

## In order to maintain stability

The Republic of Belarus has been open to friendly and business-like relations with all countries of the world since acquiring its sovereignty. The Belarusian foreign policy today is based on such notions as peacefulness and multi-vector policy, balance, consistency and predictability. It is doubly difficult to uphold them in the modern world, torn apart by conflicts, continuing military conflicts, trade wars and sanctions, extremism and intolerance, and other unprecedented challenges and threats. But the Belarusian state is purposefully and consistently promoting a peaceful and comprehensive agenda, aiming to renew the dialogue on strengthening security measures and intensify international cooperation in all areas of interaction - from east to west and from north to south, to create effective mechanisms of partnership between various integration associations, to create a favorable climate for trade, economic and investment cooperation. How this process develops in practice in such areas as the Commonwealth of Independent States, Russia, China, Georgia and Afghanistan is discussed in the proposed study.



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## **Belarus-Commonwealth of Independent States: Evolution of regional cooperation**

In February 2019, the Working Group on the Preparation of the Draft Economic Development Strategy of the Commonwealth of Independent States for the period until 2030 met in Moscow and "approved the content of the first four sections of the draft Strategy"<sup>1</sup>. The fifth section is scheduled to be discussed in April 2019. This fact shows that the CIS has started concrete work to update the CIS Concept of Further Development, adopted back in 2007, which should help identify common points of economic growth among the member states of this international association and implement plans to work out joint development priorities. It should be noted that the need to update the concept was discussed back in September 2018 at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States in Dushanbe, where it was also stated that "the CIS potential for developing regional cooperation is not exhausted, and appropriate steps should be taken to implement it. This will help increase the competitiveness of national economies, the well-being of citizens, and the development of humanitarian ties"<sup>2</sup>.

The Republic of Belarus has consistently advocated strengthening the economic potential of this association of post-Soviet countries and expanding their trade and production ties in order to consolidate the positive dynamics observed in the CIS: "Mutual trade within the CIS continues to grow. Last year [2017], trade totalled USD 164 billion, an increase of 25%"<sup>3</sup>. In the first seven months of 2018, "the value of mutual trade increased by 15% (\$102 billion) compared to the previous year"<sup>4</sup>, and the year-end figures show a 20% increase in mutual trade among CIS member states.

<sup>5</sup>One of the effective levers for resolving the tasks set in the Commonwealth is

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<sup>1</sup> A meeting of the Working Group on the Preparation of the Draft Economic Development Strategy of the Commonwealth of Independent States for the period until 2030 was held in Moscow [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.e-cis.info/news.php?id=21302>

<sup>2</sup> On the outcome of the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.e-cis.info/page.php?id=26493>

<sup>3</sup> Results of the CIS Council of Heads of Government Meeting and List of Adopted Documents (2 November 2018, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan) [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.e-cis.info/page.php?id=26548>

<sup>4</sup> Participation in the meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of Government [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/8365>

<sup>5</sup> The development of inter-regional and cross-border cooperation - the most important factor in the

further intensification of interregional cooperation among its member states, which during the existence of this international organisation has become an effective tool of interstate dialogue and an integral part of economic interaction, since "it allows strengthening economic ties among regions, optimising infrastructure location, jointly implementing large-scale investment projects, increasing the effectiveness of

It should be recalled that back in 2004 **the Concept of Interregional and Border Cooperation of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States** was adopted. Its emergence was dictated by the fact that "due to the formation of new independent states the population of border territories found themselves in a particularly difficult situation, where economic, labor, cultural and household ties were severed or significantly limited. The acuteness of this situation confirms the need to realize the potential of inter-regional and cross-border cooperation to involve the regions in foreign economic activities and to implement a set of measures for the normal life support of the border regions' population"<sup>6</sup> .

It was this document that laid down the basic principles of interregional and cross-border cooperation in the Commonwealth of Independent States: mutual respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other CIS Member States; inviolability of state borders; peaceful settlement of border disputes; mutual respect for national legislation governing interregional and cross-border cooperation as well as relevant international agreements; ensuring mutual interests in interregional and cross-border co-operation

Among the main objectives were: to create an atmosphere of trust, understanding and good neighbourliness between the population, authorities and business communities of the regions and border areas of the CIS Member States; to stimulate an increase in mutually beneficial trade, develop and strengthen economic, cultural and humanitarian links between the regions; to preserve cultural heritage; to facilitate mutual communication between interested authorities, business communities and

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consolidation of the Commonwealth [Electronic resource]. - 2015. - URL: <http://www.cis.minsk.by/news.php?id=5355>

<sup>6</sup> Concept of interregional and cross-border cooperation of the participating States Commonwealth of Independent States [Electronic resource]. -2004 . -

URL: <http://www.cis.minsk.by/page.php?id=13214>

population groups, including ethnic communities separated by the state

In October 2008, the legal framework for interregional cooperation in the post-Soviet space was supplemented by **the Convention on Cross-Border Cooperation of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States**. This document was adopted due to the fact that by this time a number of prerequisites for the development of cross-border cooperation as the most active form of interregional cooperation had already matured in the CIS. These include a new vision of coordinated development of the borderland leading to the formation of new competitive advantages; a new understanding of the interests of local communities, socio-cultural, environmental and other public initiatives that rise above municipal and regional administrative boundaries; "the actualisation of existing and the establishment of new formalised and informalised institutions of inter-territorial cooperation"<sup>7</sup>.

The Convention specifies the main directions of joint activities of the parties concerned: creation of<sup>8</sup> special or special economic zones (free economic zones) in the border areas; cross-border trade, ensuring its security; carrying out joint activities on environmental monitoring, including cross-border rivers, and rational use of natural resources, ensuring sanitary, epidemiological, ecological, veterinary and sanitary well-being on the border territories. In 2008 the **Council for Interregional and Border Cooperation of the CIS Member States** was established at<sup>9</sup> with the aim of "sustainable economic development of regions and border areas, ensuring the security of citizens and strengthening friendship and good-neighbourliness between the CIS Member States".

Active development of cooperation at the level of administrative-territorial - formations and border territories in CIS countries by 2010 began to really help to solve

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<sup>7</sup> Sachuk T.V., Sachuk T.V. Socio-economic cooperation of border regions of the Northwestern Federal District / T.V. Sachuk // Prospects of socio-economic development of border regions: proceedings of the Fourth Scientific-Practical Conference with international participation, [June 9, 2017, Petrozavodsk] / FIC "Karelian Research Center RAS", Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences; [ed.] - Petrozavodsk, 2017. - C. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Convention on Cross-Border Co-operation among the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States [Electronic resource]. - 2008. - URL: <http://cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=2510>

<sup>9</sup> Regulation on the Council for Interregional and Border Cooperation of the Commonwealth of Independent States [Electronic resource]. - 2008. - URL: <http://cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=2520>

or mitigate certain problems of interstate relations, to strengthen and develop historically established ties. By this time, the regional environment in the post-Soviet space is increasingly beginning to determine "the competitiveness of national businesses in the modern world market, promoting the development of knowledge-intensive production, in which not the scale of production and sales prevail, but the ability to constantly renew products through the introduction, creation and marketing of fundamentally new goods"<sup>10</sup>. Small and medium businesses are beginning to emerge from the "shadow" as the most adapted to the rapid change of technology and capable of creating competitive products. Regional unions of scientists, entrepreneurs and local administrations are beginning to be a factor of market success. At the same time, intergovernmental commissions on cooperation of the CIS member states become permanent formats organising and coordinating interregional and cross-border cooperation. Thus, "in the Republic of Belarus alone, 6 meetings of the intergovernmental commissions on trade and economic cooperation with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine were held in 2009 (2), and 19 meetings of the Belarusian parts of the intergovernmental commissions took place"<sup>11</sup>.

By 2014, interregional cooperation at the level of administrative-territorial formations is already becoming "an important feature of modern interstate relations of the CIS member states, contributing to the strengthening and development of historically established ties and increasing mutual trade turnover. The use of its potential is one of the most effective factors facilitating real integration and playing an important role in the creation of a common market for goods, capital, services and labour"<sup>12</sup>. Bilateral agreements regulating interregional cooperation involve 7 (out of 74) regions of Azerbaijan, 10 (out of 11) regions of the Republic of Armenia, all regions of the Republic of Belarus, 16 (out of 17) regions of Kazakhstan, all regions of the Kyrgyz Republic, 12 (out of 33) of the Republic of Moldova, 4 (out of 13) of Tajikistan,

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<sup>10</sup> Development of Interregional and Cross-border Cooperation in the CIS Member States (Information and Analytical Note). - Moscow, 2010. - C. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. C. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Information on the Role of the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member States in the Development of Interregional Cooperation among the CIS Member States [Electronic resource]. - 2014. - URL: <http://naviny.org/2014/10/10/by1130.htm>

5 (out of 6) of Turkmenistan, all regions of Uzbekistan, almost all regions of the Russian Federation. A form of interaction between the regions, such as bilateral forums, which provide an ongoing dialogue on a wide range of issues, is increasingly developing. In particular, in June 2014, Minsk hosted the first forum of the regions of Belarus and Russia. Its theme was "The effective development of agro-industrial complexes of Belarus and Russia - a major condition for food security of the Union State.

In May 2015, another important document appears within the Commonwealth of Independent States - **the Concept of Interregional and Cross-border Cooperation of the CIS Member States for the period until 2020**, which concludes that "interregional and cross-border cooperation has become an effective tool for inter-state dialogue"<sup>13</sup>. It is already aimed at the development of cooperation not only between neighbouring regions but also with non-contiguous regions with which there are common interests and intentions to develop partnerships on both a multilateral and bilateral basis, as it allows to restore and strengthen economic ties between regions, optimize the location of infrastructure on the basis of cooperation of their activities, eliminate inefficient financial expenditure related to the creation of duplicate economic structures in the regions, and jointly target the development of regional economic relations. This document contains ten main objectives:

1. Improvement of the legislation of the CIS Member States taking into account existing bilateral and multilateral international treaties, including: a) legal regulation of interregional and cross-border cooperation in order to develop common approaches to its implementation; b) convergence of technical requirements and regulations in the economic sphere.

2. Mobilisation of existing capacities in the socio-economic and cultural spheres for joint tasks, including: a) identification of the socio-economic and cultural potential of the regions; b) development of modern forms of territorial management; c) harmonisation of approaches to the development of the territories of the border regions.

3. The Forum of CIS Regions, the establishment of regional associations of cooperation, whose functioning includes: a) joint decision-making on topical issues; b)

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<sup>13</sup> Concept of interregional and cross-border cooperation of the CIS member states for the period until 2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2015. - URL: <http://www.cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=5135>

exchange of experience in the effective management of regions and territorial communities; c) joint implementation of projects in various areas of cooperation in order to achieve synergies.

