

## Promoting Interregional Cooperation in the Social Sphere as an Important Reserve to Strengthen Relations within the Union State\*



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**Abstract.** In modern conditions of globalization the need for interregional cooperation in the implementation of foreign economic relations of the countries becomes increasingly evident. In this case, if a country becomes part of a larger integration association, it must consider the aspects that arise during the joint existence of two or more countries in the association. The experience of the Union State, being such an association, is considered in the paper. The purpose of the study is to determine key factors preventing the creation of the common economic space of the Union State and the opportunities for development of interregional relations, which will facilitate a more dynamic adaptation of regional economies to modern business processes and, therefore, create new opportunities for the development and implementation of competitive advantages in the regions of both countries. The novelty of the study lies in the fact that the article defines the essence and meaning of “interregional cooperation”. In previously published studies the issue of cooperation at the regional level of the Union State was regarded very narrowly – exclusively within a single branch or two regions of the country. The methodology used is not limited only to the method of retrospective analysis, but uses methods such as socio-economic modelling and spatial data. The authors substantiate the necessity of development of interregional cooperation in the framework of the Union State of Russia and Belarus. It emphasizes the authors’ position regarding the relevance of development of interregional cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus in the spheres of education, science, culture, medicine and tourism in the context of building a single economic space. Based on the analysis of factual material reflecting the experience of cooperation between constituent entities of the Russian Federation and regions of the Republic of Belarus, the authors identify main problems of such interaction. In particular, it is shown that in the framework of the Union State, contacts and cooperation among regions face difficulties connected with the federal and unitary structure of the countries. The authors reveal that existing relationships are widespread in a geographical aspect. Addressing practical issues, the authors present recommendations for the development of cooperation between the two countries in the social sphere and platforms for cooperation in innovation sectors of economic environment. The recommendations can be used by the legislative and executive bodies of the Union State and taken into account in the work of regional authorities in order to increase the investment attractiveness of territorial administrative units of both countries.

**Key words:** spatial relationships, regional economy, social sphere, differentiation of regions, Union State.

### **Problem statement and the relevance of the study**

For any country, interregional cooperation presents an opportunity for economic growth, diversification of economic flows and increase

in the autonomy of each regional formation. A common question is how interregional cooperation is carried out. In the financial aspect, it is advantageous that every region can develop cooperation and spatial economic

relations, thereby gaining additional revenue for its development. In the management aspect, such benefit remains the prerogative to increase human capital and in the Union State – the mutual integration based on inter-territorial communication and integration of economic systems. This approach is reflected in the theoretical basis of the concept “interregional cooperation”. Thus, Protocol 2 (Madrid Convention of May 5, 1998) defines it as any concerted action designed to establish relations between territorial communities or authorities of two or more Contracting Parties, other than relations of transfrontier cooperation of neighboring authorities.

That is, in the case of interregional cooperation, ties are established between the administrative-territorial units that might not have a common border.

The relevance of highlighting this concept is justified in the preamble to Protocol No. 2: “In order to perform their functions effectively, territorial communities or authorities are increasingly cooperating not only with neighboring authorities of other States (transfrontier cooperation), but also with foreign non-neighboring authorities” [10].

In the Russian scientific literature international cooperation is considered in the works of the following scientists: V.N. Blokhin, S.K. Volkov, L.V. Vorob'eva, S.L. Goloborodko, Ya. M. Kester, V. Kuybida, K.Yu. Kudin, R.A. Latypov, E.V. Lukin, S. Maksimenko, L. Prokopenko, I. Rozputenko, A. Rudik A.N. Spartak, I. Studennikov,

V. Udovichenko, T.V. Uskova, Yu. Sharov, I.N. Shapkin, I. Shumlyayeva, and others.

Approaches to the concept of “interregional cooperation” presented in these studies are quite different. However, in essence, they all characterize the system of relations of the subjects of interaction from different regions of the country in the spheres of economy, politics, culture, education, nature conservation, etc.; this system is due to several factors, such as geographical, socio-economic and political-legal.

In turn, interregional cooperation can be considered as one of the key external drivers of socio-economic and political development of the region. Interregional cooperation is carried out by the regions that have similar goals and objectives for the development of local community and regional economy. If the state becomes part of a larger formation, it must consider the aspects that arise during the joint existence of two or more countries in the block.

