

Conducting business efficiently from distance of thousands of kilometres

Belarus' presence in Venezuela brings benefits from our two states' close partnerships and liaisons

By Victor Mikhailov

Interestingly, just five 'Belarus' tractors were found on Venezuelan plantations five years ago; only three Minsk Automobile Works' trucks furrowed the remote country's winding mountain slopes. The number has now risen many thousand fold — with 4,000 agricultural vehicles produced by the Minsk Tractor Works operational and 1,500 MAZ trucks. Moreover, many Venezuelan cities now enjoy the comfort of hundreds of Belarus-made buses.

Sales of Belarusian machinery to this South American country have driven forward trade-economic relations between us. Of course, the political component is no less important for mutual relations, with presidents Alexander Lukashenko and Hugo Chávez playing a tremendous role. Our two states' social focus has helped us realise projects extremely quickly. Our current trade turnover of \$1bn is already high, especially considering the distance between Belarus and Venezuela and the fact that, initially, we knew little of each other.

A strategic plan of action has ensured efficient movement forward, with trade goods travelling thousands of kilometres. We can now say that a new level of relations exists, using words such as 'co-operation' and,



Minsk hosts 1st Venezuela-Belarus: Achievements and Prospects for Bilateral Relations Forum

even, 'integration' — as was evident at the recent 1st Venezuelan-Belarusian Forum, hosted by Minsk. The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Venezuela to Minsk, H.E. Mr. Américo Díaz Núñez, and Belarus' First Deputy Prime Minister, Vladimir Semashko, spoke of achievements and prospects for our bilateral relations. Meanwhile, the many ministries and agencies involved

in work with Venezuela discussed future possibilities for collaboration.

Belarus is expanding (in the best sense) into Venezuela, as recent events prove. In a month or two, MAZ truck assembly is to be launched in Venezuelan Barinas. The facility is designed to manufacture up to 5,000 MAZ vehicles annually. Another plant in the same region is to produce 10,000 'Belarus' tractors and

Minsk's Amkodor is hopeful of opening a similar assembly plant — negotiations are reaching their conclusion. Importantly, a vital social aspect is at the heart of this work, as the new factories will create jobs and give Venezuelan specialists essential technological experience. Several dozen young Venezuelans are currently passing internships at Minsk Automobile Works.

We'd be remiss in ex-

ploring the Belarusian-Venezuelan phenomena without mentioning another important aspect. Belarusian specialists have been working to enhance Venezuelans' wellbeing. Of course, nothing comes free of charge, but this does not detract from its significance. Belarusians are helping build modern accommodation in Venezuela: 2,500 flats will be complete in the city of Maracay later this year — all

designed and built by Belarusian specialists. Another 20,000 are to be constructed in coming years. Our workers have ably demonstrated their high professional skills, hampered neither by unfamiliar climatic conditions nor the unique local landscape.

The Venezuelans treat Belarusian oil industry workers with respect, as they jointly mine in remote areas of the country. The same goes for our specialists laying gas pipes in Venezuela, and others helping strengthen infrastructure. Our Belarusian-Venezuelan 'house' has strong foundations, reaching far beyond the Belarusian-Venezuelan Trading House in Caracas — although its opening ensures that Belarusian products are being sold more widely in Venezuela, while manufactures from this country are being similarly represented in Belarus.

The Minsk business forum also tackled cultural liaisons, as epitomised by the Venezuelan Cultural Centre, freshly opened in Minsk, and the Belarus-Venezuela Society. Venezuelan post-graduates and under-graduates attend Minsk universities, while many Belarusian alumni wish to gain professional experience in Venezuela, working at sites overseen by Belarusian specialists.

No doubt, the future looks bright, filled with promising proposals to the benefit of all.

Promising energy development brings wider opportunities

Future nuclear power station unfolds favourable prospects for Ostrovets, in the Grodno Region

By Mikhail Overianov

Over fifty years ago, an oil processing plant was constructed on the bank of the Zapadnaya Dvina River, turning a small town into modern Novopolotsk. Similarly, the Belarusian Automobile Works transformed simple Zhodino — now known far beyond Belarus' borders. In the 21st century, the most northern district centre of the Grodno Region is set to become famous: Ostrovets. It may gain the status of a town this year; in a decade, it could

rival significant Belarusian cities, such as Lida, Slonim and Volkovysk.

Public opinion regarding the Belarusian nuclear power station has changed dramatically, as recent polls conducted by the National Academy of Sciences' Sociology Institute confirm. Over the past six years, the number of nuclear energy supporters has near doubled — reaching almost 60 percent. The situation in Ostrovets is especially exemplary. "When talks began, we faced a lack of understanding and

even, outrage, from local residents," recalls the Chairman of the District Executive Committee, Adam Kovalko. "Some time later, I met 24 companies' employees; people were actually expressing their impatience, awaiting the completion of construction."

These changes have a simple explanation: the Ostrovets District is home to about 24,000 people. Although local unemployment stands at a mere 0.6 percent, well-paid jobs are scarce. The main production base revolves



Gas welder Igor Akunevich works at Belarusian nuclear power station's site

around Olkhovka Cardboard Factory, the Radiodetal Plant, the Centre of Co-operative Industry, a consumer service enterprise and several other firms. Some jobs pay as much as Br3-5m per month, but rarely fall vacant.

The first Belarusian nu-

clear power station is yet to be built but is already a lucky ticket for the district. Russian specialists are expected to conduct its electrical work (as corresponding licences are required); meanwhile, Belarusians will be used for other tasks — including the

building of the reactor. At present, about 150 people are working on the site — most from Belenergostroy company. Our contractors have the necessary experience, having previously helped build Kalininskaya nuclear power station, near Moscow.