

The reference book presents information about major domains of the life of the Republic of Belarus. The edition covers the country and its citizens, the state system and public life, social priorities and foreign policy, achievements in economy, science, education, healthcare, physical culture and sports. Historic facts are cited.

For high readership.
BELARUS ON THE POLITICAL MAP OF EUROPE
The Republic of Belarus is situated in the central part of Europe. The length of the state border is over 3,500 km. In the north-west, Belarus borders upon Lithuania, in the north upon Latvia, in the north-east and east upon Russia, in the south upon Ukraine and in the west on Poland.

Belarus occupies the territory of 207,600 sq. km. The capital of Belarus is Hero City Minsk.

Belarus is crossed by numerous transit routes connecting Russia with Eastern and Western European countries, Ukraine and Moldova with the Baltic states and with the north-western parts of Russia.

The distance from the capital of Belarus, Minsk, to the capitals of some European states:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Distance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td>1867 km</td>
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<tr>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>1060 km</td>
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<tr>
<td>Budapest</td>
<td>1427 km</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>550 km</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>1271 km</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vilnius</td>
<td>215 km</td>
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<td>Kiev</td>
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<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>4112 km</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>700 km</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>2310 km</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Riga</td>
<td>470 km</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>2324 km</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>867 km</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helsinki</td>
<td>1328 km</td>
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</tbody>
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Today, it takes just a few hours to get to these cities from Minsk by plane.
The Road to Statehood

The earliest political entities on the territory of Belarus date back to the 6th-9th centuries. They emerged largely due to the settling of the Slavs. The latter fully assimilated the Balts who had inhabited those lands before. The mixing of cultures gave rise to such tribal unions as the Krivichi (the 9th century) and Dregovichi (948). Those tribes established the earliest political entities on the territory of Belarus – the principalities of Polotsk and Turov, which were inextricably intertwined with the history of the Kievan Rus.

The Polotsk Principality, the Krivichi’s state, was the most influential. Its capital was Polotsk founded as early as 862, which incorporated the northern and central parts of what is now Belarus. The state was governed by the Prince. The first known Prince of Polotsk was Rogvolod who ruled in 980. His princehood was marked by the completion of the first stage of the emergence of statehood: the borders were identified, the political system was adopted and internal economic links were established.

In the 10th century, Polotsk lands saw the advent of Christianity.

In the 12th century, the ancient principalities virtually fell into the era of feudal split. Vitebsk and Minsk Principalities separated from Polotsk, followed by the principalities of Drutsk, Izyaslavl, Logoisk and Lukoml, all of which received partial independence. The appanage principalities of Slutsk and Pinsk withdrew from Turov. The political map of the region thus became quite patchy.

At that time, the principalities that occupied the territory of present Belarus were gravely menaced by the dismal prospects of being invaded by the Mongols and Tatars or attacked by the Crusaders. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), which came into being in the 13th century and which incorporated most of Belarusian lands, managed to repulse the enemies. The nucleus of the new entity included the territory of the Middle Ponemonye (the middle reaches of the Neman River) and the lands along the Vilia River. According to ancient chronicles, the town of Novogrudok (situated in the western part of the present territory of Belarus) was the first capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Grand Duke of Lithuania, Mindovg, was invited to rule Novogrudok. Once he came to power, the town became the centre of gravity for Slavonic lands.

During the 14th century, the Duchy absorbed Brest lands, Turov and Pinsk lands and the Principality of Mstislavl. The principalities of Polotsk and Vitebsk acceded to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as autonomous territories. In the 15th century, the capital of the GDL was relocated to the town of Vilno. The official name of the state at that time was the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Rus and Samogitia. By the 16th century, that
country nurtured the Belarusian ethnicity and fueled the formation of the Belarusian language.

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania gradually appeared in the European political arena and gained allies. The political situation at that time made the Kingdom of Poland its closest ally. The relationship between the two states evolved from a matrimonial union of their monarchs to the actual union of the countries. The first step in this respect was the Union of Krewo which envisaged the marriage of Jogaila, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, to Jadwiga, the Queen of Poland. The final step was the Union of Lublin signed in 1569, which translated into the emergence of a new federative state, Rzeczpospolita (Commonwealth).

Rzeczpospolita was ruled by the Polish King who was the Grand Duke of Lithuania at the same time. The succession of power in Rzeczpospolita took place through elections rather than by means of hereditary continuity. All major issues were addressed at the Sejm (in Poland: a parliament). While forming an integrated whole, both Poland and the Grand Duchy
of Lithuania retained their state systems of administration, armies, treasuries and the right to stamp equal coins, administrative and judicial bodies, laws and customs systems. Each state had its own national language: in Poland it was Latin, in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania the old Belarusian language. All the afore-mentioned could not make the Grand Duchy of Lithuania a strong centralised state, but rather sparked an array of domestic and outside problems.

The history of Rzeczpospolita during the ensuing several centuries was the history of wars and armed conflicts and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was the one to bear the brunt of them. Its territory being the theatre of both internal and external hostilities, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was gradually weakening, its power gradually ebbing. The stronger neighbours – Russia, Prussia and Austria – directed their gaze toward it. At the end of the 18th century Rzeczpospolita underwent three divisions. As a result the territories presently occupied by Belarus were included into the Russian Empire.

The 19th century became the Belarusian nation-building period. The szlachta (the local nobility) turned enthusiastic about folklore, local traditions, and the Belarusian language, which, coupled with economic transformations, provided a fertile breeding ground in forming the national identity. The beginning of the 20th century saw the emergence of the first national revolutionary and democratic party – the Belarusian Socialist Hramada (in Belarusian: assembly), which articulated the necessity of transforming Russia into a federative democratic republic and endowing each people forming part of it, the Belarusians included, with the right to self-determination.

For the Russian Empire, the 20th century began with an array of political troubles which led to the collapse of the monarchy, triggered the October Revolution and the Civil War which followed it. Attempts were made during that period to establish a Belarusian state. There were two points of view as to how to achieve that, with each having their own supporters among the members of the national patriotic movement. Some proposed to establish a sovereign state, independent from other national republics. Others believed Belarus should have become a part of a federation of national republics, with each republic enjoying equal rights. Given the times of the revolution, foreign intervention and the civil war, attempts were made to materialise both options.
The year of 1918 saw the establishment of the Belarusian People’s Republic on the territory of Belarus occupied by the Germans. The newly-formed republic declared separation from the Soviet Russia. On 1 January 1919, there appeared the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus. But it didn’t live long. Later in the year the territory of the country was divided – a part of it was included into the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and the other part to the newly-established Lithuanian-Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In July 1920, there was the second proclamation of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR). In 1921, the Soviet Russia and Poland signed the Treaty of Riga, under which the western parts of Belarus were incorporated into Poland. Political steps taken in between 1918 and 1921 were often spurred by military motives, rather than in keeping with the interests of the Belarusian people.

After the Civil War, the Soviet republics realised the need for establishing closer relations with each other. The search for an appropriate form of government was accompanied by severe political battles ultimately won by supporters of the federative state model. At the end of 1922, there was established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, with the BSSR forming a part of it.

Being part of the USSR for over 70 years, Belarus regained its ethnic territories: a part of them was brought back in between 1924 and 1927 through the enlarging of the BSSR. The year of 1939 was marked by the reunification of the BSSR with Western Belarus.

At the time of the Great Patriotic War, Belarus, together with all the other republics of the Soviet Union, was fighting a long and fierce battle for its right to live in freedom. That was the last time in the history of Belarus, when the Belarusian people was on the verge of extinction.

The year of 1991 saw the proclamation of the first national state of the Belarusians – the Republic of Belarus.

Belarus is a country with unique history. Over centuries, the Belarusians were strongly influenced by their more politically conscious neighbours, several times were on the brink of complete annihilation, but managed to survive, preserve their culture and create a national state.
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
The Republic of Belarus is situated in the East-European Plain. The country rises 160 m above the sea level on average. Plains dominate the landscape of Belarus. The typical Belarusian landscape features uplands, plains and lowlands interlaced with swamps and lakes. Lowlands occupy 70 per cent of the territory of Belarus.

Belarus lies relatively far from the oceans. The fact accounts for the country’s climate which, being marked by transition from maritime to continental, is moderately continental. Winter in Belarus is mild and wet, summer is warm, autumn is wet. The Republic of Belarus lies in the sufficient moistening region. The average annual precipitation ranges between 600 to 700mm.

Belarus has around 20,800 rivers and streams which flow to the Black Sea (56 per cent of water from the territory of Belarus) and the Baltic Sea (44 per cent). The aggregate length of rivers and streams in Belarus totals 90,600 km. The biggest rivers in Belarus are Dnieper (its tributaries being the rivers Pripyat, Sozh and Berezina), Western Dvina and Neman (with its tributary being the Vilia River).

There are over 10,000 lakes on the territory of Belarus, covering roughly 2,000 sq km, the biggest being Naroch Lake (79,600 sq km). The deepest lake in Belarus is Dolgoye Lake (53.6 m deep).

There are nearly 150 relatively big and 1,500 small artificial water reservoirs in Belarus. There is a navigable waterway in Belarus, the Dnieper-Bug canal, which is still operational.

Belarus possesses large subterranean fresh water supply. The percentage of fresh water per one inhabitant in Belarus is 1,400 cubic meters.

The country’s flora is represented by forest (7.8 million hectares), meadow (3.3 million hectares), swamp (0.92 million hectares).
hectares), aquatic vegetation (0.49 million hectares) and shrubs (0.49 million hectares). Belarus is situated in a mixed vegetation zone marked by transition from the Eurasian mixed coniferous-forest zone to the European broad-leaved forest zone adjoining the forest-steppe zone. There are more than 100 types of trees and shrubs found in Belarus.

Forest is the predominant vegetation type in Belarus. Forests cover 39.8 per cent of the country’s territory. Swamps occupy 1.7 million hectares of the territory of Belarus. They are mostly found in Brest and Minsk regions.

There are 76 species of mammals, 309 species of birds, 12 species of amphibia, 7 species of reptiles found in Belarus. Among them, there is one species of turtles, three species of snakes and three species of lizards. There are 58 species of fish and three species of lam-preys found in Belarusian rivers and lakes.

As for game animals, there are 21 species of mammals and 30 species of birds. Most valuable from the point of view of hunting are elks, wild boars, deer, roe deer, beavers, wolves, foxes, musk-rats, American minks and martens. As for the birds, these are water birds, black-cock and partridge.

Nature Protection and Environmental Security

Belarus, just like the rest of the world, continually faces ecological challenges arising from human activities.
The national nature management policy is aimed at ensuring ecologically friendly living conditions for the citizens, reducing the negative anthropogenic impact on the environment, at rational and economical use of natural resources.

The Law of the Republic of Belarus On the Protection of Natural Environment, the new wording of which was adopted in 2002, is the basic domestic legal document regulating nature protection activities in Belarus. Effective are also the laws on the protection of cultivated lands, forests, water reservoirs, atmospheric air, flora and fauna.

To reduce the negative anthropogenic impact on natural environment, Belarus has created specially protected wildlife areas which currently include the Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve and four national wildlife parks: Belovezhskaya Pushcha, Braslav Lakes, Pripyat and Naroch National Parks (total area 478,600 hectares); 99 centrally administered wildlife preserves (936,300 hectares) and 414 locally administered preserves (292,400 hectares); 337 national natural monuments and 569 local natural monuments (16,500 hectares). The total square of the specially protected wildlife areas is 1,723.8 thousand hectares, or 8.3 per cent of the territory of Belarus.

Part of the National Park Belovezhskaya Pushcha
The State has taken under its protection specific facilities that have been recognised natural monuments. Most of the national natural monuments are geological monuments, with the prevailing majority being boulders and their clusters. Such stones are mostly found in the Vitebsk, Grodno and Minsk regions. Biological natural monuments are for the most part represented by centuries old trees, groups of trees of rare types and parks-monuments. Botanical gardens have been recognised biological monuments.

Fighting climate change is a priority direction of Belarus nature protection policies. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection has been working out the National Climate Programme for 2008–2012 and for the period up to 2020.

Belarus accords great importance to international environmental cooperation. The republic continuously maintains contacts with the intergovernmental organisations such as United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); World Meteorological Organisation; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe; Global Environment Facility, secretariats of environmental conventions, etc. The Republic of Belarus is a party to three global environmental conventions: Convention on Biological Diversity (1993), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2000), United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (2001). Belarus is involved in more than 20 multilateral environmental international agreements (conventions and protocols).

Currently, Belarus is implementing the project of the UNDP, Global Environment Facility and Ministry of Forestry of the Republic of Belarus on Renaturalisation and Sustainable Management of Peatlands in Belarus to Mitigate Climate Change, Combat Land Degradation and Ensure Conservation of Globally Valuable Biodiversity aimed at recreating the wetland ecosystem of 17 drained and degraded peat bogs with the total area of over 40,000 hectares. The project plans to develop a strategy for recreation and sustainable manage-
ment of degraded peatlands, to set up an integrated monitoring system for renaturalised peatlands, which will help avoid mistakes in the future in using degraded bogs, reduce the number of peat fires, create conditions for restoration of indigenous flora and fauna.

Peat bogs, a landscape feature of lowlands and wetlands, can absorb a great amount of carbon dioxide only under natural conditions and only when the peat level is saturated with water. For this reason, to conserve them is a problem of urgent importance today. Besides, lowlands and wetlands play a major role in biodiversity maintenance. According to the estimates of scholars, 15–40 per cent of Earth’s plant and animal species may face extinction by 2050. This is the threat that impends over many wading birds and bog plants.

On June 20-21, 2007, Minsk hosted the 3rd International Conference of the Michael Otto Foundation (Wetland Protection and Climate Change in Belarus) which was organised in partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus, the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, UNDP and NGO APB-BirdLife Belarus. The main objective of the conference was to review the political, scientific and economic grounds for the restoration and protection of Belarusian wetlands in order to maintain biodiversity and prevent climate change.

The presentations at the conference demonstrated the opportunities for implementing nature protection policies which can provide mechanisms for greenhouse gas emissions reduction and, at the same time, socio-economic and environmental advantages.


Belarus has approved an amendment to Annex B to the Kyoto Protocol. A Decree to this effect was signed into action by the Belarusian Head of State on April 30, 2007. In pursuance of the amendment, Belarus assumes an obligation to limit and reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions to the level of 92 per cent against the base year of 1990.

The gravest problem Belarus faces today is the consequences of the 
\textit{Chernobyl accident}. 46,500 sq. km. were contaminated (23 per cent of the territory of Belarus). For comparison: Ukraine found 5 per cent of its lands contaminated in the wake of the accident at the nuclear power plant, Russia 0.6 per cent. More than 10 per cent of the territory of Belarus was contaminated by harmful radioisotopes of strontium (Sr 90) and plutonium.

The memorial complex “To XX Century Victims” in Yelsk
56 Belarusian districts have suffered from the Chernobyl disaster. Residents of 470 population centres have been resettled to clean regions of Belarus. 9 agricultural processing factories, 54 collective farms, many schools, kindergartens and hospitals have been closed because of the Chernobyl fallout. The areas under crops and crop harvest have plummeted, as has livestock. 2.64 thousand sq. km. of arable lands have been taken out of use. Serious damage has been inflicted on forest lands (annual loss of forest resources is estimated at 2 million cubic meters and expected to double by 2010). The fallout territory enveloped 132 deposits of minerals and raw materials, and 22 of them have been wound down.

The aggregate damage inflicted on the country by the Chernobyl disaster, taking into account the 30-year period of the relief efforts, is estimated at $235 billion, or 32 pre-accident budgets of Belarus.

The accident has done an irreparable harm to health of the Belarusians who suffered an ‘iodine impact’ which triggered an unprecedented outbreak of thyroid cancer, hitting children first of all.

The severity and nature of the Chernobyl disaster make it impossible for the State to eliminate the damage within a short period of time.

Following the disintegration of the USSR, Belarus had to address all the Chernobyl-related problems on its own.

In 1992, Belarus adopted the national Chernobyl relief programme. Currently, Belarus is fulfilling the fourth relevant programme designed for 2006-2010, which is

The National Research Centre for Radiation Medicine and Human Ecology in Gomel
aimed at improving the health and overall quality of life of the people affected by the accident, as well as providing ecological, social and economic rehabilitation of the contaminated territories.

Special attention is paid to improving health of the people living on the contaminated territories (2,631 population centres; 1.3 million people). Over 1 million people have been undergoing comprehensive medical examination every year. The special system of measures developed by Belarusian experts, which includes medical supervision, in-patient services, diagnostics, health improvement and spa treatment, and which is financed from the public purse, makes it possible to compensate partly for the damage inflicted on health by the Chernobyl disaster.

A total of over 66,000 apartments, one-family houses, secondary schools for 45,700 pupils, kindergartens and day nurseries for 18,500 infants, outpatients’ clinics and hospitals for 4,600 in-patients have been built for the re-settled individuals. More than 2,000 km of natural gas and 1,900 km of water supply pipes have been laid down to supply the contaminated areas with fuel and high-quality water. 22,000 km of hard-surfaced roads have been built.

Belarus has created an effective system of radiation monitoring covering foodstuffs, agricultural products, raw materials, mushrooms, berries and game animals.
Most part of all Chernobyl-related efforts is financed from the national budget. Over the years since the accident, Belarus has channeled around $18.3 billion into Chernobyl relief efforts. In 2006 alone the government allocated Br 614.9 billion for these purposes and in 2007 it plans to spend a total of Br 641.4 billion.

Belarus was the first of the Chernobyl affected countries to develop and launch international Chernobyl programmes of new generation, which are geared toward providing sustainable development for the affected territories. Currently, the Chernobyl issue is addressed through programmes of co-operation between Belarus and various organisations of the UN family including UNDP, IAEA, UNICEF, UNESCO, World Bank, WHO, OSCE, TACIS and other organisations. Belarus has been also cooperating with non-governmental organisations from different countries. Every year Belarus receives gratuitous assistance to the tune of roughly $50 million worth of goods under various projects involving public associations and organisations. In 2001-2005, thanks to the efforts aimed at developing international co-operation, Belarus received humanitarian and international technical assistance to the amount of $400 million.

In 2003, Belarus launched new Chernobyl initiatives, namely, the international Chernobyl research and information network under the auspices of the United Nations and the International Chernobyl Forum under the auspices of the IAEA.

The CORE programme (Co-operation for the Rehabilitation of the Regions Suffered as a Result of the Accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant) has been under way since 2004. It covers four districts: Bragin, Chechersk, Slavgorod and Stolin. 116 projects have been adopted to
run under the CORE programme to a total of EURO 8.3 million; 60 projects have been granted financial assistance to the tune of EURO 4.3 million – a contribution of domestic and international partners.

The interaction between the governmental department for the elimination of the consequences of the Chernobyl accident and the IAEA has also been quite fruitful. Specifically, the IAEA is currently implementing the regional project the Strategy of Long-Term Counter Measures and Monitoring of Irradiation in the Rural Areas Affected as a Result of the Accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. The IAEA may also provide assistance to Belarus under the project related to the processing of contaminated wood. The IAEA is allocating around $2 million for the project Rehabilitation of the Territories Exposed to Radioactive Contamination as a Result of the Accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant.

Foreign charity organisations have also re-directed their efforts recently toward implementing specific projects aimed at rehabilitation of the territories and the population affected by the Chernobyl accident. Each year nearly 50,000 children are provided recreation tours abroad.

The World Bank and the Government of Belarus have developed a new line of post-Chernobyl co-operation with a view to rehabilitating the affected regions. On April 19, 2006, the World Bank and the Republic of Belarus signed a loan agreement to the tune of $50 million to finance projects related to promoting energy-efficiency and improving heat supply networks in the contaminated areas.

Many of the initiatives under the Chernobyl relief programmes can be applied elsewhere in the world where the population suffers from the consequences of man-made disasters, wars, social upheavals or economic dislocations.

The experience gained in fighting the consequences of the Chernobyl tragedy and in creating the system of preventing grave disasters is one of the most important achievements of the Belarusian State.
Population
As of January 1, 2007, the population of the Republic of Belarus was 9,714.5 million people; as of 1 July 2007 it was 9,698.1 million people.

The demographic situation in Belarus can be described as the population loss due to natural factors. It was in 1993 when the mortality rate eclipsed birthrate for the first time. In 2005, the mortality rate outstripped the birthrate by 51,300, in 2006 by 41,900 people.

In recent years Belarus has been reporting a positive birthrate trend. Specifically, in 2003, 88,500 babies were born, in 2004 – 88,900, in 2005 – 90,500, in 2006 – 96,700, in H1 2007 – 50,000 (up 8.8 per cent from H1 2006). The birthrate increase has been registered in both rural and urban population centres. Baby boom has been reported in towns of Brest, Mogilev and Gomel regions.

The year of 2006 was the ‘richest’ in twins over the last several years: 830 twins, 12 triplets and 1 quadruplets (in a family in the town of Zhlobin) were born. This was the second unique case of giving birth to a quad – in October 2004 a Minsk family celebrated the birth of four boys.

Giving birth to more than one child (two, three and more) has also contributed to the general birthrate improvement. Second children accounted for 30.8 per cent of all children born in 2004; 31.4 per cent in 2005 and 31.9 per cent in 2006. Third children accounted for 9.9 per cent in 2004; 10.4 per cent in 2005 and 10.7 per cent in 2006. That has been a sort of ‘response’ by Belarusian families to a series of birthrate encouragement measures taken by the State in recent years. The effective system of child benefits coupled with other financial support measures and tax privileges provide direct pecuniary aid to families with children. The State helps families address their housing problems, which certainly helps in tackling the demographic issue; it is stepping up the prestige of the family, promoting greater parental responsibility and healthy lifestyle.

The UN report brought forward at the 62nd session of the General Assembly applauded the efforts taken in Belarus to protect children and their parents with a view to securing the rights of the child and providing privileges to families with children.
Belarus has been reporting a gradual decrease in mortality rate. 69,100 people died in Belarus in January-June, 2007 (down 3,000 from the same period in 2006). The mortality rate with respect to children under 1 year old fell from 6.1 cases per 1,000 newborns in H1 2006 to 5.5 in H1 2007. In H1 2007, Minsk posted a population increase of 0.5 people per 1,000 people.

Life expectancy in Belarus is 69.4 years (about 2 years above the world average). As for men, this index stands at 63.6 years; as for women – at 75.5 years.

In 1995-2006, the able-bodied population in Belarus rose from 5,672.6 million people to 6.066 million, with all regions of the country reporting a relevant upward trend.

The population under prime working age has been declining (in 2006: from 1,619.5 million to 1,574.5 million).

