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INVESTING

in the future

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Experience has shown that investments into the development of science and technology are generously repaid when higher profits are yielded. Being short of raw materials, Belarus may find economic success in developing hi-tech innovative goods.

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According to European statistics, EU funding for sci-tech research in 2000 made up 1.95 percent of GDP, while in 2002 it was raised to 1.99 percent. However, this increase was considered insufficient, especially taking into account that US funding for science was raised from 2.72 percent to 2.8 percent of GDP. The EU set an ambitious goal; by 2010 they would ask all member states to spend over 3 percent of their GDP on scientific research. To date, only Sweden (4.27 percent) and Finland (3.49 percent) have met this target. Germany allocates only 2.49 percent of GDP, Denmark — 2.4 percent, France — 2.2 percent and Great Britain just 1.8 percent. Among EU newcomers, the leaders in science-related expenditure are Slovenia (1.52 percent) and the Czech Republic (1.33 percent), although Poland has allocated the largest value (1.3bn euros).

“The way for the Belarusian economy to become more competitive is for it to embrace modern methods of sci-tech production. Consumption of materials and energy needs to be limited and resources should be concentrated on the latest innovative ideas,” Chair of the State Committee on Science and Technology (SCST), Yury Pleskachevsky, tells us.

He explains that the committee focuses on international sci-tech co-operation in order to keep up with the latest technology being used in the market place. The understanding of globalisation and integration, computer technology and international research, can be used to sharpen our competitive edge.

With a view to regulating international projects, the Council of Ministers developed regulations for international sci-tech projects signed by Belarus. They define the processes for filing applications, competitive selection, and financing of joint projects. In 2004 Belarusian-Indian projects successfully passed competitive selection and were allocated funding. In addition, 22 sci-tech projects involving co-operation with Russia, the Ukraine, Serbia and Montenegro were planned; 12 Belarusian-German ventures and over 70 Belarusian-Polish projects were finalised. In association with the Education and Science Ministry of Ukraine, projects were selected for funding from our two countries' budgets for 2004-2005. Over 90 candidates filed applications; priority was given to experimental-design and technology. Programmes for co-operation with Iran and South Africa in the sphere of science and technology were also approved.

The committee assists manufacturers of scientific technology sold in domestic and foreign markets; they also encourage the attraction of potential investors and customers. This year, scientific and technical expositions were organised at the 5th Moscow International Forum 'High Technology of the 21st Century', the 4th Moscow International Innovation and Investment Salon, the 9th Russian Scientific and Technical Forum 'United Russia', IT and Communications Expo CeBIT and Hannover Industrial Fair (Germany). Expositions were also delivered in Kazan and Novosibirsk, at the 37th Cairo International Exhibition (Egypt) and at the International Industrial Expo SIMA-2004 (Syria).

European scientific programmes play a significant role in Belarus, especially those oriented to the CIS states. Participation in such projects improves the experience of our scientists and, helping to solve social, economic and ecological problems, brings closer relations with the scientific world community.

Over the past year, the European Union has focused on creating the European Research Area. This began with the 6th EU Programme for Research and Technological Development. This fundamentally differed from previous programmes by aiming to unite European science within the security of the shared market. It has a budget of 17.5bn euros — 17 percent more than previously and a considerable amount by any standards. The programme aims to encourage the scientific potential of Belarus and other CIS countries, particularly in the spheres of energy, weapon non-proliferation, health care and ecological and nuclear security. There are now equal opportunities in all scientific initiatives. The EU has moved towards co-

operation with Belarus, through the International Association for the promotion of co-operation with scientists from the new independent states of the former Soviet Union (INTAS).

Belarus has signed an agreement with INTAS to promote co-operation. A joint venture of scientific-research projects, called Belarus-INTAS-2003, was organised in December 2003 (Belarus was the only post Soviet country to have been given this opportunity). For 2004 to 2006, one million euros have been allocated to the fund, out of which 60 percent is to be distributed by INTAS and 40 percent by Belarus. The first 9 projects are to be financed in 2004. The project executors include scientists from 14 European countries. Under the aegis of SCST and INTAS, the National Information Office for Co-operation has been created.

This close relationship with foreign states should help to develop and strengthen Belarus' scientific and technical potential. It will facilitate Belarus' integration into the world sci-tech market, as well as protecting national interests regarding intellectual property and copyright patents.