplies".<sup>214</sup> Great hopes in the Belarusian region are associated with the Chinese market, where supplies have already increased by almost a quarter and amounted to 44 million dollars at the expense of Svetlogorsk CCP and dairy processing enterprises. Accreditation of new products and enterprises of Gomel region will soon be completed in this country, which will give new impulses to export to the Middle Kingdom market. This applies, first of all, to whole-milk products of the Rogachyov MKK and meat products of the Kalinkovichi and Zhlobin meat processing plants. If we talk about the Russian market, in the first half of 2021 enterprises and organizations of Gomel region concluded foreign trade contracts with partners in this country for almost 270 million dollars. "For example, at the end of June 2021, a contract was signed online between JSC Gomel Chemical Plant and VASTEKO Trading House LLC (Nizhny Novgorod) for a total amount of 878.4 million Russian rubles".<sup>215</sup>

**Brest region** enterprises increased the export of their products by almost 23 percent in the five months of 2021, supplying them to 94 countries and opening three new markets - in South America, North and East Africa. In particular, the first shipment of glass putty was sent to Bolivia, dried milk to Libya, and electrical transformers to Uganda. But deliveries to European Union countries were especially good:

"Exports to Germany increased one and a half times. Supplies to France, Spain and Romania more than doubled. Almost 100% - to Bulgaria and Slovakia. More than 40% went to Lithuania and Latvia".<sup>216</sup> The main export items here are coal, furniture, tires, plastic parts and PVC profiles, soybean and rapeseed oil, toys, wood chips and wood pellets, lumber and timber. This picture is nicely complemented by the export of services from the Belarusian region, where "the major share of foreign exchange earnings comes from the 558th Aircraft

Repair Plant (\$12.5 million). In addition, exports of transport (up 16.8%), construction (17.8%) and computer (24.2%) services increased.<sup>217</sup> All of this in a complex allowed enterprises of Brest region to achieve a foreign trade surplus of almost half a billion dollars.

The **Mogilev region** also managed to achieve a significant increase in exports - by more than 30 percent - in January-May 2021. It "managed to ensure the highest export volume (\$966 million) and a surplus for the last 5 years"<sup>218</sup>. A typical detail: exports to more than 20 countries of the European Union increased by 1.7 times and amounted to \$221 million. Supplies to China doubled as well. All these facts show that the Belarusian regions have made a good start in the new five-year period to accomplish one of the most important tasks contained in the Program of Social and Economic Development of Belarus for 2021-2025. Let us hope that these positive trends will be continued further in line with the innovative development of the Belarusian state.

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## **Belarus: food export grows, geography of supplies expands**

In July 2021, the Program of Social and Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus for 2021-2025 was approved, which set a goal to achieve an increase in exports of goods and services in excess of \$50 billion by the end of the five-year period. At the same time "the export of food products and agricultural raw materials will increase up to 7 billion US dollars by the end of 2025"<sup>219</sup>. The dynamics of growth in supplies of Belarusian foodstuffs and agricultural raw materials to foreign markets in 2021 shows that the objective set in the program for the next five years can be achieved much earlier. Statistics shows that over the first seven months of this year exports of agricultural products from Belarus increased by almost ten per cent and exceeded three and a half billion dollars. The geography of these supplies is very wide - 97 countries of the world. And practically in all regions of the planet their growth is observed. Particularly intensive was the growth of exports to the European Union countries and far abroad, by almost 45 percent. If we talk about individual products, "exports of milk and dairy products grew by 5.6 percent, beef - by 12.5 percent, sausage products - by 30.8 percent, fish and fish products - by 19.2 percent, eggs - by 37.5 percent, potatoes - by 15.2 percent, rapeseed oil - in 2 times"<sup>220</sup>.