4. Coordinated development of border infrastructure in order to: a) improve the efficiency of border crossing points between CIS Member States, including by: a) organising joint controls at these border crossing points; b) improving procedures for crossing state borders between CIS Member States' citizens, in particular when residents of border areas cross state borders; c) creating favourable conditions for passengers

5. Development of trade, economic and investment cooperation between the regions, including: a) promotion of mutually beneficial direct links between economic entities of the regions; b) development of cross-border trade; c) implementation of joint large innovative investment projects in various fields of economy and creation of joint competitive enterprises and financial and industrial groups; d) mutual exchange of information on investment activities and investment attraction, as well as on export opportunities

6. Strengthening the atmosphere of trust, mutual understanding and good neighbourliness between the population of the regions through the development of humanitarian links, including in the following areas: a) organisation and conduct of joint celebrations, exhibitions, concerts, local history and historical research, in particular the celebration of anniversaries in the common history of the CIS member states; b) joint conservation and restoration of historical and cultural heritage sites of the peoples of the CIS member states; c) joint efforts for the preservation and restoration of historical and cultural monuments of the peoples of the CIS member states; d) joint efforts for the restoration of historical and cultural heritage sites of the CIS member states.

7. Health protection and law enforcement and security, including in the following directions: a) creation of conditions for mutual provision of medical services; b) organization of mutual provision of services in the field of sanatorium-resort and rehabilitation treatment of the population; c) implementation of joint actions to prevent the appearance and spread of sanitary and epidemiological threats in the border

territories; d) taking coordinated measures on prevention, prevention, detection, suppression, investigation and ra

8. Rational and safe use of natural resources and carrying out economic activities in an environmentally sound manner, including the following: a) regulation of economic activities in order to manage industrial wastes and organise joint control over the use of hazardous substances, as well as the implementation of joint environmental protection programmes and projects; b) joint protection and management of transboundary waters and their ecosystems; c) implementation of joint measures to

9. Ensuring timely prevention and joint response to natural and man-made emergencies in border areas, including in the following areas: a) timely and regular provision of information about infectious diseases, epizootics, epiphytotics and quarantine pests, joint preventive measures and emergency measures to eliminate diseases, quarantine diseases and pests; b) improvement of transboundary monitoring systems for natural

10. The regulation of the labour market and migration processes in the border areas, implemented among others in the following directions: a) development of coordinated measures to regulate migration flows, exchange of information on national legislation in the field of migration and procedures for crossing state borders of neighbouring states by local residents; b) coordination of measures to prevent illegal migration in regions and border areas; c) exchange of information on labour market situation in border areas and in regions.

Finally, in September 2016, the **Convention on Interregional Cooperation among the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States** was adopted at the level of heads of state<sup>14</sup>, which contains a detailed list of areas of possible cooperation among regions in the post-Soviet space: the creation of free (special, special) economic zones in the regions; joint activities on environmental monitoring, rational use of natural resources by the competent authorities of the parties ; and the

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<sup>14</sup> Convention on Interregional Cooperation among the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States [Electronic resource ]. -2016 . -URL : <http://cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=5474>

implementation of joint activities to monitor the environment.

epidemiological, ecological well-being of the population, as well as protection of territories from the introduction of animal and plant diseases; development and implementation of joint programmes to protect the population and territories from natural and man-made emergencies, as well as integration of natural and man-made emergency prevention and response systems to improve the response to emergencies with transboundary consequences; support for compatriots residing in

The practical implementation of the provisions of all these documents led to the fact that at the beginning of 2018 the Register of signed international documents on interregional and cross-border cooperation within the Commonwealth of Independent States already included "about 5000 documents in the trade, economic, scientific, technical and humanitarian fields of interregional and cross-border cooperation, which characterize the current level of development of relations between the CIS member states"<sup>15</sup>. Bilateral events such as Russian-Armenian and Russian-Azerbaijani interregional forums; Russian-Kyrgyz interregional conference; a conference on Russia-Tajikistan interregional cooperation; forums of interregional cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus have become one of the most effective formats for implementing the potential of interaction between regions of different countries in the post-Soviet space. These forums are held on an annual basis, alternately in the regions of the states with involvement of representatives of federal executive and legislative bodies, business community and mass media, scientific and expert circles as well as representatives of regions of the participating states. During each forum, the parties organise regional events with presentations of promising investment projects. The existing format of the forums makes it possible to comprehensively present and realise the potential of the regions of the states in all areas of need. Thus, in 2018, the Fifth Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia, as well as the first Forum of Regions of Belarus and Ukraine were already held with the participation of the Belarusian side. These formats help actively develop trade, economic and investment cooperation, as well as cooperation ties between CIS regions.

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<sup>15</sup> Development and Activities of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 2017 (collection of information and analytical materials, issue No. 6). - Minsk, 2018. - C. 75.

All these facts show once again that inter-regional and cross-border cooperation, which is an integral part of economic interaction in the Commonwealth of Independent States, already today allows each participant to realize its economic opportunities, compensate the specifics of development and distribution of productive forces, solve social problems. But even more extensive prospects will open here in the near future with the implementation of new approaches to deepening cooperation of the CIS member states in trade and economic cooperation, energy, transport and communications within the framework of updating the provisions of the Concept of further development of the Commonwealth of Independent States after 2020.

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## **Belarus-North Caucasus: Current Issues of Interaction**

Back in May 2016, the Council of Ministers of the Union State of Belarus and Russia adopted a resolution "On the Action Plan to Create a Common Information Space of the Union State for 2016-2020", the implementation of which would allow systematising information activities in the Union State and improving the quality of topical publications, including on cooperation between the regions of Belarus and Russia, which is a crucial area of bilateral relations within the Union State. After all, as it was noted at the V Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia, held in Mogilev in October 2018, "it is in the regions of our countries that many production, technological chains for the production of joint products begin"<sup>16</sup>. Suffice it to say that the contractual and legal framework of this interaction already includes more than three hundred agreements on increasing the volume of mutual supplies of goods, expanding the distribution network, strengthening production cooperation, creating assembly facilities. And today it is very important that the implementation of these joint projects be constantly in the spotlight of the central and, most importantly, the regional media of the two countries.

It should be noted that the leading positions in the Belarusian-Russian interregional cooperation have been occupied by the Central, Ural, Volga and Northwestern Federal Districts for many years now. The North Caucasian Federal District is still noticeably behind in the development of partnership ties with the Republic of Belarus, but, undoubtedly, it has considerable potential and prerequisites to make positive changes in this regard. After all, it "has favourable conditions for the development of agribusiness, tourism, health resorts, mining and manufacturing sectors, as well as developed transit functions"<sup>17</sup>. One way to realise these natural advantages is to actively develop foreign trade relations, given that one of the key

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<sup>16</sup> Speech at the plenary session of the V Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/vystuplenie-na-plenarnom-zasedanii-v-foruma-regionov-belarusi-i-rossii-19684/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/vystuplenie-na-plenarnom-zasedanii-v-foruma-regionov-belarusi-i-rossii-19684/)

<sup>17</sup> Strategy for socio-economic development of the North Caucasus Federal District until 2025 [Electronic resource]. - 2010. - URL: <http://skfo.gov.ru/district/soc/sed/>

factors in the NCFD's long-term socioeconomic development, as stated in the Strategy for socio-economic development of the North Caucasus Federal District through 2025, is to integrate into the Euro-Asian economic space, which 'will allow investments to flow into the NCFD regions provided an attractive investment and business climate is established'<sup>18</sup>. In this case, the Republic of Belarus can be one of the effective partners of the entities of the North Caucasian Federal District. The analysis of publications in the Belarusian media shows that the leaders in establishing partnerships with Belarus in the North Caucasian Federal District are **Stavropol Krai, the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Dagestan**.

Thus, the agreement on trade, economic, scientific, technological and socio-cultural cooperation between the governments of **Stavropol Krai** and the Republic of Belarus was signed in mid-March 2017. This document markedly expanded the existing contractual and legal framework of interaction of this Russian region with the Belarusian side, once again eloquently highlighting the conclusion that "integration with the regions of Belarus is a conceptual direction of development of external relations of the Stavropol Territory"<sup>19</sup>. After all, back in 2000 and 2002 the Stavropol regional government signed agreements on cooperation with Brest and Gomel regional executive committees, providing for cooperation in trade, economic, scientific, technical, and cultural fields. The agreement on cooperation between the Stavropol Krai Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry was adopted in 2008. Today the products of a number of leading Belarusian industrial enterprises are widely represented in the region. These include the Minsk Tractor Plant and Minsk Automobile Plant. Belarusian food products are also popular here, which prompted the opening of a chain of shops selling meat and dairy products from Belarus in Stavropol. In turn, Stavropol enterprises mastered supplies to the Belarusian market of: agricultural raw materials and products of their primary processing - wheat, flour, sunflower and sunflower oil, sheep wool; engineering

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<sup>18</sup> Amirova E.A. Analysis of features of socio-economic differentiation of development of the regions of the North Caucasian Federal District / E.A. Amirova // Regional problems of economic transformation. - 2014. - №9. - C. 159.

<sup>19</sup> Vladimirov, V. Market expansion is always a benefit for entrepreneurs / V. Vladimirov // Eurasian Economic Union: regional aspect: inform.-integr. project / comp., interviewer. B. Zalesskii, M. Valkovski, A. Mostovoy. - Minsk : Biznesofset, 2014. - C. 56.

products - electricity meters and semi-trailers; chemical industry products - polymeric materials, plastics, aerosols.

All these facts show that the Stavropol Territory is one of the most promising economic partners of Belarus in Russia. Back in 2013, the trade turnover between the region and the republic increased by half compared to 2012 and amounted to 6.7 billion Russian rubles. It is true, however, that there was a certain decline thereafter. And it was only in 2016 that the volume of mutual trade reached 140 million dollars. This meant that after two years of decline, its growth dynamics exceeded 9 percent. At the same time, this fact demonstrates that the Stavropol Territory and the Republic of Belarus now have a real potential for a significant increase in trade turnover and expansion of bilateral cooperation. That is why Governor of Stavropol Region V. Vladimirov's visit to Belarus in March 2017 was regarded in Minsk as a serious intention of the Russian side "to significantly increase mutual trade and launch new promising projects in the sectors where we are interesting and useful to each other"<sup>20</sup>. Among such promising areas the two sides believe are: the development of industrial cooperation; effective cooperation in the agro-industrial sector; implementation of promising projects in the construction sector; intensification of cooperation in the light industry; and actualization of the innovation component of the partnership.

