

# Belarusians Ousted From the Russian Market, Spongers, Small Business – Belarus State TV Digest

Belarus state TV Channel 1 harshly criticised Belarusian spongers – people who do not wish to work as their fellow citizens do and abuse the nation's welfare system.

Aliaksandr Lukashenka made a number of angry statements in response to Russia's latest round of restrictions on imports from Belarus.

State TV continues to present the developments in Belarus in a generally positive light, while abroad, particularly in the EU, they cover primarily negative developments such as massive strikes, protests and clashes with the police.

## Domestic Affairs

[What is upsetting Alexander Lukashenka?](#) ONT TV showed Lukashenka's recent comments on problems the nation is having exporting and transporting food products from Belarus to Russia. He warned that if the countries are not able settle this issue soon, he would have to react. "The behaviour of Russian authorities does not only surprise me, but upsets me as well", he stated. "We are not little puppies to be taken by the scruff of the neck", he emphasised.

[Russia ousts Belarusians from its market.](#) According to coverage on state-controlled Channel 1, the recent problems with food imports from Belarus are giving Russians an additional reason to fast beyond a traditional religious pre-Christmas fasting.

The Russians have banned produce from Belarus that "is perplexing and doubt of the decency of partners" and has already brought about serious losses to the economy. It was not so long ago that the Russian media praised both the prices and quality of Belarusian food, and now the country continues to push out Belarusian food producers. Experts speak of "unfair competition", although the country is respecting all agreements related to the Customs Union and the Union State with Russia.

[Budget-2015](#). Channel 1 reported the Belarusian economy's success stories since the beginning of the year. "Hundreds of new organisations were established, thousands of new working places were created, salaries and pensions increased". The coverage also showed the head of state telling off several officials and their approach to the economy.

However, in Lukashenka's opinion, the state needs to do more to protect the Belarusian market. "Why haven't we found mechanisms for protecting our own enterprises? Why have we given up our own market? We go to the Emirates, Mongolia, Myanmar and other places, and give up our own market?" – he shouted at a meeting with the officials.

[A new enemy of the Belarusian state?](#) Channel 1 reported about "people who have lost a sense of responsibility and respect for themselves" – also known as spongers. The coverage regularly employed the term 'bum' to describe them. According to Channel 1's report, these people just drink alcohol and live on the state and Belarusian taxpayers' dime.

The programme showed a local shelter where these 'spongers' live, some of whom had lost their documents, some are disabled, and some are unemployed. "However, the guests of this shelter often rely on the comforts of life [provided by the state]", as one journalist critically noted.

[Outbursts of dissatisfaction in Europe](#). According to Channel

1, EU countries have to step up and begin dealing with their public's anger. Two big protests against budget cuts took place in Belgium and France accompanied by large-scale clashes with police. The reporter hinted that the “farmers’ revolt” in France was caused by Russian ban on imports of food from the European Union.

[On whom Belarusians should rely](#) to solve out their problems – the state or themselves discussed “Delo Principa”, a TV talk show.

**Social justice according to a communist politician.** Belarusian communist Georgi Atamanov pointed out that the negligence in “labour-wise” upbringing of young people caused the problem of the spongers. According to him, liberals think that people need freedom and lower taxes. But “these guys [pointing his finger at Yaraslau Ramanchuk, a former presidential candidate] will squirt out money. The bourgeoisie will be getting fat and we again will be their slaves”.

**“Look at American society”.** A member of the Belarusian parliament talked about the pressure to work and succeed in American society and the social exclusion for those who act like “parasites”.

**We all pay taxes.** In the view of Natalia Riabova from the project “Kosht Urada”, everyone de facto pays taxes in Belarus, by buying articles such as alcohol, cigarettes. Her opinion caused a controversy among some of the guest speakers. Anton Boltochko from Liberal Club also supported Rabiova’s opinion. He pointed out that the social aid should focus on helping the most vulnerable. According to the coverage, 50% of the state budget goes to social welfare.

[Problems small businesses face in Belarus](#). A theme of another broadcast of the talk show “Delo principa” was running small and medium business in Belarus. Michail Malash, a Belarusian entrepreneur, argued that the bureaucracy of the tax system,

high costs of rent and difficulties with getting permission to rent a premises in the country remain the biggest challenges for businessmen. In his view, these remain “temporary problems” and in principle could be resolved soon.

**Attitudes towards small businesses.** Valeryi Bojniiov, an economics professor (no affiliation was given) refuted a myth, in his view, that portrays small business as a driver for the economy and “the myth that if you give them complete freedom, they will feed us, dress us up, make us happy”. The Belarusian state greatly helps Belarusian business, he added. Bojniiov complained that the state walks on eggshells when it comes to business.

Valeryi Karpunin from the Republican Club of Financial Managers, disagreed with him and noted the importance of having a positive attitude towards entrepreneurs, even if a few of them avoid paying taxes. Karpunin argued that in the first instance the state should not harass business and should refrain from creating any cumbersome tasks for them.

*Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials available on the web site of Belarusian State Television 1 (BT1) and ONT TV. Freedom of the press in Belarus remains restricted and state media convey primarily the point of view of the Belarusian authorities. This review attempts to give the English-speaking audience a better understanding of how Belarusian state media shape public opinion in the country.*