Enterprises of the concern "Belgospisheprom", which in the first half of 2021 exported its products to 72 countries, having mastered the "13 new markets: Afghanistan," make a significant contribution to achieving these figures, Iraq, Nigeria, UAE, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Morocco, Brazil, Libya, Iceland, Oman, Pakistan. In total, products worth \$1.2 million were supplied to these markets.<sup>221</sup> As a result, in January-July 2021 the Concern achieved a foreign trade surplus in the amount of \$23 million. Belgospisheprom's enterprises are especially well positioned now on the Chinese market, where deliveries of sugar, confectionery products and strong alcoholic beverages more than doubled in the first half of 2021. The fact that the Group is now actively developing recipes for products adapted to the Middle Kingdom market also contributes to the continuation of this positive trend. In particular, the Lucky Chucky line of chocolates with low sugar content and a sugar-free chocolate line have already been produced here. Specially for the PRC market, vodka formulas with 69% and 77% alcohol content were developed. Since the beginning of 2021, the range of export goods was expanded, the first shipments of fruit baby food and oat flakes were dispatched, a contract for the supply of beer was signed"<sup>222</sup>. Especially for the 4th China International Import Fair, which will take place in Shanghai in the first decade of November 2021, Belgospisheprom prepares new products for the market research - marmalade with tomato and celery, zephyr with ginger flavor, dried lingonberry with red pepper flavor. The Glubokoe dairy cannery sees great prospects in the market of the People's Republic of China, which also opens up new types of exports to this country. In particular, "in the eight months of last year [2020] we supplied to the Chinese market demineralized whey for \$174 thousand, this year we sold \$2 million worth of products. <...> Our company produces whey all year round, on average we get about 800 tons per month. And almost all of it goes to the Chinese market."<sup>223</sup> Glubokoe Whey Plant also began to develop the Japanese and Vietnamese markets, where in 2021 several batches of the same whey were already shipped. As for the export from Belarus to the Chinese market, "in the first six months of 2021 China ranked second (after Russia) among the countries-importers of Belarusian food products".<sup>224</sup> China increased the volume of supplies from Belarus by 1.5 times, to \$156 million. Among Belarusian food exporters in terms of opening new markets we can also mention the Rogachev Dairy Canning Plant, which in July 2021 supplied the first batch of concentrated milk to Saudi Arabia. This happened due to the contract with one of the leaders in this country in distribution, which covers retail chains, stores, restaurants and cafes. The promotion of concentrated milk from Rogachev to the Saudi market was facilitated by the fact that "there are traditions there that have been preserved for centuries. For example, tea with milk is one of the favorite drinks for

the residents of that country, which they enjoy consuming in fairly large quantities." <sup>225</sup>B In this regard, the Belarusian company sees great prospects in the development of the market of this country in the Persian Gulf. Among other foreign markets, where Belarusian food supplies increased sharply in 2021, we should also mention Turkey. "In the first half of the year, food exports to Turkey increased 4.8 times compared to the same period last year and amounted to \$2.9 million. <sup>226</sup>At the first meeting of the Belarusian-Turkish working group on agriculture, which was held in August 2021, Belarus declared its readiness to further increase supplies of high-quality food products to its partners, including butter, cheese, skimmed and whole milk powder, and in the future, meat products - beef and poultry produced in accordance with Halal requirements.

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## Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange: Multi-vector approach is the main priority

The Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange (BUCE) demonstrated high growth rates of export transactions in 2021, where their volume increased by 80 percent to \$369 million in the first half of the year. Companies from 29 countries bought the Belarusian goods through the BUCE. The five largest markets are Lithuania, Germany, Latvia, Estonia and Russia.<sup>227</sup> The main export items for Lithuania were sawn wood, wood chips and oilseeds products. It is worth 101 million dollars. German companies bought sawn wood worth 64 million dollars and household stakes, milk powder and technical casein worth one million dollars. Latvia was characterized by the purchase of Belarusian lumber products, wooden poles and stakes, rapeseed oil and scrap ferrous and nonferrous metals - for 57 million dollars. As for Russia, then there has been a significant increase in exports of such commodity items as: cement - 6 times - up to \$10.7 million, butter - 61(!) times - up to \$10 million, milk powder - 7 times - up to \$6.6 million. In total, as of July 1, 2021 there were 300 new foreign companies accredited to the BUTB in the first half of the year, and their total number was 5,218. There was an activation of transactions through the Belarusian exchange platform in a number of other countries, among which Ukraine should be mentioned. The number of its representatives on the BUTB in the first half of 2021 increased to 326. "Exchange commodity turnover with Ukraine also increased significantly: at the end of six months it reached \$24.6 million, which is 58% more than for the same period in 2020"<sup>228</sup>. And already in August 2021, the first deal on the export of milk powder to the Ukrainian market was made here - a trial batch of 40 tons for 108 thousand dollars. Previously, bidders from this country were more interested in scrap metals, construction materials, flour and plant seeds. Another country that should be mentioned in this context is Poland, to whose market in the first half of 2021 rebar produced by JSC BMZ - the managing company of BMK Holding - was shipped almost four times more than in six months of 2020 - by almost four and a half million dollars. This result was the result of very painstaking work with this market. Not every Polish company was ready to work on conditions of full prepayment and deferred delivery. But now in every trading session on the BUTB "There are not two or three Polish importers, as it was in the beginning, but at least ten. Thus, firstly, a high level of competition in the bidding is ensured, and secondly, the volume of sales of Belarusian valves to Poland is steadily growing"<sup>229</sup>. Vigorous steps are being taken at the BUTB to increase sales of Belarusian goods to China. Now 48 Chinese participants - small and medium-sized enterprises - are accredited on this exchange platform. In July 2021 the BUTB agreed to develop cooperation with "BR-Consult" UE, a subsidiary of the Development Bank of the Republic of Belarus, which specializes in the implementation of export-oriented investment projects. The essence of the agreements reached is that one of the largest shareholders of the Chinese-Belarusian Industrial Park Velikiy Kamen - the Chinese corporation China Merchants Group - would be attracted to the exchange trading, which would significantly expand "opportunities for supplies of Belarusian products to China. This applies not only to lumber, but virtually the entire export range, including rapeseed oil, dairy products, meat, and tannery semi-finished products"<sup>230</sup>. Another interesting trend related to Chinese companies accredited on the BUTB emerged in July 2021. Kangkai Zhiguan (Heze) Industrial Development, a major importer of lumber from China, which has been operating on the Belarusian exchange platform since May 2020 and received the status of a non-resident stockbroker here in April 2021, announced its intention to invest in the Belarusian timber processing industry and develop its business in our country in order "not only to increase the volume of lumber purchases, but also to establish its own production in Belarus"<sup>231</sup>. At the same time, the company intends to buy raw materials and sell the finished product exclusively through the BUTB. As for the Chinese vector, we should note that this country's market is considered one of the most promising by the BUTB. As noted above, almost 50 Chinese companies have already been accredited to the exchange, and more than half of them regularly participate in trading. "In addition, every two weeks there are special trading sessions on sales of lumber in the PRC"<sup>232</sup>. All this contributes to the fact that in the first half of 2021 the BUTB's turnover with Chinese partners exceeded 25 million dollars, which is almost twice as much as during the whole year of 2020. To further increase the attractiveness of the exchange platform for customers from China,