As for the Belarusians beyond their prime working age, their number increased from 2,070.2 million in 2006 to 2,073.9 million in 2007.

The demographic situation in Belarus is influenced by the increasing urbanization. Although the country’s population is dwindling, the number of urban residents is steadily growing (in 1994, urban population accounted for 67.9 per cent, in 2006 – 72.8 per cent). This trend has been registered in all regions of Belarus.

Internal migration has been predominantly flowing from rural areas to urban population centres. 90 per cent of the people leaving rural areas are young men and women who go to study in big towns. The overwhelming majority of those who never come back to their native rural areas are women. As a result, the number of men is bigger than that of women in rural areas, and the proportion of aged people in rural areas is becoming increasingly higher, 2.3 times among women and 2.4 times among men. The State has been taking comprehensive measures to improve the living and working conditions in rural areas with a view to re-direct the internal migration flows and flatten out the demographic differences. Two national programmes have been launched for this purpose,
namely, the rural revival programme and the programme of
development of small and medium towns.

The number of women is higher than that of men in Bel-
larus largely due to differences in birth/death rates between
men and women and due to peculiarities of the internal mi-
gration flows. The share of men in total population fell from
47 per cent in 1998 to 46.7 per cent in 2006. The number of
women per 1,000 men increased over that period from 1,129
to 1,142.

The migration inflow in H1 2007 amounted to 2,695 peo-
ple (6,980 people came to Belarus in January-June 2007;
4,285 people left the country). The positive migration balance
has compensated for the population loss due to natural fac-
tors by 14.1 per cent. The migration balance remained posi-
tive with all the CIS member states and Baltic countries. In
2006, the migration inflow amounted to 5,626 people, up 2.9
times from 2005.

The President and the Government regard the poor de-
mographic situation as a national-scale problem. Demon-
strating this is the fact that Belarus was the first in the CIS
to adopt the Law On Demographic Security in 2002. Bela-
rus is currently implementing the 2006-2010 National De-
mographic Security Programme (its budget being Br 688.3
billion), and the presidential programme Children of Bela-
rus designed to run from 2006 till 2010 (Br 1.4 trillion).

Belarus has been consistently fulfilling the measures
aimed at enhancing pecuniary aid to families with children,
improving birthrate and providing an environment conducive to meeting of the birthrate targets.

There are also plans to improve taxation schemes for citizens raising children. The first step has already been made in Belarus in this area. Under the relevant presidential decree, with a view to stepping up state support for the parents with three and more children under 18 years of age or disabled children, the monthly income tax deduction has been increased to the equivalent of 4 base values per child (Br140,000 since December 1, 2007).

The national health care system has been given appropriate directions related to participation in improving the demographic situation in Belarus. The measures underway include improving the family planning and women’s consultation services, timely detection of congenital disorders, preventing major socially-perilous diseases, making high quality modern-day medical assistance more accessible at all levels, introducing leading-edge treatment and diagnostic and rehabilitation methods, techniques and technologies.

As a factor compensating for the population loss, immigration in Belarus is expected to come to 5,000 people per annum.

The main objective of the National Demographic Security Programme is to create appropriate conditions for boosting reproduction. Pursuing its demographic policy, the State aims not just at increasing the population, but also at improving the quality of life of the Belarusians and enhancing the national human capital.

The number of population of the Republic of Belarus (as of 1 January), including urban and rural, thousands of people

Birthrate, the number of people
Ethnic Breakdown

According to the population census conducted in 1999, Belarus is home to people representing more than 130 ethnicities. The most numerous of them are as follows:

- **Belarusians** – 81.2 per cent; the biggest number registered in the Minsk region (87 per cent), the smallest in the Grodno region (62 per cent);
- **Russians** – 11.37 per cent; the biggest number registered in Minsk (16 per cent), the smallest in the Brest region (9 per cent);
- **Poles** – 3.94 per cent; the biggest number registered in the Grodno region (25 per cent), the smallest in the Mogilev region (0.2 per cent);
- **Ukrainians** – 2.36 per cent; the biggest number registered in the Brest region (16 per cent), the smallest in the Vitebsk region (2 per cent);
- **Jews** – 0.28 per cent; settled throughout Belarus; the biggest number registered in Gomel and Vitebsk regions (0.7 per cent in each one), in Minsk and Bobruisk (0.6 per cent in each one).
SYSTEM OF STATE ADMINISTRATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS
The Constitutional Basics

The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus is the basic law of the country. It is the core of the legal system of the State, the basis of all legislation.

The Constitution of the sovereign Republic of Belarus was adopted on 15 March 1994. Since then, this document has been amended several times. The new wording of the Constitution emerged as a result of the nation-wide referendum held on 24 November 1996. The Constitution was supplemented with the provisions declaring the supremacy of law, redistributing the responsibilities of the President, the Parliament and the Government and extending some civil rights and liberties.

The constitutional system of the Republic of Belarus is a system of mature public relations, as laid down in the Constitution, which defines the responsibilities of governmental and public institutions, the principles of their interaction and the basic rights and liberties of the citizens.

In conformity with the Constitution, the Republic of Belarus is a unitary democratic social law-governed state, with its citizens being the only source of state power and the bearer of its sovereignty. The people exercise their authority directly through the Parliament, Councils of Deputies and other bodies formed by them by means of local self-government.

The democratic foundations of the Belarusian statehood provide for various political institutions, ideologies and
views. Equal rights are guaranteed for all. The Constitution emphasises that no ideology of any political party, religious or other kind of public association or social group can be promoted to the rank of national and mandatory for all. What the law prohibits is only the creation and activity of political parties and other public associations for the purpose of changing the constitutional system by means of violence, or propagandizing war, including war based on social, ethnic, religious or racial grounds.

The Constitution provides for a multitude of forms of property. The State guarantees equal protection and equal conditions for developing both state-owned and privately-owned property, provides guidelines for and co-ordinates the development of these forms of economic activity in keeping with the interests of an individual and society.

The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus recognises and guarantees unalienable rights of an individual. The State secures the legal status of an individual, which conforms to the universally acknowledged principles and norms of international law.

System of State Administration

President. The President of the Republic of Belarus is the Head of State, the guarantor of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, the rights and liberties of man and citizen. The President’s responsibility is to take measures aimed at protecting the sovereignty of the State, its national security and territorial integrity. One of the main functions vested with the President is to ensure economic and political stability in the State.

The Head of State ensures continuity and interaction of the bodies of state administration, maintains intermediation among them. The President has the right of legislative initiative. The President issues decrees, edicts and instructions that have binding force in the entire territory of the Republic of Belarus. Under the Constitution, all the laws to be adopted must be signed by the Head of State. The President also resolves the issues with regard to the granting of the citizenship of the Republic of Belarus, the termination thereof and granting of asylum on the territory of Belarus. Any citizen of the Republic of Belarus by birth at least 35 years of age who is eligible to vote and has been resident in the Republic of Belarus for at least ten years before the elections may be elected President. The referendum of October 17, 2004 resulted in the abolishment of the provisions in Paragraph 1 of Article 81 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, which restricted the period in office of President for the same individual to two consecutive terms.
Currently the President of the Republic of Belarus is Alexander Grigoryevich Lukashenko. On March 19, 2006, he was re-elected President of the Republic of Belarus for the third successive term.


The House of Representatives consists of 110 deputies who are elected in their respective constituencies and who represent interests of the citizens.

The Council of the Republic is the chamber of territorial representation. The Council of the Republic consists of eight deputies from every region and the city of Minsk, elected at the meetings of deputies of local Councils of Deputies of base level of every region and the city of Minsk by means of secret vote. Eight members of the Council of the Republic are appointed by the President of the Republic of Belarus.

Any citizen of the Republic of Belarus who has reached the age of 21 may become a deputy of the House of Representatives. Any citizen of the Republic of Belarus who has reached the age of 30, and who has been resident on the territory of a respective region, or the city of Minsk no less than five years may become a member of the Council of the Republic.

The main function of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus is law-making.
**Government.** The government – the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus – is the central body of state administration in Belarus. Under the Constitution, the Council of Ministers exercises executive power in Belarus, governs the system of state and executive bodies subordinate to it. In its activity, the government is answerable to the President and accountable to the Parliament. The Council of Ministers has the right to put forward legislative initiatives.

**Local government and self-government.** Citizens exercise local government and self-government through local councils of deputies, executive and administrative bodies, bodies of public territorial self-government, local referenda, assemblies and other forms of direct participation in state and public affairs. Local councils of deputies, which ensure co-ordinated activities of all bodies of territorial public self-government, are the foundation of local self-government. Local councils of deputies are representative bodies of state authorities on the territory on the respective administrative territorial units.

The system of local councils of deputies comprises rural, village, town, district and regional councils of deputies. They are elected by the citizens of the respective administrative territorial units for a four-year term. Local councils of deputies independently form their bodies, define the structure of the bodies concerned and their powers.

Local government bodies include regional, district, town, village and rural executive committees.

**Judicial system.** Under the Constitution, the judicial power in Belarus belongs to courts. The system of courts is based on the principles of territorial delineation and specialisation. The judicial branch of power includes the Constitutional Court and a system of economic courts and courts of general jurisdiction. The Constitutional Court watchdogs the conformity of enforceable enactments to the Constitution. It is prohibited to set up emergency courts.

Belarus is a European democratic state. It has created and successfully operated all the institutes inherent in a modern-day democratic state; all the basic rights and liberties of man and citizen have been recognised in the Constitution, legally enforced and exercised.
Formation of Independent Course

After gaining independence in 1991, Belarus became a full-fledged party to the international law. It was not easy for the young European state to make the first steps in the international arena protecting its national interests and forming foreign political course to guarantee peace, stability and well-being to the Belarusian people against the backdrop of the globalization process.

Although Belarus cannot boast that it had had its own statehood before, the country had gained certain historical experience and diplomatic traditions. The ancestors of the Belarusian statehood were ancient principalities of the 9th–13th centuries, namely Principalities of Polotsk, Turov and Smolensk, as well as the Great Duchy of Lithuania (13th–18th centuries) with Old Belarusian as the official language.

On March 25, 1918, the Belarusian People’s Republic was proclaimed. Although it failed to achieve a real sovereignty, the republic was recognized by several European states, namely Ukraine, Finland, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Turkey and others. In 1919 the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) was proclaimed which was recognized by the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, Poland and Germany. After acceding the USSR in December 1922, the BSSR ceased any diplomatic activities and renewed them in 1944. Closed in 1923, the Peoples Commissariat of Foreign Affairs of the BSSR was reestablished in 1944. In 1946 it was renamed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the BSSR.

After the defeat of the Nazi Germany in 1945, Belarus became one of the 50 co-founders of the United Nations Organization. Actively partaking in the UN work, Belarus became signatory of the vast majority of international conventions, agreements and treaties.

After the USSR fell apart, the Supreme Council of Belarus declared the country’s independence on August 25, 1991. On September 19, 1991, the BSSR was renamed the Republic of Belarus. Soon after that the Belarusian Parliament passed the first bill enacting the independent foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus.

The first countries to recognize Belarus as an independent state were Poland, the USA and Ukraine. Today Belarus has established diplomatic relations with 162 countries. Belarus has 65 diplomatic representative offices in 46 countries worldwide, including 44 embassies, two permanent missions to international organizations, seven consulates, 12 branches of Belarusian embassies (ten in the Russian Federation; one in Bonn, Germany; one in Almaty, Kazakhstan). Belarus is signatory to over 3,000 international documents.

There are 37 embassies; two branches of embassies (Swedish and Swiss); a trade representative office of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea; nine consulates and ten honorary consuls of foreign states; 12 representative offices of international organizations; 82 foreign ambassadors accredited in Belarus.
Belarus makes a significant contribution to global, regional and sub-regional processes. In the international arena the country has been an active participant of the fight against trafficking in people and drugs, illegal migration. Belarus has always refused double standards and ultimatums against nations; it has always advocated international initiatives on protection of the rights of children, women and the elderly.

Belarus’ geographic position is on the one hand advantageous, on the other hand, it attributes great responsibility to the country. Belarus maintains key transport routes connecting Western and Eastern Europe. The state has been doing its utmost to keep the Belarusian roads in good condition. Belarusian customs and border agencies prevent any attempt of illegal migration and smuggling to the West.

The foreign policy priorities are based on a multi-vector approach which is viewed as absence of geographic restrictions and unshakable subjective bias in the national diplomacy.

Belarus accepts only the multi-polar international relations system governed by the international law, free of discrimination and interference in the domestic affairs of other nations.

Belarus’ Contribution to Disarmament and International and Regional Security

After the USSR fell apart, the Republic of Belarus not only inherited an impressive arsenal of nuclear and conventional weapons but also assumed the responsibility to continue the disarmament policy. In May 1992, Belarus signed the Lisbon Protocol, in February 1993 the country ratified the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START 1). As a result all the nuclear weapons were removed from Belarus by 1996 year-end. The Republic of Belarus destroyed 584 missiles, missile launchers and additional military equipment. Being an active supporter of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Belarus is signatory to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, Chemical Weapons Convention, Biological Weapons Convention, the Hague Code of Conduct Against Ballistic Missiles Nonproliferation, participant of Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Belarus takes an active part in the UN General Assembly Committee for International Security and Disarmament. In particular, Belarus initiated adoption by the UN General Assembly of the resolution Prohibition of Development and Production of New Weapons of Mass Destruction and Systems of Such Weapons (1996, 1999, 2002, 2005). In accordance with the 1990 Treaty of Conventional Armed Forces in Europe the Republic of Belarus eliminated regardless financial straits 1,773 tanks, 1,341 armored vehicles, 130 war planes, which accounted for 10 per cent of the total armament and equipment destroyed by 30 signatories to the treaty.
After the USSR disintegrated Belarus had the 7th largest land mine arsenal in the world. In 1995 the country declared a moratorium on export of antipersonnel mines and in 2004 accessed the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention. The country is also signatory to the Convention on the Prohibition or Restriction on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons which May be Deemed to be Exceedingly Injurious or to have Indiscriminate Effects, the so-called Inhuman Weapons Convention, and its protocols.

An important facet of the Belarusian disarmament policy is strengthening of interaction with other OSCE member states and promotion of OSCE initiatives in the area of small arms and light weapons (SALW). Belarus was the first to use the mechanism of the OSCE document on material and technical aid provided to destruct and enhance security of storing SALW.

In 1996, Belarus joined the Conference on Disarmament, the basic multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

Bilateral Cooperation and Dialogue with Regional Organisations

In its bilateral relations Belarus prioritises maintaining and developing friendly and mutually beneficial ties with the neighbours, first of all, the Russian Federation and the European Union, which are major trade partners of this country.

Belarus has signed friendship and border treaties with all five neighbouring states – Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia.

Relations with Russia are backed not only by tight trade and economic ties, but a framework of international agreements. In particular, in line with the agreement of December 8, 1999, Belarus and Russia founded the Union State as independent states and subjects of international law. The existence of the Union State suggests taking joint steps with a view to bringing closer legal, eco-
nomic, financial and other systems of the two countries as much as possible. These measures are aimed at ensuring the equality of rights of Belarusian citizens in Russia and Russian citizens in Belarus.

Belarus and Russia have signed over 30 agreements regulating various aspects of the military and technical cooperation. Military installations in Belarus are used in the interests of the regional military taskforce. The military doctrine of the Union State was adopted in December 2001.

Belarus attaches primary attention to cooperation with the European Union. In 2006, the European Union was named the second largest trade partner of Belarus and the largest trade partner in terms of export. Trade between Belarus and the European Union went up by a third to make up $14 billion, with export as high as $9 billion.

Belarus is committed to channelling the political relations with the EU into a dialogue and pragmatic partnership, which should be based on realism, sound pragmatism, and mutual respect.

The Republic of Belarus is interested in promoting direct collaboration with the European Union in areas of mutual interest: power engineering, development of trans-European transport corridors and border infrastructure, perfection of transit conditions, environmental protection; fight against illegal migration, slave trade and organised crime; transboundary programmes, and other.

With a view to developing interpersonal contacts efforts are undertaken to facilitate visa procedures between Belarus and the European Union.

The Republic of Belarus is involved in implementing three neighbourhood policy programmes of the European Union: Poland-Ukraine-Belarus, Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus, and the Baltic Sea Region.

The European Union is a major donor of technical aid provided to the Republic of Belarus via the Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS programme). Since TACIS was launched, 320 projects worth around €204 million have been implemented in Belarus.

In response to the corresponding application of the European Commission the agreement was given to open a representation of the Commission of the European Communities in the Republic of Belarus.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus
Relations with the partnering nations within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States and integration processes in the Commonwealth are top priorities of Belarus’ foreign policy. Apart from the Russian Federation the key CIS partners of Belarus are Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Moldova, and Azerbaijan.

Trade and economic relations between Belarus and Ukraine are developing fast. Between 2003 and 2006 the trade between the two countries skyrocketed from $600 million to $2.46 billion. Cooperation of economic entities in Belarus’ regions with those in Ukraine, primarily Kiev, Donetsk region, Dnepropetrovsk region, Kharkov region, is progressing fast. In the next few years power engineering is supposed to become a major avenue for expanding the trade and economic relations between Belarus and Ukraine.

Belarus has always been dedicated to renewing interstate relations in the post-Soviet space. Belarus ships its traditional exports, namely tractors, trucks, medications, refrigerators, furniture and other merchandise, to Russia, Ukraine and other CIS states.

Belarus is ready for an open dialogue with the Council of Europe for the sake of restoring the special invitee status of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), with plans for Belarus’ entry to this European political organisation. The visit of PACE President René van der Linden to Belarus on January 18–20, 2007 highlighted the interest of both parties in promoting mutually beneficial cooperation. Belarusian diplomats and parliamentarians are ready to continue collaboration with the Council of Europe in all areas of mutual interest.


Belarus has developed historical ties with the United States of America, with rather a large Belarusian diaspora in the USA. Belarus believes the United States to be an important and prospective partner for cooperation in many avenues. Friendly and constructive relations with the USA meet the national interests of Belarus. Our country believes the future Belarusian-American relations can be developed only on the basis of equality and mutual respect, not restrictions.

The Belarusian diplomacy is convinced that geographic boundaries cannot hinder the search for strategic partners in the international arena in the modern world. Faraway countries often have similar views on international
problems, are interested in friendship and mutual support. This is why Belarus continues successfully developing relations with countries in Latin America, East Asia and Middle East.

Relations with Latin America’s largest oil exporter – Venezuela – are of strategic importance for Belarus. The two states are intent on stepping up the bilateral collaboration in all directions, especially in trade and economic, scientific and technical, and military technical areas. Tangible results have been reached in issues concerning Venezuelan oil extraction by Belarus as well as those relating to supplies of Belarusian potash fertilisers, rock haulers, trucks, and tractors to Venezuela. Belarusian–Venezuelan projects for prospecting seismology and seismic technology, provision gas supply, industry, architecture and civil engineering, agriculture and food are in progress.

A Belarusian company has completed the first phase of evaluating oil reserves in the basin of the River Orinoco. Besides, along with previously reached agreements Venezuela provided several more oil-bearing zones for Belarus. The zones can already be used to produce up to 2 million tonnes of oil annually. Belarus is supposed to be able to start extracting hydrocarbon raw materials in Venezuela in 2008.

Venezuela intends to contribute $500 million to setting up a Belarusian–Venezuelan Investment Fund. Belarus and Venezuela will sign more than $1 billion worth of contracts for military and technical cooperation. This autumn joint ventures are supposed to be set up in Venezuela with the aid of Belarus’ largest mechanical engineering companies in order to manufacture tractors, trucks and rock haulers and sell them in the South American trade bloc Mercosur.

Belarusian–Venezuelan cooperation can be expanded by inviting other Latin America countries, including Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua, to take part in the joint efforts.

Belarus considers as promising cooperation with Cuba in various areas, including pharmaceuticals, supplies of tractors and buses, development of tourism business in
Belarus and Cuba consistently support each other in international institutions.

China occupies a special place among Belarus’ foreign policy priorities. Belarusian–Chinese relations are transforming into a strategic partnership, confirming the serious intentions for long-term security of mutual interests in key bilateral and international issues.

The mutual political trust of Belarus and China is the foundation of the bilateral collaboration in trade, economy and other areas. The Belarusian social and economic development model has a certain degree of similarity with the model implemented in China.

Belarus and China vigorously cooperate in the area of loans and investments. The two countries intend to implement 36 investment projects worth around $2.7 billion. Belarus–China trade went beyond $1 billion in 2006.

Belarus is showing interest in cooperation with Iran, a major power with the potential needed to become a regional leader in the Middle East in the future. Iran with its major oil and natural gas reserves (around 10 per cent and 18 per cent of the global reserves respectively) and a high market capacity (around 70 million people) is a promising and solvent partner of Belarus. An assembling production of Belarusian trucks MAZ has been launched in Iran. In August 2006 a facility for assembling Iranian cars Samand was set up in Belarus.

Belarusian companies will start exploring the Iranian oil field Jofeyr. Belarus and Iran are intent on promoting cooperation in various branches of gas and oil industry, creating oil processing facilities, exploring oil and gas reserves, building underground natural gas storage facilities in Iran and a nuclear power plant in Belarus.

Belarus’ Participation in International Organisations

Raising the role of international organisations, primarily, the United Nations, is a matter of utmost importance to Belarus. Recognising the inevitability of globalisation processes, Belarus is committed to reinforcing the UN’s leading role in building a fair world order.
The Republic of Belarus has been a member of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 2007.

Belarus is at the forefront of fighting one of the most urgent problems of the modern world – human trafficking. Belarus’ proposal to launch a UN-sponsored global movement “Partnership against slavery and human trafficking in the XXI century” met interest of the UN member states and several UN organisations. An international centre for training personnel in charge of migration affairs and the counteraction of slave trade was opened in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, in 2007.

Belarus vigorously cooperates with UN operational bodies, which assist with providing essential technical aid to Belarus with a view to streamlining development processes. In Belarus there are 11 representative offices of programmes, agencies and organisations of the UN system, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO, the United Nations Children’s Fund, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). The UNDP’s third country programme for cooperation with Belarus in 2006–2010 outlines several projects, including ones concerning education, healthcare and alleviation of consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, all in all, worth around $33 million. A similar UNICEF-sponsored country programme for Belarus provides for spending over $5 million on projects aimed at tackling social problems of children in 2006–2010.

Along with the United Nations Belarus is represented at such international institutions as the World Health Organisation, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the World Customs Organisation, the International Monetary...
Fund, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and many others. Belarus is a bona fide member of all the six fundamental international treaties regulating human rights and eight fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organisation.