It should be noted that almost all CIS countries, including Russia, still live at the expense of economic potential and economic infrastructure developed mainly in the Soviet period. At the same time, the Western world in general after World War II was characterized by the most important process, regional economic integration. Major regional economic organizations were created. The process was especially vigorous and noticeable in Europe: first G6 and G7, then the EEC, on the basis of which the EU was created, which

represented only an economic but also a political union of European countries. Against this background, the formation of the Union State of Russia and Belarus reflects the global trend of integration processes from regional to global (globalization).

If we consider the experience of existing integration groups (primarily the EU) and the practice of cooperation, we can conclude that any integration association (especially an “advanced” one, like the Union State) will be successful only if there is a strong infrastructure of cooperation. In this regard, close cooperation between regions of Russia and Belarus becomes particularly important.

#### **The goal of the study**

The Union State of Russia and Belarus is a developing association that affects the interests of more than 150 million people. Its economic policy is implemented in the mode of existence of two supranational institutions: the Eurasian Economic Union and the Union State. This determines the purpose of the present study, which is to determine key factors preventing the creation of a common economic space of the Union State and the development of interregional relations.

#### **Main material of the study**

Interregional cooperation originates from information cooperation between the members of the Union State. Such meetings and other forms of cooperation like workshops, intergovernmental meetings and round tables, potential exchange of ideas and addressing different issues become further

reasons for intergovernmental meetings at the level of Governments. Thus, on the part of the Russian Federation, more than 3,000 enterprises and more than 50 regions are involved in commodity exchange. In June 2016, the Third Forum of regions of Russia and Belarus took place. There it was determined that the commercial cooperation of the Union State must become the reason and format for the development of the Eurasian Economic Union. The geography of cooperation on the part of Russia is not limited to border regions. Even remote areas such as the Sakhalin and Tyumen oblasts and Primorsky Krai have commodity relations with Belarus. Public administration authorities also understand that together with the economic ties it is necessary to develop cultural relations. This makes it relevant to consider the structure of such ties.

Interregional cooperation is a tool to solve regional problems and a part of the mechanism of economic growth both at the national and regional levels. For the country as a whole, the intensification of interregional cooperation solves the main problem of capitalization, mobilization and optimization of using the resources of regions as a main source of socio-economic development of the Union State. The regions participating in this kind of integration processes gain the following advantages:

- wider access of economic entities to financial, human, material resources and cutting-edge technology;

- ability to produce and supply products to the international market, which is more capacious;
- ability to operate on a broader, integrated, perhaps international, market-place;
- creating favorable conditions for economic entities of the member regions, including protection from the competition of producers from other regions and countries;
- joint search for solutions to complex socio-economic, scientific-technological, environmental and other issues.

As a logical continuation of the strategic course of the Union State aimed to establish the principles of democracy in society, interregional cooperation should develop in the spheres that deal with the challenges of the growth common to several regions and provide an opportunity to capitalize the resources that in their capacity greatly exceed the capacity of individual regions.

The economy of the regions within the Union State is characterized by unbalanced development and the heterogeneity of socio-economic situation; all this is aggravated by an unstable economic and political situation and increasing crisis phenomena in the economy. This makes it impossible to meet the needs of citizens at the level exceeding that established by government, reduces the possibility of medium-term forecasting and denies the use of long-term planning, reduces the incentives to expand economic ties and violates the existing mechanisms of interaction between

authorities, local government and the non-governmental sector.

Therefore, it is necessary to intensify domestic efforts of each region to achieve their development goals. In this case it can be useful to apply the model of endogenous development of regions, which gained popularity in the 1980s in the West, and which is based on the maximum use of local resources – labor, the accumulation of capital at the local level, entrepreneurial potential, specific knowledge of the production process and opportunities for implementing specific professional tasks. Another element of the model is the ability of local economy to control the accumulation process at the local level. However, not all regions have sufficient industrial and resource potential to achieve the goals on their own, so the only way out of this situation is to use the advantages of participation in inter-regional or international integration processes.