As for industrial cooperation, back in 2013, it was noted that "more than ten enterprises with participation of Belarusian investments are registered in the territory of Stavropol Territory"<sup>21</sup>. And further, to expand cooperation ties, the Belarusian side suggests "implementing joint projects of MAZ and Autocomponents Holding with enterprises of Stavropol Territory"<sup>22</sup>. Especially since Stavropol Territory "wants to get back to the issue of organizing assembly production of Belarusian machinery and its service"<sup>23</sup>. They are also talking about expanding deliveries of various machines from

<sup>20</sup> Negotiations with the Governor of Stavropol Territory of Russia Vladimir Vladimirov [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/peregovory-s-gubernatorom-stavropolskogo-kraja-rossii-vladimirom-vladimirovym-15800/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/peregovory-s-gubernatorom-stavropolskogo-kraja-rossii-vladimirom-vladimirovym-15800/)

<sup>21</sup> Vysheslavov, V. In perspective - joint development of innovative technologies / V. Vysheslavov // Single Economic Space: Integration of Regions: Informational-Integration Project / co-comp. and interviewer: B. Zaleski, M. Valkovski, A. Mostovoy. - Minsk : Biznesofset, 2013. - C. 79.

<sup>22</sup> Meeting with the Governor of the Stavropol Territory of Russia [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/7111>

<sup>23</sup> Negotiations with the Governor of Stavropol Territory of Russia Vladimir Vladimirov [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/peregovory-s-gubernatorom-](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/peregovory-s-gubernatorom-)

Belarus to the Russian region - passenger, municipal, cargo, and road-building machines - for the implementation of major infrastructure projects there. At the same time, "machinery may be supplied on leasing terms"<sup>24</sup>. In the agro-industrial sector two issues are of greatest interest: supplies of modern technological equipment for the reconstruction of dairy farms with the involvement of Belarusian specialists in the implementation of projects to reconstruct and build livestock farms; supplies of specialized equipment of Minsk Tractor Plant in view of Stavropol Krai's plans to develop viticulture. In the field of innovations, Belarusian and Stavropol scientists can really cooperate in robotics and resource conservation, geoinformatics and geophysics, microbiology and biotechnology.

As for **the Chechen Republic**, it signed an agreement on trade, economic, scientific, technological and cultural cooperation with the Republic of Belarus in June 2017 at the Fourth Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia. This document has seriously strengthened the contractual and legal foundation for cooperation between Minsk and Grozny in virtually all areas of partnership, which started with the agreement between this Russian region and the Minsk City Executive Committee on trade, economic, scientific, technological and cultural cooperation signed back in July 2002. That document was then one of the first concluded by the Chechen Republic with a foreign country after the beginning of the reconstruction period. "However, due to objective reasons existing at that time, including the general socio-economic situation in the [Chechen] Republic and concerns of potential investors about possible risks in the field of investment activities, these agreements, unfortunately, were not developed further"<sup>25</sup>.

But years later, when the Chechen government considerably stepped up efforts to implement all the previously signed agreements with foreign countries, the

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[stavropolskogo-kraia-rossii-vladimirov-vladimirovym-15800/](http://stavropolskogo-kraia-rossii-vladimirov-vladimirovym-15800/)

<sup>24</sup> Belarus counts on increasing supplies of machinery to Stavropol Krai and creating new joint ventures - Kobjakov [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: <http://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-rasschityvaet-na-uvlichenie-postavok-tehniki-v-stavropolskii-krai-i-sozdanie-novyh-sp-kobjakov-237868-2017/>

<sup>25</sup> Kadyrov, R. It is necessary to give a new impulse to cooperation with Belarus / R. Kadyrov // Belarus - Russia: cooperation of regions: inform.-integration project / co-comp. Zaleskii B.L., Korovkin E.A., Korovin M.E. Kovorovkin M. E., Minsk. - Minsk: BELTA, 2010. - C. 58.

relationship with the Belarusian side began to evolve as well. New impetus to cooperation between Belarus and Chechnya was given by the understanding that this Russian region has considerable economic and resource potential, which makes it possible to form a competitive economy that is beneficial for the development of interaction with Belarusian administrative and territorial entities, business entities, and public and cultural organizations. That is why "in order to discuss issues of mutually beneficial cooperation, a delegation of the Chechen Republic headed by the Deputy Prime Minister of the Chechen Republic visited the Republic of Belarus for the first time on 6 July 2015"<sup>26</sup> . And supplies of Belarusian household appliances, textiles, cosmetics, tyres, as well as road-building, municipal and agricultural machinery of the Amkodor holding began to be delivered to the Russian region.

However, a new stage in cooperation between the two sides was certainly opened by the visit of the head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, to Belarus in September 2017, during which attention was focused both on the development of trade cooperation and the key topic of bilateral cooperation - industrial cooperation, which both Minsk and Grozny consider the most advanced, mutually beneficial form of cooperation, "which helps meet the needs of the regional market and also creates high-tech jobs"<sup>27</sup> . As for trade cooperation, the sides believe that the potential for its multiplication in the coming years lies in the supply of Belarusian passenger, freight, quarry, agricultural, road-building and municipal equipment to Chechnya. A concrete project in this regard could be the participation of Minsk Automobile Plant in the modernisation of the Chechen truck and bus fleet.

The first step in the development of Belarusian-Chechen manufacturing cooperation appears to be the establishment of an assembly facility in this Russian region by the Belarusian enterprise Bobruiskagromash. At least, an agreement to that

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<sup>26</sup> Umarov D., Umarov D. The most promising direction is seen in the establishment and development of cooperative ties in the production sphere / D. Umarov // Interaction of Regions: Union State - the locomotive of Eurasian integration: information-integration project / coauthors, interviewer: B. Zalessky, M. Valkovsky, A. Greshnikov. - Minsk: Biznesofset, 2016. - C. 60.

<sup>27</sup> Meeting with the Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov [Electronic resource]. - 2017. -

effect has already been signed with the Chechen Ministry of Agriculture, and there is clarity about both the site and the stages of the project. And this may become a kind of prologue to large-scale cooperation of the parties in the field of production cooperation, because "Belarus and Chechnya need to develop other joint projects, especially to supply equipment and spare parts to automotive industry enterprises of Chechnya,"<sup>28</sup>. Among other promising areas for the development of cooperation the parties identified the following: agrarian sector - introduction of advanced technologies in production and processing of agricultural products, establishment of dairy farms, supply of modern milking halls, crop production, breeding livestock and veterinary medicine; construction and housing and utilities sector - road construction, design and construction of housing and infrastructure, supply of road construction and utility equipment, construction materials and lifts.

In other words, Minsk and Grozny have seriously embarked on filling the agreement signed in June 2017 with concrete, mutually beneficial projects, taking into account the principle voiced by the Chechen leader - "there is interest on the Chechen side to work directly, without intermediaries"<sup>29</sup>. And there is every reason to believe that the implementation of the action plan for 2018-2020, which outlines all promising areas for Belarusian-Chechen cooperation, will be another eloquent illustration of the fact that the establishment of ties between Belarus and Chechnya is a new stage in the strengthening of Belarusian-Russian relations.

As for another subject of the North Caucasus Federal District - **the Republic of Dagestan** - the Republic of Belarus signed an agreement with this Russian region on trade, economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation back in 2002. In April 2014 the agreement between the Standing Committee of the Union State and the Government of the Republic of Dagestan on cooperation in the field of trade, economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation was added to the legal framework of this interregional interaction, based on mutual interest in maintaining and expanding the

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<sup>28</sup> Meeting with the Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/7518>

<sup>29</sup> Kadyrov, R. On the word of the President, the image of Chechnya and cooperation / R. Kadyrov // [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: <http://www.belta.by/interview/view/o-slove-prezidenta-imidzhe-chechni-i-sotrudnichestve-kadyrov-podelilsia-vpechatleniiami-ot-vstrechi-s-5791/>

Belarusian-Russian relations, creating appropriate organizational, economic, legal and other conditions to strengthen the partnership of the regions, ensuring effective interaction, exchange of experience and information. Under the document the sides expressed their intention to promote joint programmes and events aimed at developing economic ties between the Belarusian and Dagestan regions, create conditions to expand trade and economic ties between the sides' economic entities, and cooperate when making decisions concerning investment and innovation activities, including the attraction of foreign capital and advanced foreign technologies. The Dagestani side immediately expressed its interest in supplies of Belarusian agricultural machinery, because "Dagestan has a need to organize processing of agricultural products"<sup>30</sup>.

In 2014, the foreign trade turnover between Belarus and Dagestan came close to USD 14 million, with the share of Belarusian export reaching about USD 13 million, based on "mineral products, metal products, timber, pulp and paper products, machinery, equipment and vehicles, chemical industry products, rubber, textile, textile products and footwear, raw hides, fur products, food products and agricultural raw materials"<sup>31</sup>. At the "Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia" event in Makhachkala in June 2014, the parties agreed, as part of the implementation of joint investment projects in Dagestan, to study "the issue of introducing Belarusian technologies for growing agricultural products, milk processing technologies, cheese production, raising broiler meat and using new technologies in egg production in the republic"<sup>32</sup>. In September 2014, the parties agreed to establish and implement joint projects aimed at building rural tourism infrastructure. In particular, the Treaty of Intent was then signed by the Dagestan Tourism Committee and the Belarusian public association Recreation in the Countryside. This document "implies interaction between the parties in the sphere of rural tourism and cultural cooperation, attracting tourists, and promoting the brand

<sup>30</sup> Cooperation agreement signed with the Standing Committee of the Union State of Russia and Belarus [Electronic resource]. - 2014. - URL: [https://www.riadagestan.ru/news/president/podpisano\\_soglasenie\\_o\\_sotrudnichestve\\_s\\_postoyannym\\_komi\\_tet\\_soyuznogo\\_gosudarstva\\_rossii\\_i\\_belorussii/](https://www.riadagestan.ru/news/president/podpisano_soglasenie_o_sotrudnichestve_s_postoyannym_komi_tet_soyuznogo_gosudarstva_rossii_i_belorussii/)

<sup>31</sup> Abdulatipov, R. Regional cooperation is strategically necessary in the conditions of sanction policy of the West / R. Abdulatipov // Interaction of regions: Union State - the locomotive of Eurasian integration: inform.-integration project / coauthors, interviewing: B. Zaleski, M. Valkovsky, A. Greshnikov. - Minsk: Biznesofset, 2016. - C. 22.

<sup>32</sup> Dagestan and Belarus agree on business cooperation [Electronic resource]. - 2014. - URL: <http://www.dag.aif.ru/society/detailsZ1186729>

of Dagestan as a tourist destination"<sup>33</sup> .