Belarus is a co-founder of the large regional organisation – the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which unites 12 countries of the former Soviet Union. The CIS is headquartered in Minsk. Since March 1994 the CIS has been an observer to the UN. This decade topical issues pertaining to collaboration of the CIS states include enhancement of economic contacts, migration control, cooperation of emergency services, counteraction of trafficking in drugs and psychotropic substances, terrorism and organised crime, cooperation in humanitarian affairs, education, culture and other areas.

In 2006, Belarus became one of the initiators of the CIS reform, which is expected to invigorate the Commonwealth. The CIS heads of state passed a Concept of the Future Development of the Commonwealth of Independent States and a plan of action of its implementation.

On October 10, 2006, the Presidents of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan signed a treaty to found the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), thus advancing the previously signed treaties on forming a customs union and a common economic space, establishing an organisation for economic integration tighter than that of the CIS. Moldova and Ukraine have been observers to EurAsEC since May 2002, Armenia – since

Priority efforts of EurAsEC include full-fledged operation of a free trade zone of the member states, adoption and pursuance of a coordinated trade policy against third countries, simplified customs procedures, creation of a single customs area with a united competition environment, creation of a transport union for the sake of intensifying transit traffic, creation of a common energy market and other things.

Participation in regional security processes, first of all, in the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, is an important component of Belarus’ foreign policy. CSTO includes Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. CSTO is committed to reinforcing stability in the Eurasian region, countering terrorism and extremism on the continent, arranging joint peacemaking operations in the area.

In February 2004, CSTO passed a resolution to set up special operations forces. Efforts are now taken to form a CSTO peacemaking force.

Belarus is interested in establishing a CSTO’s dialogue with all international security organisations working in Europe, first of all, NATO and OSCE.

Cooperation with NATO within the framework of existing mechanisms of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and the Partnership for Peace programme follows instructions issued by the national leadership with a view to consistently developing a constructive political dialogue and practical cooperation. Development of cooperation with NATO serves the purpose. Belarus is consistent in backing the idea of creating a global security system for Europe without new dividing lines.

Since 1997, Belarus–NATO practical cooperation has been developing within the framework of an individual partnership programme – the main instrument for planning Belarus’ participation in the Partnership for Peace programme. Training of Belarusian peacekeeping forces, cooperation in relieving emergencies and catastrophes, language training for specialists, democratic control over armed forces and defence installations are fundamental to Belarus–NATO individual partnership programme.
Belarus has been a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) since 1992. Entering the OSCE, Belarus acceded to such fundamental documents as the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe.

In November 1999, a Belarusian delegation led by President Alexander Lukashenko took part in the OSCE summit in Istanbul, where the European Security Charter was signed.

Belarus takes an active part in working out the most important documents and resolutions of the OSCE, contributing to the development of the European dialogue on security issues. Belarus is a party to the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty (CFE) and the Open Skies Consultative Committee. Belarus was one of the first countries to ratify the Adapted CFE Treaty.

Under Belarus’ presidency the OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension was worked out and adopted by the OSCE Ministerial Council in Maastricht in 2003.

In April–June 2005, the Republic of Belarus presided over the OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation.

Within the OSCE framework representatives of Belarus take part in negotiations on the peaceful settlement of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict, partake in OSCE missions to Macedonia and Moldova.

Belarus’ collaboration with various OSCE institutions has been invigorated recently. Cooperation with the OSCE office, which was set up in Minsk in 2003 to aid the government in avenues Belarus and the OSCE have agreed on, progresses well.

Belarus supports the OSCE’s priority role laid down in the European Security Charter in tackling security issues on the basis of respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries, labours to secure the equality of countries in and outside various military political blocs.

The Republic of Belarus is consistent in supporting the OSCE’s further evolution, reformation of its structure and methods, repairing of existing geographical and functional distortions for the sake of turning the OSCE into a
full-fledged international organisation acting in the interest of all member states. Belarus actively supports the development of the OSCE Charter and insists on correcting the election monitoring activities of the OSCE ODIHR.

Belarus has been part of the Central European Initiative (CEI) since 1996. The country speaks for intensifying efforts of the CEI members with a view to promoting bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation, overcoming dividing barriers and encouraging integration processes in Central and Eastern Europe.

Belarus has been an observer to the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation since 2005.

Belarus is the only European member of the Non-Aligned Movement. The NAM membership reinforces Belarus’ authority in the so-called third world countries and opens additional opportunities for coordinating Belarus’ views on topical issues concerning international relations with a large number of countries represented in the NAM. The NAM membership also contributes to promoting Belarus’ initiatives in the United Nations and other international organisations.

Together with partners in the NAM Belarus stands against the use of dual standards in international politics, speaks for building a fair international economic order, for effective integration of developing countries and transition economies into the global economy, advocates the uniqueness and versatility of social, economic and political development ways of the mankind. Apart from that, the Non-Aligned Movement attracts Belarus with its trade and economic opportunities, as NAM member states are huge prospective markets.

Belarus considers collaboration with the Non-Aligned Movement from the point of view of shaping a new centre of force by the leading NAM members in the international arena.
Economic Diplomacy and Customs Regulations

Economic diplomacy is the most important component of Belarus’ activities in the international arena. Since long time ago the Belarusian economy has been directed towards foreign markets. At present export accounts for more than 60 per cent in Belarus’ GDP. Belarus exports over 90 per cent of tractors and trucks and 70 per cent of metalworking machine-tools, refrigerators and chemical fibres.

Belarus intends to continue negotiating its entry to the World Trade Organisation. Since early 2006 six rounds of bilateral negotiations concerning market access have been held with nine WTO members, with final protocols signed with three of them. Belarus has completed negotiations concerning its accession to WTO with China, India, Turkey, Cuba, Bulgaria, Armenia, Moldova and Kyrgyzstan. In future efforts will be channelled into collaboration with the countries with which bilateral negotiations are close to completion, that is another four or five WTO members. Belarus has managed to win support of most members of the WTO working party for Belarus’ entry.

Belarus accomplished a plan of rule-making actions in 2002–2004 to bring the national laws into compliance with WTO requirements. Nowadays law-making is focused on bringing lower level legal instruments into compliance with the WTO-conformant fundamental laws.

Belarus pursues a general customs policy aimed at protecting the domestic market and encouraging the development of the national economy. Belarusian customs regulations are based on the Customs Code, the latest revision of which entered into force on July 1, 2007, and the Customs Tariffs Law.

Belarus’ Customs Code takes into account foreign trade regulation principles laid down by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the fundamental document of the World Trade Organisation, as well as customs regulation mechanisms adopted by the World Customs Organisation, first of all, the 1999 Kyoto Convention on Simplification and Harmonisation of Customs Procedures.

The new Customs Code lists specific documents and information the customs may require for customs clearance of merchandise. Virtually all customs procedures used internationally have been introduced in Belarus to allow economic regulation of export and import of merchandise, application of tariffs, definition of the nature of ownership, usage and management of merchandise.

Belarusian laws provide for preferential customs tariffs in order to stimulate the development of strategic foreign trade relations.

Customs clearance of goods in transit has been facilitated in Belarus. On July 16, 2007, the President signed Decree No 320 “Implementation of the freedom of transit principle”. The document enforced, Belarus as a country adherent to the freedom of transit principle has defined customs control peculiarities concerning the information the hauler is to provide when transporting goods in
transit via Belarus. Customs authorities may control information allowing identification of merchandise and its amount for customs purposes. Such information includes the name of the goods, amount, cargo package volume, and gross weight of the goods. The customs cannot control other kinds of information, but can check whether the goods are listed in the accompanying document.

If such documents contain discrepancies or are absent, the carrier may present the documents or correct them within six hours. If it fails to comply, transit goods may be transported via the country only if escorted by units of the Guard Department of the Belarusian Interior Ministry or by customs authorities of the country. The escort rules out the possibility of the carrier violating Belarusian laws and serves as an additional warranty the goods will be delivered to their destination without additional verification of the provided information. The amendments are fully compliant with international standards.

In the modern world no customs service can protect interests of its state on its own. That is why Belarusian diplomats work hard to sign treaties and multilateral agreements, work out common tariffs, agree commodity description and coding systems, facilitate and harmonise customs procedures, create a general system of security and international trade and customs organisations establishing foreign trade regulations. Belarus is a full member of the World Customs Organisation.

Belarusians Abroad

With its rich and complicated history the Belarusian nation includes not only citizens of the Republic of Belarus, but also multiple groups of Belarusians, who live practically on all continents of the planet. There are around 12 million Belarusians in the world, including 4 million Belarusians outside Belarus.

Several migration waves can be distinguished in the history of Belarusian diaspora. First, a certain number
of Belarusians became foreigners without having to leave their place of residence, as borders of the Belarusian state were reformed and areas with rather compact Belarusian communities became part of the neighbouring states – the Podlaska province in Poland, Vilnius province in Lithuania as well as part of Latgale in Latvia and several districts in the Smolensk region of the Russian Federation.

Many Belarusians were forced to leave the country as a result of tense historic events in late XIX – early XX centuries. They settled down in the far reaches of Russia, including Siberia, as well as various countries of Europe, North and South America. During the Soviet times Belarusians gradually propagated across various regions of the Soviet Union, using unexplored lands (plough lands in Kazakhstan). In the 1990s a new migration wave took Belarusians primarily to Israel, the USA, Canada and Australia.

At present the largest Belarusian diasporas live in Russia (over 1 million), the United States of America (up to 500,000), Ukraine (around 400,000), Poland (up to 400,000), Kazakhstan (112,000), Canada (100,000), Latvia (100,000), Lithuania (55,000), Estonia (around 25,000). Around 140,000 Jews of Belarusian origin live in Israel. The number of Belarusians living in the CIS and Baltic states decreases while more Belarusians leave for Europe and North America.

Before the early 1990s there were Belarusian organisations in the USA, Canada, Poland, the UK, and Argentina. Over the last 15 years a lot of new Belarusian associations have been established abroad – in the CIS and Baltic states, Germany, Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, France, the Czech Republic, and Sweden.

A kind of a colony of Belarusians was set up in the town of South River in the USA. Temples have been built to offer divine service in Belarusian in Canada, the USA, and other countries, Belarusian-language periodicals are printed, cultural and educational organisations have been established. Instruction in Belarusian is available in many educational establishments in Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and Latvia. Monuments have been erected to Francysk Skorina in Kaliningrad (Russia), Maksim Bogdanovich in Yaroslavl (Russia), Kastus Kalinovsky in Šalčininkai (Lithuania).

The Belarusian Government pays much attention to cooperation with Belarusian diasporas. A bill “Compatriots Abroad” is being prepared to legislate mechanisms to protect rights of Belarusians across the globe, secure their links to the historic homeland. Belarus finances printing of Belarusian literature and textbooks to be distributed abroad, helps Belarusian diasporas in arranging cultural and educational events, periodically holds world congresses of Belarusians.

Delivering precise and genuine information about Belarus to compatriots abroad is an important task of the government. The Belarusian-language newspaper Golas Radzimy is printed. Russian and Belarusian broadcasts by the international satellite channel Belarus-TV are available in the near and far abroad.
Today Belarus demonstrates sustainable economic growth and financial stability. The economic growth rate has placed Belarus to the seventh position in the world.


Conclusions made by foreign experts point out Belarus’ significant economic growth, low foreign debt, falling inflation, highly qualified manpower, state of the art companies and insignificant degree of social inequality.

**Leading Branches of the National Economy**

Industry is the traditional flagship of Belarus’ economic growth. It is a major branch of the national economy, supplying almost a third of the gross domestic product. The versatility of produced and sold industrial products determines the profile of the country’s overseas trade (around 90 per cent of the total export) and secures the largest part of foreign currency proceeds.

The Belarusian industry includes over 100 branches. There are over 20 thousand industrial enterprises and production facilities in Belarus. Mechanical engineering and metalworking are the leading industries of the national economy.

Supplying a quarter of the mechanical engineering output, automobile production is the largest branch of the national mechanical engineering industry. Minsk Automobile Plant (MAZ trademark) and Belarusian Autoworks (BelAZ trademark, the town of Zhodino) are the key companies.

MAZ is one of the largest European makers of heavy haulers, road trains, specialised vehicles and other automobiles (over 250 models).

Over 11 thousand trucks were produced in H1 2007 alone. All in all, in January-June 2007 MAZ turned out almost Br1.4 trillion worth of commodities, 16.6 per cent up on H1 2006.

This year Swiss company SGS audited MAZ to re-certify the company’s quality management practices used in design, production, sales and maintenance of automobiles, trailers and semi-trailers for compliance with requirements of the quality management system STB ISO 9001:2001. The auditing verified the compliance of the company’s quality management system with high international standards.
MAZ is now getting ready to start producing Euro-3 compliant automobiles powered by Yaroslavl-made, Minsk-made and European engines (Deutz and Mercedes). As from January 1, 2008 the company will produce vehicles compliant with Euro-3 standard and higher.

BelAZ is one of the world’s seven largest producers of mining equipment. The company accounts for over 30 per cent of the world market of rock haulers. The company specialises in giant and super-giant rock haulers as well as heavy transport vehicles used in mining and civil engineering.

The national tractor and agricultural machinery engineering can virtually fully satisfy the need of the Belarusian agrobusiness for the necessary machines and equipment. The industry comprises over 40 companies specialised in designing and manufacturing tractors and agricultural machines. The largest companies are Minsk-based tractor and engine works, Gomselmash and Bobruiskagromash.

Minsk Tractor Works (MTZ trademark) is one of the world’s eight largest tractor producers, which account for 96 per cent of the international tractor sales. MTZ exports the make to more than 60 countries.

MTZ produces 24 models of general-purpose ploughing tractors, 6 models of small-scale tractors, 8 models of walk-behind tractors and mini tractors, ploughs, 15 models of special vehicles for industrial use, municipal services, timber logging, and mining.

In H1 2007, MTZ exported over 26 thousand tractors, almost a third more than in the same period of last year.
Grain and forage harvesters are produced by Gomsel-mash, a major manufacturer of agricultural machines in the CIS states.

Belarus also produces building, road construction machines and machines for municipal services (the largest producers are Amkodor, Mogilevliftmash and Belkommun-mash), equipment for trading and public catering companies, household appliances.

Belarusian mechanical engineering companies also offer a wide range of sophisticated consumer goods such as TV sets, refrigerators, radio receivers, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, bicycles, and others. TV sets made by Horizont and Vityas as well as refrigerators Atlant are known far abroad.


The industrial potential of sophisticated mechanical engineering industries is represented by instrument making industry, electrotechnical industry, radio technical, electronic, optical mechanical industries. The largest companies are Semiconductor Production Corporation Integral, Minsk Production Association of Computing Technologies, Minsk Electrotechnical Plant named after Kozlov, Belarusian Optical Mechanical Association BelOMO.

The ferrous metallurgy of Belarus specialises in steel smelting, steel and cast-iron pipes, metal cord, hardware and other metal goods. The production is concentrated mainly at the premises of Belarusian Steel Works (BMZ trademark, the town of Zhlobin). Around
80 per cent of the total production of the industry is concentrated there. Annual sales exceed $1 billion.

Chemical and petrochemical industry is one of the largest branches of the Belarusian industry.

This July BMZ commissioned a pipe mill able to produce 250–280 thousand tonnes of seamless hot-rolled pipes per annum. The project cost $250 million.

Belarus is one of the world’s largest producers and exporters of potash fertilisers. Company Belaruskali accounts for over 14 per cent of the world production capacity and around 16 per cent of the world export of potash fertilisers.

Belarus is one of the few countries that produce all the three main kinds of fertilisers — nitrogen, potash and phosphorous.

Svetlogorsk Khimvolokno is one of the largest producers of artificial and synthetic fibres in Europe. Polotsk Steklovolokno offers glass fabric and fibre glass filament, exporting almost 90 per cent of the make abroad.
Belarusian tyre maker Belshina (the town of Bobruisk) manufactures over 200 sizes of tyres for cars, trucks, supersize trucks, building and road construction machines, lifters and transporters, electric transport, buses, tractors and agricultural machines. Around 60 per cent of the make is exported to over 40 countries. Belshina was the first CIS company to start producing all-metal cord tyres for trucks.

In 2007, Belshina started up the production of a super-giant tyre Bel-160 designed for dump trucks with the payload capacity of up to 220 tonnes, which are used in metal mining industry.

The national fuel and energy industry extracts, transports, stores and distributes all kinds of energy resources: natural gas, oil and petroleum products, solid fuel, electric and heating energy.

Belarus has proprietary small oil reserves. The explored deposits are located in the Pripyat bowl, which is around 30 thousand square kilometres large. The primary recoverable oil resources are estimated at 355.6 million tonnes, at least half of them is industrial grade. As of January 1, 2007, 44 oil fields were explored.

Employing cutting-edge oil extraction technologies – horizontal well drilling and the boring of lateral horizontal trunks – Belarusian oil workers have been able to maintain the annual oil extraction at a steady 1.8 million tonnes despite the rather depleted explored reserves. The know-how of Belarusian specialists enjoys interest abroad.

Belorusneft and LLC Smith Production Technology have signed a contract providing for participation of Belarusian specialists in enhanced oil recovery projects in already explored and long-used Russian oil deposits.
Belarusian specialists have also started working for a Belarusian-Venezuelan prospecting seismology joint venture SeismoVenBel in Venezuela.

The administration of the Venezuelan state oil corporation PDVSA spoke in glowing terms about the work Belarusian specialists did to assess and certify oil reserves in the Junin area. The Belarusian specialists were praised for their quality of work and time of performance in comparison with other teams representing international oil companies.

In 2007, the sides started setting up a joint venture for extracting oil in Venezuela. Belorusneft’s contribution to the authorised capital of the Belarusian-Venezuelan oil extracting joint-stock company has been set at $200 thousand.

The Belarusian oil processing industry is represented by Naftan (Novopolotsk) and Mozyr Oil Refinery. In January–June 2007 the industry turned out Br7.3 trillion worth of products. The capacity of the two oil refineries approximates 22 million tonnes, crude oil upgrading index – 70–75 per cent. The companies offer dozens of products, specialising in petrol, diesel fuel, fuel oil, lubricants and petroleum bitumen.

Belarus has a branched network of trunk pipelines pumping oil, natural gas, petrol and diesel fuel.

In Belarus oil transportation services are performed by Gomeltransneft Druzhba and Novopolotsk-based oil transportation company Druzhba. Measured in single line terms, the pipelines are 1,923 km and 1,065 km long. The Druzhba oil pipeline is a major transit corridor used to transport Russian oil and is a continuation of the system of trunk oil pipelines of Russian company Transneft.

Beltransgaz distributes and transports natural gas across Belarus. The company uses around 7 thousand km of gas pipelines varying in diameter between 100 and 1,400 mm. The company also services the Belarusian sec-
tion of the transcontinental gas pipeline Yamal-Europe owned by Russian OJSC Gazprom.

This year Gazprom took part in setting up a Belarusian-Russian gas transportation venture. The joint venture foundation contract provides for Gazprom’s acquiring 50 per cent of Beltransgaz shares by 2010.

Meant to level out seasonal irregularities of natural gas consumption and ensure a stable supply of natural gas in emergencies, underground gas storage facilities play an important role in securing the reliability of the gas transportation system. At present Belarus has two gas storages – Osipovichskoye and Pribugskoye, with their total gas storage capacity approaching 700 million cubic metres. Efforts are under way to build Mozyrskoye underground gas storage.

The Belarusian peat industry extracts peat for fuel, agriculture, chemical processing, and manufactures peat bricks.

The power generation capacity of the Belarusian power grid is represented by 27 major power plants. Cogeneration plants account for about half of the generating installations, with power-generating state district power plants accounting for 43 per cent. The power grid also includes small hydropower plants and isolated generating plants.

Belarus has enough power and heating generation installations to satisfy the home demand, but due to the insufficient domestic fuel resources is forced to import natural gas, oil and coal, which makes the national economy dependable on external suppliers and vulnerable to energy price fluctuations.

Creating conditions for the functioning and development of the national economy using fuel, energy and raw material resources as effectively as possible is a major priority of Belarus’ economic and energy policies along with securing stable supplies of energy resources. Saving and frugality are becoming key factors for progressive social and economic development of the Belarusian state.

A draft concept outlining the energy security of the Republic of Belarus up to 2020 has been developed this year. It is a comprehensive document meant to ensure the national energy security, resulting in economic, political and manufacturing security. A long-term fuel and energy budget (up to 2020), which will be used to shape further plans for social, economic and innovative development of the republic as well as various governmental programmes is a key novelty of the document. In 2010 energy intensity of Belarus’ GDP is supposed to shrink by at least 31 per cent in comparison with 2005, in 2020 – by 60 per cent.
Belarus has given the go-ahead for preparatory work to launch a project on building a nuclear plant. Specialists are carrying out necessary research based on data received from analogous facilities located in Russia, France, USA and other countries.

**Lumber Industry** unites forest harvesting, woodworking, pulp and paper and wood chemical branches. The biggest and most upgraded companies are administered by the Belarusian production and trading concern Bellesbumprom. It unites about 60 leading forestry, woodworking and pulp and paper enterprises, with production volumes accounting for about 45 per cent of the total output of Belarus’ lumber industry. A lot of private companies including joint ventures work for the concern.

**Construction Industry** unites building organisations and companies servicing the construction branch.

The core of this industry is made up by the companies producing construction materials as well as glass and faience, forestry and woodworking, mechanical engineering and metalworking enterprises.

Companies responsible for construction supplies manufacture cement, walling, roofing, heat-insulating and non-metallic materials, ceramic goods and sanitary ware, polished glass, etc.

The Belarusian companies produce materials and articles to erect buildings meeting all European durability and design standards.

For example, Gomelsteklo Co. manufactures polish glass highly competitive in the international market.

Keramin Co. expands its offering list, boosts the tile production and enhances the quality of its products on a permanent basis. In quality and output Keramin is an undisputed leader in the CIS countries.

By the end of autumn 2007, Keramin will send into service a new tile production line with the capacity of 2.8 million square meters of tiles a year. The line will be fitted with equipment from the leading world producers – SACMI, SYSTEM, Ingegneria Cheramica, Nuova era. With the new line in service, Keramin will manufacture tiles of a format absolutely new for the company and for the Belarusian market – 300X600mm, and will certainly continue producing tiles of a 275X400mm format, which have been so popular in the market for the last two years.
The following companies are leading manufacturers of construction materials in the country: Belarusian Cement Plant, Gomelzhelzobeton, Gomel Plant of Structural Units, Grodno Glassworks, Glassworks Neman, Molodechno Hardware Plant, Liuban Plant of Construction Materials and Minsk Factory of Silicate Goods.

