

Demand gives rise to offer

By Andrey Smirnov

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development financing manufacture of medical equipment

The EBRD 7-year loan will allow the Medin Group (among the top ten manufacturers of operating tables worldwide) to double its production capacity. Financing is to be directed towards metal working equipment to make basic components used in the manufacture of operating tables and other medical furniture.

Long-term financing will allow Medin to satisfy growing demand for medical goods, inspired by the development of the private medical sector and programmes of modernisation of state health services in Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. About 85 percent of Medin manufactures are exported: to more than 20 countries.

Francis Daley, Chief Representative of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in Belarus, comments, "We're very impressed by the level of management and professionalism of Medin engineers and by the achievements of Belarusian private business in the world market for medical equipment. We consider that the company has great potential, and that participation in this project will allow our bank to support a dynamic Belarusian company in its aspiration to offer modern medical technologies to consumers."

Today's customer is always right

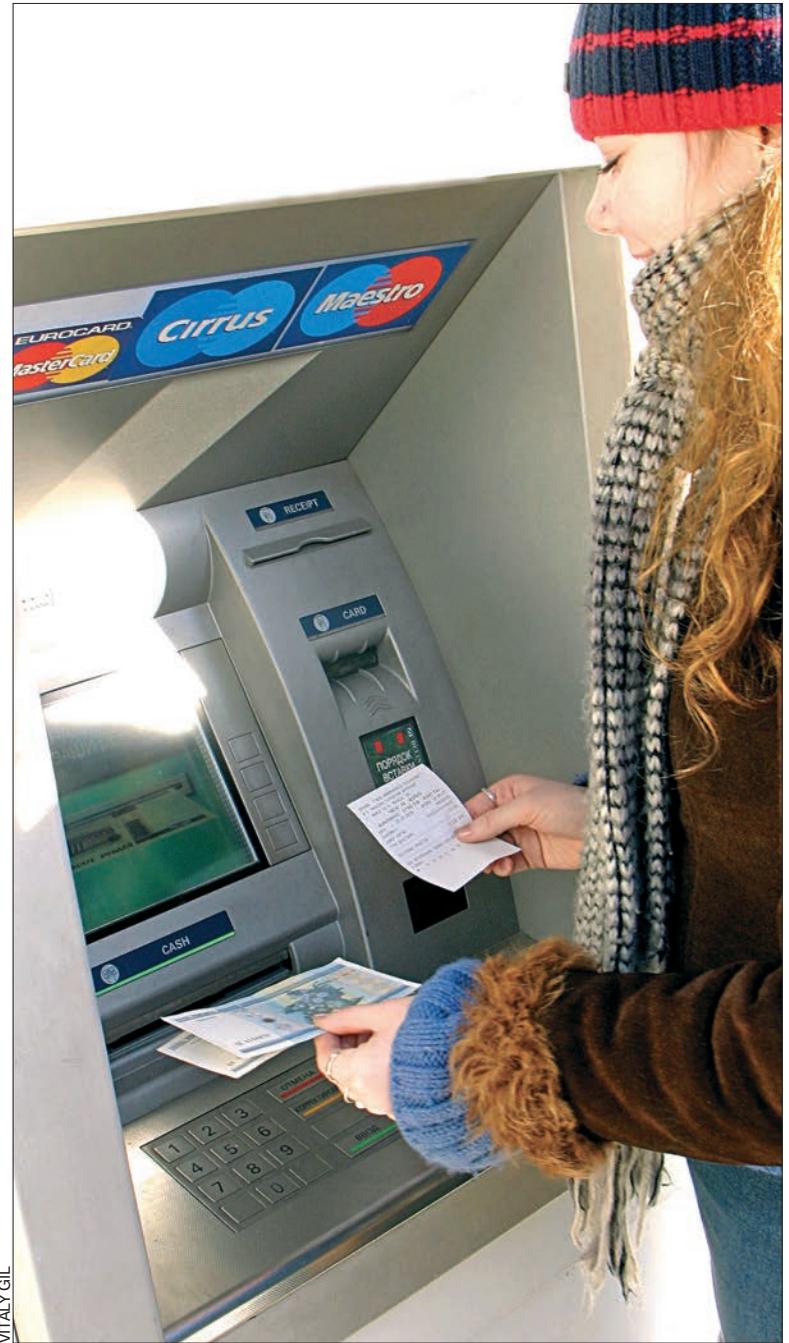
Belarusian banks to refund money to client accounts in cases of fraud, regardless of the reason

By Alexander Benkovsky

Regardless of personal carelessness in losing a card, bank customers are soon to be covered for all cases of fraud, as soon as to be announced by the recently created Committee on Non-cash Payments. Comprising representatives of the National Bank, the Association of Belarusian banks, and various other banks of Belarus, the Committee's initiatives are not proving popular with many of the commercial banks, who fear that fraud will rise as a result. However, most countries across Western Europe already uphold 'zero responsibility' in such cases; even Russia has its Law 'On the National Payment System', obliging banks to immediately refund clients on being notified of illegal withdrawal, rather than waiting until each case has been examined. The number of cases of fraud has been seen to rise since the amendment.