Systematization of modern experience to meet the challenges of the first and second areas of analysis and the works on assessing interregional cooperation has allowed us to formulate our own vision of a technique for designing a model for evaluating the progress and results of interregional cooperation.

In order to understand the essence of the technique it is necessary to provide explanations to this model. The first stage involves selecting the indicators of socio-economic development in the regions participating in the Union State, which may

show the result of interregional cooperation. Since its goal is to create beneficial relationships that are based on the principles of cooperation and focused on rational reproduction of resources, then in the first place it is possible to allocate the following groups of indicators: gross regional product, interregional trade, interregional movement of capital and investment, interregional migration, transport flows and so on. The analysis must include indicators such as the standard of living, evaluation of employment, education, health and others and select data from official statistical information [11].

During the next stage the selected indicators should be assessed regarding the nature of their influence on economic or social efficiency of cooperation that is regarding the possibility of getting positive or negative synergetic effect. Such action is necessary to carry out based on the analysis of dynamics of the changes in absolute and relative statistical indicators classified at the first stage, and also on expert assessment, since there are no official data on some aspects of the volumes of interregional flows.

The two groups of indicators thus obtained (increase in the useful resource and deterioration of socio-economic status) are to produce a system of indicators and occupy a respective rank position (by degree of impact and direction of impact (“+” or “-”). These methodological tools will help reveal information only in the integration aspect of the performance, which will greatly simplify

the assessment of the progress of the process and results of interregional cooperation, both in general and for individual areas and programs.

In this case mutually beneficial cooperation is not reduced only to barter transactions, but industrial cooperation is developing vigorously [2]. In particular, new joint assembly productions are being established, which in turn contributes to the creation of related infrastructure facilities and provides employment for people: in Bashkiria (assembly of combines), in the Yaroslavl Oblast (components for assembly of engines). Cooperation programs focus primarily on high-tech industries (the program “Research and development of high-performance information and computing technology for increasing and effectively using the resource potential of hydrocarbon raw materials of the Union State” (“SKIF-NEDRA”) 2015–2018, the program “Development of space and ground assets, providing consumers from Russia and Belarus with the information on remote sensing of the Earth (“Monitoring-SG”) 2013–2017, the program “Development of modern and perspective technology for creation of thermal imaging technology of special and dual use on the basis of photoreception devices of infrared range of the third generation in the Union State members”), as well as attempts to cooperate in the agricultural sector (the program “Innovation development of potato and Jerusalem artichoke production (“Potato and Jerusalem artichoke”) 2013–2016).

The legal side of the issue is regulated by several by-laws. On the part of the Russian Federation it is Federal Law 4-FL dated January 4, 1999 (as amended on July 13, 2015) “On coordination of international and foreign economic relations of constituent entities of the Russian Federation” and on the part of the Republic of Belarus it is Resolution 183 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus dated February 24, 2012 (as amended on June 22, 2015) “On the approval of the regulations on the distribution network of Belarusian organizations abroad, the classification of the types of supply of goods to be taken into account in the implementation of export operations, and annulment of some resolutions of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus”. Currently, at the regional level, more than 260 agreements and protocols on trade and economic cooperation are in action, as well as programs on development of cooperation. An example is the agreement to develop techniques for recycling motor oils in cooperation with KAMAZ in the city of Grodno. The importance of considering this sector is due to the fact that more than 20% of the total budget of the Union State is allocated for it; 62.3 mln rubles is allocated for education, 89.9 mln rubles – for culture and art, 36.8 mln rubles – for health care, 60.8 mln rubles – for social policy. Thus, the importance of expenditure on the social sphere is taken as an original fundamental principle for development on the part of public authorities.

*Education.* Integration in the field of education is carried out at the level of state educational institutions. According to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, every year, between 20 and 50 budget-funded places in universities of the Russian Federation are allocated for citizens of the Republic of Belarus. In particular, out of 17,427 citizens, who as of January 1, 2016 study in Russia, just over 200 have a scholarship. In Belarus more than 2,000 Russians study in 54 educational establishments. According to the Ministry of Education of Belarus, 73% of them study on a budgetary basis and receive a scholarship.