In March 2015, Minsk Tractor Works opened its machinery dealer centre in Dagestan - at the base of Dagselmash in Buynaksky District, where at the first stage "tractors will be restored and new machinery will be sold in the future"<sup>34</sup> . To this end, they have set about preparing an exhibition area for Belarusian tractors, as well as training specialists, providing them with the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills for maintenance and repair of machinery at the training centre of the Minsk Tractor Works. Also in 2015, a highlight of interregional cooperation was a fair of Belarusian producers in Dagestan, which featured products from the agricultural sector and light industry: sweets, honey of different varieties, sausage products, clothing, shoes, textiles, and much more. As a result, the Dagestan side estimated that in 2017 it had "the largest trade transactions with Azerbaijan - \$47.93 million, Iran - \$34.54 million, China - \$17.81 million, Belarus - \$16.67 million."<sup>35</sup> .

Let us sum up. All of these facts clearly demonstrate how wide the thematic range of publications in the media of both countries is already becoming on the organization of cooperation between the regions of Belarus and Stavropol, Chechnya and Dagestan. The most important task for the Belarusian, Stavropol, Chechen and Dagestani media today is to ensure an adequate media articulation of this interregional cooperation, so that all joint projects would be fully reflected in the media space to ensure the transition of union integration into a qualitatively new state - total interaction at all levels.

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<sup>33</sup> Belarusians will teach Dagestanis to develop rural tourism [Electronic resource]. - 2014. - URL: <https://www.interfax.by/news/belarus/1167841>

<sup>34</sup> MTZ has opened a dealership in Dagestan [Electronic resource]. - 2015. - URL: <https://www.belarus.by/ru/business/business-news/mtz-otkryl-dilerskii-tsentr-v-dagestane-i-0000020779.html>

<sup>35</sup> On the results of foreign trade of the Republic of Dagestan for 2017. [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: [https://makhachkala.mid.ru/mezdunarodnoe-sotrudnicestvo/-/asset\\_publisher/ZPNsLt1FS6Qn/content/ob-itogah-vnesnej-torgovli-respubliki-dagestan-za-2017-g-?inheritRedirect=false](https://makhachkala.mid.ru/mezdunarodnoe-sotrudnicestvo/-/asset_publisher/ZPNsLt1FS6Qn/content/ob-itogah-vnesnej-torgovli-respubliki-dagestan-za-2017-g-?inheritRedirect=false)

## **Belarus-Georgia: complementarity yields results**

It is known that in recent years Belarusian-Georgian bilateral relations have become stable. The dynamic development of cooperation between the two countries is largely due to the complementarity of their economies, as "there is a demand for Georgian fruit and vegetables in Belarus and Georgia is interested in supplies of Belarusian engineering products, pharmaceuticals, wood processing, mineral fertilizers and food products"<sup>36</sup>. This gave the parties grounds to declare several years ago their aspiration to reach \$200 million trade turnover by 2020. And it must be said that a number of concrete steps have recently been taken in this direction. Thus, in 2017, the volume of Belarus-Georgia foreign trade in goods and services amounted to \$112 million. At the same time, the range of products supplied from Belarus to Georgia has expanded significantly. And today it is represented in almost all sectors of the Georgian economy. "In particular, agricultural products, from seed potatoes to foodstuffs, agricultural machinery, trucks. Medicines are well represented; they have a good rate of entry and registration on the Georgian market. Petrochemicals are also present - tyres, synthetic threads and cables. Belarusian furniture is supplied"<sup>37</sup>. Special mention should be made of the Belarusian foodstuffs which are available in dozens of shops of the two trading networks in Georgia, ranging from bread to liqueurs and spirits. As a result, "the share of Belarusian products in Georgia's total imports is 15%, for butter 12%, cheese around 9% and sausages and meat products 20%."<sup>38</sup>.

How to address the task of further growth in bilateral trade by expanding trade and economic cooperation was discussed in Tbilisi in March 2019 at the fifth meeting of the Intergovernmental Belarusian-Georgian Commission for Economic Cooperation, where, among other things, they discussed ways to implement specific projects in such areas as industrial cooperation, transport and logistics, science and technology,

<sup>36</sup> Belarus and Georgia: promising cooperation [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://export.by/news/belarus-i-gruziya-perspektivnoe-sotrudnichestvo>

<sup>37</sup> Interview by Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Belarus to Georgia M. Myatlikau to BelTA news agency (21 March 2018) [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://mfa.gov.by/press/smi/aaeb2c722e229f16.html>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

development of interregional ties.

The focus on **industrial cooperation** in this case is quite understandable, as "Belarus is interested in launching a joint Georgian-Belarusian production for the assembly of tractors in Georgia, and the Georgian side is interested in opening a shop for Georgian agricultural products in Belarus."<sup>39</sup> . These plans took quite concrete shape during the fifth meeting of the intergovernmental commission, as it resulted in "agreements on further development of the assembly production of lifts of JSC "Mogilevliftmash" in Georgia, opening of the assembly production of Belarusian small tractors in Batumi, continued cooperation in the field of livestock breeding, mutual supply of agricultural products"<sup>40</sup> .

It should be reminded that Georgia is already implementing a project to set up an assembly production of lifts. The fact is that about 25 thousand lifts, at least 50% of which are made in Belarus (Mogilevliftmash) and supplied during the Soviet era, "need to be completely replaced in this country. That is why the project is first of all aimed at the Georgian market, at cities such as Tbilisi, Batumi and Kutaisi. <...> This is the kind of project that makes it possible to make a JV with the necessary level of localisation"<sup>41</sup> . Plans for the development of production and cooperation links in the field of pharmaceuticals also look tempting. For this reason it is planned "to open a Belarusian pharmaceutical company in Georgia in 2020. Today exports of this group of goods make a significant contribution to the overall turnover of the two countries"<sup>42</sup> . Suffice it to say that during the Belarusian-Georgian Business Council held in Tbilisi in March 2019, eight out of the 15 agreements signed were related to the supply of pharmaceutical products.

Interesting plans for cooperation are also outlined in **transport and logistics**, where a positive growth trend in freight traffic between Belarus and Georgia is observed

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<sup>39</sup> Belarus and Georgia plan to launch a joint production on tractor assembly [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-gruzija-i-planirujut-zapustit-sovmestnoe-proizvodstvo-po-sboru-tractorov-340718-2019/>

<sup>40</sup> Mikhail Rusiy paid a visit to Georgia [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/8695>

<sup>41</sup> Interview of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Belarus to Georgia M. Myatlikau to BelTA news agency (21 March 2018) [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://mfa.gov.by/press/smi/aaeb2c722e229f16.html>

<sup>42</sup> Belarus and Georgia expand areas of cooperation [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://belarus24.by/news/economics/belarus-i-gruzija-rasshiryayut-sfery-sotrudnichestva/>

today. In particular, "in 2018, the total volume of shipments amounted to 94,000 tonnes, which is 10.6% more than in 2017. The volume of foreign trade in transport services also increased compared to the previous year - by 27.6% to \$16.4 million."<sup>43</sup> . This is despite the fact that the only way to get products to Georgia today is via the Georgian Military Road, a pass through the Caucasus Mountains. The fifth meeting of the intergovernmental commission discussed several promising projects in this area. First, it was decided to study the issue of forming a single ship consignment from Belarus to Georgia by direct water transport. This would mean the development of ferry service and transit of Belarusian cargo to Georgia via Ukraine. Second, we discussed the possibility of organising rail container shipments via Tbilisi - Baku - Minsk, taking into account the experience of such shipments in the Tbilisi - Baku - Tbilisi route.

Finally, cooperation between Belarus and Georgia in **science and technology** can be very effective. The results of the first meeting of the Belarusian-Georgian commission for scientific and technical cooperation, which was held in Tbilisi in March 2019, in particular, attest to this. In the framework of this new format for coordinating partnership ties, the sides agreed to hold a competition for joint scientific and technical projects in topical areas of bilateral cooperation, including agriculture, medicine and pharmaceuticals, nano- and biotechnologies.

As a reminder, the parties signed an agreement on cooperation in science and technology in Minsk in 2016. "Currently, Georgian and Belarusian scientists are jointly involved in six projects under the European Union, in particular, graphene, new genetic tools for biological assessment of aquatic ecosystems in Europe, improvement of indoor living space: smart living"<sup>44</sup> . Furthermore, one of the priorities of S&T cooperation with Georgian partners, in addition to the implementation of bilateral projects, is the joint submission of applications to European Union programmes, including Horizon 2020. In addition, Belarus and Georgia participate in the Eastern Partnership

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<sup>43</sup> . Belarus, Georgia and Azerbaijan will discuss the possibility of container transportation by rail between their capitals [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://belta.by/special/economics/view/belarus-gruzija-i-azerbajdzhan-obsudjat-vozmozhnost-kontejnnyh-perevozok-po-zhd-mezhdu-ih-stolitsami-341087-2019/>

<sup>44</sup> Belarus and Georgia to hold a competition for joint scientific and technical projects [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://belta.by/society/view/belarus-i-gruzija-provedut-konkurs-sovmestnyh-nauchno-tehnicheskikh-proektov-340739-2019/>

programme initiative, which includes the EaP Connect project aimed at supporting links between researchers and students.

The great potential for cooperation in the field of science and technology is evidenced by the fact that at the exhibition Made in Belarus, held in Tbilisi in March 2019, the Belarusian side presented 125 scientific, technical and innovative developments of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, the National Academy of Belarus. And during the exhibition itself, the Central Botanical Garden of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus signed two new agreements on scientific cooperation - with the Institute of Phytopathology and Biodiversity of Batumi State University and with the Botanical Institute of Ilia State University. On the whole, the exhibition presented the most innovative and promising projects in a wide range of fields, from new materials and biotechnologies to potato growing and innovative technologies in coffee roasting.

As for the development of **interregional ties**, back in March 2018, a Treaty on the Basis for Cooperation between Belarus and Georgia was signed at the highest level, in which the parties expressed their intention to promote the expansion of interregional cooperation. Concrete facts show that the capitals of the two states - Minsk and Tbilisi - are a very eloquent illustration of the implementation of this commitment in practice.

Minsk and Tbilisi became sister cities in September 2015, agreeing then to promote investment and innovation activities, cooperation in healthcare and education, sports, culture, and exchange experience in local government organisation. This twinning relationship became a good impetus for intensifying Belarusian-Georgian cooperation in various areas in the following years. Suffice it to say that "the trade turnover of enterprises in Minsk with Georgia in 2017 increased by 13.5% to \$18.8 million, exported goods worth \$7.9 million, imported goods worth \$10.9 million. 161 commodity items were supplied. There are 14 enterprises with Georgian capital registered in Minsk (5 of them are joint ventures, 9 are foreign)"<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Belarusian-Georgian business forum to be held during Minsk Days in Tbilisi [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.belta.by/regions/view/belorusko-gruzinskij-biznes-forum-projdet-vo-vremja-dnej-minska-v-tbilisi-293959-2018/>

In March 2018, Minsk Days were held in the Georgian capital, during which the parties tried to make the best use of such tools to strengthen partnership and twinning ties as the Belarusian-Georgian business forum and the exhibition of goods by Minsk manufacturers. The format of these events allowed the citizens of Minsk to generously share with their Tbilisi counterparts their experience in implementing the system "Smart City", demonstrate the capabilities and convenience of travel with a map of the Belarusian capital, demonstrate features of design and construction of the underground, innovations in passenger transport, new technologies in the food industry. Georgian businessmen were able to thoroughly familiarize themselves with the products of such Belarusian exporters as Kommunaraka, Slodych Confectionery Factory, Minsk Kristall, Minskhhlebprom, Belita, Modum - Our Cosmetics, Minsk Automobile Plant, Amkodor, Minsk Tractor Plant.