the BUTB decided to give them the opportunity to make all necessary settlements in yuan. This will affect the settlement of exchange contracts, payment of the exchange fee and the transfer of the deposit. And in general it will simplify the financial side of exchange activities for Chinese participants. If we talk about the Asian vector of BUTB activity, let us recall this fact: in June 2021 the first company from the Republic of Korea was accredited here to participate in the bidding - Nam Chang Co. Ltd., which is a large supplier of timber products on Korean market and has its own production facilities and a branched warehousing network. It is going to buy sawn timber and fuel pellets produced in Belarus at BUTB. "The delivery of the goods is planned to the port of Pusan using rail and sea transport."<sup>233</sup> It is interesting that with the appearance of this Korean participant, the geography of the exchange trade on the BUTB started to cover 65 countries. A little earlier - in March 2021 - the first BUTB broker in Israel became a major distributor of furniture and finishing materials - Global Edge Sourcing Ltd, whose plans include "Organize direct supplies of Belarusian lumber to market in Israel, where today there is an increased demand for these products."<sup>234</sup> In the future we are talking about expanding the range of goods purchased through the BUTB. In particular, this could happen due to the rolled rebar produced by the Belarusian Steel Works. It should be noted that as of the end of March 2021 more than 50 broker companies, including those from Germany, China, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Russia, and Estonia, had already been accredited to the BUTB. Along with China, such a European country as Great Britain becomes one of the fastest-growing export destinations of the BUTB in 2021. According to the results of the first half of the year deliveries of Belarusian lumber to the British market through the exchange platform increased 11(!) times, exceeding 12 million dollars, and wooden stakes - 16(!) times - up to 3,7 million dollars. Back in April 2021 regular sales of tanned semi-finished products "vet-blue" produced by Belarusian tanneries to this European country were launched here. And in just a couple of months the amount of transactions on this commodity item exceeded \$740 thousand. To all appearances, this is only the beginning of a very dynamic and promising growth. And at the end of June 2021, a special trading session was organized at the BUTB, which became "the first experience of selling timber products to the British market in the form of complex multi-base lots"<sup>235</sup>. As a result of these trades, almost five thousand cubic meters of lumber worth two and a half million dollars were sold to the UK. In June 2021, the first deal on the sale of Belarusian leather products to Italy was also registered at the BUOTB. The Italian company bought a trial batch of tanned semi-finished vet-blue products worth \$35,000 at the leather raw materials export auction<sup>236</sup>. And there is every reason to believe that this pilot deal will become a starting point for long-term cooperation. In 2021, BUTB specialists also engaged in a serious study of the African vector of activity. In particular, the Egyptian direction. In March, "the first deal to export Belarusian goods to this North African country was made by the Egyptian company Sama Al-Jazeera for Import and Export, which purchased a trial batch of Belarusian lumber"<sup>237</sup>. And the goods were safely delivered to the final consumer. In June 2021 the delegation of the Egyptian business circles visited BUTB to study the Belarusian experience of exchange trade and use it as a basis for creation of the first Egyptian exchange. The business partners from this North African country were especially attentive to the peculiarities of the exchange trade in agricultural products, "as it is planned to conduct pilot trading at the first commodity exchange in Egypt for this very group of goods."<sup>238</sup> In the future, the parties plan to cooperate in other areas, including supplies of Belarusian lumber, construction materials and industrial goods to the north of the African continent. In the meantime, information about the opportunities Belarusian exchange platform has already been included in the materials of the events held by the Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce. Another trend that eloquently shows that the Belarusian stock exchange is gradually gaining popularity among representatives of foreign business, for whom minimization of risks is of paramount importance, is the rapid growth - three and a half times in the first half of 2021 - of the number of transit transactions made by foreign companies. The peculiarity of these transactions is that their participants are non-residents of Belarus - companies from Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Poland, and Estonia. An important detail: if in 2020 these transactions concerned only industrial and consumer goods, now they are registered practically in all areas available at the BUTB. In particular, "Russian companies actively supplied softwood lumber to the Baltic states and Poland. As a

result, 77 transit transactions to the amount of \$968 thousand were registered in the first half of the year<sup>239</sup>. As for the industrial and consumer goods, 76 transactions involved textiles, lighting equipment, furniture, and motor oil, worth a total of \$2.3 million. And there is every reason to believe that these figures will only increase in the future. Speaking about the Russian vector, and as of June 1, 2021 2589 economic entities from Russia were accredited at the BUTB, it should be emphasized that the intensification of work with companies from the regions was one of the main trends in the interaction of the BUTB with the Russian Federation in the first half of 2021. Total amount of exchange transactions between Russian and Belarusian subjects of economic activity during this period increased by 1.8 times and amounted to 63 million dollars. This is largely due to the fact that in 2021 the BUTB still had 126 new participants from Russia. And the largest volume of transactions accounted for representatives of the Leningrad, Moscow and Smolensk regions. "The leadership of the Leningrad region is due, on the one hand, to the significant volume of purchases of Belarusian cement and dairy products, and, on the other hand, coal supplies for the needs of Belarusian enterprises. The <sup>240</sup>Novosibirsk Region, the largest buyer of Belarusian dried milk, and the Ivanovo Region, the leader in exchange purchases of butter in Belarus, also joined the leaders. It is quite possible that this list will include other regions of Russia in 2021. In particular, for Voronezh region BUTB is planning to provide a single sales and procurement channel for agricultural producers, since it is the products of the agro-industrial complex that have all chances to become the driver of exchange trade with this Russian region. The fact is that "oilseed meal, feed additives, cereals and grains are always in demand on the Belarusian market, and the Voronezh region is just one of the leaders in this segment"<sup>241</sup>. On the other hand, according to the results of the first half of 2021, the turnover of agricultural products at the BUTB has already grown by 70 percent, and Belarusian exports have increased almost fourfold, exceeding 60 million dollars. As for the Yaroslavl region, it is planned to organize the export of Belarusian butter and powdered milk there through the BUTB site. This became known in July 2021, when "the management of one of the leading producers of dairy products and ice cream in the Yaroslavl Region expressed an interest in purchasing large volumes of butter and skimmed milk powder on the exchange trades to meet the enterprise's needs for high-quality raw materials"<sup>242</sup>. At the same time it is also a question of using the BUTB platform to sell Yaroslavl products to China using the mechanism of transit transactions. The fact that the use of the exchange mechanism can give a powerful impetus to the development of trade and economic cooperation between Belarus and the Pskov region, the volume of which decreased noticeably in 2020, was discussed at the business forum in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of this Russian region in June 2021. The attention of its participants was focused not only on the supplies of the Pskov enterprises to the Belarusian market, but also to third countries by means of transit transactions. After all, it is now one of the most in-demand instruments for Russian exchange traders. And agreements have already been reached to sell "a wide range of lumber, oilseeds and processed products, fodder additives, electrical equipment, BOPET films and polyester produced by Pskov companies"<sup>243</sup> through the BUTB.

