

Military parades in Belarus: displaying military might and annoying locals

Belarus's tradition of military parades

In Belarus, military parades usually take place twice a year: on 9 May, or [Victory Day](#), when post-Soviet countries celebrate victory in the Great Patriotic War with Nazi Germany, and on 3 July, the [official Independence Day](#).

Thousands of members of the armed forces gather to exhibit the country's military equipment. Tanks, soldiers, and the military orchestra have become prominent symbols of the parade. Top-level officials, including president Alexander Lukashenka, also participate in the parades.



Every year, the parades involve helicopters, planes, missile systems, demonstration of tanks and military vehicles, and marches accompanied by the military orchestra. Additionally, in 2011-2016, Belarus invited Russian paratroopers to join.

Military parades usually involve mobilising a spectators. Organisations such as BRSM and other pro-governmental associations [forcefully ensure that their members attend](#). Many ordinary citizens also come to the parades to look at the military equipment and large fireworks displays.

The Independence Day parade, which is accompanied by patriotic

songs and slogans, highlights Belarus's Soviet past. This emphasis on the [Great Patriotic War](#), which started when Nazi Germany invaded the USSR in 1941, to a large degree overshadows Belarus's independence.

The precision and scope of the parades, which is achieved at a very high cost and involves numerous rehearsals, make the phenomenon look like a scene from a movie. This year, on 3 July, more than 6,000 soldiers, hundreds of units of military equipment, and thousands of spectators took part.

Logistical hassles aside, which involve diverting traffic, changing public transport schedules, and damaging roads with tank tracks, many Belarusians disagree with the very nature of the parades.

The link between the [official Independence Day](#) and the parade on 3 July itself remains dubious. On 3 July, Minsk was indeed liberated from the Nazis, but the rest of Belarus remained under occupation.

Earlier, Independence Day was celebrated on July 27, when Belarus became a sovereign state.

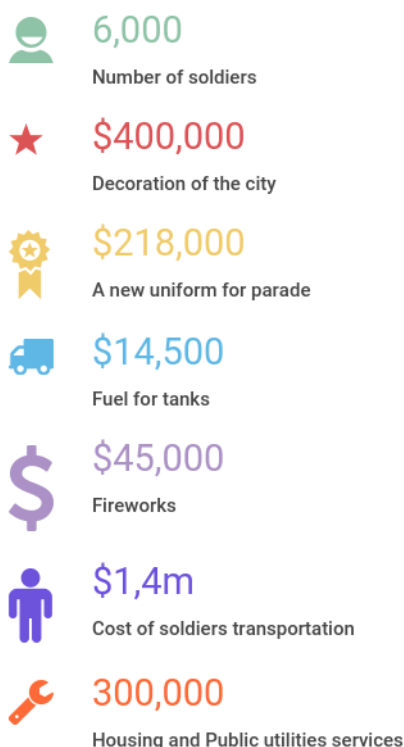
Tanks and toilets: the 2017 Independence Day parade

Even before the military parade took place, many Belarusians were heatedly discussing it. On 24 June, during a rehearsal, a large tank bumped into a lamppost and a tree. Nobody suffered from the incident, but it garnered much attention. Belarusians then started a petition to move the parade outside Minsk.

The parade is intended to demonstrate not only Belarus's military might, but also the successes of the Belarusian economic model. Therefore, along with tanks, guns, and other

military equipment, the parade exhibited some of the country's non-military products. The event's organisers decided to showcase Belarusian furniture brands (Pinskdev and Maladzechna Mebel), tractors, and even Belarusian toilets.

This decision was supposed to prove that Belarus is able to produce everything it needs – from toilets to military equipment. In turn, this was intended to encourage Belarusians to buy Belarusian products. However, the presence of the toilets caused wide-spread ridicule among Belarusians on the Internet.



Thus, in May, Lukashenka stated: 'There is no need to be stingy with this [parade], especially because they are not so expensive. It should be a real parade, an impressive one. This is why it is being done. This is a demonstration, we show people that we are eating the bread of war for a reason'.

According to Lukashenka's demands, the parade was indeed massive and expensive. The Ministry of Defence, however, refused to divulge its expenditures. In contrast, Russia reported the costs of its parades, despite the closed nature of its military entities.

Although ascertaining the real cost Belarus's military parades remains difficult, analysts have attempted to estimate the budget of this demonstration of power. Thus, *Naviny.by* reports that Belarusians probably paid around \$2.37m in taxes for

transportation of equipment and soldiers, decorations, and fuel for tanks.

Speaking with *TUT.by*, Belarus's most popular news portal, analyst Andrei Alesin concluded that the parade in 2009 cost \$50m. However, in 2009 the parade featured 4,000 soldiers – 2,000 less than in 2017. Moreover, in 2009 there were only about 200 units of military equipment, while in 2017 there were over 500. However, given the differences between these two figures and the lack of access to concrete figures about the parades, it remains impossible to estimate the parades' true cost.

Why conduct military parades?

Historically, the aim of military parades has been to demonstrate the country's ability to protect itself during war. After the Ukrainian conflict, which led to worries of a possible Russian intervention in Belarus, military parades possibly even reassured citizens.

What's more, many believe that showing off military equipment is proof that the country has the resources to resist aggression from any side. Thus, the parade creates an [illusion of military capability](#).

The military parade of 3 July is also proof that the Belarusian government continues to demonstrate its support for Soviet traditions and symbols and sees them as a key element to nation building.



These parades also involve different forms of entertainment, such as fireworks, concerts, and competitions. As Leanid Spatakaj, an analyst at Belarus Security Blog, told Belsat: 'People need not only bread but also a spectacle: if there was no demand there would be no offer'.

The Ministry of Defence is unlikely to announce the true cost of these parades in the near future. However, given the amount of military equipment, city decorations, and entertainment, this sum is nothing to sneeze at. Instead of conducting expensive military parades, Belarus could focus on updating equipment and repairing army facilities.