According to Chapter 3 of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus of February 7, 2006 No. 80 “About the rules of admission to higher and secondary special educational institutions”, in addition to the compulsory examination on the Russian/Belarusian language, each group of specialties has its own two entrance exams. It is allowed to take no more than three exams in the form of a Centralized Test (CT). The applicant can choose either the CT, or the Unified State Exam. The results are not mutually recognized, there is no scale of conversion, and regulatory retake timeframes relative to each other are also absent.

Cooperation in the regional aspect in education seems to be relevant in three main areas:

1. Establishing a network university that implements a double degree program, while the content of the curriculum is identical with

the inclusion of an international component. Only participation in a more virtualized space has been implemented so far. An example is the CIS Network University, the Borderland University Network and CIS Network University Technical Consortium.

2. Establishing scientific-production complexes on the basis of higher educational institutions. In the Russian Federation such complexes are successfully operating; scientific studies in the Republic of Belarus tend to be divided on research in educational institutions and research in research institutes. But even in existing regional complexes (Yanka Kupala Grodno State University) tier education prevails with the inclusion of colleges and schools in the composition of the university. In Russia such systems have been designed and implemented in the private education sector, but were not widespread.

3. It is currently very difficult for students and graduate students to submit their final projects, and to transfer freely to educational institutions. Besides, it is not easy to achieve mutual recognition of all training programs even in their current versions. Therefore, the question of practical recognition of intermediate documents remains open.

Current contacts in the framework of the Union State are characterized by the exchange of technology and a high degree of student exchange in the border regions (Mogilev, Gomel, Smolensk and Bryansk oblasts). The staff of a number of private educational institutions tried to establish

individual contacts on the principles of enthusiasm. The experience has about 5–7 endeavors in this sphere in 2010–2016 (it was planned to sign a document on a double degree program between the International Law Institute (Moscow – Volgograd) and Belarusian Institute of Law (Minsk – Mogilev); in 2012, Moscow Witte University (Moscow – Rostov-on-Don) and the Institute of Modern Knowledge (Minsk) discussed the project of creating a Network University. The project has been postponed for five years until 2017.

Such initiatives were expressed at the meetings of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation.

*Culture.* Another important component of communication of the Union State at the level of social relations is represented by cultural forms of cooperation, which are implemented mainly through the organization of joint activities. In 2007–2015 more than 50 agreements on the development of culture were signed (*Tab. 1*).

The analysis of statistical data shows that participants of Union State, not including national festivals, comprise almost 40–50% of the total number of speakers. Table reflects only some of those activities that are held on the territory of neighboring countries. In total, more than 400 cultural collaborative sessions and exhibitions of culture in Russia and in Belarus were held. Most often the groups and individual representatives of the country participate in international competitions and festivals.



Table 1. Development of cultural relations between regions of Russia and Belarus in 2016

Russia's regions that host festivals (with the date of the festival)	Regions of Belarus that participate in cultural exchange (with the date of the festival)
Russia, Moscow, March 27, 2016, 3rd international festival-contest of children and youth creativity "MOSCOW BELIEVES IN TALENTS" (international children festival)	Minsk, March 27, 2016, 2nd international festival-contest of children and youth creativity "BELARUSIAN PATTERNS" (international festival, 40% of participants were from Russia)
Moscow–Vladimir, March 27, 2016, trip to two festivals: "MOSCOW BELIEVES IN TALENTS" (Moscow, Russia) and "INSPIRATION OF THE GOLDEN RING" (Vladimir, Russia) (festival of the Union State)	
Russia, Vladimir, March 30, 2016, 5th international festival-contest of children and youth creativity "INSPIRATION OF THE GOLDEN RING" (festival with international participation)	Vitebsk, May, 4, 2016, 3rd international festival-contest of children and youth creativity "ON THE LEGENDARY STAGE" (Slavic festival of culture)
Russia, Rostov-on-Don, April 1, 2016 1st international festival-contest of children and youth creativity "VISITING THE SOUTHERN CAPITAL" (40% of invited participants – from Belarus)	
Russia, Sochi, May 2–5, 2016 14th international festival-contest of children and youth creativity "ON THE CREATIVE OLYMPUS" (international festival)	
Russia, Novosibirsk, May 5, 2016, 2nd international festival-contest of children and youth creativity "SIBERIAN INSPIRATION" (international festival)	
Compiled by the author with the use of the data from the portals of public authorities of constituent entities of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus	