In June 2021 the Belarusian-Russian Trade Union and the St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry agreed to unite their efforts for the development of Belarusian-Russian trade. It should be reminded that in 2020 the trade turnover of Belarus with St. Petersburg and the Leningrad Region The region's business relationship "is close to \$2 billion, and this despite the negative effects of the pandemic."<sup>244</sup> The fact that the interest in business cooperation between the parties continues to grow is evidenced by the BUTB seminar for St. Petersburg business circles held in June 2021, which was attended by executives of 30 companies representing various branches of economy, including rolled metal and electrical products manufacturing, machine building, wholesale trade of agricultural products, equipment supply for railroads and agro-industrial complex. The Oryol Region also sees great potential for cooperation with the BUTB in 2021. This is evidenced by the agreements reached in June 2021 and associated with the organization of "deliveries of cable and wire products, load-lifting equipment, and solid-state relays to Belarus"<sup>245</sup>. It should be noted that for this Russian region, Belarusian business entities, along with Latvian and Kazakh ones, are among the top three major trade and economic partners. In 2020 Oryol enterprises supplied nearly \$41 million worth of products to the Belarusian market.



The BUTB will provide them with an additional sales channel and direct access to the largest Belarusian consumers. The activation of exchange trade with the Kaliningrad region was discussed at a seminar held at the end of June 2021, which was attended by representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises. The participants of the business meeting agreed that the most promising direction of the exchange trade is agro-industrial products. As a result, participants of the business meeting agreed that the most promising direction of exchange trade is products of agro-industrial complex. In particular, products of oil and fats group which traditionally occupy a significant share in export of Kaliningrad region, and "the largest processor of oil seeds in the region regularly tops the list of sellers of oil meal at the exchange trade. Moreover, the exchange platform can serve not only as an entry point to the Belarusian market, but also simplify the access of Kaliningrad companies to the markets of third countries"<sup>246</sup>. Exchange trade could become an important element of trade and economic interaction with other Russian regions as well. In particular, this was discussed at the same June 2021 meeting of the working group on cooperation between Belarus and Kalmykia, where the BUTB demonstrated its readiness to provide Kalmyk exporters with direct access to more than 21 thousand Belarusian companies and also become an electronic window to markets of other countries, revealing the experience of transit deals "on sales of Russian rapeseed oil to China and lumber to the Baltic states"<sup>247</sup>. Business circles of the Orenburg region are planning to cooperate with the BUTB in several directions at once, which was discussed at the webinar of the parties held at the beginning of July 2021. First, we are talking about organizing exports of Orenburg iron and rolled steel to the Belarusian market. Secondly, the supply of oilseeds processing products to the markets of third countries through the mechanism of transit deals arouse the interest of entrepreneurs of this Russian region. The fact is that non-energy commodities prevail in the structure of Orenburg region's exports. And the Belarusian side is particularly interested in metal products - pig iron and rolled sheets. As for transit deals, the BUTB "is ready to help oilseeds processors from the Orenburg region to enter the markets of China, Switzerland and the Baltic states"<sup>248</sup>. The Republic of Bashkortostan also considers exchange trade as an effective tool for enhancing trade and economic cooperation with Belarus. At the meeting of business circles of this Russian region in July 2021 with the representatives of the Belarus Stock Exchange, 12 Bashkir companies involved in the production and sale of compressor equipment, air purification systems, food products, bio-fertilizers, reagents for the oil industry and water recycling systems showed interest to participate in electronic trading on the Belarusian exchange platform at once<sup>249</sup>. All these facts convincingly show that the BUTB today is taking active measures to actualize interaction with Russian regions, since "deepening integration with the Russian Federation in the next five years will remain the most important task of the Belarusian government in terms of the development of foreign economic activity and international cooperation," which provides for the implementation of plans for joint activities in sectors of the economy and Russian regions.<sup>250</sup> For this purpose, it is envisaged to implement plans for joint activities both by sectors of the economy and by Russian regions.

