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Dear members,

In the name of the CCBLR's board, I wish you an excellent and prosperous year, for you personally and for all your enterprises.

For our chamber, I confirm in any case that the ever-increasing interest from entrepreneurs for Eastern Europe has represented recently a significant boost in the motivation of our executive team and in the interest of new members to join the efforts of our chamber to improve the economic relationship between our countries. In some four years, the level of membership has more than tripled. In 2006, our chamber has not only very actively participated in the Prince Philippe's mission to Russia, but also we have organized completely by ourselves a mission to Kazan, Togliatti and Samara, which have been very much appreciated by all the participants, with a special mention to the visit to the car manufacturers VAZ and KAMAZ.

Also, the monthly edition of East Inform which is more and more recognized as a very important source of information for business opportunities in Russia and Belarus, the frequent organization of seminars and conferences with our traditional partners, the signing of a cooperation agreement with the business association Russia - Luxembourg, the availability of a hot line to serve the interest of our members, have represented a significant investment from our people and have been unanimously appreciated by our members.

We have also started to work on new projects and ideas for 2007 : our chamber will organize two very important regional missions : one in **Nizhni Novgorod**, where we will participate to the most important trade fair in Russia. And another one in the Ural region, namely in **Ekaterinburg**, an important center for the mechanical and steel industry in Russia, and in **Tiumen**, an oil and gas industrial center. A special 3 days international conference about **metallurgy** will be also organized in Belgium.

Those projects together with the ever continuing service to present and future members of our chamber would not be possible without the motivation and the dedication of the executive committee of our chamber and I would like to thank each of them for their efforts and their success in the name of the board and of all our members. Spassiba ! You did a great job.

Luc Willame
Chairman of the CCBLR



INVITATION

Economic and political Relations between EU and Russia

24 January 2007 at 17.30 pm
Avenue Louise, 500 - 1050 Brussels

H. E. Mr Vladimir A. CHIZHOV, Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary, permanent representative of the Russian Federation To The European Communities will expose the relations between EU and Russia.

Free entrance, a cocktail will be offered by our Chamber at 18.30

REGISTRATION obligatory by Mail:
ccblr@belgacom.net before the 21 of January.

Mr / Mrs:

Company :

Address :

.....

e-mail :

Tél. :

Fax :

- will attend the conference on January 24th
- the ensuing cocktail

24 January 2007



Second Russian Regions Day at the Chamber of Commerce of Luxembourg

Wednesday, November 29, at the time of the 2nd Russian Regions day, Luxembourg and Belgian buildings contractors have put at the honour the Federation of Russia and three of its Regions ("oblasts"), those of Tambov, Tiumen, and Yaroslavl. Fitting in the current promotion trend of the trade between the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the Federation of Russia, reflected by initiatives such as the 1st day of the Russian Regions in 2004, the seminar "Investing in Russia" in 2005, or the official economic mission to Moscow and Ekaterinbourg in 2006, this event was organized in close cooperation with the Luxembourg Ministry for Economy and Foreign Trade, the Embassy of the Federation of Russia in Luxembourg and the Embassy of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg in Moscow. The "Luxembourg-Russia Business Forum" of Moscow, as well as the "Luxembourg-Russia Business-Association" of Luxembourg, (to which belongs our Belgo-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce for Russia and Belarus), whose success reflects the flourishing relationship between the two countries, were associated to the organization of this Day.

In front of a floor of more than 160 participants, Mr. Robert Dennewald, Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg did not miss, in its welcome words, to point out some key figures about the development of the economic exchanges between both countries, as well as the big importance of the prospects and resources offered by the Russian market. Among the more significant data: between 2000 and 2005, the exports of the Grand Duchy from Luxembourg to Russia have more than tripled and they reached during the first 8 months of 2006 a total value higher than that of the previous year; the Russian market represents 145 million of inhabitants; the Federation of Russia is at the source of more than 10% of the world oil production; finally, for the valorisation of its resources in hydrocarbons; and the Federation of Russia must carry out investments valued at some 35 billion dollars per annum. When adding to these data the fact that the Federation of Russia is now a direct neighbour of the U.E., it is easy to explain the results of surveys carried out by the Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce, stressing the importance given by the Luxembourg companies to the development of their activities in Russia. This was confirmed by the success of this 2nd Russian day.



Following the successive interventions of H.E. Mr. Carlo Krieger, Ambassador of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg to the Federation of Russia, and H.E. Mr. Edouard Malayan, Ambassador of the Federation of Russia in Luxembourg, the Luxembourg Minister for Economy and Foreign Trade, Mr. Jeannot Krecké, underlined the needs for supporting these already well advanced efforts of co-operation between the two economies, by increasing the presence of the Luxembourg companies within the Russian economic landscape. This will of principle and these commitments were reflected into facts, by the signature of a highly symbolic investment agreement between the company Astron Buildings S.A. and the Region of Yaroslavl, represented by its Governor, Mr. Anatoly

Litissine. As more symbolic as Russia is in the construction sector one of the most dynamic markets in Europe, and symbolic also thanks to the fact that the agreement foresees the opening, in Russia, of a production site by the metal building European leader: this acknowledges the Federation of Russia as a privileged market for investments. This new setting up reflects correctly the strategic importance and advantageous situation of the three Regions which were present on that day and, one after the other, presented their own characteristics, economy, and various strong points.

