

**PRINCIPAL INDICATORS AND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS OF THE VITEBSK REGION.
ECONOMY GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA**

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The article gives a positive assessment of the development of Vitebsk region, and also focuses on the strengths of the geographic location and natural resources. This, in turn, explains the favorable conditions for the development of small hydropower in the region, the production and export of building materials, the timber and wood processing industry, livestock, flax cultivation, fish farming, processing industries of the agro-industrial complex, development of tourism and recreation services.

Transport arteries pass through the region, connecting the largest and most developed economic regions of Russia with Europe. There two European transport corridors: Crete № 2 (Berlin - Warsaw - Minsk - Moscow), Crete № 9 (Helsinki - St. Petersburg - Kiev - Chişinău- Bucharest). Such large economic centers as Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev, Warsaw, Vilnius, Riga are located at a distance of 400–800 km from the regional center, the distance from the seaport of Klaipeda is 400 km. Railway junctions of Vitebsk and Orsha are of international importance. In these cities there are airports that provide the possibility of organizing cargo and passenger flights. The airport "Vitebsk" of category IV"B" class has a permit to operate in limited meteorological conditions and is able to accept all types of modern airliners.

The airport on the territory of OJSC "Orshansky Aviapremontny factory" has a class "B", and is capable of receiving aircraft in the daytime. The fiber-optic line from Orsha to Berlin, the Yamal-Europe gas pipeline runs across the region. The significance of the geographical location of the region has increased due to the increase in cargo flows Russia - Kaliningrad region of Russia.

As for significant industrial potential, industry is the basis economic complex formed on the territory of the region. The industry included 24.1% of the total number of employed population in 2014, produced 58.6% of gross output, 33.6% of gross value added. The areas of specialization of the industrial complex of the region in the republican division of labor are oil refining and petrochemistry, the production of textile products (synthetic and linen materials, carpets and rugs), shoe making, machine-tool construction, electric power engineering, mining and processing of clay raw materials.

There are "Orsha fax factory", which produces almost 100% of flax fabrics of the republic, OJSC "Vitebsk wood factory», the share of products of which in republican volumes is more than 90%, a complex of shoe productions, producing more than 40% of republican volumes of this group, etc. All of them are located on the territory of the region.

There is the only Delarussian fur factory. For a number of other major trade factors, the region also holds a monopoly or dominant position in the republic. The production facilities of republican significance are OJSC «Naftan», including the factory «Polimir», OJSC «Polotsksteklovolokno», OJSC Lukoml GRES which have a decisive influence on the results of the economic complex of the region.

The industrial potential of the region is open and focused on foreign markets. For most types of products, exports account for more than 50% of the volume produced, for individual items (acrylic fibers, organic acids, polyethylene, fiberglass) exceeds 90%. Products of the oil refining and chemical industries prevail in the export trade structure.

Export-import operations are carried out with 100 countries of the world. The main trade partners of the region are Russia (59% of the total turnover), the Netherlands (24.5%), the United Kingdom (2.3%), Germany, China, Poland (1.5% each), Ukraine (1%).

Talking about developed agro-industrial complex, the region accounts for 17.2% of the republican area of agricultural lands. In terms of the quality of land resources, the region is significantly inferior to other regions of the republic; low bonitet of the soils is combined here with high congestion, clay soils, small contour and fragmentation of the plots. Under more severe climatic conditions, this significantly limits the possibilities of crop production. Work has been organized to optimize land use, part of the low-fertile arable land is transferred to natural lands, which allows to increase the feed base and develop the production of demanded agricultural products. The specialization of agricultural production in the region is dairy cattle breeding with developed pig breeding, poultry farming. The region specializes in flax cultivation in the republican division of labor.

The production capacity of the food industry allows to fully process the received agricultural products. Active modernization aimed at deepening the processing of meat and dairy, vegetable and fruit raw materials, increasing shelf life, introducing new types of packaging, ensures the competitiveness of products in the domestic and foreign markets.

As for a variety of raw materials suitable for industrial use, the region has more than one-third of republican peat reserves (1,135 million tons, 52% of which are within the protected areas), almost 100% of explored reserves of dolomites (approved reserves of 878 million tons with a depth of 2.5–4.5 to 35–38 m), 14% of republican reserves of building sand, 35% of explored reserves of sand and gravel material, 38% of balance reserves of clay raw materials, including 47% of developed reserves, more than 77% of republican sapropel reserves. A variety of mineral water sources has also been identified. Forest resources have significant potential – 39.5% of the land fund of the region is occupied by forests and shrubs (1,580.3 thousand hectares), the wood supply is estimated at 292.8 million m³; the total timber reserves in the forests of the region are about 1/5 of all Belarus reserves.

Availability of unique water resources and natural landscapes

In terms of surface water reserves, the region takes the first place in the republic; more than 90% of its territory belongs to the zone of the Belarusian Lakeland. The number of lakes is more than 1.5 thousand – 89% of all lakes in Belarus. Unique bogs of the region are called the “the lungs of Europe”. Vitebsk region accounts for 22.3% of all specially protected natural territories of the republic. The region contains most of the Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve (Lepelsky and Dokshytsky Districts), the Braslav Lakes National Park (the Braslavsky District), 6 landscape, 4 biological and 11 hydrological reserves of republican significance, 60 reserves of local importance, 76 nature monuments of the republican and 166 local values. The Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve and 2 reserves - Osveysky (Verkhnedvinsky district) and Yelnya (Miory and Sharkovshchina districts) have the international status of Ramsar territories. The importance of recreational resources and landscapes of the region is increasing due to the practical absence of radioactive pollution in the region.