## Great Stone Industrial Park: On the Way to the Medical Cluster

In June 2021, the Republic of Belarus adopted a decree that improves the legal regulation aimed at improving the investment climate in the Chinese-Belarusian Industrial Park "Great Stone". In particular, this document provides for: 1) making the park administration more independent by transferring additional powers from local authorities in terms of administrative procedures; 2) expanding the types of activities of the industrial park; 3) supporting startups; 4) creating preferential conditions for large investment projects with investments of over 50 million dollars. Among the new areas of Great Stone's activities should be mentioned, first of all, the creation and development of productions in the areas of biopharmaceuticals, medical products and medical services. A very attractive innovation in this regard are special conditions for the development of medical activities on the territory of the park, where it will be possible to provide medical services using medicines, medical equipment and products, treatment methods of foreign countries without mandatory registration in Belarus and without the need to obtain a license for medical services. The terms will be significantly shortened for manufacturers and the procedures for registration and re-registration of medicines and medical devices, as well as for clinical trials, will be simplified. In other words, all these changes "open up great opportunities for development of a medical and pharmaceutical cluster in the park, and primarily in the field of traditional Chinese medicine"<sup>251</sup>.

The focus on the development of Belarusian-Chinese cooperation in the field of medicine in the context of the fight against the coronavirus epidemic is very timely. After all, Chinese traditional medicine "has unique advantages in the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of diseases. <...> It not only has a good therapeutic effect on mild COVID-19, but also has obvious advantages in treating severely ill patients, so that the mortality rate in severe cases has dropped from 21% to 5%"<sup>252</sup>. Using the "Great Stone" platform to realize the existing potential of Belarusian-Chinese collaboration in the field of health care can give a serious positive result in terms of preventing new "waves" of the coronavirus epidemic. Recall that today in the industrial park "Great Stone" there are 73 residents, 12 of which operate in the medical direction. "These are companies from Belarus, China, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Russia, and the USA"<sup>253</sup>. An important component of the medical cluster being created here will be the company "Novoera Biotech," which became a resident of the industrial park in March 2021. Its founders include the Institute of Culture and Economics Jingtai, Xishanqingxue Chinese Medicine Clinic LLC (Beijing) and Xishanqingxue Pharmaceutical Technology Company LLC (Beijing). The new resident will implement a project related to Chinese traditional medicine. "The medicines, supplements that are planned to be produced are based on environmentally friendly natural material. They will be in demand not only to help in the treatment of coronavirus, but also in the treatment of colds, flu, asthma"<sup>254</sup>. In particular, the production of Linlan Yiqing, a drug aimed at effective treatment of coronavirus infection, will be organized. It is assumed that at the first stage, the produced drugs, the production of which is planned to start in 2021, will be exported to Ukraine, Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkey and India. In March 2021, plans were also announced to create the Eurasian Center for Traditional Chinese Medicine at Great Stone, which will provide medical services to the industrial park's residents and its Chinese and foreign employees, as well as interact with scientific research institutions and healthcare institutions of Belarus and neighboring countries to exchange experience in traditional Chinese medicine. In May 2021, the memorandum of cooperation was signed by the Industrial Park Development Company and the Center for Expertise and Testing in Healthcare RUE. And in July, Great Stone signed an agreement to create a Sino-Belarusian zone of advanced cooperation and an international park of traditional Chinese medicine and The new model of interaction between Belarus and China in this area is based on the health care system. All these facts testify to the active steps

to deploy in the industrial park "an extensive cluster, which will gather the developments in the field of Chinese medicine. <...> A medical center for diagnostic services is expected to appear in the future. This area is already in the works<sup>255</sup>. In addition, the development of medical tourism is also envisaged here, for which a kind of medical village will be built near the Volmyanskoye reservoir - clinics and various medical facilities in the field of rehabilitation.