The area of Yaroslav, at first, enjoys a favourable position on the Russian territory, between Moscow and Saint-Petersburg, perfectly served by a full network of roads, railways, maritime infrastructure and air transports, with the service of a powerful and diversified industry, which however does not encroach on the residential housing development, tourism, or academic life. Vis-à-vis this one thousand year old Region, the area of Tioumen, represented by Vice-governor Mr. Alexander Mohr, belongs to the energetic average of Russia. With a definition of its general strategy for economic development up to 2020, the Region of Tioumen shows its will of diversifying its economy, based until now on oil extraction and refining and chemical industry. Sectors like light industry, mechanic construction, wood exploitation, logistics or services, in particular private and business tourism, are stressed as goals for this development program and favourable grounds for investments, attracting world-size companies. On the other hand, the Belgian Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce for Russia, will organize in 2007 an economic mission in the area of URAL (Tioumen)

As a conclusion of the conference, Mr. Oleg Bétine, governor, presented his Tambov Region, where are born talents of international reputation like that of S. Rakhmaninov. With rich agricultural lands, located between Moscow and the big cities of the South, this area exploits obviously its natural favourable environment, but is also active in fields such as machines construction, scientific search, or chemical industry. As a conclusion, he evoked the friendship links binding the two countries gathered at the time of this event, links that he wished durable and profitable, and one cannot obviously prevent oneself to wish that the organization of this Russian Day will carry fruits, wake up the consciences and accelerate the process of integration and economical complementarities between respectively the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the Federation of Russia.



Signature of the investment agreement between the Astron Buildings S. A. company and the Yaroslav Region, represented by its governor, Mr. Anatoly Litissine.



Join or die: Sen. Sergei Vasilyev discusses Russian banks

for the first time in many years, analysts around the world are predicting a bright future for Russia. Within a few decades, Russia will be a highly developed country, leaving behind in some indicators Germany and France. Sergei Vasilyev, chairman of the Federation Council committee for financial markets and the money supply, spoke about whether the Russian banking system is keeping up with the pace of economic growth.

Q.: How do you assess the present state of the Russian banking system?

A.: Russia's present monetary and fiscal policy is fully in line with its main task: reducing inflation and fighting the symptoms of Dutch disease, i.e. an extreme increase in the value of the national currency. As to the banking system, its current level of development is not quite adequate for Russia's economic ambitions. But the overall dynamics and direction of its development are right.

I believe that positive changes in the banking sector will continue. Some things give more reason for optimism today than they did five years ago. For example, the government is not active in encouraging banks to merge, but the present state of affairs is forcing them to do so. This process has now become natural. If you had asked me five years ago how the banking system should develop, I would have described a situation like the one now.

Q.: What is the main problem of the Russian banking system at present?

A.: The main problem of Russian banks is a shortage of equity capital. Assets are currently growing much faster than equity funds. Many Russian banks are already reaching the critical amount of equity capital as a percentage of assets, 10%-11%. Most importantly, this problem is relevant even for such giants as Sberbank and VTB. In order to expand operations, these banks also have to think about increasing their equity capital.

Naturally, many Russian banks are trying to solve the problem, even by floating their stock. I think that when large Russian banks place their shares on domestic and foreign exchanges, demand will be high. I'd like to emphasize that this does not involve any risk to a bank's clients. On the contrary, the bank's capitalization will grow and so will its clients' confidence.

Q.: The latest IPO's of Russian companies were not very successful, raising far less money than expected...

A.: I do not think that investors' interest in Russian companies is fading. The failure resulted from other factors, such as overpricing combined with excessive supply. It could have been avoided if the market had been analyzed more thoroughly. There are large players on the global stock market, notably investment and pension funds. Usually, they invest in Western companies, but they are allowed to put some of their money in emerging markets.

Russia's sovereign credit rating is now increasing at a marvelous pace, so Russian stocks' ratings will increase too. This in turn means that demand for Russian stocks will grow. These financial tools are becoming acceptable even for Russian funds, including pension funds. Still, the Russian stock market remains very limited. There are not many blue chips. So the flotation of a Russian company presents investors with a new opportunity.

Q.: Are Russian banks ready to compete with foreigners in the era of globalization?

A.: The competitive conditions of the Russian financial market are now almost the same for Russian and foreign banks. Foreign banks are already working in Russia in some form, and some of them are even among the top 20 banks, but none holds a leading position. This might seem strange, but a closer analysis explains why this is so. Almost none of the foreign banks that have come to Russia is fully prepared for the Russian reality. It is difficult for them to operate here.

At the same time, modern Russian banks are ready to solve even the most difficult problems, including those arising from Russia's WTO entry. Their staffing potential is in no way inferior to that of foreigners. Resources are a different issue, and domestic banks generally lag behind the competition in this respect. Many foreign banks are able to invest huge sums in Russia, and there are few Russian banks whose financial power is comparable to that of foreigners. The low capitalization of Russian banks hinders the proper development of the banking system. This is one of its shortcomings. Nonetheless, foreign banks' financial advantages are canceled out by their lack of experience on the Russian market.



The terms of Russia's WTO accession provide for a transitional period for the banking system, during which only subsidiaries of foreign banks will be allowed to operate in Russia. They will have to fully abide by Russian legislation and will be responsible to the Russian Central Bank, so in that sense they will be on equal terms with Russian banks.