The official part of Minsk Days in Tbilisi was also busy. First, the two sides signed the Programme for Trade and Economic Cooperation for 2018-2020, in which they identified partnership areas in economy, tourism, culture, education, transport, and housing. In particular, "the cities intend to exchange experience in public services, maintenance and overhaul of housing stock, energy saving, high-tech and innovation, as well as investment proposals, advertising and information materials"<sup>46</sup>. Secondly, a number of documents on cooperation of Minsk enterprises with the Georgian partners were agreed at the above mentioned business forum. Thus, "within the section "Modern Minsk and Tbilisi" a memorandum between Kommunaraka and Bel Trade Ltd. and an agreement between Minsk Tourist Information Centre and Resistorgeo LLC were signed<sup>47</sup>, and an agreement between Minsk City Technopark LLC and Tbilisi Technopark. In addition, Minsk Automobile Plant, in the framework of the adopted contract with

Georgia's Profauto LLC has granted that company exclusive rights to sell automotive

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<sup>46</sup> Minsk and Tbilisi will define a cooperation programme for 2018-2020 [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.belta.by/economics/view/minsk-i-tbilisi-opredeljat-programmu-sotrudnichestva-na-2018-2020-gody-293935-2018/>.

<sup>47</sup> Matveev, V. About 30 documents signed at the Georgian-Belarusian forum in Tbilisi / V. Matveev // [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.belta.by/economics/view/okolo-30-dokumentov-podpisana-na-georguzinsko-beloruskom-biznes-forume-v-tbilisi-295186-2018/>.

equipment on Georgian soil and will supply 20 dump trucks to Georgia for more than one million dollars, and has worked out possible contracts to supply fire-fighting equipment to the Georgian Ministry of Emergencies and discussed "the possibility of supplying passenger buses to Tbilisi"<sup>48</sup>. Minsk tractor plant has signed a contract with the Georgian supplier of agricultural machinery Hermes Ltd. for the supply of 50 sets and is opening assembly production of Belarusian tractors in Batumi. The management of the Belarusian company is sure that "2018-2020 will be the most successful years for the tractor factory in the Georgian market"<sup>49</sup>. It is expected that at least two to three hundred machines will be assembled here per year, as Georgia has a demand for various tractors, from low-power to power-packed ones.

Finally, interesting prospects are opening up in the Georgian market, where not only in Tbilisi there is a need to renew the public transport fleet and an interest in using electric buses, for the Minsk-based Belkommunmash. Similar interest has also been expressed by three other major Georgian cities. This is why the creators of the Belarusian electric buses are already thinking about the possible localization of production of their environmentally friendly vehicles on Georgian soil. In particular, "the production of Belarusian electric buses may be set up in Tbilisi"<sup>50</sup>. In the meantime, in the next few months, the miners will deliver one electric bus to the Georgian capital for pilot operation, and a little later they will present a detailed concept and business plan of the project of production cooperation.

The trend for expanding Belarusian-Georgian interregional cooperation was reinforced by the agreement on cooperation in the socio-economic, scientific and technical, cultural and humanitarian fields signed in July 2018 between the Glubokoe District Executive Committee of the Vitebsk Region and the Telavi municipality. In practice, the parties have been cooperating since 2014, but until recently - mostly only

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<sup>48</sup> . Matveev, V. MAZ to supply dump trucks to Georgia for \$ 1 million / V. Matveev // [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.belta.by/economics/view/maz-postavit-v-gruziju-samosvaly-na-1-mln-295227-2018/>

<sup>49</sup> Matveev, V. Assembly production of Belarusian tractors opens in Batumi / V. Matveev // [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.belta.by/economics/view/sborochnoe-proizvodstvo-belorusskih-traktorov-otkryvaetsja-v-batumi-295203-2018/>.

<sup>50</sup> Matveev, V. Production of Belarusian electric buses may be set up in Tbilisi / V. Matveev // [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://www.belta.by/economics/view/proizvodstvo-belorusskih-elektrobusov-mozhet-byt-sozdano-v-tbilisi-295211-2018/>.

in the field of culture. By signing the agreement, Hlubokoe and Telavi announced real plans to expand the areas of partnership. In particular, the Georgian side has expressed its willingness to cooperate "in the fields of medicine, agriculture and sports"<sup>51</sup> .

Another very effective way to expand trade and economic ties between Belarus and Georgia is to intensify **trade-fair** cooperation. The experience of the past few years shows that "the annual holding of Belarusian exhibitions in Georgia has become a good tradition and reflects the active development of cooperation between the two countries: the range of products supplied is expanding and shops with national goods are opening in Tbilisi and Minsk"<sup>52</sup> . As a reminder, the national exhibition of Belarus was held in the Georgian capital back in 2016. In 2017 and 2018, large-scale Belarusian expositions were shown in Tbilisi as part of the international AgroFood exhibition. In March 2019, the exhibition of Belarusian producers Made in Belarus was held in the central pavilion of the Expo Georgia exhibition centre, where more than 70 companies from almost all regions of Belarus showed their best products. As a result, 13 contracts were signed to supply Belarusian products to Georgia.

For example, Minsk Tractor Works showed "agricultural machinery assembled in Georgia: Belarus 322.1, Belarus 321, Belarus 311, Belarus 320.4 and Belarus 622 tractors for mountainous terrain, orchards and vineyards"<sup>53</sup> . Another metropolitan enterprise, Belkommunmash, demonstrated an innovative means of transport - an electric bus that, after a six-minute charge at special charging stations, can provide movement along a route of up to 25 kilometres in length. Belarus' largest manufacturer of finishing materials and tiles Keramin brought more than twenty modern collections to the Georgian capital for a demonstration. Minsk is also home to the Republican Research and Practical Center of Cardiology, which showed in Tbilisi innovative

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<sup>51</sup> Shcherbitsky, A. Glubokoe will cooperate with the Georgian city of Telavi / A. Shcherbitsky // [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/glubokoe-budet-sotrudnichat-s-gruzinskim-gorodom-telavi-311294-2018/>.

<sup>52</sup> Georgia's prime minister familiarised himself with Belarusian products at an exhibition in Tbilisi [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://belta.by/economics/view/premjer-ministr-gruzii-oznakomilsja-s-belorusskoj-produktsiej-na-vystavke-v-tbilisi-340835-2019/>.

<sup>53</sup> The best brands of Belarus will be presented at a large-scale exhibition in Tbilisi [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/luchshie-brendy-belarusi-budut-predstavleny-na-masshtabnoj-vystavke-v-tbilisi-340191-2019/>.

developments in heart transplantation - a unique operation, which is conducted by Belarusian surgeons since 2009. In 10 years, the centre has performed more than 300 operations on patients of all ages.

Among the fodder and grain harvesters and tillage machinery under the Palesse brand presented by Gomselmash, a small-sized potato harvester digger-loader KMP-1.5, which was successfully tested on Georgian fields in September 2018, attracted attention. Other Gomel Region companies taking part in the exhibition included the Gomel Chemical Plant and the Mozyr Oil Refinery. Innovative comprehensive solutions for automation of railway tracks to make train travel comfortable and safe were the basis of the exposition of the Brest Electrotechnical Plant. Mogilev Region was represented at the exhibition by Strommashina Plant and Mogilev Metallurgical Plant, Vitebsk Region by Polotsk-Steklovolokno and Naftan, and Minsk Region by Mining Wax Plant from Svisloch.

In order to participate in the global infrastructure development programme Georgia 2020, the Belneftekhim Group, which brings together the largest Belarusian petrochemical companies, exhibited in Tbilisi rubber tyres, fast-drying paint for all surfaces, and road marking paint. Belarusian foodstuffs, whose high quality and natural ingredients are already well known in Georgia, were traditionally well represented at the exhibition. The samples of meat, dairy and confectionary products, as well as alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages from producers such as Kommunarka, Krinita, Minsk Kristall, Spartak, Zdravushka-Milk, Pinsk and Oshmyansk meat processing plants, will most probably soon be available in Georgian shops.

Finally, this exhibition Made in Belarus is also interesting because it is the first time in the practice of such events that the Belarusian side has used a new logo, which is a "flower of linen, painted in the colours of the national flag and inscribed in a pentagonal figure, resembling a state quality mark. The flower petals are shown as people holding hands, which reflects the idea of national unity and common work to strengthen Belarus' independence, identity and well-being"<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Georgia's prime minister familiarised himself with Belarusian products at an exhibition in Tbilisi [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://belta.by/economics/view/premjer-ministr-gruzii-oznakomilsja-s-belorusskoj-produktsiej-na-vystavke-v-tbilisi-340835-2019/>.

## **Belarus-China: the science and technology vector of a comprehensive strategic partnership**

One of the main areas of trustful all-round strategic partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Belarus is the intensive development of partnerships in science, where the "need to deepen further scientific cooperation, implement new forms of interaction and expand the list of joint projects" is obvious<sup>55</sup>. As a reminder, in 2018, China hosted a meeting of the S&T cooperation commission of the China-Belarus intergovernmental cooperation committee, during which the parties noted the strengthening of interaction in recent years, identified potentially important scientific projects and came to an unambiguous conclusion: "Joint research work has gradually become a new model of cooperation between the two countries"<sup>56</sup>.