At present special emphasis is placed on cement production. Belarusian cement plants should upgrade the production facilities in order to step up the output.

Newly built facilities are recommended to work using the Belarusian feedstock only.

In H1 2007 some 54 thousand tonnes of cement were sold in the domestic market of Belarus or 2.5 times more than it was planned for the period.

In 2007 the Belarusian cement industry intends to manufacture 3.7 million tonnes of cement, up by 200 thousand tonnes on 2006.

In two–three years the Belarusian cement industry will be raised to the level of world standards.

Light Industry unites more than 10 branches and dozens of productions. On the whole over 400 companies make part of the holding. The biggest factories are administered by the Belarusian state concern for manufacturing and selling light industry goods Bellegprom.

In terms of production volumes textile companies take the leading position in the structure of Belarus’ light industry. They manufacture all types of fabrics, knitwear and other felt-based products.

The second most important industry sector is the sewing industry which unites more than 250 companies.

Belarus has created favourable conditions for development of flax, wool, silk, knitwear and footwear manufactures.
The agricultural sector is an important branch of economy and the principal component of the agro-industrial industry of Belarus.

Enterprises of various forms of ownership specialize in production of agricultural goods: agricultural companies, farms, household plots, etc.

The agrarian sector is divided into cattle breeding and plant growing. Cattle-breeding companies produce more than a half of the total livestock output. As of January 1, 2007 there were 3.989 million head of cattle in the Belarusian stock-raising companies including 1.506 million cows. The major part of the cattle stock – 91 per cent is kept in the agricultural companies including cows – 79 per cent.

As of January 1, 2007, the pig stock totalled 3.642 million head in Belarus and only 72.5 per cent belonged to agricultural companies; the rest – to private households and farms. Pork produced by Belarusian agricultural companies accounts for 69 per cent of the country’s total pork output.

One of the most rapidly developing industry sectors is poultry farming. Belarus annually produces 15 kilos of poultry meat and 320 eggs per capita. In early 2007 there were 28.7 million head of farmed poultry in Belarus. And only 22 per cent belonged to private households. Poultry meat and eggs produced by state-run organisations account for 97 per cent and 65 per cent of Belarus’ total production volumes respectively.

The republican association Belpitseprom supervises the state-run poultry farming sector in the country. It unites poultry farms, two feed mills and a feather processing factory. The company Plempitsezavod Belorussky carries out poultry stock selection and breeding projects. Specialists of the company create new poultry crosses and improve the existing ones. The pedigree poultry stock is exported to the CIS countries.

Belarus is also promoting fish and horse-breeding, beekeeping and fur-farming.
There are 89.8 thousand square kilometres of farmland in Belarus including 55.4 thousand square kilometres of arable land.

Grain farming companies mainly produce barley, rye, oats, winter and spring wheat and triticale. About 90 per cent of Belarus’ total grain area is sown with these crops.

In 2007, Belarus’ gross grain yield totalled 7 million 435 thousand tonnes. In grain production the country caught up with many European states.

Belarus is one of the seven world leading potato producers and tops the list of the countries in terms of potato production per capita. Virtually all Belarusian state-run agricultural companies and private farms grow potatoes.

In 2007, some 45.9 thousand hectares were sown with potatoes by state agricultural enterprises and about 370 thousand hectares – by private households. The gross potato yield exceeds eight million tonnes.

Belarus has about 16 per cent of the world area under flax. It is one of the five countries, out of 26, leading in the flax fibre manufacture. Belarus has conquered one third of the CIS market of flax fibre.

Some 49 Belarusian flax-scutching mills perform flax primary processing operations. Their annual capacity makes about 50 thousand tonnes of flax fibre. There are also four flax export-sorting facilities in Belarus. More than a half of flax products are supplied to the domestic market; the rest – is exported. Belarus mainly exports flax fibre, yarn, packing and household flax fabrics.

The climatic conditions in Belarus are favourable for sugar beet cultivation. More than 500 agricultural companies of the Brest, Grodno and Minsk regions grow sugar beet.

Four Belarusian companies process sugar beet – Gorodeya, Skidel, Slutsk and Zhabinka Sugar Refineries. Their annual aggregate processing capacity is about 2.7 million tonnes.

Belarus can completely satisfy the domestic demand for sugar.

More than one thousand agricultural companies and about three million private households and farms grow vegetables in Belarus. In 2007 Belarus is projected to harvest more than two million tonnes of vegetables.

Belarus uses about 70 per cent of its farmland for fodder production needs. Every year the Belarusian cattle-breeding and poultry-farming companies utilise more than 20 million tonnes of fodder units.

In terms of output the processing branch stands second in the structure of Belarus’ agricultural industry.

One of the most important components of the processing branch is food industry, which is divided into 20 sectors. It unites about 2,730 companies producing foodstuffs, strong and soft drinks, tobacco good and cosmetics.

Companies of the Ministry of Agriculture and Foodstuffs of the Republic of Belarus produce more than 70 per cent of all goods made by the agro-industrial indus-
try, companies of Belgospischeprom Concern – about 20 per cent, foreign companies and joint ventures – a bit more than 10 per cent.

Meat and milk branches take leading positions in the structure of Belarus’ food industry, which also unites bread-making, sugar, confectionery, wine-making and fish sectors.

Belarus can completely satisfy the needs of the population for meat and milk products. But it has to import vegetable oil, fish and fish products, vegetables and fruits to meet the domestic demand.

Belarus’ favourable geographical situation helps build up high transit potential of the country’s transport communications. Belarus is a link connecting the East and the West. The shortest railways and motorways linking countries of Western Europe with the CIS states, Southern and Central Europe with the north-western regions of Russia and Scandinavia run through Belarus. The following transport corridors cross the country: No2 Berlin-Warsaw-Minsk-Moscow; No9 the Russian border with Finland-Vyborg-St. Petersburg-Vitebsk-Gomel and farther through Ukraine, Moldavia, Bulgaria and Greece; a branch of corridor No9 Gomel-Minsk-Vilnius-Klaipeda-Kaliningrad.

A two-lane electrified railway Moscow-Minsk-Berlin 1.874 kilometres long and a motorway Brest-Minsk-Russian border 592 kilometres long run through the territory of Belarus within the framework of transport corridor No2.

Transport corridor No9 “North-South” connects the countries of South-Eastern Europe with Ukraine, Belarus and Finland. It provides Belarus with a direct access to the ports of the Baltic and Black Seas and Russia – the shortest way between the central part and the Kaliningrad region.

Belarus has virtually all modern transportation modes: railway, motor, river, aviation and pipeline transportation. Urban electric transport – trams and trolleybuses – is well-developed as well. There is underground in Minsk. Besides, railways and motor transport play a key role in the transportation system of Belarus.

The length of the Belarusian trunk railways is 5.5 thousand kilometres, electrified railways – 874 kilometres. The country’s railway network includes latitude (east-west) and meridian lines with several branches. At present 424 suburban electric trains and 26 local trains travel back and forth
in Belarus. There are 21 railway terminals, more than 560 roadside stops and 320 railways stations in the country.

East-west truck railways are of special importance – Moscow-Orsha-Minsk-Brest, Gomel-Kalinkovichi-Luninets-Brest, Kriviec-Mogilev-Opisovichi-Baranovichi-Volkovysk. The railway Gomel-Bobruisk-Minsk-Molodechno and farther towards Vilnius crosses the country from the south-east to north-west.

It is the shortest route linking big industrial centres of Ukraine with the Baltic States.

A railway Gomel-Mogilev-Orsha-Vitebsk plays an important role in connecting the northern-western regions of Russia and St. Petersburg with Ukraine and the Volga region. A meridian railway Luninets-Baranovichi-Lida crosses the Brest and Grodno regions of Belarus and provides the western regions of Ukraine with an access to the Baltic states. Today Belarusian Railways provides transportation of about 75 per cent of all cargos and more than 50 per cent of all passengers in the country.

Frights and passengers conveyed by motor transport account for 69.4 per cent and 59.4 per cent respectively.

Many cargos are conveyed by motor transport as transit goods through the territory of Belarus. Over three thousand carriers are involved in this type of activity.

Public transport is a key element of the Belarusian transportation system as well. 14.4 times more passengers choose city and suburban buses rather than railway transport. International passenger transportation is provided along 79 routes to the European, Baltic and CIS countries.

Belarus has an extended network of motorways, which helps provide year-round communication with almost all settlements. The road network is rather dense – 82,958 thousand kilometres including 15,406 thousand kilometres of republican and 67,552 thousand kilometres of local roads. Belarus takes the 15th position among the countries with the well-developed road system in terms of density of public roads per one kilometer and the 12th position – in terms of kilometerage of roads per one thousand residents.

Four main directions ensure international foreign economic links:

Minsk ring road
Economy and Finance

- Brest-Minsk—the border of the Russian Federation;
- Kaliningrad-Kaunas-Vilnius-Minsk-Gomel—the border of Ukraine;
- St. Petersburg-Vitebsk-Gomel-Kiev-Odessa;
- Minsk-Grodno-Gdansk.

Transit air routes from Western Europe to the East and to the South-Eastern Asia, from Scandinavia to the South and the Mediterranean cross the Belarusian airspace. The length of air routes over Belarus makes more than five thousand kilometres.

The air companies Belavia, Transaviaexport and Gomelavia provide air communication services in the country. Bелаeronavigatsiya Co. and its affiliates provide technical maintenance and ensure flight safety. Belarus has established air communication with all CIS member states and ten foreign countries.

Belavia provides about 90 per cent of all air transportation services. Among the company’s partners is Aeroflot (Russia), Lufthansa (Germany), LOT (Poland), Austrian Airlines – on the whole more than 30 air carriers.

Gomelavia offers flights to Moscow, Kaliningrad, Italy, Germany, Spain, Bulgaria, Turkey, China, India, the UAE and other countries.

Transaviaexport delivers cargos mainly to the countries of Europe, South America, South-Eastern Asia and the Middle East.

Tax System

The tax system is one of the most important elements of the country’s economy. On the one hand, taxes stimulate economic development; on the other hand, they replenish the state’s budget. On the whole, the tax system of the Republic of Belarus conforms to other generally used tax systems in the global economy.

The taxes levied in Belarus today can be divided into the following groups:

- direct taxes, i.e. mandatory payments paid from incomes, including taxes on profits, income taxes, a real estate tax, a single tax on sole traders and other natural persons, a tax on gambling industry, local taxes on profits;
- indirect taxes, i.e. extra charges on sold goods and services which include VAT, taxes and dues on profits from sale of goods and services, a sales tax, excise taxes, other dues and fees;
- mixed taxes contributing to the price formation process as an element of prime cost levied on different tax-
ation objects. They are taxes to the wages fund, land and eco-tax, payments to innovation funds;
- other taxes, dues and fees, payments to the Social Security Fund of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

The tax burden on the economy, i.e. taxes and dues to the special-purpose budget funds and the Social Security Fund, fell by 0.3 percentage points to 48.3 per cent in H1 2007 as against H1 2006.

The country continues implementing the tax reform to reduce tax burden, improve tax administration and raise rationality, justice and stability of the tax system. With a view to lessening tax burden the country continues reducing or abolishing some taxes. Measures are taken to simplify the country’s tax system.

Belarus has completed introduction of the generally accepted practice of foreign trade taxation. Belarus applies the single principle of indirect tax collection in trade with all countries.

**Banking System**

As of September 1, 2007, the banking system of the Republic of Belarus included 27 banks, of them 16 were partially and seven banks were wholly foreign-owned.

As of September 1, 2007, bank assets totalled Br35.991 billion, an increase of 19.8 per cent as of January–August 2007. Bank revenues in January–August 2007 totalled Br360 billion. The overall statutory capital grew by Br158 billion to Br 3,896 billion (about $1.8 billion) as of September 1, 2007.

The greatest share of banking capital (about 85%) is concentrated in five major banks, namely, Belagroprombank, Belarusbank, Priorbank, Belpromstroibank, Belinvestbank.

Svetlogorsk branch No 322 of Belarusbank Savings Bank
There are seven representative offices of foreign banks in Belarus. Latvian banks have three representative offices, German, Lithuanian and Ukrainian banks have one representative office each. There is also one representative office of Interstate Bank.

As of June 1, 2007 foreign investments in the overall statutory capital of the Belarus-based banks accounted for 8.83 per cent (and 7.84 per cent as of January 1, 2007), including 2.99 per cent of Russian investments. The countries investing in the Belarusian banks are Austria, Great Britain, Cyprus, Latvia, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Canada, the USA and others.

In April 2007 the Russian-based Vneshtorgbank (VTB) bought out the controlling interest of the Belarusian Slavneftebank. The additional emission of shares resulted in redoubling of Slavneftebank’s statutory capital Br 40.173 billion (an equivalent of $18.7 million). The bank stock grew to $50 million. VTB investments in Slavneftebank totalled $25 million.

In June this year Russian Vnesheconombank bought out the controlling interest of the Belvnesheconombank.

In August 2007 Ukrainian-based Delta Bank bought 100 per cent of shares of the Belarusian Atom Bank. The bank is set to accumulate a $300 million loan portfolio within the next three years. For the purpose up to $50 million will be gradually injected into Atom Bank.

The International Investment Group Dogmat bought over 90 per cent of shares of the Belarusian International Reserve Bank in August 2007. By 2010 Dogmat plans to increase the loan portfolio of the International Reserve Bank to $350–400 million.

By supervising and regulating activities of banks and other financial organisations the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus ensures the development and strengthening of the Belarusian banking system, stability of the Belarusian ruble, efficient and reliable functioning of the Belarusian payment system.

Today Belarusian banks provide a wide range of services, including insurance, property management, purchase and sale of securities and precious metals, consultancy, etc. The Belarusian banks also actively introduce all the latest credit and financial services such as leasing, factoring, trust as well as the system of non-cash settlement with the use of plastic banking cards. The banks also issue BelCard, VISA, Europay/MasterCard cards.

The credit rating awarded to Belarus will benefit all the Belarusian banks. They will be able to receive or enhance individual credit ratings from international credit rating agencies. Belarusbank, Belgazprombank, Belagroprombank and Belinvestbank received international credit ratings.
from Fitch Ratings. Belpromstroibank was rated by both Fitch Ratings and Moody’s Investor Service. Soon Belarusbank and Belagroprombank plan to receive their second international rating from Moody’s.

Free Economic Zones

There are six free economic zones (FEZ) in Belarus, namely, Brest, Vitebsk, Gomel-Raton, Grodnoinvest, Minsk, Mogilev.

Thus, every region of Belarus has a free economic zone, an efficient tool of economic management promoting development of certain areas by attraction of foreign investments and introduction of advanced technologies.

Free economic zones offer their residing companies tax preferences. FEZ residing companies pay fewer taxes and enjoy certain tax reductions. In terms of customs dues and tax payments FEZ can be considered a free customs zone.

Belarus has established a unified legal (tax and customs) regime for all free economic zones. Economic entities are held accountable for violations of the terms and conditions of operating in the zones. In addition, this special legal regime is applied to the products of FEZ residing companies deemed for export or if they are on the import-substitution goods list adopted by the President of the Republic of Belarus.

Foreign or Belarus-made goods imported to a free economic zone are exempt from taxes and customs dues except for paperwork fees. Goods imported from a free customs zone to the customs territory of the Republic of Belarus, are subject for taxation depending on the country of the origin.

Goods made by FEZ residing companies are exempt from export dues and taxes except for paperwork fees. As for goods made outside free economic zones the export taxes and dues are paid in accordance with the tax legislation of the Republic of Belarus.

Both national and foreign currencies are accepted for settlement within free economic zones in accordance with the rules and regulations endorsed by the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus.

Foreign investors operating in FEZ enjoy investment protection guaranteed by the state. The state guarantees foreign investors the right to reimbursement of their share
of a company’s property in accordance with its residual value as well as due revenues, including foreign currency revenues, generated from their investments in the Republic of Belarus.

As of July 1, 2007 FEZ residing companies (except for banks) accumulated $266 million foreign investments, of them 22.6 per cent were investments to statutory capital.

FEZs Brest and Minsk are leading among other free economic zones in the volume of investments attracted – $97 million and $82.8 million respectively. They are followed by Gomel-Raton with $28.4 million investments, Mogilev with $20.4 million, Vitebsk and Grodnoinvest with $19.7 million and $17.7 million respectively.

In H1 2007 FEZ exports totalled $443.1 million.

Exports to the CIS member-states stood at $391.3 million (88.3 per cent of the total exports). Exports to Russia made up $347 million (78.3 per cent of the total). The majority of FEZ exports are furniture and components (19.5 per cent), fish products (9.7 per cent), plastic goods (9.3 per cent), sausages and canned meat (6.2 per cent), aluminium ware and spare parts thereof (4.5 per cent).

As of July 1, 2007 there were 262 FEZ residing companies registered, of them 250 were active.

Park of High Technologies

Belarus intends to become an active player in the global IT market with the turnover as high as $1.3 trillion. This is one of the major strategic goals of the Park of High Technologies (PHT) of Belarus. PHT is involved in development and application of information and communications technologies and software both locally and internationally.

Apart from development and introduction of information and communications technologies and software intended for both domestic and foreign markets, PHT will work in 12 other fields from micro- and nano-electronics to aviation and rocket science.

The state envisages measures to support PHT residing companies. In particular, they are exempt from taxes and dues for this accounting year. The land plots where the PHT will be located are exempt from the land tax within three years. All unfinished facilities within PHT are exempt from the real estate tax. Equipment imported to the Park of High Technologies is also exempt from VAT and customs dues.

To see the full version of the Regulations on Park of High Technologies, please, visit www.park.by.

The Belarusian Park of High Technologies applies the extraterritorial law which means that PHT residing companies do not have to be located on the territory of the Park and their products can be supplied to the domestic market.

Due to the extraterritorial law PHT already accepts first applications and business plans since the Govern-
The government has approved the documentation regulating the registration process, compilation of business plans, agreements on terms and conditions of operation of PHT residing companies. A tender has been invited to select the best design of the future Park which will be located in Uruchye district of Minsk next to Academgorodok. Several multinational corporations voiced their interest in investing in PHT.

To date, there are 30 juridical entities, one sole trader and several business plans registered as PHT residents. About 80 per cent of PHT products is exported. Import-substituting goods account for 20 per cent of the PHT output.

In 2006 the PHT output approximated $30 million. Over 2006 about $8 million worth of R&D projects were introduced in Belarus. In H1 2007 the software production in the Park grew 2.6 times. In H1 2007 PHT tripled export of IT products to $20 million as compared with the same period 2006. This is a record high growth not only in the CIS and Eastern Europe but in the whole Europe.

On December 31, 2007, an IT Academy is to appear in the Belarusian Park of High Technologies. The world’s largest IT companies, such as Microsoft, Oracle, SAM and Sisco are interested in setting up an IT Academy in Belarus. The Academy will provide training to graduates of Belarusian technical universities as well as advanced courses to state officials and teaching personnel.
SOCIAL POLICY OF BELARUS
Education

Everyone in Belarus has the right to education. And a multistage educational system created in the country helps the Belarusians exercise the right in full.

**Preschool Education.** Belarus’ preschool educational system unites institutions that differ in types and methods of upbringing and educating children. There are day nurseries, nurseries-kindergartens, kindergartens and kindergartens-schools in Belarus. They are divided into general preschool establishments, groups of profound aesthetic and physical development, sanatorium-type institutions, specialized establishments for children with specific features of physical and psychic development and preschool child development centres. All the aforementioned institutions enrol children under six.

**General Secondary Education.** This is the next stage of receiving education in the Republic of Belarus. The system unites secondary schools and gymnasiums for boys and girls who are six years and older.

Belarus’ standard of general secondary education is based on several stages. The first stage is primary education. The period of study lasts four years – from the 1st to 4th forms. The second stage is basic education. The period of study – primary education plus study from the 5th to 10th forms. The third stage – general secondary education. It is provided to pupils who have received basic education. They become students of 11th(10th) and 12th(11th) forms.

Boys and girls may also receive general secondary education in vocational schools and specialized secondary education establishments which they may enter having received basic education.

At present Belarus continues reforming the general secondary education system and transiting to the 12-year period of study standard. By the way, the 10-grade assessment system of knowledge substituted the 5-grade scale in the Belarusian educational estab-
lishments several years ago. It was done to enhance the individual approach to pupils and students.

Children and teenagers are involved in various forms of out-of-school education. This system includes various clubs, hobby groups, sports sections and studios operating in schools and non-school establishments. As a rule, the participation in them is free of charge. Pupils’ self-government bodies, children’s and youth organisations also work hard to prepare children and teenagers for adult life and to involve them in active leisure activities.

**Vocational Education.** The Republic of Belarus has an extensive network of vocational educational establishments. At present it covers vocational schools, vocational-technical lyceums and colleges. They provide vocational-technical and general secondary education. Students obtain necessary qualifications to work as skilled workers and get relevant vocational education certificates.

**Special Secondary Education.** Belarus’ system of special secondary education covers technical schools, colleges, schools-colleges of arts, gymnasiums-colleges of arts, vocational colleges, linguistic gymnasiums-colleges and higher colleges.

Special secondary education is provided on a basis of the general basic, general secondary and vocational education. Students may attend full-time, extra-mural or evening classes. The period of study ranges from two to four years.

**National Higher School.** Belarus’ system of higher education unites 43 state-owned and private establishments: 31 universities, 6 academies, 2 institutes, 4 higher colleges and 12 private universities. All the establishments of higher education have been certified irrespective of the patterns of ownership. Belarusian State University and Belarusian National Technical University are leading establishments in Belarus’ national higher education system; nine profile universities are leading institutions training specialists for certain branches of economy.

The national higher school trains specialists in more than 360 specialties and over two thousand fields. It virtually completely satisfies the demand of the national economy for highly skilled personnel.

In 2002, with the Decree “On the Recognition of the Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region” in operation, Belarus became a full-fledged party to the 1997 Lisbon Convention drafted by the UNESCO and the Council of Europe. The decree helps resolve more speedily the problem of recognizing diplomas of the Belarusian establishments of higher educa-
tion abroad and helps attract more foreign students to Belarus. In the future foreigners are expected to account for 5 per cent of the total number of students attending a higher educational establishment.

**Scientific, research and educational personnel.**

Belarusian students may take postgraduate and doctoral degree courses in higher educational establishments and research organisations of the Education Ministry of Belarus (www.minedu.unibel.by).

Belarus built up a network of specialized educational establishments for improving qualifications or retraining specialists.

These establishments are administered by the public authorities as well as local executive and administrative bodies. The Ministry of Education of Belarus is responsible for the state and development of the national educational system.