Foreign banks will not be able to set up branches for some time. Even after the transitional period is over, however, conditions for Russian banks will probably not change drastically. Foreign banks do not usually open branches on emerging markets, settling instead for subsidiaries. This happens everywhere and there is no reason to believe that the world's leading banks will behave differently in Russia.

Q.: Foreign banks are actively courting the consumer-loan market and are among the leaders in this segment. However, they have problems attracting the deposits of Russian individuals. The market of inter-bank loans is therefore becoming their main source of funds, which does not improve their stability.

A.: All foreign banks are making efforts to attract clients. The share of deposits in their liabilities is growing. But they are following their own route to our market. They have started with loans, and they will gradually make Russians accustomed to deposits as well. By offering favorable loan terms, they help the general population recognize them more easily. Both foreign and domestic banks have problems expanding their client base. There is nothing unusual about that.

The sweeping growth of consumer loans affects the quality of the banking portfolio. The economic situation is favorable today, the general population's incomes are growing, and banks are not facing any problems. Loans are repaid fast. Yet if the economic situation starts deteriorating, the amount of arrears may increase. Of course, this is just a conjecture. The share of arrears in consumer loans is now low, about 3%. There are countries where this figure stands at 20% or more.

By the way, at the start of the Asian financial crisis of 1998, the share of unpaid loans in those countries had reached almost 35%. This is hardly possible in Russia. The country is improving its bank supervision, and it has set up a deposit-insurance system and credit history bureaus. These factors help to improve the stability of the banking system. Banks are protected against fleeing clients. The current economic situation in the country does not promise any trouble.

Dr. Sergei Vasilyev represents the government of the Leningrad Region in the Federation Council, the upper house of the Russian parliament. He chairs the Federation Council's committee for financial markets and the money supply and is also a member of its internal audit committee. Before his election to the Federation Council, he headed the Russian government's Working Center for Economic Reform, served as Russian deputy economics minister, first deputy head of the Russian government staff and later director of the Leontyev Center, an international center for social and economic research.



NEWS FROM RUSSIA

* Russia's economy in 2006

The year 2006 has been better for the Russian economy than was predicted, with the last months of the year witnessing the most good news.

According to data from the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, Russia's GDP growth in October alone was 8.2% higher than in October 2005.

However, this is not the only reason for optimism. Also in October, total investment in the Russian economy increased by 19.1% over the same month in 2005. The 2006 annual indicator may be 13.2% higher than the 2005 figure. Does this mean that we can look forward to an economic boom?

Completion of Russia's Transition to a Market Economy

Russia's GDP growth last year was 6.8-6.9%. This is a respectable indicator and higher than expected: the forecast was 6%. Over the course of the year, this figure was revised upwards, but the final result exceeded the boldest of predictions.

Russia's economic indicators for last year are good not only because they exceeded the forecast. An increase of less than one percentage point is not in itself a great achievement.

The main reason to celebrate is that the trend towards a slowdown in economic growth that has persisted over the past several years has been reversed. In 2003, Russia's GDP grew by 7.3%, in 2004 by 7.2%, and in 2005 by 6.4%.

Of course, only this year's performance will show whether the year 2006 has signaled a turning point or not. However, it is obvious that Russia's economic performance last year has proven to be better than the year before in terms of the key macroeconomic indicator - GDP growth.

The dynamics of Russia's economic development in 2006 have led to another significant conclusion. Based on last year's results, we can state with confidence that the country's deepest economic recession of its transition to a market economy has been completely overcome.

Note that by 1998, Russia's GDP had fallen by nearly 40% from the 1991 level (as you may remember, economic reforms in Russia were launched in January 1992). Thus the Russian economy hit rock bottom in 1998. The decline lasted for seven years after the start of reforms, and in 1999 Russia's economy began to slowly grow again. It took eight years of growth, including last year, for Russia's GDP to fully recover.

The 2006 figure means that Russia's transition to a market economy is complete. The economy has been fully restored to its pre-reform level.

Surely, one indicator is not enough to draw such a serious conclusion. Do not forget, however, that GDP is the key macroeconomic indicator. Such conclusions, therefore, can be made, though with some reservations.

Other Economic Indicators

Inflation last year was about 9%, its lowest level in 15 years. It is also significant that for the first time in the past several years inflation is no longer recorded in double digits (in 2005, Russia's annual inflation was 10.9%).

Note that the initial forecast for inflation last year was 7-8.5%, which means that the planned targets had not been met. Nevertheless, the year-end results are respectable.

Russia's lasting economic growth has served as the foundation for achieving the level of inflation in 2006. The government's efforts to restrict the money supply and the Stabilization Fund's efforts to sterilize it have also had a positive effect.

However, there are still reserves left for curbing inflation in 2007. Russian commodity producers' competitive potential has not been fully taken advantage of.

Foreign investment is a major indicator of investment activity in general. A total of \$130 billion in foreign capital had accumulated in the Russian economy by late September of last year. In January-September, the Russian economy received \$35.3 billion in foreign investment, or 31.7% more than in the same period in 2005.

It is interesting that Russian investment abroad amounted to nearly the same sum, \$34.6 billion, registering a 51.4% increase over the previous year's figure.