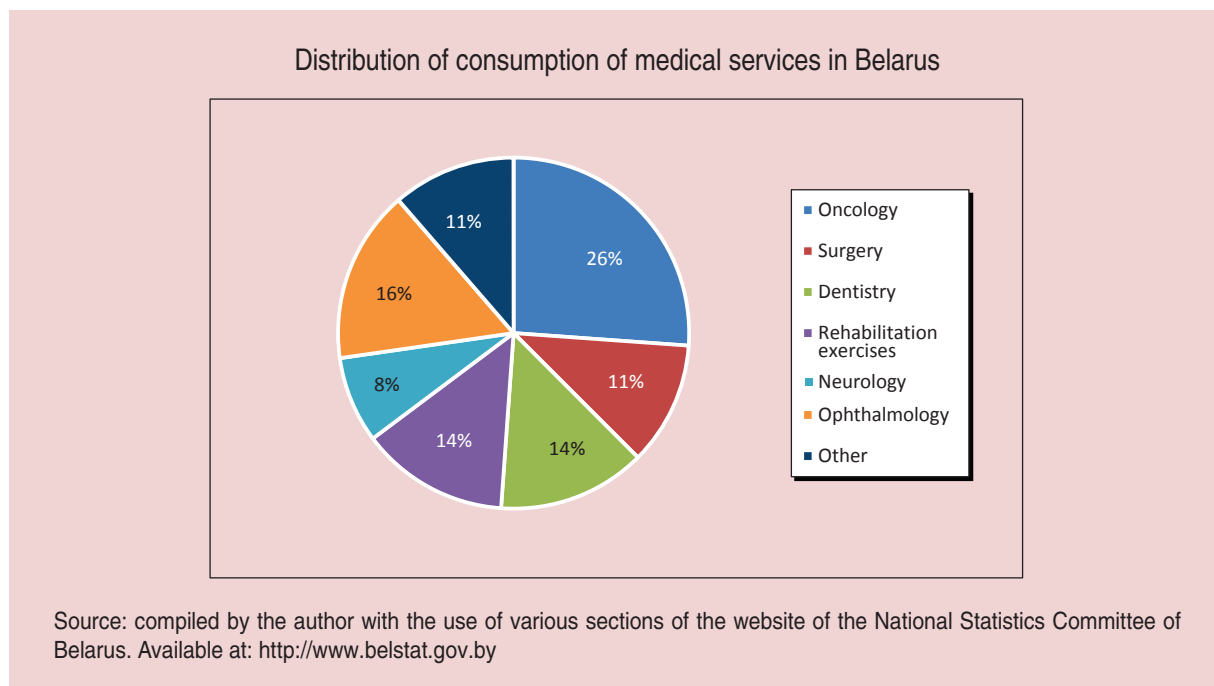
Cooperation programs signed by Russian Federation constituent entities often lack joint activities on the representation of cultural forms. At the same time, the program of cooperation between the Kursk Oblast and Belarus for 2016 scheduled more than 20 events of this kind – exhibitions, regional fairs, joint advertising of achievements of countries and regions. Every region each year hosts from five to ten exhibitions of Belarusian culture and identity, which the program of cooperation on the part of Russia lack.

Major cooperation takes place in the border regions with little participation of the Central Federal District. The regions include mainly the Mogilev, Minsk and Gomel regions, on Russia's side – the

Bryansk, Smolensk, Kursk and partly Saratov oblasts.

*Medical tourism.* In total, more than 45,000 of Russians in 2015 were treated in Belarus, including the visitors of health resorts (all resorts admit patients only upon doctor's referral). According to the National Statistics Committee of Belarus, the structure of treatment is as follows (*Figure*).

Cancer and dental treatments were in greatest demand along with surgical procedures. It is also noted that in addition to Russian citizens, more than 5,000 foreigners came for treatment in Belarus. The export of medical services of Minsk in 2015 increased compared with the previous year by 200 thousand US dollars to and was equal to 10.1 million US dollars.