Belarus created an effective system to control the quality of services provided by educational establishments. The system includes licensing, certifying and accrediting operations. To have the right to issue certificates meeting state standards an educational establishment should follow relevant certification procedures, which will also define its status. Watchdog agencies monitor the activity of all educational establishments on a permanent basis and give a full assessment to the quality of educational and upbringing services, management behaviour, etc.

**Foreign Students.**

The rules of applying for admission to the Belarusian educational establishments by foreign citizens are stipulated in the resolution on training foreign students in the Republic of Belarus approved by the Council of Ministers. Foreign students may enter Belarusian universities in line with the international treaties signed by the Republic of Belarus including interdepartmental agreements and relevant contracts concluded by Belarusian educational institutions with foreign citizens or corresponding agencies. Such contracts provide for compensating for training expenses.

Belarus’ economic sector is actively developing thus steadily
pushing up living standards of the population. There are no ethnic-based conflicts in the country and at an affordable cost foreign students may purchase all for living and studies in Belarus.

Education in Belarusian or Russian is available. Following international practice each educational establishment fixes the tuition fee on its own.

Foreign citizens who intend to go into higher education in Belarus should take a one-year pre-training course to study Russian and other subjects necessary to do well in further studies.

The list of universities open to foreign students is available on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (www.mfa.gov.by).

The following groups of people are entitled to receive free vocational education in the Republic of Belarus: foreign nationals and stateless persons permanently living on the territory of Belarus, refugees who acquired this status under the Belarusian legislation, Belarus-born citizens of other states constantly living on their territory as well as citizens of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

**Health Care**

Promoting people’s health care, enhancing the quality of medical services and improving of the health care system are top priorities of Belarus’ state policy. The system of delivering medical care includes primary medical care (including first aid and emergency medical services), specialized and stationary medical assistance.

The regional and republican medical establishments provide not only mass medical services but also special ones. In some cases this is unique medical treatment.

The public health protection sphere is supervised in Belarus by the Ministry of Public Health (www.minzdrav.by) through the health care offices of the regional executive committees and the health department of the Minsk City Council. The republican health care organisations are subordinate directly to the Ministry of Public Health.

Non-state (private) medical establishments provide medical aid in Belarus as well.

Belarus also has interregional medical centres. These are research institutions that unite several multifunc-
tional experimental unites located on the same territory. At present there are seven such centres in Belarus – Cardiology, Mother and Baby, Centre of Children’s Oncology and Hematology, Centre of Hygiene, Radiation Medicine and Ecology, Centre of Haematology and Transfusiology and Centre of Neurology and Neurosurgery.

In January–June 2007 specialists of the republican research centre Cardiology performed 1,200 cardiac operations. Among them – coronary stenting, coronary artery bypass grafting and cardistimulator implantation. One of the most complex operations performed by doctors of the centre is aortic aneurysm surgeries. The centre’s hospital lethality level makes only 2 per cent.

Sanitation and epidemiological services are provided in Belarus by state-run health care organisations. The system is headed by a directing agency – the Republican Centre of Hygiene, Epidemiology and Healthcare. At the regional level sanitation and epidemiological services are offered by region, town and district hygiene and epidemiology departments.

The republican AIDS Prophylaxis and Prevention Centre was founded in Belarus because of the risk of HIV infection spread.

Sanatorium-and-spa treatment is also an element of the Belarusian system of medical rehabilitation. Belarusian health centres provide all types of physiotherapy services including eight forms of massage therapy, spa technologies and treatment methods for various diseases. The Belarusian hydropathic establishments and institutions for mud-cures offer high quality services as well.

Some 101 Belarusian sanatorium-and-spa institutions provide their services in Belarus and neighbouring states.

In 2006, more than 27 thousand foreign tourists visited the Belarusian health resorts.

In H1 2007, the Belarusian sanatorium-and-spa institutions were attended by 17 thousand 800 foreign citizens, of them about 14 thousand visited the Belarusian recuperation facilities located in the territory of the Republic of Belarus.

In H1 2007, more than 73 thousand 500 Belarusian children living in the Chernobyl-affected regions were provided medical treatment in the Belarusian sanatorium-and-spa institutions.

Every year the Belarusian recuperation facilities receive up to 15 thousand Belarusian citizens.

Additional information about sanatorium-and-spa treatment services in Belarus is available at www.otpusk.by (CentrKurort Co.), mshp.minsk.by (Belagrozdravnitsa) and www.kurort.by (Belprofsouzkurort).

Health expenditures constantly rise in Belarus. In 2007, they are expected to amount to Br3.869 trillion or 4.2 per cent of the projected GDP – 19 per cent up on 2006.
Housing Construction

Available and affordable housing is one of the main showings describing standards of living of the population. The Belarusian Government is working hard to help those who need better housing. Among the top priorities is lowering the cost of housing and increasing incomes of the population.

Citizens of the Republic of Belarus may choose a form of improving their living conditions on their own. They may buy a new apartment, reconstruct or repair the existing housing facilities. The Belarusian legislation does not specify any limitations on the number and size of living quarters citizens and juridical entities may own.

Citizens of the Republic of Belarus, who need better housing, are registered by the local bodies or in the companies and organisations they work for.

As of January 1, 2007, there were 623 thousand people who needed to improve their living conditions in Belarus including 200 thousand – in Minsk.

According to the global experience, housing is considered to be affordable if one square meter of residential space costs one average monthly wage of an individual. Today a resident of Belarus can purchase 0.69 square meter of housing in a tract house built with state support. That is why state guarantees and support for the disadvantaged
population are still top priorities of the state housing policy. There is also such type of housing as welfare homes in Belarus. People with low incomes may take up residence there. The Belarusian legislation specifies the terms and conditions regarding the use of this type of accommodation.

The Belarusian laws also allow Belarusian citizens to receive subsidies, cheap loans and other forms of state support for improving their living conditions. In H1 2007, about 80 per cent of those who needed better housing had the right to get preferential loans including 35 per cent – in Minsk.

**Family Support and Employment Policy**


In line with the Labour Code a mother may take an up-to-three-year parental leave to take care of her child. This right is guaranteed to any other working member of the family – husband, grandmother or grandfather. Once a week a full-time working woman, who has a status of a mother of many children or a single parent, may take an additional day off which is completely paid off.

On June 1, 2007 the lump sum benefits in connection with child birth were increased. Thus, when the first child is born, the family receives five times the minimum living wage. When each succeeding child is born, the family gets an additional seven times the minimum living wage. Today the benefits total Br924,000 for the first child and 1,293 million for each succeeding child. One-parent families receive additional benefits.

If a couple divorces, the parent who receives the child custody has the right to claim alimony. If this is not possible the parent has the right to claim a benefit equal to 40 per cent of the minimum living wage.

In case of death of the primary income earner, a family has the right to claim a pension commensurate with the wage of the deceased parent.
Families raising disabled children belong to a special social category. According to the Belarusian legislation such families have the right to receive the following benefits: child disability pensions and a benefit totalling 65 per cent of the minimum living wage if the physical state of the child does not allow his mother to work. The childcare time qualifies as work record. If the childcare lasts more than eight years the mother has the right to early retirement at the age of 50.

Some 140,000 new jobs are to be created in Belarus of them 21,000 have already appeared in small and medium towns. This can be attributed to innovation programmes of construction of new facilities and manufactures which provided new jobs. In addition, the state rendered assistance in creating new jobs in the sphere of small and medium businesses.

Involvement of the unemployed in community works another measure to temporary solve the unemployment problem.

Creation of new jobs in Belarus requires additional training and retraining of specialists. The number of people sent on retraining courses on request of employees is on a rise. Unemployed school leavers are given an opportunity to undergo vocational training in professions highly demanded in the labour market with further job placement.

Disadvantaged citizens enjoy additional employment guarantees in Belarus. The state undertakes the responsibility to provide jobs to orphans, the disabled and other people who cannot compete at the job market. The state also provides the first job placement to graduates of higher educational establishments and vocational colleges.

**Development of Physical Education and Sports**

The state social policy of the Republic of Belarus aims at promoting physical education and sports in the society. Promotion of a healthy lifestyle and sports is one of the priorities of the state policy. The measures taken by the state to reach this goal are creation of sports facilities, development of sports infrastructure, particularly in small and medium towns.

The Ministry of Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Belarus is a body responsible for implementation of the
state policy aimed at developing physical education and sports.

Physical education and sports is an independent economic branch with a well-formed managerial structure, logistics and personnel potential, system of specialized educational sports establishments and organisations.

The Belarusian budget allocates funds for promotion of physical education and sports, particularly, for organization of sports competitions, maintenance of sports facilities and educational establishments, sports clubs, etc.

To fully meet the public demand the country has been developing a market of recreational and sports services. Sports facilities are free for the disabled children under 16, orphaned children, children left without parental care and handicapped. Pensioners, children from large families or families with disabled parents enjoy certain discounts.

The state also focuses on the development of professional sports. The country has been developing a system of training of high-class sportsmen, which in-
includes sports schools, specialized schools of Olympic reserve, colleges of Olympic reserve, schools of higher sports mastership, centres of Olympic training. There are also children’s and youth clubs of physical training. Sports schools are mainly oriented on Olympic sports.

Belarus has developed a system of awarding athletes, coaches and managerial stuff of sports schools for great achievements at international competitions.

In 2007 Belarusian national team ranked second in the third World Championships and Games for Short-Sighted Sportsmen in San Paulo having won 39 medals, of them 19 gold. Sergei Punko became champion in individual competitions for the 8th time as well as won gold in team relay. Igor Fortunov won three gold medals. Olga Zinkevich clenched two 100m and 200m sprint gold.

In 2007, Belarusian Irina Fedotova and Yelena Drozdova won two gold medals at Para-Cycling Championships in Bordeaux, France.

The development of sports among the disabled as an important tool of their social adaptation is a special concern of the state. Sports federations, clubs and local sports organizations are responsible for physical rehabilitation of the disabled. Belarusian disabled sportmen take part in Paralympic Games.

The country has set up the National Olympic Committee. It is a public association which role and status fully comply with the Olympic Charter and the law of the Republic of Belarus “On physical education and sports”. The National Olympic Committee fosters professional sports. It has representative offices in all regional centres to promote and develop the Olympic movement locally.
Public Organisations (NGOs)

According to the Ministry of Justice, in H1, 2007 the Republic of Belarus had over 2,200 unions, foundations and other public associations.

The most popular public organisation is the Belarusian Federation of Trade Unions (BFTU), the national single centre of trade unions, the republican voluntary independent association of local trade unions. As of early 2007 the federation had 28 republican trade unions, six regional trade unions and Minsk City Association of Trade Unions with over four million members all together.

BFTU fosters political and socioeconomic stability in Belarus. Being a member of the International Trade Union Confederation, BFTU represents interests of Belarusian employees in the International Labour Organisation and cooperates with various trade union organizations in the Commonwealth of Independent States, Europe, Asia and America.

Over 500 public associations are involved in sports. There are also 350 charities. The most prominent one is the Belarusian Charity and Health Foundation, which is part of the International Charity and Health Foundation, European Union of Charity Associations.

Belarus has been actively developing youth movement: there are 152 youth and children’s organisations in the country.

The largest and the most influential of them are the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRYU) and the Belarusian Republican Pioneer Organization. They have branches in all the regions of the country.

BRYU has over 420,000 members; the Belarusian Republican Pioneer Organisation has over 482,000 members.

There are 141 organisations of veterans, and 306 other public organisations involved in education and organisation of leisure activities.

There are 69 environmental protection organisations.

As for other public associations, 108 of them are involved in science and technology, 99 unite national minorities, 39 art unions, 36 women’s organisations, several public associations on protecting historical and cultural heritage.

In 2007, a public movement Belaya Rus was set up in the Grodno region. In summer 2007 it established branches in all Belarusian regions.
Belarus has 16 registered political parties that strive for playing an active role in the public and political life of the country and protecting interests of various strata of population.

Trade unions, councils of deputies, youth organizations are the backbone of the Belarusian civil society, which provides opportunities for the public to take part in state governing.

**Religion**

Over the last decades, the religious and ethnic self-awareness of the Belarusian people has considerably heightened, the denomination-related factor has gained prominence in the socio-political life of the society. Democratization of social life has largely added to these developments. Religion has started to be regarded as a stimulating link in reviving spiritual foundations and national traditions of the society.

Most religious organisations promote interconfessional dialogue, seek to preserve the traditions of tolerance in society. The state policy is aimed at supporting traditional denominations, improving their material conditions. Strengthening interconfessional accord in the Belarusian society is among priority objectives of the staff of the Office for Religions and Nationalities which plays the role of a research and coordinating centre and a supervisory body. The Law of the Republic of Belarus On Freedom of Religion and Religious Organisations has passed international expert appraisal and has been recognized as complying with international standards. There are 25 religious denominations in Belarus now.

The total number of religious organisations, as of the beginning of 2007, was 3,103 (including 2,953 communities of believers).

**Orthodox Church**

Orthodoxy is the ancient Christian denomination which got spread across the territory of Belarusian lands.
The first Orthodox eparchy – the Polotsk eparchy was founded in 992.

Founded in 1989 the Belarusian exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church comprises eleven Orthodox eparchies (Brest, Minsk, Polotsk, Mogilev, Pinsk, Grodno, Novogrudok, Vitebsk, Turov, and Bobruisk eparchies). Another official name of the Belarusian exarchate is the Belarusian Orthodox Church. It is governed by the Council of Church (Synod) whose head is Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk and Slutsk, the Patriarchal Exarch of All Belarus.

As of early 2007, there were 1,175 Orthodox churches in Belarus; the construction of 172 more was underway.

Restoration of religious organisations started in Belarus in the 1990s. As of early 2007, there were 27 Orthodox monasteries in Belarus, 13 brotherhoods, 9 sisterhoods and 12 other communities.

An academy and a seminary were opened at the Zhirovichi St. Assumption Monastery. Young men from all countries of the former Soviet Union may enter these religious higher educational establishments.

**Roman-Catholic Church**

Catholicism is one of Belarus’ traditional religions. It started spreading widely in the territory of Belarus at the end of the 14th century.

At the beginning of 2007, there were 440 registered Roman-Catholic communities in Belarus, of which 170 had been established in the Grodno region. Some 381 clergymen (192 of whom are foreign nationals) work in the parishes of Belarus. As of early 2007, there were 435 Roman-Catholic churches in Belarus; the construction of 45 more was underway.

A huge rise in the number of Catholic communities, observed in Belarus over the past decade, has prompted the reorganization of the management structure of the Roman-Catholic Church in Belarus. By now, four dioceses have been established in Belarus – the Vitebsk, Grodno, Pinsk and Minsk-Mogilev Dioceses. The Conference of the Catholic Bishops in Belarus was founded in 1999. It is headed by Wladyslaw Blin, the Bishop of Vitebsk.
Since 1993, Mogilev has been hosting the international Christian music festival Magutny Boža which was initiated by the Catholics of Mogilev. Its main goal is to revive and enrich the musical culture of the European nations and unite the Christians of different denominations. Music groups from Ukraine, Poland, Russia, Germany, France and other countries take part in the festival.

**Protestant Churches**

As the forms of Protestantism, Lutheranism and Calvinism have been known in Belarus since the 16th century. They came to Belarus from the neighbouring Prussia and Livonia. In the times of the Protestant Reformation and later, Lutheranism was not popular enough (in contrast to Calvinism) and preserved mainly among the German (partially Lettish, Lithuanian and Polish) population of Belarus. At present there are 27 Lutheran communities in Belarus. Most of the believers are ethnic Germans.

The religious movement of Evangelical Christians was established in Belarus in 1988 after their union with Evangelical Christians-Baptists had dissolved. In terms of the number of followers, this is one of Belarus’ biggest Protestant organisations. As of early 2007, there were 493 communities of Evangelical Christians in Belarus including 153 and 133 communities in Brest and Minsk regions respectively.

There are also 9 communities of the Apostolic Christian Church in Belarus apart from the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (267 communities). The Belarusian Confederation of Seventh-day Adventists (74 communities), the Full Gospel Christian Church (54 communities) and the Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses (26 communities) function in Belarus as well.

**Uniate Church**

The Uniate (Union) Church is one of Belarus’ Christian religious movements (Greek-Latin, Greek-Catholic, Orthodox-Catholic and Belarusian faith). In 1596, the Brest Synod officially announced the Union of the Catholic and
Orthodox Churches. The two Churches were to unite under the Pope. The Uniates did not reject the main dogmas, traditions and ceremonial rites of the Orthodox Church. However, they acknowledged the supremacy of Pope and certain points laid down in the Apostles’ Creed and wanted the Uniate Church to have peculiar national-cultural features.

The Uniate Church re-emerged in Belarus in the late 1980s. In contrast to many other Belarusian religious organisations, it does not enjoy strong support from abroad and is not very popular in Belarus. As of early 2007, there were 13 Uniate communities in Belarus (9 in 1994).

**Judaism**

The Judaism followers appeared in Belarus in the 9–13th centuries. The largest increase in the Jewish population was seen in Belarus in between the second half of the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century. Jews were settling in big and middle-size towns and in villages depending on their professions and activities. The active revival of Judaism, which started in the 1990s, has been slowed down by emigration and an internal religious split. As of early 2007, there were 46 Jewish communities and 8 synagogues functioning in Belarus.

**Islam**

Islam spread in Belarus in the 14th–16th centuries mainly due to the Grand Dukes of Lithuania who invited Tatars-Muslims from the Crimea and the Golden Horde to protect the frontiers of the State. Beginning from the 14th century, the Tatars were offered ranks and positions in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. By the end of the 16th century more than 100,000 Tatars lived in Belarus and Lithuania, including those who were given jobs or resettled and prisoners of war.

The local Tatars are the followers of the Sunni branch of Islam.

Most of the Belarusian Tatars (especially the younger generation) do not know well the dogmas of their faith. They are religiously neutral and tolerant. The cultural-religious elite of the Tatars like the idea of the Belarusian national rebirth and take an active part in this process.

As of early 2007, there were 24 Muslim communities in Belarus. Their major part, 8 communities, was registered in the Grodno region.

**New Religious Trends**

The wave of religious revival in Belarus has spurred the emergence of new religious trends. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness and the Baha’i Faith Organisation have registered their communities in Belarus (6 and 5 communities respectively).

In 1995, the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus passed a resolution stating the regulations regarding the inviting and activity of foreign clergymen on the territory of the Republic of Belarus.

Belarus foiled several attempts to set up destructive sects on its territory – Aum Shinrikyo, sects of Satanists. The country is working hard to minimize the impact of destructive sects upon the population.
Belarusian Mass Media

Periodicals

As of August 1, 2007, the Republic of Belarus had 1,244 printed mass media registered, of them 703 newspapers, 503 magazines, 34 bulletins, three catalogues and one almanac. Over two thirds of them are private.

Periodicals are published in the Belarusian, Russian, English, German, Polish and Ukrainian languages.

Today there are nine news agencies in the country. The Belarusian News Agency (BelTA) is the largest of them.

TV and Radio Broadcast

As of August 1, 2007, the Republic of Belarus had 156 radio and 60 TV shows registered. Their founders are local executive committees, councils of deputies, state companies, NGOs, foreign companies and joint ventures, public associations.

The country has five national TV channels, namely, Pervy (First), LAD, ONT, Stolichnoye Televidenie (Capital Television, STV) and an international satellite channel Belarus TV. In 2002, Pervy Muzikalny Telekanal (First Music TV Channel) was launched.

On August 1, 2007, there were 129 cable TV studios licensed by the Ministry of Communications and Informatization of the Republic of Belarus (24 in the Brest region, 14 in the Vitebsk region, 11 in the Gomel region, 28 in the Grodno region, 24 in the Minsk region, 17 in the Mogilev region, 11 in Minsk City). Of them 28 were state-run companies and 106 – private. Some 20 operators have the mass media registration certificates which give them the right to broadcast their own TV shows and advertisement.
As of August 1, 2007, there were 30 FM radio stations in Belarus. Among them are five radio stations of the National State TV and Radio Company, Radius FM, Kultura, First Channel of the Belarusian Radio. There are 14 radio stations (12 private and two state-run) in Minsk. Nine FM radio stations broadcast in regional and district centres.

Since the opening of the international satellite channel Belarus TV (www.belarus-tv.by) on February 1, 2005 the number of viewers of the Belarusian television has soared immensely. The channel does not only feature daily news programmes, but also the best films and shows of the Belarusian TV and Radio Company, ONT and STV channels, Belarusfilm Film Studio and Belarusian Video Centre.

The radio station Belarus is the only state-run outlet broadcasting abroad in Belarusian, Russia, Polish, English and German. Today it also broadcasts ten hours online. Due to cooperation with the radio station Golos Rossii (Voice of Russia) the programmes of the radio station Belarus are now broadcast in 160 countries worldwide (Voice of Russia broadcasts Belarusian- and Russian-language news prepared by Belarus radio station thrice a week). The number of listeners of the radio exceeds 100 million people. The Internet site at www.radiobelarus.tv.by is visited by people from over 80 countries.

As of January 1, 2007, the Belarusian TV and Radio Company had 352 agreements signed for broadcasting in 252 towns of 13 countries.
CULTURE AND ART

CULTURE AND ART
Over the centuries the Belarusians have created a rich and unique cultural heritage. Belarus has great historical and cultural potential which is made manifest through pieces of architecture, town-building, arts, in archaeology, through park complexes, museum and book collections. There are over 15,000 historical monuments in Belarus. The architectural and cultural complex of the Radzivils in the town of Nesvizh, the Mir castle complex, the Belovezhskaya Pushcha and the Struve Geodetic Arc have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List of cultural and natural properties. At the stage of preparation are the documents for the Augustow Canal and nine other properties recommended for inclusion into the List by UNESCO experts.

Belarus regards preservation of its historical and cultural values as one of its priority missions. In 2007, more than 300 sites have been under refurbishment and reconstruction, including the Mir Castle, the palace and park ensemble in Nesvizh, the edifice of the National Academic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre, the former Potyomkin palace in Krivech, the Church of the Transfiguration of Our Lord the Saviour in Polotsk (reconstruction of the 12th century frescos) and many other associated projects.

At the same time, contemporary Belarusian architecture makes display of innovation through spatial and constructive solutions. Public buildings are marked by artistic expressiveness resulting from a confluence of realistic and avant-garde solutions. In town-building, there is an increasing popularity of grand-manner and decorative arts, sculpture and varied colour solutions; graphic means and decorative lighting are widely used.