There is little doubt that the total figure for 2006 will be even higher. However, Russian investment abroad will still nearly equal foreign investment in Russia.

How should we react to this? On the one hand, it is not so bad that Russian investment abroad is growing. On the other hand, this growth far outpaces the growth of investment in Russia.

This means that in the near future Russian investment abroad will exceed foreign investment in the Russian economy. Russia is becoming a kind of global donor.

It is good that Russia has money to invest, but it is also clear that it desperately needs investment itself. The task of making Russia more attractive to investors is still before us, and the above-mentioned trends confirm this.

What Are the Reasons Behind Fast Economic Growth?

It might seem paradoxical, but the government cannot find a proper answer to this important question. However, that does not matter much. It would be worse the other way round if, in the absence of any economic growth, the government could clearly see the reasons for the country's stagnation.



In spite of the lack of an explanation, the government can certainly come up with replies to the question of economic growth. For instance, it has credited customs and amortization policies. Moreover, Russia's Finance Ministry says that the decision to reimburse the value-added tax as soon as possible has served as an economic accelerator in general. Apart from this, the government has explained the surge in economic activity by the launch of the Investment Fund. This is all correct, but it is not enough to fully explain the developments under way.

No doubt, the reasons behind the rapid economic growth will soon be clear. We need this clarity in order for economic growth stop being a pleasant surprise. Only then will we clearly understand what must be done in the future. (Igor Nikolayev for RIA Novosti), Igor Nikolayev is director of the strategic analysis department at the FBK auditing and consulting company.

* Gazprom: today Russia, tomorrow the world

Gazprom's latest moves on international markets have shown that the Russian gas monopoly is strengthening its positions and becoming integrated into the global economy.

Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller and Gaz de France President Jean-Francois Cirelli have recently signed an agreement to extend contracts for Russian gas supplies until 2030.

Under the contracts, Gazprom will sell up to 1.5 billion cubic meters of gas to French end consumers as of next year. In 2005, Russia supplied 13.1 billion cubic meters of gas to France. GdF's portfolio totals about 67 billion cubic meters of gas.

Italy's Eni and Austria's OMV also agreed to make similar concessions as part of agreements to extend their long-term contracts. Eni will enable Gazprom to sell 2 billion cubic meters of gas on the Italian market, and to raise this amount to 3 billion cubic meters in 2010. OMV granted the Russian energy giant the right to sell 1.7 billion cubic meters in Austria through GWH and Centrex, which are affiliated to Gazprom Export and Gazprombank.

German E.ON-Ruhrgas refused to give the Russian gas company access to its sector of the German market. However, Gazprom has agreed to swap assets with German energy companies. As a result, Gazprom will exchange stakes in the Yuzhno-Russkoye deposit for access to European gas distribution networks. Agreement has also been reached to jointly build the Nord Stream pipeline under the Baltic Sea.

Dutch Gasunie has also offered Gazprom a stake in the BBL gas pipeline, which connects Belgium to Great Britain, and promised to give the Russian company access to the Dutch market in exchange for 9% in Nord Stream.

All this clearly shows that a strategic assets swap, which Gazprom talked about last year, is being put into practice. Foreigners have secured long-term gas supplies and stakes in Russian gas fields, while Gazprom will get access to European gas distribution networks.

Global hydrocarbon reserves are limited and mostly located in problem-ridden regions, hence the interest in Russian gas assets, which seem more secure than Venezuelan, Nigerian or Iraqi ones. Foreign investors' confidence in Russian companies, such as Gazprom, has grown significantly in the past few years. Early this century, Gazprom's capitalization was \$45-\$50 billion, and today it makes \$273 billion. The global stock market has appreciated the Russian gas monopoly's play in the global arena.

The agreement with Gaz de France actually means that Gazprom has made an advance payment to the French state-owned concern in the hope that it will buy some of its assets. During the forthcoming merger of GdF and Suez the two companies will have to cede control of some of their assets in Belgium and France. A decision has been made to sell stakes in Belgian Distrigaz, including its French assets, and in power engineering company SPE, a joint venture of GdF and British Centrica, as well as Cofathec Coriance, GdF's thermal network in France.

"We will be open to outside proposals," said Gaz de France President Jean-Francois Cirelli. According to the mass media, during their negotiations Gazprom and GdF discussed every asset that could be sold in detail.

Gazprom's access to end consumers in France and other European countries shows that Moscow is determined to build a balanced scheme of gas cooperation with Europe that would ensure the energy security of both parties. By issuing long-term guarantees of stable gas deliveries Gazprom is seeking access to distribution networks for stable gas sales. Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller said the agreement with Gaz de France was aimed at improving France's energy security. In turn, the head of the French monopoly said: "We consider Gazprom the best of all companies we would like to see on our market."

In the outgoing year consolidations, mergers and takeovers became a characteristic feature of energy market growth. Most analysts in the West describe the merger of Norwegian companies Statoil and Norsk Hydro, and the forthcoming merger of Gaz de France and Suez as counterbalance to Gazprom, which has been strengthening its positions in Europe. However, the Russian company is also becoming integrated into the European gas market. Core companies have set a trend of swapping assets and giving one another access to lucrative sectors or deposits of natural resources.