The fifth Belarus-China Youth Innovation Forum New Horizons, which took place in Minsk in November 2018 and gathered over 200 participants, demonstrated an important trend in the theme: "Cooperation between Belarusian and Chinese scientists relies on young people."<sup>57</sup>. The following detail speaks for itself: whereas previously the State Committee for Science and Technology of Belarus and the Ministry of Science and Technology of China traditionally announced one contest of Belarusian-Chinese projects once every two years, in 2018 alone, they announced it twice. As a result, the competition for joint Belarusian-Chinese science and technology projects 47 applications have been submitted for 2019-2020 in priority areas of bilateral cooperation : information and communication technologies, energy efficiency and energy saving, biotechnologies, chemistry and

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<sup>55</sup> Belarus and China are interested in developing scientific cooperation [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/belarus-i-kitai-zainteresovany-v-razvitii-nauchnogo-sotrudnichestva-285359-2018/>

<sup>56</sup> Tsimin, C. Friendship between Belarus and China has become all-weather / C. Tsimin // [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/druzhiba-belarusi-i-kitaia-stala-vsepodobnoi-tsui-tsimin-331056-2018/>

<sup>57</sup> Cooperation between scientists of Belarus and China bets on youth - Shumilin [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://belta.by/society/view/v-sotrudnichestve-uchenyh-belarusi-i-kitaja-stavka-delaetsja-na-molodezh-shumilin-325711-2018/>

agribusiness. Among them is the implementation of a project to create the Sino-Belarusian Center for Cooperation in Science and Technology Transformation that will help create new high-tech production facilities both in Belarus and China. It should be noted that this project is included in the programme of S&T cooperation between Belarus and China until 2020, which also includes other promising strategic joint projects - "establishment of an enterprise to produce equipment for use in solar energy, a training centre on the basis of a joint institute of Belarusian State University and Dalian Polytechnic University and a Sino-Belarusian centre for incubation of innovation projects"<sup>58</sup>.

Among domestic higher education institutions actively developing ties with Chinese partners, one should first of all mention the Belarusian State University, which plans to establish a second joint institute with Dalian Polytechnic University in 2019. We would like to remind that the first one, where now 159 Chinese students study in two courses of three faculties - applied physics, engineering mechanics, mathematics and applied mathematics - was formed in 2017 and operates in Dalian. Teaching there is conducted in English. A second joint university is expected to open in Belarus. It is expected that "the specialists trained at the institute will be in demand in the Sino-Belarusian Industrial Park Great Stone"<sup>59</sup>.

The Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics is going to actively develop ties with Chinese partners in 2019. In mid-March this year, it opened a joint research and educational centre in Minsk with the East China Research Institute of Computer Technologies, whose activities will promote international cooperation, strengthen international cooperation of scientists to solve breakthrough problems in high technology, train highly qualified specialists in the field of computer science and technology. In addition, the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics signed an agreement on scientific cooperation with the University of Science and Technology in Hong Kong. The agreement with the South China

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<sup>58</sup> 47 applications have been submitted for the competition of Belarusian-Chinese science and technology projects [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://belta.by/society/view/na-konkurs-belorussko-kitajskih-nauchno-tehnicheskikh-proektov-podano-47-zajavok-329805-2018/>.

<sup>59</sup> BSU plans to establish a second joint institute with Dalian Polytechnic University [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/bgu-planiruet-sozdat-vtoroj-sovmestnyj-institut-s-daljskim-politehnicheskim-universitetom-337473-2019/>

University of Science and Technology in Shenzhen was reached on "implementation of educational programmes at the first cycle of higher education based on the '2+2' model of two-degree education"<sup>60</sup>. A logical and important step in terms of strengthening cooperation between higher education institutions of Belarus and China was the opening of the "Center for Belarusian Studies at the Sichuan University of Foreign Languages" in March 2019 during the Minsk Region Days in Chongqing<sup>61</sup>.

In total, more than 350 direct cooperation agreements have been signed between Belarusian and Chinese higher education institutions as of March 2019, which are successfully implemented in the form of bilateral research projects, joint educational programmes, as well as providing for further "academic exchanges, the creation of joint educational

structures and scientific laboratories"<sup>62</sup>. The following statistics also speaks volumes. Today almost a thousand of Belarusian citizens study in China under various programmes. The dynamics here is such that their number increases by about a hundred people a year. And more than three thousand representatives of China are trained in Belarus. And, to all appearances, this is not the limit, because now "Belarus and China are preparing an intergovernmental agreement on mutual recognition of education, training and academic degrees"<sup>63</sup>, the implementation of which will make Belarusian-Chinese

The education sector is even more dynamic and effective in its interaction.

Divisions of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus are also active participants in bilateral scientific cooperation with Chinese partners. In particular, back

<sup>60</sup> BSUIR and East China Research Institute of Computer Technology to open joint educational centre [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://belta.by/tech/view/bguir-i-vostochno-kitajskij-nii-kompiuternyh-tehnologij-otkrojut-sovmestnyj-obrazovatelnyj-tsentr-338475-2019/>.

<sup>61</sup> Centre for the Study of Belarus opened at Sichuan University of Foreign Languages in China [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/special/society/view/tsentr-izuchenija-belarusi-otkrylsja-na-baze-syчуанского-университета-иностранных-языков-v-kitae-340916-2019/>.

<sup>62</sup> Grishkevich, A. Belarusian and Chinese universities successfully implement more than 350 cooperation agreements - Karpenko / A. Grishkevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/beloruskie-i-kitajskie-vuzy-usheshno-realizujut-bolee-350-dogovorov-ot-sotrudnichestve-karpenko-339787-2019/>.

<sup>63</sup> Gryshkevich, A. Belarus and China prepare agreement on mutual recognition of documents on Education / A. Grishkevich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/belarus-i-kitaj-gotovjat-soglasenie-o-vzaimnom-priznanii-dokumentov-ob-obrazovanii-339806-2019/>.

in September 2018, the Institute of Physics of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and the Institute of Laser Research of the Academy of Sciences of Shandong Province of China came to an agreement to establish a joint research laboratory to perform a number of contracts in the field of laser physics. At the same time, the NAS of Belarus, the Shandong Provincial Academy of Sciences and the Jinan Municipal Government signed a trilateral memorandum on cooperation, which deals with identifying priority research areas and a list of specific projects of mutual interest to develop relevant technical and industrial areas, as well as the possibility of "establishing new joint laboratories"<sup>64</sup>.

With regard to humanitarian cooperation, the Institute of Economics of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and the Institute of World Economy and Politics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences are implementing a joint research project to study the prospects and development strategy of the Chinese-Belarusian Industrial Park "Great Stone" in line with the "One Belt and One Road" initiative.

The thematic expansion of Belarusian-Chinese scientific ties is evidenced by the fact that in March 2019, a Belarusian-Chinese research centre for the development of modern means of protection against emergencies opened at the University of Civil Defense of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Belarus. This educational and experimental platform for creating and studying means of public safety, where innovative technical means, software products in the field of protection from emergencies are presented, appeared thanks to the scientific potential of the Chinese Institute for Public Safety Research of Tsinghua University and GSafety company. The relevance of creating such a research centre is explained by the fact that the National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction in Belarus for 2019-2020 provides for the development of a new model of urban safety management, where such technologies as the Internet of Things, Big Data, artificial intelligence, information models of objects will have to be used. Here, the new centre will "work on the development and implementation of safety systems designed to detect and eliminate fires, early warning

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<sup>64</sup> Academies of Sciences of Belarus and China's Shandong Province to set up a joint laboratory [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/akademii-nauk-belarusi-i-kitajskoj-provintsii-shandun-sozhdadut-sovmestnuju-laboratoriju-319153-2018/>.

of emergencies, manage public safety, ensure transport safety, monitor and control safety in the operation of urban life support systems"<sup>65</sup>.

The course towards strengthening scientific and technical cooperation is also characteristic of the activities of the residents of the China-Belarus Industrial Park Velikiy Kamen. It should be recalled that by the beginning of 2019, more than 40 companies from all over the world had become residents of this park. The peculiarity of this peculiar free economic zone on the territory of the Republic of Belarus, where residents are provided with unprecedented tax and tariff conditions, is that "only those production facilities, those technologies that are future-oriented" are placed there<sup>66</sup>. The fact that development here is progressing apace is evidenced by this fact: in 2018, "the first phase of infrastructure construction of the Great Stone Industrial Park was completed on an area of 8.5 square kilometres"<sup>67</sup>. Also in 2018, the amount of investment attracted here was at least \$180 million. Overall, the accumulated investment since the creation of the industrial park had reached half a billion dollars by early 2019, about half of which is made up of residents' funds and the other half of which is investment in infrastructure development. As for the prospects, "by 2020, the China-Belarus Industrial Park will have more than 100 residents with at least \$2 billion in investments and \$1 billion in output. There will also be at least 6.5 thousand new highly productive jobs"<sup>68</sup>.

The successful resolution of such challenging tasks of developing the industrial park should be facilitated, among other things, by the strong potential of Velikiy Kamen's new residents. Facts prove that there is such a potential. For example, in January 2019, the 42nd resident of the park was the Chinese LLC Weixisi International

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<sup>65</sup> Belarusian-Chinese research centre opened at the University of Civil Protection [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/belorusko-kitaj-skij-issledovatel'skii-tsentr-otkryli-v-universitete-grazhdanskoi-zaschity-340523-2019/>

<sup>66</sup> Interview by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus Uladzimir Makiej to the Japanese broadcaster NHK (19 December 2018) [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <http://mfa.gov.by/press/smi/de367645ecb2d418.html>

<sup>67</sup> Tsimin, C. Friendship of Belarus and China has become all-weather / C. Tsimin // [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/druzhiba-belarusi-i-kitaia-stala-vsepogodnoi-tsui-tsimin-331056-2018/>.

<sup>68</sup> The amount of investment raised in Great Stone in 2018 will be at least \$180 million [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/obiem-privlechenykh-investitsij-v-velikij-kamen-v-2018-godu-sostavit-ne-menee-180-mln-330428-2018/>

Bel, which plans to set up both a manufacturing and a research and technical support centre here. "The investment will amount to more than \$2 million, which could be increased to \$5 million in the long term."<sup>69</sup> . The activity of the new resident, whose founder is Wiseasy, one of the leaders in business analysis hardware services in China, will contribute to the intensive development of the mobile payment system in Belarus. The fact is that Wiseasy International Bel Ltd specialises in manufacturing smart electronic terminals based on the Android system, which can accept payments with an encrypted card with a magnetic stripe, a bank card with a chip, as well as with the use of near-field contactless communication widely used in smartphones.

In December 2018, Great Stone welcomed to its "family" a Chinese company Yunzhi Technology, founded by Shenzhen-based firm Yunzhi Tech Co. Ltd. known for its LED control systems and exporting its products to more than a hundred countries worldwide. The new industrial park resident specialises in manufacturing innovative products meeting high environmental standards - LED transparent screens and LED monoblocks, which are used in the decoration of stages and exhibitions, large-scale sporting events. "The total investment in the project is \$3.2 million"<sup>70</sup> . With an investment of about two million dollars, the limited liability company China-Belarus Hi-Tech Aerospace Research and Development Centre also became a member of the Great Stone Industrial Park at the end of 2018, which will engage in space technology R&D activities here.