According to the existing segments of the medical tourism market, it is possible to allocate the following directions, which are very popular in Belarus:

1. Diagnosis and treatment (including operations).
2. Renewable treatment at rehabilitation and physiotherapy centers.
3. Dental tourism (provision of services for treatment, prosthetics and cosmetic dentistry).
4. SPA and wellness tourism.
5. Beauty tourism (including plastic surgery).
6. Thermal tourism (spa treatment at the mineral springs).
7. Balneological tourism.
8. Medical tourism for the elderly.

Major trends in medical and tourism cooperation between the regions of Russia and Belarus are presented in *Table 2*.

When analyzing the demand for travel services, we should note that according to the National Statistics Committee of Belarus the number of organized tourists from the Russian Federation visited the Republic of Belarus in 2015 amounted to 70,390 people. The average length of stay of Russian tourists in the Republic of Belarus is five days, which is one of the highest indicators in the CIS and corresponds to the level of tourist exchange between the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. Cooperation is developing most dynamically between the Republic of Belarus and the cities of Moscow and Saint Petersburg, the Moscow, Smolensk,

Table 2. Trends in medical and tourism cooperation between the regions of Russia and Belarus

Cooperation regions	Cooperation project or program
Minsk Oblast (Institute of Genetics and Cytology of NAS of Belarus) – Moscow (Federal Agency for Scientific Organizations (FANO))	The goal of “DNA identification” program – to develop innovative geographic and genomic technology for forensics and prevention of socially significant diseases, which allows to increase the safety of citizens of the Union State and to counter terrorism.
Moscow Oblast (Nikiforov Russian Center of Emergency and Radiation Medicine, Medical Radiological Research Center, Federal Medical Research Center of Psychiatry and Narcology), Leningrad Oblast (Saint Petersburg Research Center for Radiation Hygiene), Kaluga Oblast (Obninsk Scientific Research Center “PROGNOZ”), Bryansk Oblast (Bryansk Oblast Healthcare Department Bryansk Clinical and Diagnostic Center). Countering the change in incidence rate after the Chernobyl power plant accident.	
Vitebsk Oblast – Moscow Oblast Mogilev Oblast – Saratov Oblast, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast	Agro-ecological tourism
Minsk Oblast – Moscow, Leningrad Oblast Mogilev Oblast – Yaroslavl Oblast, Saratov Oblast, Tula Oblast	Medical tourism
Minsk Oblast – Kaliningrad Oblast, Republic of Bashkortostan, Yaroslavl Oblast, Penza Oblast	Support to knowledge-intensive medical industries
Compiled by the author according to the findings of the study.	

Yaroslavl, Bryansk, Nizhny Novgorod, Saratov and Tula oblasts. In Belarus, Russian tourists get acquainted with the monuments of history, architecture, art, with natural and ethnic features, modern life of Belarusian people. Holidays in Belarusian agricultural mansions are popular among Russian tourists. Of the total number of foreign citizens, who visited Belarusian agricultural mansions, Russian tourists account for more than 80%. In 2015, 533.8 thousand Belarusian citizens went on a holiday abroad, and among them 64.1 thousand people chose Russia as their destination. The Moscow and Leningrad oblasts were the most popular regions to visit.

*Conclusions and recommendations.* In the course of the analysis, we developed recommendations, which in general can help

overcome the problems that currently hinder integration of the countries of the Union State.

We think that cooperation in education in the regional aspect is relevant in the following three main areas:

1. Establishing a network university that implements a double degree program, while the content of the curriculum is identical with the inclusion of an international component.
2. Forming scientific-production complexes on the basis of higher educational institutions.
3. Practical recognition of intermediate documents.

In the sphere of culture it is necessary to expand the spatial coverage of the festivals and enable participation of groups from the Union State in them.

On the part of Russia it is necessary to conduct activities that will present little-known places, which can be a prerequisite for tourism development. In general, a most promising direction is to allocate funds of the budgets of the regions and the Federal State to conduct joint exhibitions and cultural exchange programs. The joint efforts of the regions in the health care industry and medical tourism will allow by 2020 to create a new industry – medical service tourism, which will not only have a significant impact on the tourist market, but will also affect the overall level of population health.