New sports facilities have been intensively built in Belarus, as well as new buildings for banks, business and cultural and educational institutions. Over the recent years Belarus has built and remodelled such facilities as the National Library of Belarus, the Moskovsky bus terminal, the Minsk railway terminal, the football arena. The opening of the Hôtel d’ Europe in 2007 marked the completion of another stage in the project on recreating the historical centre of Minsk.

Moskovsky Bus Terminal, Minsk
Artistic life in Belarus is dynamic and varied. Exhibitions are becoming increasingly popular; joint exhibitions featuring Belarusian and foreign artists are being often held; art-design, photo art and computer graphics, as well as other types of artistic expression, are all on the rise now. The art of metaphorical and conceptual art has come to replace thematic art. Belarusian artists draw on foreign artistic experience; there is a process of artistic assimilation with the international artistic trends. The traditions of realism in fine arts are still strong (M.Savitsky, G.Vashchenko, L.Shchemelyov, B.Kazakov, V.Krivoblotsky, V.Shruburo). The emotional-associative themes have been developing in fine arts, where contemporary plastic means of expression have been used (V.Kozhukh, V.Alshevsky, V.Tovstik).

Belarusian artists have been contributing much of their efforts to promoting Belarusian art abroad, to foreign markets. This is evidenced by the wide exhibition geography: France, Italy, Germany, Austria, England, China, the USA and other countries.

The National Fine Arts Museum of Belarus has the richest national collection of works of Belarusian, Russian and foreign artists. It has about 24,000 exhibits. By 2006, the exhibition area of the museum showcased only about 2.5% of the collection. When the new building was opened the area of the permanent exposition grew more than four-fold. The museum promotes national arts. Thus, in 2007 it hosted a jubilee exhibition of People’s Artist of Belarus and the USSR Mikhail Savitsky. The exhibition marked his 85th anniversary. The museum also held personal exhibitions of People’s Artist of Belarus Leonid Shchemelev and other Belarusian painters. Belarusian art admirers had also an opportunity to get familiar with works of Belarusian sculptor Sergei Bondarenko and Chinese artist Yan Fei Hong during the Formula of Motion project showcased in the museum. The Captives of Beauty project featured masterpieces of Russian classics of the 19th – early 20th centuries from the funds of the State Tretyakov Gallery and the National Fine Arts Museum of Belarus.

The Belarusian professional theater has been combining global theater styles and trends with the best national theater traditions. Today there are 28 state-run theaters in Belarus: 12 in Minsk, two in Brest, two in Vitebsk, three in Gomel, two in Molodechno, one in Bobruisk and Slonim, two in Grodno, two in Mogilev and one in Mozyr. Psychologi-
cal realism dominates Belarusian stages, though modernism aesthetics is also developing. The classical Belarusian dramaturgy is being renewed. The best plays, directors and actors enjoy popularity both at home and abroad. Belarusian theaters frequently tour, take part in and often win various international festivals, among which are the Edinburgh Theater Festival in the UK, Schiller and Bonn Festivals in Germany, Shakespeare Festival in Spain, Chekhov Festival in Russia and many others.

The international festival Panorama in Minsk features the best plays staged by the leading theaters of Russia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Estonia, Sweden, Israel, Germany and other countries. In 2008, the Belarusian State Puppet Theater will mark its 70th anniversary with the international puppet festival in Minsk.

Shows of the National Academic Bolshoi Ballet Theater of Belarus enjoy great popularity with the public. Belarusian choreography owes its international fame to theater’s art director and ballet-master Valentin Yelizaryev. The ballet Passions by Belarusian composer A. Mdivani received the prize and diploma of the International Dance Association under UNESCO in 1995 for the best choreography.

The Belarusian cinematograph has rich traditions as well. The Film Studio Belarusfilm is one of the leading film studios in Eastern Europe. Not only Belarusian filmmakers make movies at Belarusfilm. Some joint projects with Russian, German and Israeli cinematographers have been implemented there. Belarusfilm also has documentary studio Letopis, a cartoon department, the Theater of Cinemactors. With a view to enhancing quality of products, the studio started an upgrade project in 2007.

Recently documentaries have come to the forefront of the national film industry. The vast majority of documentary films are made at Belvideocenter. Documentaries play an important role in resurgence of the nation. Many documentaries are dedicated to famous Belarusians, national customs and traditions, folklore, arts and crafts, history, cultural heritage, flora and fauna. Belvideocenter document-

Belarus often plays host to various theater festivals as well. In 2007, the 12th Festival Belaya Vezha (White Tower) in Brest gathered together companies from 25 countries.

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Yanka Kupala National Academic Theatre. A scene from the play Sny ab Belarusi (Dreams of Belarus) based on the play by V. Korotkevic
tories have won prizes and awards of various international festivals (Festival of Nations in Austria; Message to Man in St. Petersburg, Russia; Film Festival of the Pompidou Center in Paris, France; Zolotoi Vitiaz in Minsk/Moscow). Belarusian animated films also have success at international festivals.

A festival of films presented by various countries becomes a major event held in the country. In 2007 animators from 12 countries nominated 37 works for the 10th international film festival Animaevka in Mogilev. Cinematographers from 33 countries took part in the movie festival Listapad-2007.

The Belarusian nation is especially proud of its musical culture. Belarus’ contemporary art wants to preserve national traditions while enhancing professionalism connected with the main tendencies of development of the world musical movement. The Belarusian composers – D.Smolsky, G.Vagner, G.Gorelova, O.Khodosko and others successfully presented their works. Belarus boasts the State Academic Symphonic Orchestra, the ensemble of soloists Classic-Avant-Garde, the State Dancing Company, the Belarusian Choreographic Company Khoroshki, the State Academic Choral Choir named after G.Shirma, the State Academic People’s Choir named after G.Tsitovich.

In various styles and genres perform Belarusian professional bands abroad (Spain, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, India, France, Brazil, China, Lithuania, Poland, etc.). The vocal band Chisty Golos, which consists of five soloists, may be by right called Belarus’ visiting card. Their style of performing sacred and classical music gained wide recognition in many countries. The Belarusian band Kamerata is also rather popular for its original style and repertory.

The Belarusian bands perform in all popular musical styles: classical and heavy rock, rap, blues, pop-rock, chanson, electronic music and others. Ethnic music, which is a...
synthesis of the authentic folklore and contemporary musical trends, is popular in Belarus as well. The Belarussian ethnic trio Troitsa has gained widespread popularity abroad. Belarus became famous abroad also due to the bands Pesnyary and Syabry, which creative work is closely connected with Belarus’ national traditions and is filled with civil pathos.

The State Symphonic and Pop Music Orchestra headed by Mikhail Finberg works hard to develop and popularize the national pop and musical culture. The orchestra organises chamber music festivals in small towns of Belarus. More than 70 festivals have been held in Nesvizh, Turov, Mir, Zaslav, Mstislavl, Molodechno and Chechersk.

In 2007 Mikhail Finberg was nominated for the Belarus-Russia Union State Prize in the Sphere of Literature and Art for 2007-2008 for the series of concerts dedicated to the creative work of the Belarusian and Russian composers.

The Belarussian hospitable land plays host to many musical forums – Belarussian Musical Autumn, Minsk Spring, Golden Hit, a jazz festival and many others. In 2007 Yuri Bashmet International Festival gathered world stars of classical music in Minsk and Vitebsk.

The international festival of arts Slavonic Bazaar in Vitebsk has become a symbol of Belarus’ festival movement. Attending the forum are popular singers from many countries, theatre workers, film directors, actors, artists, famous public figures. For its 16-year history Slavonic Bazaar has become one the most prestigious festivals in the world. In 2007 the International Federation of Festival Organisations (FIDOF) called Slavonic Bazaar in Vitebsk the festival of the year. The Vitebsk musical forum received the award for professionalism, excellent organisation, mastery of performers and popularisation of high humanistic ideas twice – in 2000 and 2004. The reconstruction of the main stage of Slavonic Bazaar in Vitebsk – the Summer Amphitheatre – became an important event of Belarus’ cultural life. About Br46 billion was injected in the reconstruction. Today the Summer Amphitheatre, fitted with the equipment produced by the world leading companies, seats more than six thousand people.

In 2007 Slavonic Bazaar gathered over 150 thousand spectators, 4,800 guests representing 32 countries. The repertoire featured 85 concerts, exhibitions, movie premieres, and theatrical productions.
A very intensive process of intercultural interaction lasted during the entire history of Belarus. In the centre of Europe, the country felt influence both of the East and the West. Many public and cultural processes overlapped the local traditions, enriching the traditional culture. Rich in talents, the Belarusian land was home to prominent figures, many of whom belong to the Belarusian culture as much as they do to cultures of other nations: Simeon of Polotsk, Adam Mitskevich, Stanislaw Moniuszko, Tadeusz Kosciusko, Michal Oginski, Marc Chagall and many others.

Contemporary Belarus continues the process of integration into the global community, exploration of the world’s cultural space. Belarus’ participation in the system of multilateral cultural cooperation is large. Belarusian Culture Days held abroad are an approach to popularising the rich Belarusian heritage. In 2007 the opportunity to get familiar with the culture of Belarus was granted to Egypt, Poland, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan. In turn, Belarus hosted days of Armenian and Indian cultures.

The International Chagall Days held in Marc Chagall’s home city Vitebsk were a major event on the international scale. In 2007 the 120th anniversary of the artist’s birthday was marked. Belarus presented an extensive programme: an exhibition in the Marc Chagall Museum, an international children’s and youth art school, a scientific conference dedicated to Marc Chagall’s art. A large-scale Belarusian-Latvian project “Marc Chagall – Mark Rothko: Art Without Boundaries” was worked out in Vitebsk and Daugavpils.

In 2007 the 125th anniversaries of Belarusian literature classicists, popular poets Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas, were widely celebrated across the country. Multiple art exhibitions, scientific conferences, festivals, concerts and actions were timed to the date. Representatives of Belarusian diaspora abroad – in Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Moldova, and Russia – were in
the thick of the festivities. In particular, two streets were named after Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas in the Polish town of Hajnowka. A commemorative sign to Yanka Kupala was unveiled in Gdansk. Riga played host to the second international festival of Belarusian songs. The Embassy of Ukraine in Belarus presented the first total Ukrainian translation of Yakub Kolas’ poem Novaya Zemlya (new land).

Belarusian Written Language Days held since 1994 are meant to enhance the prestige of the written language as the foundation of the centuries-old culture. The holiday is a tribute of deep respect for great Belarusian enlighteners Euphrosyne of Polotsk, Kirill of Turov, Frantsisk Skorina, Symon Bydnyi, Vasily Tiapinsky and others. Now a tradition, Belarusian Written Language Days are held in towns renowned as historical centres of culture, science, literature and book printing. The holiday has been held in Polotsk, Turov, Novogrudok, Nesvizh, Orsha, Pinsk, Zaslavl, Mstislavl, Mir, Kamenets, and Postavy. In 2007 Shklov welcomed the tradition. The event gathered over 2 thousand guests, including delegations from Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania, representatives of foreign diplomatic missions accredited in Belarus. During the festival of books and the press pavilions and theme stands dedicated to the history of Belarusian book printing and the country’s modern books were deployed, Belarusian mass media were widely represented. Presentations of books and periodicals, meetings with writers and journalists, the awarding of laureates of the national contest Book Art, of the national contest for the last year’s best work of art Golden Cupid cannot entirely fill the list of events held during the Belarusian Written Language Days.

Shklov. The Day of Belarusian Written Language. Book fair
Minsk is the capital of the Republic of Belarus, the centre of the Minsk region and the Minsk district. It is located on Minsk upland along the river Svisloch. The total area of the city is 256 square kilometres. Minsk is divided into nine administration districts. It is Belarus’ largest city with the population of 1,790,000 people or about 17 per cent of the whole Belarusian population. It is ranked 116th among other cities worldwide in the number of residents. Belarusians account for more than half of Minsk dwellers. There are also Russians, Ukrainians, Polish, Jews and Lithuanians.

Minsk is the capital of the state. It is the country’s political, financial, industrial, scientific and cultural centre. The President of the Republic of Belarus, the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus, the Parliament and the Government – the Council of Ministers – reside in Minsk. It is also home to the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, diplomatic corps, consulates and representative offices of international organizations in the Republic of Belarus.

Minsk has its own official symbols: a statute, a Coat of Arms and an anthem. The city marks its anniversary every second Saturday of September. In 2007, Minsk celebrated its 940th anniversary.

A peculiar location, per se at the crossroads of major routes from South to North and from West to East played an important role in the city’s history. Through many centuries Minsk has been repeatedly invaded, looted, burnt down, restored and destroyed again. The city was a south outpost of the Principality of Polotsk, a province centre in the Great Dutch of Lithuania and Rzeczpospolita, a province centre of the Russian Empire. The second half
of the 19th century saw a rapid development of Minsk triggered by the construction of a highroad from Moscow to Warsaw in 1846 and railways connecting Russia, Poland, Baltic States and Ukraine in 1871–1873.

In 1919, Minsk was proclaimed the capital of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. The 1920–1930s marked the heyday of the Minsk architectural design with Moscow and Leningrad architects coming to work in Minsk. Some buildings built in then-fashionable constructivism style survive in the city. However the construction boom was interrupted by the Great Patriotic War which turned into ruins about 80 per cent of the city. Due to such massive destructions it was suggested to move the capital from Minsk to some other city. However Minsk residents managed to restore the city turning it into one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. That is why, though Minsk is hundreds years old its present-day look has no traces of the past. It is the only city in the post Soviet area which retained all the features of the Soviet-style architecture.

Today the city faces new challenges: it has to introduce qualitative and quantitative changes to its economy, industry and infrastructure. Due to the general plan of Minsk reconstruction by 2030 the city will acquire a new impressive look. In accordance with the general plan, Minsk will be extended and will have a clear division between residential, recreational and manufacturing areas. The general plan contains a set of rules and regulations which can be used by investors.

Practically all newcomers note that Minsk is a very green city. According to the estimates, there are over 2 million trees in the city. There are about 34 square meters of greenery per every Minsk resident. Minsk is considered to be one of Europe’s most compact cities stretching for about 20km from North to South and 22km from West to East owing to the clever combination of buildings, green recreation zones and river semi-rings.

Minsk lies on the watershed of the Baltic and Black Seas that is why all the rivers flow not into the city but from it. The main water artery of the city, the river Svisloch, is not very big. The rapid development of manufacture in the post-war years increased the city’s demand for water (today underground waters satisfy about 60 per cent of the city’s demand). Three decades ago the Vileika-Minsk water system was constructed: waters of the river Neris were pumped via a 62-km canal to the river Svisloch. By the way, the Svisloch belongs to the Black Sea basin while the Neris belongs to the Baltic Sea basin. Thus, the Neris was turned around to become a river flowing to the Black Sea. Owing to the project the Minsk industrial complex was supplied with water, scenic recreation zones featuring a cascade of 14 reservoirs appeared in the Minsk suburbs and two river semi-rings now belt the city.
A special pride of Minsk residents is a zoological reserve Lebyazhy located in Pobeditelei Avenue. This comparatively small park occupying less than 60 hectares is home to ten species of birds listed in the Red Book of Belarus. Nesting in the reserve are crakes as well as other 14 species which are on the verge of extinction in Europe.

In the last few years several new impressive buildings appeared in Minsk, namely, the Central Railway Station, the National Library, Football Manege, Hôtel d’Europe. Soon the capital will see an entire architectural compound Minsk City replacing the old airport Minsk 1. However not only cutting-edge buildings are built in Minsk. One of the country’s state priorities is reproduction of the historical centre of the Belarusian capital. On July 14, 2004, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko signed the decree “On the development of Minsk’s historic downtown”. In October 2004, the Council of Ministers adopted a 2004–2010 comprehensive programme of reconstruction and restoration of Minsk historic downtown. This means that in the near future Minsk will regain its original look lost over the many decades. Some steps have already been made in this direction: the Minsk City Hall was recreated in Svobody Square. It first appeared in Minsk in 1499.
when the town received the Magdeburg Right allowing it to set up a town council.

A group of buildings of Prospekt Nezavisimosty, the main avenue of the Belarusian capital, is recognized as UNESCO historical and cultural heritage and is listed in the 10-volume encyclopaedia The World Architecture 1900–2002. The unique building hosting the National Library of the Republic of Belarus is also located in Prospekt Nezavisimosty.

Minsk is a large industrial centre. It produces almost one fourth of the industrial output of the country with trucks and tractors accounting for half of it. The major manufactures include Minsk Tractor Works (MTZ), Minsk Automobile Works (MAZ), Atlant, Minsk Motor Works, Minsk Mechanical Works named after S. I. Vavilov, Belkommunmash, Horizont, Integral, Keramin, etc. Over 300 manufactures produce trucks, tractors, wheel-tire tractors, buses and coaches, trolleybuses, trams, motorcycles and bicycles, refrigerators and TV sets, furniture, fabrics and many others. In the last few years Minsk manufacturers made a significant progress by introducing quality management systems. Every fifth factory has international quality management standard certificates. About 70 per cent of products are certified. Due to the investment activities companies managed to boost the output and simultane-
ously cut the material intensity and increase the labour productivity. The average labour productivity in the industrial sector grew by more than 12 per cent.

Foreign investments play an important role in the economy of the Belarusian capital. Now Minsk has over 1,800 companies with foreign participation in the statutory fund and their number has been constantly growing. Foreign companies and joint ventures were set up in partnership with investors from 60 countries. Minsk accounts for over 40 per cent of the foreign trade turnover of Belarus.

The capital of Belarus is a large scientific and education centre. There are 164 research institutions and the National Academy of Sciences in Minsk. Minsk-based universities also conduct scientific research. The major ones are Belarusian State University, Belarusian National Technical University, Minsk State Linguistic University. There are 34 institutions of higher learning, 28 specialised secondary educational establishments, 258 secondary schools, over 500 preschool facilities in Minsk.

The capital of Belarus boasts a broad network of cultural establishments which include 120 public libraries, 18 museums (including the National Arts Museum and the Belarusian State Museum of the Great Patriotic War), 12 theatres (including the Gorky National Drama Theatre, Yanka Kupala National Academic Theatre, National Academic Bolshoi Ballet Theatre), 36 clubs, 27 children’s arts schools, 20 cinema halls. There are about 300 magazines and 700 newspapers printed in the city.

**MINSK REGION**

The Minsk region is located in the central part of the Republic of Belarus. It includes 22 districts. The region population is 1,464,800 people. The administration centre of the region is the capital of the Republic of Belarus Minsk.

The territory of the region is 39,900 square kilometres (19.2 per cent of the total territory of Belarus). In the
East the Minsk region borders on the Mogilev region, in the North – on the Vitebsk region, in the West – on the Grodno region, in the South-West – on the Brest region, in the South – on the Gomel region. This is the only region in Belarus which has no borders with other countries. Yet, the region has good opportunities for the development of economic ties with other countries since all the major transport corridors pass via it.

Today the Minsk region is one of the most developed areas of Belarus. Favourable geographic position and natural resources foster the socioeconomic development of the region.

The Minsk region industry is varied with automobile engineering, chemical and petrochemical industries accounting for the greatest share of the industrial output. The region also has building materials manufactures, furniture-making factories and companies of light industry. In addition, companies processing agricultural products have been rapidly developing in the Minsk region. The region is leading in production of foodstuffs, flour, cereals and mixed fodder.

The major manufacturing centres are the towns of Soligorsk, Borisov, Zhodino, Slutsk, Molodechno. The leading manufactures are Belaruskali (potassium fertilizers), BelAZ (large and small-capacity trucks, quarry equipment), Molodechno Hardware Plant, Borisov Avtogidrotulisitel, Borisov Plant of Car-and-Tractor Electric Systems, Borisov Meat Factory, Slutsk Meat Factory, Slutsk Sugar Refining Plant, Gorodeya Sugar Factory.

The Minsk region is the largest agricultural area of Belarus. The majority of districts of the region are involved in cattle breeding and cultivation of grain, potatoes, beet-roots and flax. Agricultural companies located in the close vicinity of Minsk and other large towns also specialize in cultivation of fruits and vegetables.

As for minerals, the Minsk region is rich in potassium and rock salt, peat, shale oil, clay, sapropel, iron ore, mineral water.
The Minsk region has all the prerequisites to boost the country's export potential. Exports account for 50 per cent of the region output. The region trades with over 120 countries worldwide. The trade with the CIS member states accounts for over 45 per cent of the region trade turnover.

The Minsk region is located at the crossroads of the major transport itineraries connecting Western Europe with East, Black Sea regions with Baltic Sea regions. The railways from Brest to the Russian border pass through the region. The average velocity of freight trains is 100 km/hour; the average speed of passenger trains reaches 160 km/hour.

The Minsk region has very good motorway connections. The main transport flows head to Russia and Asian countries in the East, to Baltic Sea ports in the North, to European countries in the West and to Black Sea ports in the South.

With a view to attracting foreign investment in the Minsk region the free economic zone (FEZ) Minsk was set up in 1998. FEZ Minsk includes industrial districts of the Belarusian capital, the territory of National Airport Minsk, land plots of the Minsk region located in the Minsk and Smolevichi districts.

The territory of FEZ Minsk is 1,537.3 hectares. The FEZ specialises in production of export-oriented and import-substituting products.

As of July 1, 2007, FEZ Minsk had 70 companies registered. Some 22 countries invested in the FEZ Minsk residing companies. The main investors are Great Britain, Russia, Cyprus, the USA, Germany and Latvia.

Since the foundation of FEZ Minsk the total investments made up $344.1 million (as of July 1, 2007), of them $82.9 million were foreign.

In January–June 2007, FEZ Minsk residing companies attracted $39.9 million of investments, an increase of 32.1 per cent as against same time last year. Foreign investments accounted for $14 million or 55.5 per cent more than on the same time 2006; capital investments grew by 26 per cent to Br 43.9 billion.
The dominating industries in FEZ Minsk are automobile engineering and metal-working. Other well-developed industries are chemical and petrochemical; production of communications means, radio electronics and building materials; woodworking; furniture-making; paper and pulp industry, printing.

As many as 667 objects of historical and cultural heritage of the Republic of Belarus are located in the Minsk region. Among them are historic and archaeological sights, specimen of architecture, ancient estates, palaces, gardens and parks. The major historic and architectural specimen are as follows: an 18th century Roman-Catholic Church in Borisov; an ancient downtown, a park and a wooden church in Logoisk; ruins of a 16th–17th century castle in Zaslavl; St. Bernardine Roman-Catholic Church in the village of Budslav of the Myadel district; a 16th century castle in Nesvizh.