Gazprom's huge resources make it possible to suggest that it will be stepping up its acquisition of European gas transportation, storage and distribution assets. One can agree with the Russian gas monopoly's head, who said that the trend was aimed at strengthening European energy security, which is impossible without a balanced system that would take into account the interests of both consumers and producers.

Igor Tomberg, Ph. D. (Economics), is chief researcher at the Center for Energy Studies at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences.

* Russian Railways revises investment plan

Russian Railways has increased its investment program for 2006 from the planned RUR 160.9 billion to RUR 175 billion (approx. from \$6.1 billion to \$6.67 billion), according to preliminary estimates, the Russian Railways' press office announced on Wednesday. The revision was due to increases in the price of goods and services, as well as some additional operations. Russian Railways'



own investment will amount to RUR 173 billion (approx. \$6.6 billion).

Further increase in capital investment will boost the development of related mechanical engineering and metal companies. Valentin Gapanovich, Vice President of Russian Railways, said the company had developed a new ideology for the development and acquisition of railway vehicles. "Russian Railways' interest in using advanced technological and innovative solutions is the basis of our demands for producers," he said. "We want to get the best and most advanced equipment," Gapanovich stressed. Russian Railways is implementing a large modernization program, aimed at ensuring rail traffic volumes, reducing operating costs, developing an efficient rail traffic management system, and introducing resource-saving technologies. Domestic producers will play an important role in the modernization and development of the railway system.

"We consider any constructive proposals regarding the development of railway car building," said Vladimir Yakunin, President of Russian Railways. "It is very important that producers meet our demands for railway vehicles. We are prepared to help them with technical documentation, technological control and our experience," he added.

Russian Railways has an effective system of contracts with its key partners. Transmashholding will supply over 200 passenger electronic locomotives to Russian Railways. These will be new generation locomotives, presented at the recent Innotrans 2006 rail exhibition in Berlin. Dmitry Komissarov, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Transmashholding, says cooperation with Russian Railways will allow Transmashholding to catch up with Siemens, Canada's Bombardier and France's Alstom in terms of production and technology.

One of Russian Railways' largest long-term contracts is with the Viksun Metallurgical Plant, part of the United Metallurgical Company (OMK), which will supply 5 million railroad wheels to Russian Railways until 2010. The contract is worth over RUR 32 billion (approx. \$1.2 billion).

"Both the government and private businesses will benefit from Russian Railways' participation in innovation projects based on advanced research and experience," said Vladimir Savchuk, the head of the Railway Transport Research Department of the Institute for Natural Monopoly Problems. "Russian Railways, supporting domestic producers, has achieved a multiplicative effect. Players on this market are developing and growing, together with the rest of the Russian economy," he concluded. RBC

* Sales of foreign cars exceed those of Russian makes

This year, sales of foreign cars exceeded those of Russian vehicles for the first time in 75 years. The largest national carmaker, AvtoVAZ, which controls only 33.5% of the local market compared with 50% two years ago, faces bleak prospects because Nissan, General Motors and Volkswagen want to build plants in Russia.

Experts at Ernst & Young said 800,000 to 900,000 Russian cars, as well as one million foreign vehicles, had been sold in 2006. In all, 250,000 foreign cars were assembled in Russia this year.

The situation will not improve for the Russian automotive industry because a record-breaking number of contracts for the assembly of foreign motor vehicles in Russia was signed this year.

Volkswagen has launched construction of a large automotive plant, expected to produce 115,000 vehicles per year, in the Kaluga Region. GM, Nissan and Toyota plan to build facilities worth \$1 billion in St. Petersburg. GM alone wants to assemble 50,000 cars per year.

Foreign automakers are rushing to enter the local market because the government's car-assembly resolution stipulating low import duties on components has now expired.

Yevgeny Bogdanov, head of the machine-engineering and transport department at the management consulting firm A. T. Kearney, said major automotive concerns have done their best not to miss the boat.

At least one million foreign cars will be assembled in Russia in 2010, Valery Tarakanov, an independent automotive market expert, told the paper.

Ivan Bonchev, a consultant for the automotive industry from Ernst & Young, said AvtoVAZ is the only Russian carmaker that is trying to develop its own models. However, AvtoVAZ and Canada's Magna have signed a contract on building another plant in Togliatti worth \$1.7 billion. The new enterprise will turn out 450,000 cars per year. AvtoVAZ will find it harder to compete against foreign companies with each passing year. Ernst & Young said the company will control only 28-30% of the local market by 2010. Vedomosti.

* Bekaert signs declaration of intent for the acquisition of Uralkord in Russia

Bekaert has signed a declaration of intent to acquire the Russian Uralkord for an enterprise value of 1.6 billion Russian roubles (€47 million). Uralkord, located in Magnitogorsk, manufactures steel cord products for tire reinforcement and serves nearly a quarter of the Russian market.

Bekaert has built up an extensive customer portfolio over the recent years for steel cord products used in tire reinforcement, steel fibres for reinforcing concrete and other specialized wire products. These products are now supplied to Russia from Bekaert plants in Central Europe.

Marc Vandecasteele, Group Executive Vice President, stated: "The development of a strong position in Russia is an essential part of our strategic objective of sustainable profitable growth. Given the growth potential in the Russian market we want to work closely with the steel industry and anticipate a significant increase in the demand for top quality products. Bekaert can offer the Russian tire manufacturers optimal service by having its own production platform."