Also in December 2018, the construction of a Sino-Belarusian centre for cooperation in the transformation of science and technology was launched at the Great Stone, which is scheduled to open in a year's time. The five-storey building with a total area of around 20,000 square metres, shaped as a geometric figure resembling the mathematical symbol "infinity", is expected to house "a demonstration and multifunctional hall, sales areas, centres for commercialisation cooperation, business incubator and testing work, an intermediate testing and small-scale production centre

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<sup>69</sup> New resident registered at Great Stone [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/novyj-rezident-zaregistirovan-v-velikom-kamne-331481-2019>

<sup>70</sup> Two new residents registered at Great Stone [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://belta.by/economics/view/dva-novyh-rezidenta-zaregistirovany-v-velikom-kamne-330351-2018/>

for scientific and technological achievements, dealing with preliminary experiments"<sup>71</sup>. It will also operate laboratories, production halls for trial tests, a testing centre, conduct sample demonstrations and offer information on manufacturing products for subsequent titling. Finally, in December 2018, China's Sinotrans, one of the country's largest logistics service providers and a provider of sea freight, freight forwarding, express transport and warehousing services, opened its headquarters in the Great Stone Industrial Park in the Eurasian region. This is done with a long-range vision, as "a world-class logistics platform is being created on the Silk Road, the purpose of which will be to provide rail and air freight"<sup>72</sup>.

In February 2019, another Chinese resident, Xinlian International Technology Company LLC, was registered at Great Stone, with plans to create a big data storage and processing centre within the next two years. The project, with an investment of about two and a half million dollars, "will create infrastructure solutions based on the smart city concept for planning traffic routes, finding parking spaces, and e-registration for clinics"<sup>73</sup>. And in March 2019, it was announced that an investment fund will be set up in the Great Stone Industrial Park to support small and medium-sized businesses and venture projects both in the park and in Belarus as a whole. The fund will be set up on the basis of the centre of cooperation in the field of transformation of scientific and technical achievements which is under construction there. The project is to result in "a comprehensive infrastructure to stimulate innovative development of the Park"<sup>74</sup>.

All of these facts attest to the main point: in 2016, Belarus-China relations

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<sup>71</sup> Sino-Belarusian Centre for Cooperation in Science and Technology Transformation of achievements planned to be built in a year [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/kitaisko-belorusskii-tsentr-sotrudnichestva-v-oblasti-transformatsii-nauchno-technicheskikh-dostizhenii-329775-2018/>

<sup>72</sup> Sinotrans has opened its Eurasian headquarters in Great Stone [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/sinotrans-otkryla-evraziiskuiu-shtab-kvartiru-v-velikom-kamne-329874-2018/>

<sup>73</sup> Lisatović, T. New resident will create a large storage and processing centre at Great Stone data volumes / T. Lisatovich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/novyy-rezident-sozdast-v-velikom-kamne-tsentr-hranenija-i-obrabotki-bolshih-objemov-dannyh-338346-2019/>

<sup>74</sup> Lisatović, T. Investment fund to support small and medium-sized businesses to be set up in "Veliky stone" / T. Lisatovich // [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/investitsionnyj-fond-podderzhki-malogo-i-srednego-biznesa-sozdadut-v-velikom-kamne-341563-2019/>

reached a new level - a trusting all-round strategic partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation - and became the basis for further progressive development of Belarusian-Chinese cooperation in the science and technology and education sectors, which in 2019 should acquire new innovative formats for implementing joint projects to ensure high-quality economic growth.

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## **Belarus-Afghanistan: filling cooperation with concrete projects**

In April 2019, the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus and the Ministry of Information and Culture of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan signed an agreement on cooperation in the field of information. The appearance of this document means that the topic of Belarusian-Afghan cooperation in topical areas of bilateral cooperation will have to find adequate media coverage in the Belarusian media as soon as possible. In the meantime, international journalists, who are directly related to this thematic block, will have to take into account in their work a number of peculiarities of the development of partnership ties between the two countries.

In this regard, we recall that back in July 2015, official Minsk drew attention to the fact that "Afghanistan is not such a distant country for us, and we can intensify our cooperation in the near future"<sup>75</sup>. There were several preconditions for this. First, there has been an intense process of stabilization and normalization of relations between various political and ethnic-religious groups in that country in recent years. Second, one cannot deny the role of Afghan territory in terms of transit, especially between the north and the south, where large states with enormous and diverse reserves of raw materials are located.

In August 2017, Afghanistan's Chief Executive A. Abdullah paid an official visit to Belarus. Abdullah, which, according to the two sides, opened a new page in the cooperation between the two countries. In Minsk, the attitude towards this Asian country is based on the fact that "Afghanistan needs certain economic, military and political support today due to the processes that are taking place there"<sup>76</sup>. Declaring its openness to a dialogue on the development of bilateral cooperation with Kabul, the Belarusian side emphasized "the need to consolidate the Afghan society, national

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<sup>75</sup> Meeting with the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai [Electronic resource]. - 2015. - URL: [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/vstrecha-s-prezidentom-islamskoj-respubliki-afganistan-ashraf-gani-axmadzaem-11749/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/vstrecha-s-prezidentom-islamskoj-respubliki-afganistan-ashraf-gani-axmadzaem-11749/)

<sup>76</sup> Meeting with Representative of the President of Afghanistan Mohammad Shaker Kargar [Electronic resource]. - 2015. - URL: [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/vstrecha-s-predstavitelem-prezidenta-afganistana-moxammadom-shakerom-kargarom-11609/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/vstrecha-s-predstavitelem-prezidenta-afganistana-moxammadom-shakerom-kargarom-11609/)

reconciliation and territorial integrity of the country"<sup>77</sup>. Apparently, positive changes in this respect are already taking place on the Afghan soil, if at the meeting between Abdullah and the Belarusian head of state the parties agreed that "Belarus and Afghanistan should move from wishful thinking and talks to building up concrete cooperation"<sup>78</sup>. Moreover, in recent years, the two countries have managed not only to expand the contractual and legal framework of bilateral relations, but also strengthen partnerships in industry, agriculture and pharmaceuticals, as evidenced by the figures: "The trade turnover shows a good dynamics, which in the first half of 2017 grew by 34.3% to \$12.5m"<sup>79</sup>.

In determining the most promising areas for Belarus-Afghanistan cooperation, it is important to take into account a number of factors. First, the main sector of the Afghan economy is agriculture, which accounts for about one third of the gross domestic product. More than 80% of the able-bodied population is employed in this sector. The main problem with the agricultural sector is its dependence on weather conditions, which is largely due to the lack of long-term storage capacity for harvested crops. And for this reason, much of the foreign investment in Afghanistan is related to construction and infrastructure projects. And the main imports are petroleum products, foodstuffs, machinery and equipment, metals and consumer goods. India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Russia and the United States are among the countries that supply goods to the Afghan market the most. At the same time, the main transit of goods to this country occurs through Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Second, Afghanistan is rich in minerals; therefore, joint development of these deposits can be a very effective vector of cooperation. Third, large-scale infrastructure projects are under way in Afghanistan, not only in terms of the country itself, but also in terms of the entire region, to build power

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<sup>77</sup> President of Belarus accepts credentials [Electronic resource]. - 2014. - URL: [http://president.gov.by/ru/search\\_ru/getExtendedResults/?query=&search\\_type=all\\_words&group=0&from\\_day=12&from\\_month=12&from\\_year=2014&to\\_day=12&to\\_month=12&to\\_year=2014&search\\_type=sort=desc&search.ok.x=33&search.ok.y=4&search.mode=&search.node=news&search.node.id=374&search.title.name=events](http://president.gov.by/ru/search_ru/getExtendedResults/?query=&search_type=all_words&group=0&from_day=12&from_month=12&from_year=2014&to_day=12&to_month=12&to_year=2014&search_type=sort=desc&search.ok.x=33&search.ok.y=4&search.mode=&search.node=news&search.node.id=374&search.title.name=events)

<sup>78</sup> Talks with Afghanistan's Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/vstrecha-s-glavoj-ispolnitelnoj-vlasti-afganistana-abdulloy-abdulloy-16855/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/vstrecha-s-glavoj-ispolnitelnoj-vlasti-afganistana-abdulloy-abdulloy-16855/)

<sup>79</sup> Meeting with Afghanistan's Chief Executive [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: <http://www.government.by/ru/content/7438>

lines, gas pipelines and hydroelectric power plants, and Belarus could take part in these projects if it is possible to specify the forms and mechanisms of its involvement in them. Fourthly, Afghanistan needs quality food products and a general boost in agriculture based on modern technologies, which Belarus has and can share.

Given all of these arguments, the parties came to the conclusion that the most promising areas of cooperation at this stage of the development of the bilateral Belarus-Afghanistan relations are machinery and machine tool construction, petrochemistry and oil refining, agriculture and military-technical cooperation, healthcare and personnel training. An efficient mechanism for realizing the outlined objectives should be a joint committee on trade and economic cooperation, the decision to create which was made during the visit of the Afghan Prime Minister to Minsk. A roadmap for cooperation to be signed by Minsk and Kabul will become a conceptual guide for both the governments and business communities of Belarus and Afghanistan.

Undoubtedly, these agreements have given new impetus to the current and potential participants in the Belarusian-Afghan engagement. Today, "four entities of the MTZ distribution network operate in Afghanistan - Jawad Afghan Limited, Herat Keshawarz co.ltd, Sayed Jamal Co. Ltd.", "Silk Road International LLC/Barakat Company Ltd"<sup>80</sup>. The Minsk tractor plant has shipped over 20 thousand machines to the country since 1956, and it intends to expand the model range of the machines it supplies. Tractors designed for various agricultural works and transport auxiliary operations are already arriving in Afghanistan. At the end of 2017, it was planned to "ship 525 tractors, about 300 tractors have already been shipped. Last year 470 units were shipped"<sup>81</sup>.

The Amkodor holding, which unites 29 enterprises that produce machinery for the agro-industrial, road construction, housing and communal services, forestry, manufacturing and logistics sectors and is aimed at developing relations with countries of the far arc, which include Afghanistan, has started working on its options for entering

<sup>80</sup> Afghanistan [Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://export.by/afghanistan>

<sup>81</sup> Sergeeva, V. MTZ intends to expand the model range of tractors supplied to Afghanistan / V. Sergeeva // [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: <http://www.belta.by/economics/view/mtz-nameren-rasshirit-modelnvyj-rjad-postavljaemyh-v-afghanistan-tractorov-261724-2017/>

the Afghan market. The first option involves the assistance of a dealer of a Belarusian manufacturer in Tajikistan. The second is through the sale of assembly equipment in Uzbekistan. After all, "currently five models of Amkodor machinery are produced in Tashkent. There are plans to expand the model range every year. The production has already received 44 units of machinery in the form of complete units, from which the complete machines are assembled"<sup>82</sup>. The next milestone, which should be reflected in the roadmap of cooperation between Belarus and Afghanistan that is being drawn up, should be the establishment of joint production facilities in agriculture and industry, as well as expansion of cooperation in mining, road construction, and the organization of supplies of agricultural products.

