

# Belarusian Independence Day: tanks and “carnivals”

On 3 July Belarus celebrated [its official Independence Day](#). Many Belarusians felt frustrated despite a [military parade](#) and festivities to celebrate the achievements of the national economy. While Alexander Lukashenka branded the parade as “the best” in Belarus’s history, Minsk residents complained of traffic jams and damage to public roads.

In both Minsk and other centres, local authorities have traditionally celebrated Independence Day with displays of what they considered the most important achievements of the Belarusian economy, showing off refrigerators, washing machines, hospital equipment and tractors.

## Rocket launchers and T-34 tanks attack Minsk’s streets

So, what did Minsk’s streets endure on 3 July this year? About 250 military vehicles took part in the parade, including multiple-launch rocket systems (Smerch, Grad, and Polonez) and anti-aircraft missile systems (S-300 PS, Osa-AKM, and [Tor-M2](#)). As well, T-72 B battle tanks, BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, and BTR-70 family vehicles also rolled through the streets. As has become tradition, the legendary WW2 T-34-85 tank led the convoy.

The hundreds of armoured vehicles put colossal pressure on the roads, leaving numerous cracks in the asphalt surfaces. Each year, after military parades, Minsk’s residents share pictures of tank tracks and bumps left on the roads.



Source: tut.by

In 2017 more than 9,000 Belarusians signed a petition against military parades in the centre of Minsk. Among major complaints, they listed ecological damage, excessive noise, traffic jams, and road damage.

To date Belarusian state officials have downplayed public concern about road damage and other inconveniences caused by annual parades. The Ministry of Defence emphasises that military parades take place in accordance with the decision of the President of Belarus and with the full support of the Belarusian people. The Ministry of Defence adds that the potential relocation of any annual military parade would significantly raise its costs.

Dzianis Glinsky, the head of the capital's road administration, rebutted claims about road damage caused by armoured vehicles. According to Glinsky, tank tracks hardly constitute a danger to the capital's asphalt and concrete surfaces.

# A risky show funded by taxpayers?

Despite optimistic affirmations from top Belarusian officials about the parades' popularity with the general public, each year Belarussians discuss them in a negative context. First, the use of a large volume of military equipment inevitably leads to incidents. In June 2017, during a parade rehearsal, a tank hit a lamppost on one of Minsk's central streets. The video of the incident has garnered significant attention and collected more than 754,000 views on YouTube.

In June 2018 an infantry fighting vehicle near Hrodna accidentally crashed into a passing car, injuring the car's driver. The incident led to the heated discussion of parades' feasibility across Belarus.

Expenditure on military parades also raises concerns. Since [the Ministry of Defence](#) has not divulged parades' costs, several analysts have attempted to estimate their budget independently. Naviny.by reported that Belarusian taxpayers paid approximately \$2.37 million for the arrangement of the 2017 parade. Analyst Aliaksandr Alesin provided another figure: in 2009, he claims, the military parade cost taxpayers about \$50 million. Taking into account the reluctance of the Ministry of Defence to disclose the real figure, speculations about parades' budgets will continue.

The scenarios of the annual military parades annoy some Belarusians. The "carnival" part of the parades receives an utmost criticism. For instance, Belarusian internet users mocked the previous year's parade, which featured Belarusian-made refrigerators, washing machines, and TV-sets as a demonstration of national industrial success. Amid criticism, the recent parade avoided showing off refrigerators and stuck

to dancers and singers instead.

Consequently, the feasibility of an expensive and sometimes dangerous [display of the nation's military power](#) remains questionable for a number of Belarusians. Two weeks ago a popular newspaper, "Nasha Niva", conducted a survey asking whether the celebration of Independence Day should involve a military parade this year. 85 % of respondents replied that it should not.

## Or a patriotic display of national unity?

For Lukashenka, an annual demonstration of the nation's military might serves to unify of the Belarusian people. The president maintains that the nation must see a [battle-ready Belarusian army](#). According to Lukashenka, Independence Day's parades must be "impressive" and their arrangement should "spare no resources". In this way, annual military shows continue to remain a viable tool of the Belarusian state ideology with [aviation](#), armoured [vehicles](#), and [missile systems](#) as irreplaceable components.

Globally, approaches to military parades vary from "spare no resources" to the utterly pragmatic. While the United States and the United Kingdom constrain themselves to soldiers and horses, the post-Soviet States traditionally engage armoured vehicles in parades. Hundreds of battle tanks and infantry fighting vehicles hit the streets of Moscow and Kazakhstan's Astana on a yearly basis.

In this way, Lukashenka's intention to carry on with impressive parades despite the growing national displeasure looks in line with his neighbours' policies. Armoured vehicles will, therefore, continue to roll through Minsk's streets next

year, resulting in additional cracks and tracks, much to the anger of the capital's citizens.