The parties anticipate to further work out this declaration of intent in order to close the transaction

Signature of an investment agreement, highly symbolic, between the company **Astron Buildings S.A.** and the Region of Yaroslavl,



represented by its Governor, S.E. Mr. Anatoly Litissine. As more symbolic as Russia is for construction one of the most dynamic markets in Europe, and symbolic also thanks to the fact that the agreement foresees the opening, in Russia, of a production site by the European metal building leader: this acknowledges the Federation of Russia as a privileged market for investments.

Russia's **Severstal-Auto** started assembling Fiat Albea cars in Russia under a license from Italian carmaker Fiat Group. Fiat Albea cars are assembled at Severstal-Auto's compact car production factory ZMA based in the city of Naberezhnye Chelny in the constituent republic of Tatarstan. Severstal-Auto is indirectly controlled by Severstal Group's major shareholder Alexei Mordashov with a stake of about 58%. The second largest shareholder is the company's general director, Vadim Shvetsov, who holds a 15% stake

Toyota Motor Corporation plans to finish the construction of its assembly plant in the Russian city of St. Petersburg in February 2007 and start installing equipment on March 1, 2007. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development is expected to take part in the financing of the project.

Bateman Engineering was selected as the contractor for the design, engineering, supply, construction and commissioning of a 700,000 diamond treatment plant to be built in the Arkhangelsk region of Russia for OJSC Severalmaz. The principal shareholders of Severalmaz are AK "ALROSA" with 92.3% and the Committee for the State Property Management in the Arkhangelsk region with 5.1%. The US\$531 million contract is part of an overall project to increase the capacity of the Lomonosov Mine to 5.6 million tonnes per annum.

Italy's Same **Deutz-Fahr** group is expected to start tractor assembly in Russia's Leningrad Region in 2007. The assembled tractors will be sold mainly in the Leningrad Region and cost about U.S.\$100,000 each. Same Deutz-Fahr group is one of the world's leading manufacturers of tractors, engines, combine harvesters and other farm machines Engineering and Construction.



NEWS FROM BELARUS

In 2007, all companies in Belarus should have their manufactures certified in line with the requirements of ISO 9000 quality management system, Belarusian Premier Sergei Sidorskiy said as he was presenting awards of the government of the Republic of Belarus for achievements in the sphere of quality of goods and services Quality 2006. "With all companies duly certified, Belarus will be able to advance to the level of developed countries," he said. The Premier underscored the importance of enhancing the quality of socially-important services. Besides, the development of the travel industry in Belarus will be given much attention. This area should become one of the state priorities. "We have relieved taxes for travel companies," the Premier said. The Government took a number of decisions to develop roadside servicing. The share of services in GDP is expected to increase to 55 per cent in this five-year period.

This year, for the first time, Belarus has managed to step up its exports to the EU pushing it to 50 per cent of the country's total exports. "We set even more ambitious goals to make our goods more competitive in the European market," he added. This year Belarus has reported a record-high volume of foreign trade turnover as of the end of nine months, which hit USD 30 billion.

Belarus is well-known for the beauty of its nature, forests and lakes. However, the country also has a significant and growing industrial base.

In 2003, **ASTRON's** management launched a marketing development plan to provide ASTRON buildings and services to investors in this country. The result has been significant, with several major projects having been delivered. Perhaps the most important of these was a 17.000m project for Alutech Incorporated.

This dynamic company manufactures aluminum products and components. The design and preparation of the project required ASTRON engineers to work with the Belarus Authorities in order to obtain Belarus Technical Approval.

Many adaptations of ASTRON's design concept were made to conform to specific local norms and construction practices. The 17.000m project, equipped with cranes, subsequently was delivered in 2004. The customer was highly pleased with the result!

The erection time was only 8 months and the factory is now up and running. As a consequence of this good performance, in June 2006, ASTRON was awarded a new project for Alutech. A 20.000m components plant, this new building will be shipped later this year.

Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus with Regard to the Approval by the Council of the European Union of the Decision to Suspend Tariff Privileges for Belarus within Generalized System of Preferences.

21 December 2006

The approval by the Council of the European Union of the decision to suspend tariff privileges for Belarus within the EU Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which can take effect in six months, demonstrates the lack of foresight of its initiators and supporters. Short-sightedness and defectiveness of such a step are obvious.

It is evident that the EU decision absolutely runs counter to the stated goal of "providing support to Belarusian population". This decision has clearly showed that in reality the interests of common citizens of the Belarusian state mean nothing to EU. Hypocrisy of the statements by the European Union is evident to everybody.

The EU decision is in a complete discord with the positive dialogue maintained by the Government of Belarus with International Labor Organization.

By carrying out a multi-vector foreign policy, Belarus has on its side reliable partners in different parts of the world. The EU decision will not provide a serious challenge to Belarus' economy and citizens.

Exerting pressure from outside on the Belarusian people and its state will not yield any results. History has proved it many times. It is time for the European Union to give up the inertia of its thinking, and take a sober view of the situation in Belarus, admit its socio-economic successes, and the important contribution it made to strengthening the European security and stability. This all is an outcome of the real unity of the society and state leadership in developing a strong and prosperous Belarus.

We hope that common sense prevails in the European Union.