There is much to suggest that over the past nearly four years Belarus and Afghanistan have done a lot to bring their positions closer in terms of organizing bilateral cooperation across the entire spectrum of interstate relations. This has led to the first meeting of the joint Afghanistan-Belarus trade and economic cooperation committee in Kabul in April 2019, which the two sides described as "historically significant". When creating this committee in August 2017, Minsk and Kabul expressed the hope that the new structure "will become an effective mechanism for the development of trade, economic and humanitarian ties between the two countries"<sup>83</sup>. Moreover, the emergence of this new format for the coordination of Belarusian-Afghan engagement occurred against the backdrop of very positive trends in the development of bilateral ties. Thus, while in 2017 the volume of mutual trade between the two countries increased by 12 percent and amounted to almost \$30 million with the share of Belarusian exports amounting to \$28.7 million, "the trade turnover between Belarus and Afghanistan in 2018 compared to the previous year increased by 31% to \$38.7 million. The surplus reached \$38.1 million. The main Belarusian exports were oil products, tractors and truck tractors, bars and aluminum profiles"<sup>84</sup>.

<sup>82</sup> Sergeeva, V. Amkodor is working on options to enter the market of Afghanistan / V. Sergeeva // [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: <http://www.belta.by/economics/view/amkodor-prorabatyvaet-varianty-vyhoda-na-rynok-afganistana-261728-2017/>

<sup>83</sup> Belarus and Afghanistan establish a joint committee on trade and economic cooperation [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-afganistan-sozdaj-ut-sovmestnyj-komitet-po-torgovomu-i-ekonomicheskomu-sotrudnichestvu-261871-2017/>

<sup>84</sup> Belarus and Afghanistan sign agreement on military-technical cooperation, information and culture

During the first meeting of the joint committee, the Afghan side pointed out that Belarus is an important trade partner of Afghanistan, with which cooperation is significant not only in trade, but also in industrial cooperation. In this regard, a proposal was made to set up joint working groups to expand bilateral interaction. The meetings between representatives of the Belarusian enterprises - Minsk Motor Works, Tractor Plant, Motor Vehicle Plant, Belshina - with the business community of Afghanistan in the "business to business" format have helped identify needs of the partners, their commercial interests and prospects of cooperation. In particular, interesting opportunities for cooperation with the Afghan side were identified by Minsk Motor Plant, whose business offers attracted the attention of such companies as Javed Afghan group, Sayed Jamal Ltd Co. Ltd. The fact is that "the Afghan market is characterized by a high interest in the supply of diesel generator sets, four-cylinder engines in the aftermarket for the conversion of operating tractors produced by MTZ, <...> as well as spare parts"<sup>85</sup>. This is why Minsk Motor Plant, in order to enter the Afghan market on a large scale, intends to conduct here the exclusive pricing policy, taking into account socio-political and economic situation in the region. All of these facts suggest that now is the right time for Minsk and Kabul to decide on the most important areas for further collaboration in order to eventually adopt an effective cooperation roadmap and take concrete steps to expand the contractual and legal framework for Belarusian-Afghan cooperation.

In particular, in Kabul in April 2019, in addition to the above-mentioned agreement on cooperation in the field of information, two more agreements were signed: "Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on military and technical cooperation; Agreement between the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus and the Ministry of Information and Culture of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on

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[Electronic resource]. - 2019. - URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/belarus-i-afganistan-podpisali-soglashenie-v-sfere-voenno-tehnicheskogo-sotrudnichestva-informatsii-i-342905-2019/>

<sup>85</sup> Korsak, O. Mutual interest / O. Korsak // Motorbuilder. - 2019. - 12 apr. - C. 2.

cooperation in the cultural sphere"<sup>86</sup>.<sup>87</sup> These documents complete the list of previously adopted bilateral agreements, among which we can recall the agreement on cooperation in the field of healthcare, which entered into force in May 2014, under which the parties intend to cooperate in such areas as modernisation and promotion of investment projects in healthcare; medical education and training of medical personnel; circulation of medicines, medical products and medical equipment; exchange of experience in the development of information management systems

Interesting cooperation between Belarus and Afghanistan is also possible in the framework of the upcoming Belarus-Tajikistan-Afghanistan trilateral cooperation, which was launched by the first International Business Forum of the three countries, which took place in July 2017 in Tajikistan. Representatives of such leading machine-building holdings as Minsk and Belarusian Automobile Plant, Amkodor, Gomselmash, Belarusian Optical and Mechanical Association, as well as MinskInterkaps, Pozhsnab and Minsk Soft Drinks Plant took part on the Belarusian side. "There were representatives of over 60 companies in the Afghan delegation"<sup>88</sup>. More than twenty documents, including contracts, were signed as a result of this forum. Belarusian participants held talks with representatives of Afghan companies interested in developing cooperation in the fields of metalworking, textile industry, agriculture, food industry, chemical industry, construction, energy, mechanical engineering, medicine, transport and logistics. An agreement on cooperation between the chambers of commerce and industry of Belarus and Afghanistan was also reached in order to effectively assist "organisations and entrepreneurs in the development and deepening of all forms of foreign economic activity, <...> to assist in the establishment of joint ventures."<sup>89</sup>. Besides, the parties have agreed to support each other in business forums,

<sup>86</sup> On the outcome of the 1st meeting of the Belarus-Afghanistan Committee on Trade and Economic cooperation [Electronic resource ]. -2019 . - URL: <http://taiikistan.mfa.gov.by/ru/embassy/news/c3a35780b1447cdf.html>

<sup>87</sup> Agreement between the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Belarus and the Ministry of Health of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on cooperation in health care, education, medical science and medical assistance to citizens of the Republic of Belarus and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan [Electronic resource]. - 2014. - URL: <http://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=101400053&p1=1>

<sup>88</sup> Zaitsev, Y. Dushanbe hosted the first International Business Forum "Belarus-Tajikistan-Afghanistan" / Y. Zaitsev // [Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: <https://findirector.by/news/v-dushanbe-proshel-pervyy-mezhdunarodnyy-biznesforum-belarustadzhikistanafganistan/>

<sup>89</sup> Cooperation Agreement between the BelCCI and the Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industry

exhibitions, fairs, seminars, conferences and other business events, provide regular exchange of commercial offers, lists of potential partners interested in cooperation, information on congress and exhibition events held in Belarus and Afghanistan, assist in opening of information centres, take all necessary measures to ensure efficiency and development of business relations. The second Belarus-Tajikistan-Afghanistan International Business Forum was held in Dushanbe in May 2018. Twenty Afghan companies participated. The Belarusian pharmaceutical industry was well represented and "talks were held with major Tajik and Afghan pharmaceutical companies"<sup>90</sup>.

In September 2018, during a visit to the tractor assembly plant in the Tajik city of Hissar, the Belarusian head of state was shown "a new large workshop where the assembly of tractors for delivery to Afghanistan has already started"<sup>91</sup> and the first contract was signed with the Afghan side to deliver assembled tractors from here "in the so-called tropical version. The Afghans have asked to resume production of these models for their market"<sup>92</sup>. Interestingly, Belarus itself has not produced such agricultural machines for a decade and a half. Nevertheless, in Tajikistan their production has been resumed. It was planned that tractors of tropical design assembled in Gissar "will go to Afghanistan on their own"<sup>93</sup>. Let us note that the Afghan side would like not only the return of the Belarusian tractors to its market, the need for which is estimated at thousands of units. "There is an acute need for spare parts and maintenance, because the country lacks its own specialists"<sup>94</sup>. This is why the

[Electronic resource]. - 2017. - URL: [https://www.cci.by/ru/content/2017\\_news\\_237](https://www.cci.by/ru/content/2017_news_237)

<sup>90</sup> Belarus' pharmaceutical industry presented at the international business forum in Tajikistan [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: [https://www.belarus.by/ru/business/business-news/farmotrasl-belarusi-prezentovana-na-mezhdunarodnom-biznes-forume-v-tadzhikistane\\_i\\_79570.html](https://www.belarus.by/ru/business/business-news/farmotrasl-belarusi-prezentovana-na-mezhdunarodnom-biznes-forume-v-tadzhikistane_i_79570.html)

<sup>91</sup> A visit to a tractor machinery assembly plant in Gissar city [Electronic regime]. - 2018. - URL: [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/poseschenie-sborochnogo-proizvodstva-traktornoi-texniki-v-gorode-gissar-19592/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/poseschenie-sborochnogo-proizvodstva-traktornoi-texniki-v-gorode-gissar-19592/)

<sup>92</sup> Matveev, V. First contract for supply of Belarusian tractors to Afghanistan expected Tajik assembly / V Matveev // [Electronic resource]. -2018. - URL:

<https://www.belta.by/economics/view/ozhidaetsja-pervyj-kontrakt-na-postavku-v-afganistan-beloruskih-traktorov-tadzhikskoj-sborki-319379-2018/>

<sup>93</sup> Kononovich, E. Belarusian tractors will go from Tajikistan to Afghanistan / E. Kononovich // [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://www.sb.by/articles/beloruskie-traktora-svoim-khodom-poydut-iz-tadzhikistana-v-afganistan.html>.

<sup>94</sup> Old but popular: Belarus tractor caught on video in Afghanistan [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: <https://sputnik.by/video/20181221/1039263794/Staryy-no-populyarnyy-traktor-Belarus-popal-na-video-v-Afganistane.html>

educational sector can also become a very promising area for Belarusian-Afghan cooperation in the near future.

The prospect of implementing Belarusian-Afghan projects in conjunction with another Central Asian country - Uzbekistan - is quite real, as the Belarusian head of state said during his official visit to Tashkent in September 2018: "The Afghan market does not need supercombines or smart tractors, they need simple machines"<sup>95</sup>. And the Belarusian side expressed its willingness to assemble such machinery on Uzbek soil to further sell it in Afghanistan.

As we can see, Belarus not only hopes for "the further successful development of Belarusian-Afghan cooperation and filling it with concrete joint projects in trade, economic and other areas of interaction"<sup>96</sup> but also takes concrete steps towards their effective implementation for the benefit of the two nations.

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<sup>95</sup> Talks with President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Merzиеv [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/peregovory-s-prezidentom-uzbekistana-shavkat-mirzиеvym-19489/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/peregovory-s-prezidentom-uzbekistana-shavkat-mirzиеvym-19489/)

<sup>96</sup> Congratulations to President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Mohammad Ashraf Ghani [Electronic resource]. - 2018. - URL: [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/pozdravlenie-prezidentu-islamskoj-respubliki-afganistan-moxammadu-ashrafu-gani-19318/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/pozdravlenie-prezidentu-islamskoj-respubliki-afganistan-moxammadu-ashrafu-gani-19318/)

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