

Filling package with concrete proposals to benefit trade

Not long ago, Smorgon's centre became a huge trade pavilion, hosting the *Grodno Region's Northern Vector* fair. Seventy enterprises took part, hailing from the three northern districts of the area: Smorgon, Oshmyany and Ostrovets. Simultaneously, the city hosted the International Economic Forum, gathering guests from ten states.

By **Iosif Poplavsky**

This was the second 'northern' fair, with Smorgon taking the baton from last year's host, Oshmyany. The Deputy Chairman of the Grodno Regional Executive Committee, Alexander Rusanov, notes that the idea is well grounded, "The Grodno Region's northern lands are unique in their geographical position, while boasting motorways and railways and large enterprises with well qualified staff. However, analysing the economies of these three districts, there are some omissions — especially regarding the attraction of foreign investments. A strong impetus was needed, so we decided to organise a fair and forum. Figures now speak for themselves. Last year, just 69 companies with Lithuanian capital were registered in the Grodno Region; in 2011, their number reached 120. We're also closely liaising with Polish businessmen; there are now 129 firms with their participation, against 78 in the past. Importantly,

the initiative to attract investors has been demonstrated at district level — including in Smorgon, Oshmyany and Ostrovets."

This time, the *Northern Vector* fair featured 54 projects, as yet being studied by foreign guests. No immediate investments have been settled but some agreements have been signed during the Economic Forum. For example, the Smorgon District Executive Committee has signed an agreement with Syrian businessmen to build a cheese making plant, while Oshmyany has joined Lithuanian Ukmerge in signing a draft co-operative agreement to ensure safe traffic. The Deputy Head of the Lidzbark Warmiński District of Poland's Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, Jarosław Kogut, has signed an agreement with the Ostrovets District, explaining, "It's my second time at the *Northern Vector*. I initially wanted to look closer but am now ready to conduct definite projects. One of the proposals deals with the construction of a package making facility; I



Enterprises demonstrate their production potential at trade fair

have a businessman with me who's keen to study the opportunity. We're also interested in joint ecological and cultural projects, in addition to exchanging delegations of young people and teachers."

Next year, the fair is to be hosted by Ostrovets but the programme for the Grodno Region's

development goes far beyond these plans. Forum participants have debated the possible establishment of a free economic zone. Mr. Rusanov stresses that this could be realised, helping attract investments. The Grodno Region's southern districts are also ready to join a FEZ (centred in Slonim).

The MT reference:

The Grodno Region's northern area includes three districts: Smorgon, Ostrovets and Oshmyany. 115,000 people live over an area of 4,300 square kilometres, while the Minsk-Vilnius international transport corridor passes through these three districts.

Plastic cards highlighted

Three thousand ATMs installed countrywide

By **Maria Dromova**

Thirteen years ago, ATMs were perceived as something extraordinary — being rather like magic money boxes. The first was installed in Belarus 1998, offering limited functions; you could only withdraw money or see your account balance. Of course, there were few plastic card holders anyway, as many distrusted the idea. Now, ATMs are an integral part of our lives.

Belarus' largest bank — Belarusbank — owns a third of the three thousand machines countrywide; not long ago, it unveiled its 1,000th ATM — in Minsk's Loshitsa residential suburb. It operates about 250 machines in the capital, in addition to another hundred in rural areas.

Sadly, residents of remote urban suburbs often lack access to ATMs; accordingly, they are now being tailored at the design stage of residential housing — as any other local infrastructure might be. "ATM use allows a bank to distribute client flow, reducing the burden on face to face personnel," explains the Deputy Director at Belarusbank's Calculating Centre for Plastic Cards, Gen-



Jubilee ATM installed in Minsk's Loshitsa suburb

nady Sery. "Apart from ATMs, our bank boasts a wide network of infokiosks, which primarily allow our clients to make non-cash payments; they offer a wide range of services and their number should exceed 2,000 by the end of the year."

Mobile and Internet banking is generally seen as the way forward (over 30,000 Belarusbank clients use the latter). The bank also plans to install another 30 ATMs countrywide by late 2011. "Global

recommendations indicate that a single ATM works efficiently if it services about 3,000 plastic cards. We're focusing on this figure in developing our infrastructure," notes Mr. Sery, adding, "Some card owners still prefer to use traditional bank offices and some use other banks' services, so we meet this requirement."

Belarusbank accounts for over half of the nine million plus plastic cards countrywide.

Attractive joint projects in transport field

By **Olga Belyavskaya**

Belarus invites Qatari businessmen to invest in major transport projects

Possibilities for joint projects have been recently discussed at a meeting between Belarus' Transport and Communications Minister, Ivan Shcherbo, and Qatari businessmen. Mr. Shcherbo informed the foreign guests of the structure of Belarus' transport complex, stressing that the Ministry is open to co-operation and aims to do its utmost to promote such partnerships. Mr. Shcherbo is convinced that Qatar will find interesting

projects in Belarus, available from a list of opportunities, as proposed by our country.

The Qatari businessmen expressed interest in Belarusian projects. The Transport and Communications Ministry tells us that Markus Vanko, the Investment Director of the General Portfolio Investment Department of the Qatar Holding Company, has noted that the Eastern company is ready 'to inject significant funds and implement joint projects to generate success and benefits'. The position is supported by other members of the Qatari delegation, including representatives of Qatari Diar Company.

Growth to follow fall

By **Andrey Asfura**

Belarusian car dealers expected to sell 20,000 foreign cars in 2011

This year, sales of Russian and Chinese cars have fallen, despite the levelling of customs fees for companies and individuals from July 1st. Sergei Varivoda, the Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Scientific and Industrial Association, believes this could be connected with problems

on the foreign currency market, a decline in people's real incomes and rising interest rates for automobile loans. "We're not expecting a boost in sales this autumn," he admits.

Next year, car sales are projected to rise, with around 35,000 foreign cars sold. In 2013, this could rise to 50,000. Mr. Varivoda stresses that, after a uniform Belarusian Rouble exchange rate is introduced, car dealers will be able to sell cars for Belarusian Roubles, at lower prices.