Not pressure, but an equal and mutually respectful dialogue must provide a basis for interaction, if EU's goal is indeed the creation of a large common Europe.



Belarus Boosts Foreign Trade by 30 Percent to USD 37.7 Billion in January-October

The foreign trade of Belarus has reached USD 37.696 billion in January-October this year having increased by 29.9 per cent over the same time last year, according to the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis.

The Belarusian exports upped by 24.5 per cent to USD 18.425 billion over the 10 months. The imports jumped by 35.6 per cent to USD 19,27 billion thus contributing to a USD 846.0 million foreign trade deficit.

The foreign trade in goods totalled USD 34.55 billion, including USD 16.46 billion worth of exports and USD 18.09 billion worth of imports.

Belarusian companies were trading with 170 countries world wide, of them 138 were importing the Belarus-made goods and 152 were exporting to this country. Among the main trade partners of Belarus are Russia (47.5 per cent of the total turnover), the Netherlands (9.3 per cent), Germany and Ukraine (5.7 per cent each), Poland (4.3 per cent), the UK (4.1 per cent), China (2.1 per cent), the US, Italy, Lithuania.

In line with the methodology of the balance of payments, the foreign trade in services in January-October amounted to USD 3.12 billion having increased by 14.2 per cent as against same time last year. The export of services upped by 9.5 per cent to USD 1.86 billion, import – by 21.9 per cent to USD 1.26 billion.

Prime Minister of Belarus Sergei Sidorskiy presented today prizes of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for quality achievements-2006. A solemn awarding ceremony was held in the National Library of Belarus.

The high awards were given to 22 companies of Belarus for the application of highly efficient management methods and for the production of highly competitive goods. A corresponding decision was taken by the commission on awarding the prizes of the government of the Republic of Belarus for quality achievements-2006.

Among them – open joint-stock companies Berezastroimaterialy, Grodno Azot, Krinitsa (Minsk), Polotsk-Steklovolokno, republican unitary companies Gomel Plant of Castings and Normals, Gomel Machine-Tool Plant named after S.M. Kirov, Molodechno Hardware Plant, the scientific-production republican unitary company LEMT (Minsk).

A big group of companies producing foodstuffs were presented quality prizes as well: open joint-stock companies "Brest Meat-Packing Plant, Gomel Meat-Packing Plant, Mogilev Meat-Packing Plant, Slonim Meat-Packing Plant, Schuchin Butter and Cheese Making Factory, First Minsk Battery Farm, Poultry Farm Soligorskaya, Belarusian-Russian joint venture – OAO Belovezhskiy Syry (the town of Vysokoye).

Crystal symbols and diplomas were also presented to OAO the Planeta Hotel, the state establishment Palace of the Republic of the Presidential Property Management Directorate (Minsk), Vegas Ltd. (Brest), experimental-production company Special Machines Design Office of Belarusian State University, the republican unitary company Novogrudok Garment Factory and private unitary knitting factory Romgil (Slonim).

This year 25 companies of Belarus have confirmed their title of winners of the prizes of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for quality achievements -2003. They received corresponding diplomas.

Foreign Investments in the Republic of Belarus in January-June 2006

From January though June 2006, Belarus attracted USD 1.0 billion of foreign investments (25.5% rise in comparison with the same period of 2005) including:

USD 451.3 million of direct investments;
 USD 63.4 thousand of portfolio investments;
 USD 672.3 million of other investments.

The ratio of foreign investments from CIS participating countries (Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, Kazakhstan) amount to 15.3% of the total volume. The Russian Federation ranks first with USD 136.5 million of investments.

The share of other foreign countries reaches 84.7% of the total volume of investments.

The most significant investing countries are:

Switzerland (USD 245.2 million - 24.5%);
 Russian Federation (USD 136.5 million - 13.6%);
 Austria (USD 128.3 million - 12.8%);
 Germany (USD 100.8 million - 10.1%);
 Cyprus (USD 68.4 million - 6.8%);
 Poland (USD 52.0 million - 5.2%).



Reference: in January-June 2005, the major investors were Switzerland (22.3%), Austria (13.9%), the Netherlands (6.2%), Germany and Cyprus (4.6% and 4.5%), the United Kingdom (5.2%), the USA (4.2%), Latvia (3.8%).

The inflow of foreign investments in January-June 2006 were distributed among the sectors of economy as follows:

commerce (USD 394.0 million, 39.4%);
industry (USD 315.5 million, or 31.5%);
trade and public catering (USD 142.8 million, or 14.3%);
communication (USD 63.1 million, or 6.3%);
transport (USD 44.6 million, or 4.5%);
construction (USD 8.0 million, or 0.8%).

The total amount of foreign direct investments (USD 328.7 million) made 32.8% of the total inflow of foreign investments, and increased by 25.5% in comparison with January-June 2005.

The main forms of direct foreign investment are as follows:

credits and loans received from direct investors (USD 267.5 million, or 81.3% of the total inflow of direct investments);
other direct investments (USD 38.0 million, or 11.6%);
deposits to the authorized fund (USD 22.3 million, or 6.7%).