The presence of a sufficiently developed research potential and training system, corresponding to the structure of the socio-economic complex.

There are 4 institutions of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, 11 research and design departments of industrial organizations, 5 state institutions providing higher education and leading active scientific-research activities in the region. There multi-level training system from personnel of working specialties to top-level specialistshas been created: veterinary medicine, sewing, textile, footwear industry, mechanical engineering, machine-tool construction, instrument engineering, petrochemistry, energy, construction, information technology, and medicine. A number of institutions providing training for specialists with higher education are competitive in the international market of educational services. There are 2 science and technology parks operate on the basis of the EI “Vitebsk State Technological University” and the EI “Polotsk State University” on the territory of the region.

The level of medical care system is a fairly high and competitive in the foreign market in a number of areas (diagnostics, gynecology and obstetrics, cardiology, vein surgery, purulent surgery, neurosurgery, ophthalmology, urology, gastroenterology, dentistry).

A number of leading medical institutions of the region are equipped with equipment of world industry leaders: Siemens, Karl Storz, Drager, General Electric, Philips, Carl Zeiss, Fujinon, TOMEY. In combination with a high level of training, this allows the use of the latest medical technology in the diagnosis and surgical treatment. The region was the first in the republic to create a register of medical services provided, received a license and opened a medical tourism center. From 2010 to 2013 exports of services in the industry grew by more than 2 times. The effectiveness of the use of funds invested in health care in the region remains the highest in the country.

Competitive Recreation and Leisure Time Infrastructure

The network of health resorts, recreational organizations and leisure time organizations in the region includes 112 units, or 24.0% of all organizations of the republic. For the period 2005 – 2013 their number increased 1.5 times. There are 8 sanatoriums (including 1 - children's in Miory district), 32 recreation centers, 66 other recreational and recreational organizations on the territory of the Vitebsk region. The total capacity of the network of health resorts and recreational organizations at the end of 2014 was 6,675 beds. The largest organizations are located in Lepel, Polotsk, Vitebsk, Braslav districts.

According to the results of 2013, health resorts and recreational organizations of the region were recognized as the best in the country. At the same time, in the whole region, the proportion of trip vouchers sold to foreign citizens in 2013 amounted to 40.9% of their total number. The popularity and attractiveness of a number of organizations is very high. So, in the resort «Liotsy» (Vitebsk district), 81% of trip vouchers were sold

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to foreigners, «Forest lakes» (Ushachy district) - 78.8%, «Lesnoie» (Dokshytsy district) - 64.3%, “Lepel Military Sanatorium” 58.7%. According to the group of organizations of recreation and leisure time in the Braslavsky district, a sustainable brand "Braslavskie ozera" was formed on the domestic and foreign markets.

Successful experience of the rural tourism development

The region is one of the leaders of the republic in this direction. In 2013, 502 agro-farmsteads operated in the region, or 23.9% of the total number in the republic. Since 2009, their number in the region has increased 1.8 times. The most intensively rural tourism develops in Braslavs, Glubokoe, Lepel, Miory, Polotsk, Postavy, Rossony districts, where 77.7% of all agrofood regions are concentrated.

Rich historical and cultural heritage

There are 931 immovable heritage objects included in the State List of Historical and Cultural Values of the Republic of Belarus, including 291 architectural monuments, 258 historical monuments, 4 - arts, 374 - archeology, 2 urban monuments (historical centers of Vitebsk and Polotsk), 2 reserved places (Yanka Kupala's place of life and creativity in the village Levki, Orsha district, Berezinsky water system in Lepel district). This is 17.6% of the total number of these objects in the republic. The region takes the 2nd place among the regions of the country by the number of museums (27 units, 22 of which are located in the districts).

Multi-genre festival movement

A number of festivals have the status of international and more than 20 years of holding festivals history.

The International Festival of Arts «Slavianski bazaar in Vitebsk», the International Repinsky plein air, International Chagall Days, the International Music Festival named after Sh. I.Sollertinsky, International Festival of Contemporary Choreography in Vitebsk, International Festival of Organ Music and the International Festival of Old and Modern Chamber Music in Polotsk, International Festival of Folk Music and harmonica in Postavy are the most traditional and significant festivals. The regional festival of song and music of Dnieper region, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, the festival of arts «Dzvina – Dvina – Daugava», the festival of guitar music «Minstrel» and others are widely famous.

Thus, the available natural resources and peculiarities of the territory of Vitebsk region provide favorable conditions for the development of small hydropower industry in the region, production and export of building materials, timber and wood processing industries, livestock, flax farming, fish farming, processing industries of the agroindustrial complex, development of tourism and recreation and leisure time services, and mud therapy.

The region is making active efforts to develop socio-economic potential based on the use of existing competitive advantages. Every year the volume of funds allocated for investments in the region amounts to about 20 trillion rubles, of which more than 7 trillion rubles are allocated for the modernization of production.

The priority areas of investment activity of the region are: the development of the production sector with the implementation of investment projects with a high proportion of high-tech and resource-saving technologies, export-oriented and import-substituting production; reconstruction and modernization of enterprises for the processing of agricultural raw materials, renewal of agricultural machinery; further development of the free economic zone "Vitebsk" with a focus on the creation of innovative industries; rendering assistance to foreign investors in the creation of new enterprises and industries; the intensification of work on attracting foreign credit lines; small business development; involvement in the economic turnover of unused property that is in the communal property of the Vitebsk region

Such areas as transport and logistics, energy, construction and production of building materials, agriculture, food production, trade, pharmaceuticals are the most attractive for investors. Investors are invited to discuss options for the use of agricultural land for the organization of the cultivation of grain crops, flax, rapeseed, vegetables, for laying gardens and berries.

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