In order to establish closer cooperation, it is necessary to standardize the goals and procedures of health care with the introduction of amendments to the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Government of the Russian Federation “About the provision of medical assistance to citizens of

the Republic of Belarus in healthcare institutions of the Russian Federation and to citizens of the Russian Federation in healthcare institutions of the Republic of Belarus” dated January 24, 2006 and to ensure that health insurance is valid on the territory of the entire state, and regional medical programs should be extended to cover all citizens that are in the region, where the program is in action for the entire period of their stay.

According to *Table 3*, the main cooperation exists between the border areas, regions of the Central Federal District and the Volga Federal District. It is recommended to expand the geography of cooperation to include the Southern Federal District, Northwestern Federal District and, in the future, in Siberia and the Far East.

In addition to the expansion of regional programs on cooperation in the spheres of national economy, it is necessary to focus on

Table 3. Regions that are engaged in the most active cooperation between Russia and Belarus

Sector	Russian Federation	Republic of Belarus
Education	Moscow Novosibirsk Oblast Sverdlovsk Oblast Kaliningrad Oblast Voronezh Oblast Smolensk Oblast	Minsk Oblast Mogilev Oblast Brest Oblast Grodno Oblast
Culture	Moscow Moscow Oblast Vladimir Oblast Rostov Oblast Krasnodar Krai Novosibirsk Oblast	Minsk Oblast Vitebsk Oblast
Healthcare	Minsk Oblast Bryansk Oblast	Moscow Oblast Kaluga Oblast
Compiled by the author according to the findings of the study.		

increasing the access of goods and services on the domestic market, especially in border regions. It is necessary to form new principles of cooperation, under which organizing cultural, social or economic activities does not require registration of the legal entity of the host country and the citizens of Belarus do not fall under the purview of the law on foreign citizens. The transfer of authority to conclude trade and economic agreements on cooperation and development to the regions without ratification by the Government will reduce communications through the central channels of communication and shift to multilateral direct links.

The economy of regions within the Union State is characterized by unbalanced development and the heterogeneity of socio-economic situation, which is aggravated by an unstable economic and political situation and strengthening of the crisis phenomena in the economy. This makes it impossible to meet the needs of citizens at the level exceeding the one established by the government, reduces the opportunities of medium-term forecasting and denies the use of long-term planning, reduces incentives to expanding economic ties and violates existing mechanisms of interaction between federal authorities, local authorities and public sector.

Therefore, it is necessary to intensify domestic efforts of each region to achieve their development goals. In this regard, it can be useful to apply the model of endogenous development of regions, which became

especially popular in the 1980s in the West, and which is based on the maximum use of local resources – labor, the accumulation of local capital, entrepreneurial capabilities, specific knowledge of the production process and implementation of specific professional tasks. Another element of the model is the ability of the local economy to control the accumulation process at the local level. However, not all the regions have sufficient industrial and resource potential to fulfill assigned tasks on their own, so the only way out of this situation is to use the advantages of participation in interregional or international integration processes.

Interregional cooperation is a tool to solve regional problems and it is also part of the mechanism of economic growth both at the national and regional levels. For the country as a whole the intensification of interregional cooperation solves the main problem of capitalization, mobilization and optimization of the use of resources of regions as a main source of socio-economic development of the Union State. Regions that participate in this kind of integration processes will get the following advantages:

- wider access of economic agents to resources: financial, human, material resources and cutting-edge technology;
- the ability to produce and supply products to the interregional market, which is more capacious;
- the ability to operate on a broader integrated, perhaps international, market-place;

– favorable conditions for economic entities of the participant regions, including protection from the competition of producers from other regions and countries;

– joint solution to complex socio-economic, scientific, technological, ecological and other issues.

As a logical continuation of the strategic course of the Union State for approval of the principles of democracy in society, interregional cooperation should develop in directions that address challenges common to

several regions on the way toward their growth and provide an opportunity to capitalize the resources, the capacity of which greatly exceeds that of individual regions. This requires the establishment of cooperative relations, especially concerning the position on the import of products under sanctions and development of import substitution programs. In addition to the economic and political standards, it is necessary to adhere to the policy of cultural and educational exchange.

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