The most significant foreign direct investors were the following:

Switzerland (USD 234.3 million, or 71.2%);
Russian Federation (USD 14.8 million, or 4.5%);
Poland (USD 13.8 million, or 4.2%);
Austria (USD 12.4 million, or 3.8%);
Netherlands (USD 11.7 million, or 3.6%);
United Kingdom (USD 10.4 million, or 3.1%);
Latvia (USD 6.6 million, or 2%);
USA (USD 6.4 million, or 1.9%)

Reference: as of January 1st, 2006, 3,545 enterprises with foreign investments were registered on the territory of Belarus, including 1,903 joint ventures and 1,642 businesses with 100% of foreign assets.

The total amount of other foreign investments (USD 672.3 million) made 67.2% of the total inflow of investments, and increased by 25.4% in comparison with January-June 2005.

The main forms of other foreign investments are as follows:

foreign credits (USD 299.0 million, or 44.5%);
foreign loans (USD 239.9 million, or 35.7%);
trade credits (USD 128.8 million, or 19.1%).

Most of other foreign investments were received from the following countries:

Russian Federation (USD 121.7 million, or 18.1%);
Austria (USD 115.8 million, or 17.2%);
Germany (USD 97.2 million, or 14.5%);
Cyprus (USD 63.7 million, or 9.4%);
United Kingdom (USD 40.3 million, or 6%);
Poland (USD 38.2 million, or 5.7%);
Latvia (USD 32.6 million, or 4.8%).



Shtokman reverse

MOSCOW. (Dr. Igor Tomberg, for RIA Novosti) - The Russian government has again given foreign companies hope of joining the Shtokman project. However, they will be able to develop one of the world's largest gas fields only if they make "interesting proposals" to Gazprom in return.

The Russian state-controlled monopoly wants to gain access to end gas consumers in the United States and Europe.

Late last week Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that Western partners' proposals on the Shtokman field in the Barents Sea could be considered again. "At talks with its potential partners, Gazprom is seeking access to end consumers of natural gas in the U.S. and Europe in return for a stake in the development of Europe's largest gas field," said Putin in an interview with Mexican publisher Mario Vasquez Rana. "It has not succeeded so far, but the issue has not been dismissed finally. It can be considered again if we receive interesting proposals from foreign partners."

The president's aide Igor Shuvalov in Washington and Industry and Energy Minister Viktor Khristenko in Moscow also spoke about the possibility and desirability of foreign companies' involvement in the Shtokman project about the same time.

So far, foreign companies have not made any proposals that would be as interesting as Shtokman, Khristenko said. "This means that we can attract partners in a different capacity: as contractors in the project's vital elements or as participants, but in a different format and on different terms," he said. Shuvalov said that Shtokman would be developed together with foreign firms, but Gazprom would be the only license holder.

So bargaining around Shtokman goes on. Russian officials do not conceal that access to one of the world's last fields of this scale is a political rather than financial or technical issue. Russia's seemingly tempered position on the project can turn out to be part of a bigger energy play. Arguing with Western partners on the basic principles of energy security and on ratification of the Energy Charter, Moscow uses its natural resources as a bargaining chip, demanding equal conditions in global business. Russia is willing to look for mutually acceptable decisions and to closely cooperate with Western partners, provided this cooperation is mutually beneficial, said Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. So far this position has been rejected by Russia's partners.

Considering Russia's new statements on Shtokman in the political context of recent months, they obviously come from assuaging contradictions with Western, especially European, partners. It is no coincidence that Russian official statements came at a time when the EU-Russia Permanent Partnership Council on Energy held its second meeting and similar views were voiced by its participants. "The European Union hopes that European companies will successfully cooperate with Gazprom in the Shtokman field development," said Andris Piebalgs, EU Energy Commissioner, on Friday. His optimism is fully in line with foreign companies' sustained interest in joining the project.

This opportunity will appear only in exchange for significant assets in Europe and, perhaps, in the U.S. Today it is difficult to predict the format and scale of Western participation in the project. There is no longer talk of giving them a 49% stake as before. According to media reports (see Kommersant, December 11, 2006), the meeting of the Russian Security Council on December 9 discussed the government's new strategy in offshore fields development. Under the strategy, the Kremlin will set up a new state-owned company with the participation of Gazprom, Rosneft and Zarubezhneft to develop Russian shelf deposits. The outlook and the size of the future shelf monopoly can be assessed through the scale of its task. Recoverable reserves of Russian shelf exceed 100 billion tons of oil equivalent, according to the Natural Resources Ministry. In 2020-2030, offshore reserves will be the main source of hydrocarbons in Russia.

So foreign companies are unlikely to receive any significant stakes in the Shtokman project. At best, they can hope to get gas from the field as payment for state-of-the-art production technologies. Yet even mere participation in the project is extremely valuable. It is logical to expect truly interesting proposals from Western candidates and view the current surge of interest in the project as a Christmas present from the Russian authorities in the ongoing political bargaining with the West.

Dr. Igor Tomberg is senior research fellow at the Center for Energy Research, the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences.



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KEY SPEAKERS

- **I. Klebanov**, Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoy of the Russian Federation to the North-West federal district
- **A. Reus**, Deputy Minister of Industry and Energy of the Russian Federation
- **K. Androsov**, Deputy Minister for Economic Development and Trade of the Russian Federation
- **M. Blokhin**, Executive director, «National Association of Automotive Component Manufacturers»
- **H. Nensen**, Chairman of the automobile producers Committee of the Association of European Business in Russian Federation
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