Exhibits of 19 state-run museums bear testimony to history and modern life of the country. Museums of Borisov, Slutsk and Myadel have the richest collections of historical artifacts. The most interesting of them are the National Museum of History and Culture Nesvizh, branches of the Yan-ka Kupala Literature Museum Vyazynka and Yakhimovshchina; branches of the Yakub Kolas Literature Museum Akhinchitsy, Albut, Smolnya, Lastok; Kuzma Chorny Museum; a branch of the National Fine Arts Museum of the Republic of Belarus in Raubichi.

There are several theatres in the Minsk region. The Minsk Regional Drama Theatre and the Minsk Regional Puppet Theatre Batleika are headquartered in Molodechno.

Various national and local festivals are frequently held in the Minsk region. Among them are the National Festival of Belarusian Song and Poetry in Molodechno, the National Festival of the Belarusian Chamber Music Muzy of Nesvizh; Choreographic Festival Khorovod Druzei as well as theatre festivals, tilting matches, tourist and bikers’ gatherings.
The town of Nesvizh is a real gem of the Minsk region. For many centuries it belonged to one of the richest families of Europe – the Radziwills. True connoisseurs of arts those Belarusian magnates hired the best foreign architects and artists. Nesvizh owes many of its unique features to the famous Italian architect Giovanni Maria Bernardoni. He designed the 16th century castle and Corpus Domini Roman-Catholic Church, the first Jesuit baroque building in the Rzeczpospolita. Its walls and ceiling are richly covered with frescos. The church hosts one of the largest necropolises in Europe with 102 sarcophaguses of the Radziwill family.

The church in the village Budslav of the Myadel district once was one of the greatest Roman-Catholic churches in Europe. It is famous for its miracle-working Budslav Mother of God icon painted in 1598 and given to the church in 1613. Today the icon is becoming a national object of worship. On July 2, 1998 the icon was crowned. In 1992, the tradition of pilgrimage to Budslav was renewed.

Many historic sights of the Minsk region are connected with the Great Patriotic War. The Memorial Compound Khatyn, a monument to all Belarusian villages burnt down by the Nazis during the war, has gained international recognition.

One of the calling cards of the Minsk region is the Stalin Line Compound featuring fortification facilities of Minsk built in the 1930s not far from the town of Zaslavl. The 40-hectare compound recreates WWII front-line units and artillery batteries.

The north of the Minsk region is famous for a picturesque chain of lakes. Lake Naroch and so-called Blue Lakes are real gems of the Belarusian nature. In 1999, with a view to preserving natural peculiarities of the region the National Park Narochansky was set up there. The total area of the Park is 94,000 hectares, of them 37,900 hectares are covered with woods. There are 42 lakes with the total area of 18,300 hectares in the Park.
The region has the greatest amount of pine forests and is also notable for its mineral waters.

Due to the picturesque landscape and mild climate the region is home to 18 sanatoria and rest homes.

The major part of the Berezinsky State Biosphere Reserve is located in the Minsk region some 120km to the north of Minsk. Founded in 1925 the Berezinsky Reserve occupies a territory of 82,000 hectares. Europe’s biggest marches are located there.

There are two biggest national skiing resorts in the Minsk region, namely, Silichi and Logoisk.

Due to its hilly landscape and scenic views the Logoisk district located some 30km away from Minsk has been dubbed Belarusian Switzerland. It hosts one of the most popular skiing resorts in Belarus which is second to no European skiing facility in providing high-class services to skiers and snowboarders.

Another skiing resort Silichi is open all year round. It has seven skiing tracks, a comfortable 100-bed hotel, cottages, restaurants, Russian saunas, a training compound, a ski renting facility and a gym. In summer holidaymakers have an opportunity to relax by the forest lake which has a beach, a café, boat rents, a volleyball ground, a paintball shooting range, children’s attractions. In autumn the area is open for fishermen.

In line with the tourism development programmes adopted by the Minsk Region Council for 2006–2010 the Minsk region has been actively developing agro- and eco-tourism. There are over 40 officially registered manor houses in the region. The vast majority of them are concentrated in the Myadel district. Eight manors of the Minsk, Logoisk, Pukhovichi, Cherven, Borisov and Molodechno districts were included into a 350-kilometer tourist itinerary The Ring of Manors.

There are over 100 hotels, motels, sanatoria, rest homes and other tourist facilities in the Minsk region.
The Brest region is located in south-west Belarus. It occupies around 32,800 square kilometres, which makes 15.7 per cent of the country’s territory. The Brest region borders upon Poland in the west and upon Ukraine in the south. The region comprises 16 districts, inhabited by around 1.5 million people, 14.7 per cent of the entire population of Belarus.

The city of Brest is the administrative centre of the region.

The city’s industrial potential is mainly channelled into producing consumer goods. Products offered by some companies are unparalleled in Belarus. The products are primarily gas stoves marketed under the trademark Gefest (up to 570 thousand gas stoves produced annually, with over 70 per cent of the figure exported) and electric bulbs made by Brest Electric Bulbs Plant (up to 190 million electric bulbs per annum). Brest-based companies also offer light industry goods such as carpets, sportswear, garments, knitwear, and hosiery.

Mechanical engineering and metalworking companies make the larger part of the city’s industry. Their number includes Tsvetotron, electrotechnical, radiotechnical, electromechanical and mechanical engineering works.

Food industry makes a major contribution to the city economy. The largest companies include Brest Meat-Packing Plant, Savushkin Product, Brestskoye Pivo, Brest Distillery BelAlco and others.

The city’s industry has a high export potential: products made by Brest companies are sold in over 40 countries, including Russia, Italy, Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, and others.

At present there are around 300 core industrial companies in the Brest region producing over $2 billion worth of goods per annum. Industry accounts for around half of the profits the region gets.
Food, light and mechanical engineering industries are the main ones in the Brest region. The well-developed braches include chemical industry, woodworking, timber, pulp and paper, flour-and-cereals industry, construction materials, power engineering. The region accounts for over 8 per cent of the national industrial output and 18 per cent of the country’s turnout of consumer goods.

Brest region companies account for over 90 per cent of the national press-forging equipment, up to 60 per cent of cotton fabrics, almost half of the flake boards, a third of hosiery output, a third of all cheeses made in Belarus, a quarter of facing tiles, a fifth of raw sugar and several other commodities that sell well in Belarus and abroad.

Products made by Santa-Bremor, Savushkin Produkt, Brest Meat-Packing Plant, Module (plastic window and door frames, insulated glazing units, module products, and other) sell well. Major efforts are exercised to keep exports in compliance with international standards.

The region is rich in natural resources. There is a major granite deposit used for manufacturing building stone. There are unique clays in the Stolin district allowing producing bricks able to survive over 100 winters. Belarus’ largest chalk deposit Khotislavskoye is located in the Malorita district, with the reserves as large as around 500 million tonnes. This quarry has a layer of pure quartz sand. The number of useful minerals the region has includes building stone, easily fusible and unfusible clay, glass, moulding and mortar sand, peat, sapropel, gravel. Deposits of slate coal and brown coal have also been discovered.

The regional agriculture specialises in meat and dairy farming, cultivation of potato, grain, sugar beet, and vegetables.

Major railroads, motorways, waterways and airways pass through the Brest region.

The transit corridor Berlin-Warsaw-Brest-Minsk-Moscow, direct roads to Vilnius and Kiev connect Western Europe with Russia, the Baltic states with Ukraine and Southern Europe. Near Brest there are two modern border checkpoints for vehicles on the Belarusian-Polish border. In the Brest and Kamenets districts there are border checkpoints to Poland and Ukraine. Around 80 per cent of the CIS states’ land export to Western Europe passes through the region.

There are several important railway junctions in the region. The Brest railway junction is a major one, securing transit traffic of the CIS states bound for Western Europe in Moscow and Saint Petersburg directions.

The city of Brest has an international all-weather first-class airport, which can handle heavy aircraft such as Boeing 747.

Waterway traffic uses the rivers Pripyat, Pina, Mukhavets, Styr, Garyn, Dnepr-Bug Canal and Mikashevichi Canal.
The oil pipeline Druzhba and gas pipelines Torzhok-Minsk-Ivatsevichi and Kobrin-Brest-Warsaw pass through the region.

The Brest region maintains trade and economic cooperation with economic agents in 112 countries.

The region expects good cooperation prospects within the framework of the transboundary association Euroregion Bug, which comprises the Brest region of Belarus, the Lublin Voivodship of Poland, and the Volyn region of Ukraine. Euroregion Bug concentrates efforts on fostering mutually beneficial economic links, cooperation in social and cultural areas, in issues regarding ecology and prevention of emergencies.

The annual multi-industry fair “Brest. Common-wealth” is of much importance for the development of interregional ties.

**The free economic zone Brest** was created in March 1996. It occupies as much as 71 square kilometres and comprises two areas. The first one is located to the northwest of Brest and adjoins the state border near the border checkpoint for vehicles “Kukuryki-Kozlovichi”. It develops through building a customs terminal, warehouse facilities, and service facilities. The second area is located to the east of Brest, near the airport and next to the motorway Berlin-Warsaw-Minsk-Moscow.

As of July 1, 2007, FEZ Brest had 81 resident companies, including 76 functioning ones. There are investors from 20 countries in the FEZ.

At present FEZ resident companies are involved in fish processing, timber processing, furniture making, production of MDF fibreboards, confectionery, meat products, luminescent lamps, paints and varnishes, road-marking machines, garments, refrigerating equipment, electrical products, heat-resistant glass sheets, plastic goods, polyethylene film and others.

Santa-Bremor LLC is the largest FEZ Brest resident company. It was registered in 1998.

The company produces fish preserves and ice cream as well as tinned sea food. $99.5 million has already been invested in Santa-Bremor. Thanks to Santa-Bremor’s fish product exports to Germany, Canada, the USA, Russia and
other countries, Belarus is now considered a “sea power”. It is remarkable that the world’s capelin caviar output makes 6 thousand tonnes per annum, with Japan buying 3.5 thousand tonnes and Brest-based Santa-Bremor processing the rest.

Products by such FEZ Brest resident companies as STiM (construction materials and machines), Inco-Food (meat products), First Chocolate Company LLC and some other companies are well-known in the CIS.

At present priority development avenues of the FEZ include creation of high-tech companies, pharmaceutical, automobile, electronic and mechanical engineering companies. Attracting investments for setting up facilities to produce goods for export and import-substituting goods is believed to be the most promising avenue.

The Brest region is widely known abroad thanks to the memorial Brest Hero Fortress and Belovezhskaya Pushcha, the visiting card of the land.

The Brest region has a lot of memorable places reminding of Lev Sapega, Adam Mitskevich, Napoleon Orda, Tadeusz Kosciuszko and other prominent people.

All in all, the Brest region has over 2 thousand historical, cultural and architectural monuments, including the pearl of Belarusian Polesie – Pinsk, original Motol and Bezdezh, ancient Kamenets with its famous Belaya Vezha (White Tower), Ishkodl with ancient gothic architectural monument Trinity Catholic Church and of course, the hero-city Brest.

The memorial Brest Hero Fortress is a symbol of the deeds accomplished by the Soviet nation during the Great Patriotic War. The Brest fortress was one of the first to receive the blow of Nazi invaders on June 22, 1941. The courage and heroism of Brest fortress defenders have entered the history to be remembered for ever. The Brest fortress was built back in the 19th century following an order of the Russian emperor. It was solemnly opened on April 26, 1842.
The regional local lore museum can tell a lot about the history of the city. The museum’s affiliates include archaeological museum Berestye (built on the site where remnants of a town dated back to the 12th century were found), museums City History, Saved Artistic Values, Native Nature, Cosmos. In Brest there are two theatres – Brest Drama and Music Theatre and Brest Puppet Theatre as well as Brest Region Philharmonic, which has an ancient music ensemble Kontrdans.

The museum of history of Belarusian Polesie in the town of Pinsk as well as two railway history museums – the Railway Machines Museums in Brest and the museum of the Baranovichi department of the Belarusian Railways in Baranovichi represent a special interest.

Towns of the Brest region welcome multiple international and national festivals and sports competitions. The most famous ones include the international theatre festival Belaya Vezha, January Musicale, a superlight aviation and aeronautics festival in Pruzhany, a musical holiday Belarusian Fanfares in Baranovichi, rallies of bikers and trophy raids.

There are 280 archaeological, 300 architectural, and 1,222 historical monuments in the Brest region. The number includes Kosovo Palace in the Ivatsevichi district, a park and mansion ensemble in the village of Skoki, Brest district, a Franciscan monastery in Pinsk, a park and mansion ensemble in the village of Gremyache, Kamenets region, palace ruins in the town of Ruzhany, a chapel erected for “Stalwart forefathers who perished in the battle of Gorodechno on July 21, 1812”.

There are many unique natural complexes and natural monuments in the region. The most precious ones are protected by the state. There are 117 protected territories and objects, occupying a total of 417,500 hectares, 12.7 per cent of the region’s total area in the Brest region.

The national park Belovezhskaya Pushcha is a unique forest territory in Europe. It preserves the last of the once vast plain forests and unique plants and animals, primarily aurochs. The Pushcha was first mentioned in chronicles in 983, with access regulations close to those of a forbidden territory established in the early 15th century. The protected area was used to found the national park Belovezhskaya Pushcha in 1991. In 1992 it was inscribed onto the UNESCO World Heritage List. In 1993 Belovezh-
Belovezhskaya Pushcha was turned into a biosphere reserve and awarded a European Diploma in 1997.

Belovezhskaya Pushcha occupies around 90 thousand hectares. Its flora and fauna include versatile plants and animals. The forests boast white fir, various kinds of fir trees, pine tree, witch-elm, over one thousand oaks from 300 to 700 years old, ash trees 450 years old, pine trees 220 years old, cedars 150 years old. Belovezhskaya Pushcha also boasts aurochs, red deer, wolves, wild boars, lynxes and other animals as well as various birds and fishes. All the naturalistic systems of Belovezhskaya Pushcha are preserved in their natural state.

Visitors to Belovezhskaya Pushcha can see historical and cultural monuments located in the natural park such as a homestead of Prince Tyshkevich, an emperor’s road, wild-hive beekeeping facilities, an ancient tower Belaya Vezha and other places of interest.

Natural peculiarities of the land can be observed in the nature museum of the national park Belovezhskaya Pushcha in the village of Kamenyuki, Kamenets district.

The Brest region is the heart of Belarusian Polesie. It boasts unique natural complexes combining forest and swamp landscapes. Despite industrial peat mining and land improvement the region has preserved around half of the swamps in the original state. These territories are the home to the national park Pripyatsky. It is situated 250 km south of Minsk and 350 km east of Brest and the western border of Belarus.

A protected area was set up in the form of a landscape-hydrological reserve in the flood plain of the river Pripyat in 1969. A national park was set up there in 1996. Its territory exceeds 83 thousand hectares.

Inundated landscapes in the park represent peculiar interest. The regularly flooded lands – in spring the Pripyat becomes up to 10–15 km wide – is now a home to peculiar vegetation complexes, namely unique oak groves and ash forests substituted in low lands by sticky alder forests and willow coppice, where more than 30 unique floodplain lakes and several small springs are located.

The park’s flora is represented by 826 varieties of higher plants and over 200 varieties of moss. One can find there all types of forests and swamps of the Belarusian Polesie. The
fauna of the national park counts 45 species of mammals, 265 species of birds, 11 amphibians, 37 fishes. It is home to aurochs, badgers, lynxes, black storks, grey cranes, harrier eagles, eagle owls, spotted eagles, freshwater turtles, natterjacks, smooth snakes, sterlet.

In the Brest region recreation areas are centred around lakes Beloye (Brest district, Bereza district), Gat (Baranovichi district), Papernya (Pruzhany district), Vygonoščanskoje (Ivatsevichi district), Zavishye (Ivanovo district), the river Mukhavets (Zhabinka and Drogichin districts), and others.

Visitors of Brest city and the region can use over 50 hotels, motels, sanatoriums, recreation centres and tourist camps.

VITEBSK REGION

The Vitebsk region is located in the northern part of Belarus. It borders upon Lithuania, Latvia and Russia and occupies 40 thousand square kilometres. The region comprises 21 administrative territorial districts. The population totals 1.334 million, with urban Belarusians accounting for some 70 per cent of the total.

The city of Vitebsk, a major cultural and industrial centre of the republic, is the administrative centre of the region. Vitebsk-made TV sets Vityas, silk, carpets, BelWest and Marko footwear are known in many countries.

Vitebsk companies maintain trade links with 40 countries. The major trade partners are Russia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Moldova.

The city has a developed educational network and is home to the country’s oldest educational establishments such as Vitebsk State University named after P.M. Masherov (founded in 1918). Vitebsk State Medical University was founded on November 1, 1934, has seven faculties, a central research lab. Graduates of the university work in 109 countries.

The State Veterinary Medicine Academy is the supreme Belarusian establishment teaching veterinary medics and zoologist engineers. The academy educates students from 12 countries.

Vitebsk State Technological University represents a synergy of educational, research and manufacturing facilities. Scientific efforts are also led by the Economic Research Institute of the Economy Ministry and the Acoustic Engineering Institute of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus.

The core of the Vitebsk region industry is power generation (Lukoml State District Power Plant, Novopolotsk Combined Heat Power Plant), oil processing and petrochemistry (Naftan, Polymir, and Polotsk Stek—

The Coats of Arms of Vitebsk
lovolokno), mechanical engineering, light and food industries. The region produces all of the country’s linen cloth, polyethylene, half of the petrochemical products and power, around 40 per cent of carpets, over 30 per cent of hosiery. The region also produces machine-tools, footwear, construction materials, fat, tinned meat and milk.

The largest specialised enterprises are concentrated in Vitebsk, the Polotsk industrial node and Orsha.

More than a thousand of the region’s economic agents are actively involved in foreign trade, with half of the region’s make shipped to almost 80 countries.

The agriculture specialises in grain and forage crops as well as flax. Fisheries are well-developed.

In the region there are explored reserves of dolomite, with some of them commercially developed. There are reserves of cement and fusible clays and sandy loam, a lot of peat and construction sand.

The region has the country’s largest density of rivers and the largest total lake area. Vitebsk region rivers flow into the Western Dvina (80 per cent) as well as the Dnepr, Neman and Lovot. In the region there are more than 2.8 thousand lakes, the largest ones are Osveyskoye, Lukomskoye, Drivyaty, Drivyaty, Nescherdo, Snudy, Yezerische, Strusto and Absterno.

The Vitebsk region makes part of the euroregion Lake District.

International trunk railroads Moscow-Orsha-Minsk-Warsaw, Saint Petersburg-Vitebsk-Orsha-Kiev, Smolensk-Vitebsk-Polotsk-Riga pass through the region. The largest railway junctions are Orsha, Vitebsk and Polotsk.

The major motorways are Moscow-Orsha-Minsk-Brest, Saint Petersburg-Vitebsk-Orsha-Kiev, Smolensk-Vitebsk-Polotsk-Daugavpils, and Vitebsk-Lepel-Minsk.

Waterway navigation is used along the river Western Dvina from Velizh to Polotsk and along the Dnepr from Orsha and on. There is an airport in Vitebsk.

The free economic zone Vitebsk was set up in August
1999. It is located in the city of Vitebsk and comprises seven parts with the total area as large as 1.09 thousand hectares. On preferential terms resident companies are given production premises and installations for various purposes with the total area as large as 50 thousand square metres. The FEZ offers land plots fit for building new facilities. The production premises are located within the city and have all the utilities, including automobile and railway access. The buildings, facilities and land plots are rented on a long-term basis.

Since the establishment and up to July 1, 2007 FEZ Vitebsk drew Br88 billion in investments.
In H1 2007 resident companies of FEZ Vitebsk more than doubled their fixed-capital investments in comparison with the same period of last year to a total of Br13.8 billion. Apart from that, $1.93 million in foreign loans and direct investments has been attracted to finance investment projects.

Investors are provided with the necessary conditions for creating proprietary infrastructure.
As of July 1, 2007, FEZ Vitebsk had 31 resident companies from 12 countries, including 29 functioning companies.
In FEZ Vitebsk there are successfully operating industrial enterprises, which produce construction materials, foodstuffs, petroleum products, garments, timber, electronics and veterinary medications. Resident companies of FEZ Vitebsk also offer chemicals for agriculture, fibre optic cables, waste treatment installations and equipment, liquid crystal displays, fur goods and lighting fixtures.
The production of fibre optic cables by Russian Soyuz-Kabel LLC is one of the successful projects implemented in FEZ Vitebsk at present. The company exports almost the entire output to Russia. Over the last several years around $8 million has been invested in manufacturing.
Vitebsk Mechanical Engineering Plant Novmash, which specialises in manufacturing oil and gas equipment, became a resident company of FEZ Vitebsk in 2007. Other new residents are Vityas (TV sets), BELIT (components for TV sets and home appliances), PECTO LLC (pectin and pectin-containing products), furniture maker Vifurn.
In 2007, free economic zone Vitebsk plans to increase the area of sector No 5, which occupies less than 50 hec-
The expansion is expected to bring an additional $70 million into the region’s economy. Roughly the same amount is supposed to be invested within the next 5–7 years as planned projects are accomplished.

There are 600 architectural monuments, 136 historical and cultural monuments, 625 archaeological monuments in the Vitebsk region. The history and the modern state are reflected by 27 museums, including the Vitebsk Region Local Lore Museum and the National Polotsk Historical and Cultural Museum-Preserve, one of the richest in monuments.

The Vitebsk land is closely connected with the art of internationally recognised painters I.Repin, I.Khrutsky, K.Malevich, M.Shagal, M.Savitsky, Z.Azgur. The Vitebsk region welcomes an international children’s plain air named after I.Repin and an international Shagal’s plain air as a tribute to the prominent artists of the past and a kind of creative studio for the modern followers of the Vitebsk art school.

Vitebsk has the National Academic Drama Theatre named after Yakub Kolas, Belarusian Theatre Lyalka, a regional philharmonic, a concert hall.

The international art festival Slavonic Bazaar in Vitebsk, a major event for Belarus and the world, has become the symbol of festival movement. The festival gathers popular artists from many countries, theatre figures, movie directors, actors, painters as well as prominent public figures and politicians. Slavonic Bazaar in Vitebsk has been awarded “The Festival of the Year” twice by the International Federation of Festival Organizations (FIDOF) for professionalism, irreproachable organisation, mastery of performers, and the popularisation of higher humanistic purposes at the international level.