Belarusians are often victims of card fraud while travelling abroad. In particular, 2010-2011 saw an 'epidemic' of such cases, particularly in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Italy and Spain. Travellers to Brazil, Mexico, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Australia also registered illegal transactions on their cards. A common ploy is for criminals to install skimmer devices, which are placed over the keyboard (to register a card's PIN code) and within the slot (to save card data). Information is then used to create a copy of the original card, which can be used freely, until the true owner informs their bank of incorrect use.

The introduction of zero responsibility is still under debate in Belarus, notes Sergey Dubkov, the Deputy Chairman of the National Bank. The level of compensation is yet to be decided, as there are taxation implications.



VITALY GIL

Money stolen from cash dispensers will be returned to owners

"It's necessary to detail the system and strike a happy medium, convenient to banks and to clients," Mr. Dubkov stresses, adding that

the largest banks countrywide have long adhered to the principle. Now, it seems that smaller banks will need to follow suit.

Wreath for wine and straw for beer

Horse-trams, telephone and electricity come to Minsk: all thanks to beer

By Lyudmila Minakova

Belarusians' ancestors used to drink up to 700 litres of beer a year. However, its consumers were mostly the nobility, as villagers were prohibited to brew alcoholic beverages and, accordingly, drank less. If the situation had been different, Belarusian brewing traditions would have arrived at modern times with only minor changes. As a result, we know little of the history of Belarusian beer. However, the beverage was extremely popular, and our forefathers even drank it in the morning instead of tea.

'Gramatka' vs coffee

Belarusian beer was first mentioned in 14th century chronicles confirming old brewing traditions. In the past, beer was as popular as bread. In the times of the Rzech Pospolita, a nobleman drank up to 3 litres of beer daily (almost 700-1,000 litres a year). Our forefathers could easily rival modern record setters, the Czechs, who drink about 160 litres

of beer annually per capita.

However, our ancestors were not drunkards. Beer was considered to be a light beverage and was used, not only as a beverage, but as a food ingredient. Sausages, for example, were cooked in beer. In addition, beer was also served hot, jointly with honey or milk. Beer soup was also common, made with raw yolks, cream, cottage cheese and a range of spices. An expert in cultural matters, historian Ales Bely, has investigated the Belarusian beer traditions. He writes: 'Such a soup (called 'gramatka', byarmushka' or 'faramushka') or pure beer (warmed, and served with stale bread or cottage cheese) was eaten with toast. In the Rzech Pospolita period, beer soup replaced coffee or tea and, although they were gaining popularity in the 17th century, 'gramatka' still remained popular.'

Radziwills' glassware

In the past, beer was drunk in 'banyas' or 'tavernas' which could be eas-



BELTA

At Lidskoe Pivo JSC enterprise

ily found in any village or town. A system of secret signs existed; enabling tavern visitors to learn what beverages were sold there. Those selling beer, placed a batch of straw (called a 'vekha') nearby. A saying even existed those times. 'A wreath stands for wine and a vekha stands for beer'. A phrase 'to move from one vekha to another' was in common use. Horse drivers were aware of the places selling beer, and could eas-

ily lay their routes from one 'vekha' to another. Beer was mostly served in clay or wooden mugs, with glassware appearing in the 17th-18th century. The Radziwills', Uretskaya and Nalibokskaya manufactures produced extremely popular glass cups.

As already mentioned, beer was brewed primarily by the nobility and townsfolk, as villagers were only allowed to brew beer for marriages. However, those

paying the so-called 'beer rent' could brew for their own needs.

Home brewed beer was not good quality, and city beer was tastier as professional maltsers brewed it. Every city was eager to receive the privilege to run breweries, as beer brewing and selling brought in high profits. Mr. Bely notes in his paper: 'A famous civil figure and Minsk's Head, Duke Karol Czapski (who developed a Minsk brewery — now known as Alivariya) used his own funds (including those earned from beer brewing) to replenish the city budget. Owing to this, a horse-tram, telephone communication system, electricity and many other amenities were introduced to our city.'

Belarusian beer brewing traditions are yet to be studied in detail, yet this page of our history is no less interesting than song or dance folklore. Its study is truly exciting and useful. Modern domestic brewers could learn much from our forefathers.

'We won't give away our power network...'

Belarus' First Deputy Prime Minister, Vladimir Semashko, has announced that the state will keep its monopoly on transporting and selling electricity in Belarus while allowing both state-run and private companies to build power stations.

Structural reform in the power engineering industry is being guided by a draft law already submitted to the National Assembly, with the state's release of its monopoly over electricity generation at the heart of the document. "Anyone will be able to build major power stations, but we won't give away our power supply network," explains Mr. Semashko. He views the network as a natural monopoly and believes it would be an error to transfer it into private ownership, although Russia and Ukraine have done so.

Ownership of the power supply network allows the state to pursue an effective energy policy while determining how electricity is reliably distributed to customers, securing economic effectiveness.