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### **Free Economic Zone "Grodnoinvest as a platform for expanding the export component**

Business entities of Grodno region increased their supplies to foreign markets by more than a third in the first half of 2021. As a result, the volume of exports amounted to about 1.2 billion dollars. "Goods of the region were delivered to 90 countries <sup>256</sup>. And the positive balance of the foreign trade turnover is close to 500 million dollars. There are several positive trends in the achievement of such high indicators of the Grodno region. One of them is a successful economic activity of the residents of free economic zone "Grodnoinvest" that includes 75 companies with investments from 40 countries of the world. They successfully carry out investment projects in wood processing and furniture production, machine building and metal working, food, chemical and light industries, agriculture and export a wide range of products, with the largest share of foreign supplies being wood processing products and furniture, food and chemical products, machinery and equipment, textile products. In the first half of the year their exports increased one and a half times at once. "In January-June 2021, residents of FEZ "Grodnoinvest" exported products worth \$647 million. <The key markets were Russia (60% of total exports), Poland (13%) and Ukraine (9%). <sup>257</sup>Deliveries to the European Union doubled to \$156 million. In their including Belgium, Hungary, Spain, the Netherlands, and Latvia. Even higher rates of export of FEZ residents grew to such countries on different continents as Italy, Egypt, Czech Republic, France, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Estonia, Lithuania. This made it possible to double the positive balance of foreign trade in the free economic zone. It is noteworthy that the FEZ "Grodnoinvest" now has new investment projects, which in the near future will have a very positive impact on the export component of the FEZ and the entire Grodno region. In particular, at the FEZ site in Smorgon, Europlasteks Invest LLC is taking on its second project as a resident of Grodnoinvest. The first involves construction of a vertically integrated complex for the production of cotton yarn and cotton yarn products. The second project is the organization of metal processing production in Smorgon, the total cost of which will exceed five million euros. The first products are planned to be produced here in 2022. Most of it "will be oriented to export to Central Asia, Western Europe, the Middle East. <sup>258</sup> To this end new production facilities will be built and existing ones will be modernized, and modern technological equipment for the production of steel pipes and profiles will be purchased. As a result, the new investment project will create dozens of new jobs, bring unused facilities into use and partially replace imported products from abroad. Notethat on the industrial sites of the FEZ "Grodnoinvest" in Smorgon district today successfully operate Nine resident enterprises, including those with investments from the Netherlands, Poland, Turkey, and other countries, which since 2015"invested over \$470 million in the creation of modern export-oriented enterprises<sup>259</sup>. This is where almost half - 48 percent - of all industrial production of FEZ "Grodnoinvest" was produced in 2020. As for the other industrial sites of the FEZ, "29% of production is in the city of Grodno, 8% - in the Lida district. The leaders in terms of growth rate for 2020 were Smorgon (136%), Grodno (123%) and Svisloch (123%) districts" <sup>260</sup>.

And there is good reason to believe that new domestic and foreign investors will soon appear here. The fact is that in August 2021 Smorgon launched the second start-up complex of a large-scale infrastructure project to reconstruct the city's main traffic artery - Industrial Avenue, which connects the residential area with the FEZ industrial park and includes a modern four-lane road, engineering infrastructure networks, landscaping and landscaping of the surrounding area, and lighting. In 2021 the implementation of the third stage of the project will begin here, it involves the creation of a traffic circle, as well as providing the industrial park with additional electricity. All this will make the conditions for the activities of both existing and potential residents of the FEZ even more attractive. The FEZ industrial site in Grodno also continues to develop, with two new residents already registered in 2021. The first

one, the company "Unis Trade", creates in Grandichi the production of metal structures. The second is OV-PlastSnab LLC, registered here in June 2021, which will organize an enterprise for the production of a wide range of synthetic polymer products. In addition to exporting finished products and import substitution, the investment project of the new resident will allow to form additional prerequisites for the development of a chemical cluster in the FEZ at the industrial site in the "Auls" area, where such residents as PCC Consumer Products Navigator LLC, Belagrofert LLC, Grodnoraiaagroservice OJSC, PT Typhoon LLC are already successfully implementing their projects. And "the construction of a unique plant for the production of glass products has recently begun"<sup>261</sup>. So, the prospects for growth of the export component are most serious here as well.

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