The Vitebsk region hosts traditional musical festivals: a festival named after Sollertinsky, a jazz music festival, a bard music festival Vitebsk Fall, a guitar music festival Minstrel, an international festival of modern choreography, a festival of ballet dance, a festival of organ music; a contest of dress designers White Amphora; annual folklore holidays

The 16th International Arts Festival Slavonic Bazaar in Vitebsk

Vitebsk town hall (regional museum of local history and culture)

The manor-museum of L.Repin in the village of Zdravnevo

The 16th International Arts Festival Slavonic Bazaar in Vitebsk
Ringing Cymbals, Dnepr Voices, Braslav Lightnings.

One of the most ancient Belarusian cities, Polotsk, is famous for its Sofia Cathedral and Saviour Transfiguration Church with original frescos of the 11th century. Both the architectural monuments are part of the world cultural heritage. It was in Polotsk that the masterpiece of applied arts, the famous cross of Euphrosyne of Polotsk was made. The relics of Saint Euphrosyne are kept in the Saint Euphrosyne Convent.

Polotsk is the native land of Frantsisk Skorina. Thanks to Skorina Belarusians were among the first Europeans to get a printed Bible in 1517.

In the Vitebsk region there is the most beautiful place in Belarus – the national park Braslav Lakes. The park was set up in 1995, occupies around 70 thousand hectares.

Water ecological systems with versatile and sometimes unique flora and fauna are the key riches of the Braslav Lakes, home to over 800 plant varieties, including around 20 rare ones and listed by the Red Book of the Republic of Belarus. In the lakes one can find about 30 species of fish, including eel of economic importance. The park is a home to up to 35 per cent of the birds nesting in Belarus, including 45 species listed by the Red Book. There abide rare animals such as badgers, lynxes, brown bears, flying squirrels, elks, boars and roe deer.

In the region there are 9 sanatoriums, 15 preventoriums, tourist recreational centres, including well-known Belarusian resorts Lettsy, Braslav, Braslav Lakes, Losvido, and Orsha.
The Gomel region is located in the south-eastern part of Belarus along the state border with Russia and Ukraine. The region covers the area of 40.4 thousand square kilometres and is divided into 21 administrative-territorial districts. This is the largest region in Belarus.

About 1.5 million people live in the region. Belarusians account for 84.2 per cent of the total population.

The administrative centre of the region is the city of Gomel.

Gomel is the largest industrial city of Belarus. Gomel industrial enterprises produce 44 per cent of the region’s aggregate output. Gomel boasts big industrial companies producing peat extracting machines, fodder and grain harvesters, starting engines, glass pipes, bearings, glazing plate glass and iron castings. These products are much in demand abroad. The following companies are famous far beyond the bounds of Belarus: Gomselmash (farm machines to cultivate and harvest crops), the Gomel-based Production Association Kristall (diamond production and precious stone grinding), Spartak (chocolate and confectionery), Gomeldrev (furniture), Gomelsteklo (glassware), Komintern (man’s suits and women’s costumes) and the garment factory 8th of March (knitwear).

Gomel is the scientific and cultural centre of the region. There are such establishments of higher education in the city as Frantsisk Skorina State University of Gomel, Belarusian State University of Transport, Gomel State Medical University, Pavel Sukhoy State Technical University of Gomel, Belarusian Trade-Economic University of Consumer’s Co-operation and Gomel Institute of Engineers of the Emergency Ministry of Belarus. There are also many special secondary education establishments, colleges and vocational schools in Gomel.

A significant contribution to the research activities is made by Gomel scientists, engineers and designers who work for 20 research institutions, design offices and relevant affiliates. Widely
known are achievements of research staff of the Forestry Institute of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and the Institute of Mechanics of Metal and Polymeric Systems.

Gomel scientists also analyze consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. Specialists of the Polesye Radiation Ecological Reserve examine and preserve Chernobyl-affected territories in their natural state as the radiation impact made on that area is absolutely unique.

Some 69.3 per cent of the territory of the Gomel region was contaminated with radionuclides after the Chernobyl disaster. People were resettled from the most contaminated areas. As a result agricultural production declined in importance. The actual arable land area was reduced (today arable land covers only 35.3 per cent of the territory); the cattle stock fell down.

Industrial facilities occupy the central role in the region’s economic sector. Industrial manufacturers produce steel and rolled metal, mechanical engineering, chemical and woodworking products, light industry goods and foodstuffs. They also offer oil products, sulphuric acid, phosphoric fertilizers, fodder harvesters, bearings, machines, glass, paper, cardboard, wallpaper, construction materials, furniture, kitchen salt, soap and agricultural products. About one third of all products are exported to 70 countries.

The Gomel region has oil reserves, potassium and rock salt fields, brown coal and oil-shale deposits as well as peat, reserves of building stone, sand, chalk, gypsum, loam, kaolin and mineral water. Important traffic arteries run through the region, which also has big railway junctions – Gomel, Zhlobin and Kalinkovichi. The region centre is located at the intersection of railways Odessa-Kiev-St. Petersburg, Bakhmach-Vilnius and Bryansk-Brest.

Motorways St. Petersburg-Kiev-Odessa, Bryansk-Kobrin, Gomel-Minsk and Gomel-Mozyr connect all centres of the region.

The Gomel Airport offers flights to near and far abroad. Regular navigation routes go along the Pripyat, Dnepr and Berezina. Business contacts with the neighbouring countries are promoted within the framework of the Euroregion Dnepr.

In 1998, the Gomel region set up a free economic zone Gomel-Raton, which is divided into production, export and free customs areas.
As of July 1, 2007, there were 33 residents registered in the zone including 32 operating companies. Enterprises set up with foreign capital work in Gomel-Raton. Investments come from Russia, Germany, France, the Czech Republic, Lichtenstein, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Poland, Switzerland and the USA.

As of July 1, 2007, some Br164.8 billion of capital investments was utilised by Gomel-Raton residents. Since its founding the zone has attracted $48.9 million of foreign investments.

In January-June 2007, Gomel-Raton residents attracted $12.8 million of investments including $4.9 million of foreign financial resources.

In H1 2007 capital investments utilised by Gomel-Raton companies neared Br21 billion, up by 46.6 per cent on the same period of 2006.

The zone offers all necessary facilities, warehouses, a well-developed infrastructure and a whole set of utilities services for the work of radioelectronic, instrument making, electrotechnical and cable manufacturing companies.

Free lands are available for implementation of new investment projects.

Direct foreign investments attracted by Gomel-Raton residents accounted for 53.1 per cent of the total foreign funds invested in the companies of the Gomel region and 57.9 per cent – in Gomel enterprises.

The companies-residents work in such sectors of economy as petrochemistry, mechanical engineering, metal working, woodworking and pulp and paper industries. They produce construction materials, glass ware and foodstuffs. Gomel-Raton top managers are interested in promoting science-intensive, innovation-based and environmentally friendly production on the territory of the zone.

One of the promising residents of Gomel-Raton is the Russian private company VEZA-G. The company has been successfully implementing an investment project “Climatic Equipment Production”. In line with the project VEZA-G will launch absolutely new production for the Republic of Belarus. It will manufacture industrial central frame-panel conditioners. Since its founding the Russian company has injected $2.1 million into the project including $0.8 million in capital investments. A pilot batch of the products was made in June 2007.

There are 1,360 historical and cultural, 140 architectural and 1,040 archeological monuments and sites in the Gomel region. The region also boasts more than 20 museums including the Gomel regional museum of local lore, the Vetka arts and crafts museum and two picture galleries.

The Gomel Palace and Park Ensemble has been one of the most famous sights of the city for more than two hundred years. Its pearl is a magnificent palace of the Rumyantsevs-Paskevichs, one of the best species of the Classicism-style architecture not only in Belarus but in the whole CIS area.
There is a Gavriil Vaschenko picture gallery in Gomel. The artist’s creative work had a strong impact on the whole Belarusian art. Gavriil Vaschenko is a People’s Artist of the Republic of Belarus, an Honored Art Worker, a State Prize-winner of the Republic of Belarus. His works are very popular in Belarus and abroad. The International Biographical Centre in Cambridge called Gavriil Vaschenko “Person of the 20th Century” and “Person of the Year ’92”. The American Biographical Institute called him “Man of the Year ’94” and awarded him a Medal of Honor 2000.

There is a regional drama theatre, a puppet show and a youth experimental theatre-studio in Gomel.

The Gomel State Circus is considered to be one of the best circus shows of Belarus. Performances of the Gomel city symphonic and chamber orchestras are always a great success as well. The Gomel regional philharmonic society organises concerts of Belarusian and foreign pop singers.


The region is famous for a medieval centre – the Old Turov – the former capital of the Turov Principality. Kirill of Turov (1130–1182), a philosopher, preacher and author of many works, which make part of the golden stocks of the Orthodox compositions, lived and worked there. In 1993 a monument was erected to this outstanding man in Turov.

Founded in 1680 by the Old Believers fled from Russia, the Vetka arts and crafts museum presents a unique collection of black-letter books.

Those who are keen on archeology can visit a small Belarusian town of Yurovichi in the Kalinkovichi district. A whole cluster of specimens of archeology including six ancient settlements, remainders of an ancient fortified town and a burial mound were discovered there. Collections of the archeological-ethnographical museum of Frantsisk Skorina State University of Gomel may arouse deep interest as well.
The national park Pripyatsky was once laid out on the territory of the region to preserve unique landscapes of the Belarusian Polesye. This is the only place on the Earth where ancient floodplain oak woods exist.

More than a half of all Belarusian oak woods grow in the Gomel region. There are many lakes in the region as well. The biggest one is Lake Krasnoye with the area of 44 square kilometres. Big navigable rivers – the Dnepr, the Sozh, the Berezina and the Pripyat run through the region.

The Gomel region boasts 3 sanatoriums – Pridneprovsky, Solnechny and Vasiljevka, 15 health centres, 4 children’s recuperation facilities, 4 health resorts, 3 student’s health centres, 5 recreation centres and 29 children’s summer camps.

More than 30 hotels and motels offer their services to Gomel guests.

The Grodno region is located in the north-western part of Belarus and borders upon Poland and Lithuania. The region covers 25 thousand square kilometres (12 per cent of Belarus’ total territory). It is divided into 17 districts with the population of 1 million 260 thousand. Belarusians account for 62.3 per cent of the population, Poles – 24.8 per cent, Russians – 10.1 per cent, Ukrainians – 1.8 per cent, Jews – 0.4 per cent, Lithuanians – 0.2 per cent, Tatars – 0.2 per cent and other nationalities – 0.4 per cent.

Due to its geographical situation the region is actively promoting economic relations with Poland, Lithuania and Russia (the Kaliningrad region) within the framework of the Euroregion Neman. The Euroregion unites Grodno region, Mariampol and Alytus regions of Lithuania and the Polish Województwo Podlaskie.

The Grodno region has a highly developed industrial sector. The biggest companies are located in Lida, Slonim, Volkovysk, Novogrudok and Smorgon.
The city of Grodno is the administrative centre of the Grodno region.

Grodno is one of the oldest cities of Belarus – it was first mentioned in the chronicles more than 800 years ago. Grodno is located at the intersection of important trade routes and is a connecting link between the countries of Eastern and Western Europe.

Grodno is a large industrial city. Most developed are light industry (fine cloths, textile, fancy goods), chemical industry (nitrogen fertilizers, chemical fibre), food, mechanical engineering and metalworking industries (production of drive shafts and machines). There are power engineering, woodworking and leather processing facilities, companies producing construction materials, a tobacco factory and a brewery in the city.

There are several establishments of higher education in Grodno including Grodno State University, Grodno State Medical University and Grodno Higher Theological Seminary.

Grodno region companies specialise in the production of nitric fertilizers and chemical fibre, truck spare and component parts, technological equipment, furniture, footwear, textile and tobacco goods, ready-made garments, woodworking products and construction materials.

The region’s rapidly growing agricultural sector stimulates development of the agricultural processing industry. Besides, the agricultural production indices of the region are close to the European and world levels.

The following railways cross the territory of the Grodno region – Minsk-Molodechno-Smorgon-Vilnius, Vilnius-Lida-Baranovichi, Molodechno-Lida-Mosty-Grodno, Vilnius-Grodno-Bialystok (Poland). Lida, Grodno, Volkovysk are the largest regional railway junctions. Transportation of cargoes on narrow gauge railways meeting European standards is available.

The Grodno airport receives virtually all types of aircraft.

The main motorways running via the Grodno region lead to Minsk, Vilnius, Baranovichi and Brest. One of the main arterial roads of Eurasia goes through the region promoting broader international co-operation. Owing to the favourable geographical situation, the Grodno region has become an integrated element in the trade between Western and Central Europe and the CIS and Asian countries.

One of the major components of the transport industry of the region is water transport and navigable waterways – the Neman and the Schara. The Grodno River Port may be used for shipping cargoes along the Neman through Lithuania to the Baltic Sea. The neighbouring Belarus-EU border terminal is located 15 kilometres away from the city.

Branches of the gas pipelines Dashava (Ukraine) – Minsk – Ivatsevichi – Lida – Vilnius – Ivatsevichi – Slonim – Grodno run through the territory of the region.
There is a free economic zone Grodnoinvest in the Grodno region. The zone is divided into independent plots of land of the total area of 1,046 hectares in Grodno and the Grodno district.

Founded in 2002 Grodnoinvest unites 38 residents from 17 countries including 29 operating companies. Grodnoinvest residents work in various fields – woodworking, mechanical engineering and metalworking industries, production of construction materials, light industry goods and foodstuffs, chemical and petrochemical products.

Since its founding Grodnoinvest has attracted $65.1 million of investments (as of September 1, 2007) including $29.5 million of foreign investments.

In January-June 2007, the companies-residents attracted $12.5 million of financial resources or three times more as against the same period of 2006. The level of foreign investments reached $8.65 million and exceeded last year’s analogous index over 2.6 times. In H1 2007, some Br18.2 billion of capital investments was attracted, up by 46 per cent on the same period of 2006.

Foreign investments attracted by Grodnoinvest accounted for 32.8 per cent of the total financial resources utilised by the companies of the Grodno region and for 42.4 per cent – of the city of Grodno.

Among the most successful investment projects carried out by Grodnoinvest is the production of multilayer polyamide thermostable sausage casing using flexography technologies launched by Bigan Co., which was set up with the American ownership. The company manufactures import substituting products and is the only producer of sausage casing which uses flexography technologies. At present Bigan Co. satisfies 45 per cent of the domestic demand for these products. The company has already utilised $3 million of investments and intends to inject $1.5 million more in its production facilities.

The production of plant protection means is one of the biggest projects launched by a Grodnoinvest resident – Grodnoraiagroservis Co. in 2007. Till 2010 the company plans to use about $8 million of financial resources.

Architectural compounds are the main physical artifacts inherited by Grodno residents from past generations. This is a major part of their cultural heritage. These are monuments of various epochs and styles reflecting facts from the convoluted history of the city. Monuments of the Russian art of building survive (reminders of the caste walls and towers, the Lower Church and Sts. Boris and Gleb Church), the Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque-style species of architecture (Bernardin Cathedral and Monastery, Old Castle), Baroque-style monuments (Jesuit, Bridgettine and French Convents with Cathedrals), etc.

Sts. Boris and Gleb (Kolozha) Church is a unique specimen of the Russian art of building. Located on a high steep bank of the Neman it has not completely survived: its arches and cupola collapsed long ago and the southern and a part of the western wall fell to the river.
hit by a landslide in 1853. During the Soviet Union times the church was restored and is operating now. Visitors may see fresco paintings of the 12th century inside the church.

St. Frances Xavier Cathedral (earlier Jesuit Cathedral) built in 1678 is a splendid specimen of Belarus’ architecture of the 17–18th centuries. Once the cathedral and monastery were the richest churches in Rzeczpospolita. They occupied a whole residential area in the centre of the town. Architectural plastic, sculpture and paintings used to decorate the cathedral.

There are two theatres in Grodno – the Grodno Regional Drama Theatre and the Grodno Puppet Show.

The Grodno city and suburbs boasts many historical monuments and specimens of architecture. Among them are Stanislawow country estate with a park and August palace, a former residence of the Polish King August Poniatowski. These are small Baroque-style buildings having certain features of the Classicism architecture dating back to the 1760s–1770s. Only fragments of the palace survived while the country estate is used as an educational establishment.

The town of Novogrudok is the first capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which hosted sessions of the Lithuanian tribunal and the Seim of the Polish gentry to elect the Grand Duke of Lithuania and later – the King of Poland.

It was Novogrudok where poet Adam Mitskevich was born. His family moved there from the farmstead of Zaoje. In Novogrudok Adam Mitskevich went to school and started writing his first poems in the Polish language though he called himself a Lithuanian. An exposition of the local museum will tell visitors about the creative activity of the Belarusian poet and everyday life of the Belarusian gentry.

There is a Krasnoselsky archeological complex on the territory of the region. It is a unique collection
of artifacts from the Mesolite epoch to the late Middle Ages.

The Grodno region traditionally hosts many festivals. Among them are the All-Belarusian Festival of National Cultures, the republican festival of arts “Mir Castle”, the republican festival of the creative youth of drama theatres and puppet shows “Nadezhda”, the regional folk music festival “May Musicians Play!”, the international tilting match in Novogrudok, artistic meetings “Grodno-Bialystok” and others.

The Grodno region has managed to preserve and restore several historical castles. Among them is Mir Castle – an ancient specimen of architecture that in 2002 was inscribed onto the UNESCO World Heritage List.

A part of the national park Belovezhskaya Puscha and the Nalibokskiy hunting reserve are located in the region. There is also a hydrological reserve Dikoye, landscape reserves Svytazanka and Ozera, Gozhovsky, Porechsky, Sopotskinsky and Slonimsky botanical reserves in the region.
Zhirovichi Monastery is one of the main pilgrimage sites not only in the region but also in the whole country. Besides, the miracle-working Zhirovichi Mother of God icon is kept there.

**MOGILEV REGION**

The Mogilev region is located in the eastern part of Belarus and borders upon the Smolensk and Bryansk regions of Russia. It covers the area of 29.1 thousand square kilometres and is divided into 21 administrative-territorial units. Belarusians account for 86 per cent of the total population of the region – over 1,180 thousand people. Town-dwellers account for more than 70 per cent of the population.

The city of Mogilev is the administrative centre of the region.

Chemical and petrochemical industries (32.3 per cent), mechanical engineering and metalworking (30.3 per cent), food industry (12.1 per cent), light industry (10.9 per cent) occupy leading positions in the industrial system of Mogilev.

The economic sector accounts for 48.6 per cent of the activities of Mogilev region.

The Mogilev region has an enormous industrial potential. It is the only producer of truck and car tyres, elevators, curtain lace and tape recorders in the country. Its companies produce 76 per cent of chemical fibre and yarn, 67 per cent of rubber footwear and 52 per cent of electric motors in Belarus.

Mogilev, Bobruisk, Krichev and Osipovichi are the regional industrial centres. Products made by two industrial giants – Mogilevkhimvolokno and Belshina account for more than 25 per cent of the total output of the Mogilev region.

Arable land covers 50.3 per cent of the territory of the region. In 1986–1991 some 47 thousand hectares of the Chernobyl-affected land was withdrawn from the agriculture turnover. Plant growing plays a leading role in the agricultural industry. Most of the cattle-breeding
companies specialize in milk and meat production. There are several specialized companies in districts involved in fur-farming and fish breeding.

The Mogilev region has various mineral deposits including phosphorite fields, absolutely unique for Belarus. The region has the biggest reserves of cement raw materials (chalk, marl, loam and loam soil), vast reserves of construction and silicate sand, sand-gravel aggregates, peat, sapropel and mineral water. The eastern part of the region (the territory of the Khotimsk district) boasts huge reserves of tripoli – a mineral which is characterized by high processing properties.

There are six state-run and several private establishments of higher education in the region.

Railways Vitebsk-Orsha-Mogilev-Zhlobin, Zhlobin-Bobruisk-Minsk, Orsha-Krichev-Unecha, Krichev-Mogilev-Osipovichi cross the territory of the region. The most important junctions are Mogilev, Bobruisk, Osipovichi and Krichev.

The main motorways are St. Petersburg-Kiev, Roslavl (Russia)-Bobruisk-Brest, Mogilev-Minsk, Mogilev-Bobruisk.

The length of the navigable waterways (the Dnepr, Berezina, Sozh) is more than 400 kilometres.

**Free economic zone Mogilev** was founded in January 2002 in Mogilev. Its total area is 655 hectares. At present 11 companies-residents work in the zone.

FEZ Mogilev unites production, export and free customs sectors. All the power generating units and production facilities including facilities providing utilities services and are located in the zone the way to accommodate the needs of the residents. FEZ Mogilev has warehouses and workshops necessary for operation of mechanical engineering, building and woodworking companies.

In January-June 2007, the residents of the zone boosted the export 1.8 times as against the same period of 2006 to $18.7 million. Export products are mainly destined for the Russian Federation. In January-June 2007, FEZ Mogilev made products worth almost Br54.6 billion, up by 35 per cent on the same period of 2006.

In the near future FEZ Mogilev intends to expand its area more than two times – to 1.5 thousand hectares in order to attract over $20 million worth of investments in the region’s economy and to launch new import-substitution productions.

The Mogilev region has numerous specimens of archeology and architecture as well as monuments of applied and decorative arts. 27 museums and their branches tell about the history of the region. Among them are the Mogilev regional museum of local lore and the
museum of the memorial to the Soviet-Polish comradeship-in-arms in the village of Lenino, the Gorki district.

To learn more about the war events which happened on the territory of the region visitors come to the village of Lesnaya in the Slavgorod district, where a memorial chapel and a monument to the fallen were erected in honour of the victory of the Russian troops over the Swedes during the Northern War. Tourists also visit the settlement of Saltanovka in the Mogilev district, where covering the retreat of the Russian troops General Raevsky defeated Marshal Davout’s corps in 1812. One more famous place is the Buinichi Field, which saw at least three historic battles passed into the history.

There are three theatres and a philharmonic society in the Mogilev region.

Among the biggest cultural events hosted by the region are the international sacred music festival “Magutny Bozha”, the international song festival “Golden Hit”.

There are a lot of churches and cathedrals in the region. Among them are St. Nicolas Monastery of the 17th century in Mogilev, a Jesuit cathedral and a monastery of the early 17th century in Mstislavl, a palace and park ensemble of the 18th century in the village of Zhilichi of the Kirov district, a palace of Prince Potemkin of the 18th century in Krichev, the Carmelite Monastery of the Dormition of the 18th century in the Mstislavl district, St. Stanislaus Cathedral of the 18th century in Mogilev, the Trinity Church and St. Alexander Nevski Cathedral of the 19th century in Mstislavl.

There are two republican hydrological reserves Zaozereye and Ostrova and 72 local reserves in the region. The Mogilev region has 37 health and recuperation centres and about 40 hotels and motels.