

Viciebsk Region – the Land of Artists and Terrorists

Viciebsk city hosted one of the most famous avant-garde art schools of the 20 century counting amongst those who walked through its doors such famous names as Marc Chagall and Kazimir Malevich.

But recently it has become famous as the terrorist capital of Belarus, as supposed organisers of [2011 explosion in Minsk metro](#) originated from there. In addition, explosions occurred in Viciebsk also in 2005 and 2012.

The west of the Viciebsk region appears more supportive to democratic opposition. It has a sizable Catholic population and uses Belarusian language more widely, while the eastern region maintains a more “Russian” area.

Although quite industrially developed, the region suffers from high labour emigration, as Russia offers salaries significantly larger when compared to domestic companies.

Cities to Any Taste

Apart from Viciebsk city, several major cities with their particular identities are located in the Viciebsk region. Polack is the most famous of them – the oldest city of Belarus, first mentioned in chronicles in 862 AD. Polack served as the centre of the first form of Belarusian statehood, the Polack principedom, which subsequently joined the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Navapolack (or New Polack), the city that lies right near Polack, is the young industrial city that emerged only in 1958 as an industrial complex. One of the two Belarusian refineries that play a significant role in

the Belarusian economy and politics are found here.

Another old city, Orša, first mentioned in the chronicles in 1067, is famous the birthplace of prominent Belarusian writer Uladzimir Karatkievič. Today, however, it has become famous mostly for an unusual concentration of prisons. A famous phrase says “In Orša there are three prisons and not a single university”.

Land of Lakes and Artists

The region has a significant tourist potential thanks to its natural conditions – the abundance of lakes. Braslaŭ's lakes attract many tourists as a popular resort destination in Belarus. This is a complex of large lakes in the northwestern corner of the region on the border of Belarus, Lithuania and Latvia.



People around the world might know Viciebsk for another interesting page of its history. In the beginning of the 20th century, it became one of the centres of European art avant-garde. Such famous artists as Kazimir Malievich and Marc Chagall taught at the art school and created several of their masterpieces there.

Viciebsk city has the oldest tram lines in Belarus, and one of the oldest in Russian empire. They were launched in 1898, a year earlier than in Moscow and a full nine years earlier than in Saint-Petersburg.

The Capital of Terror

Viciebsk, along with the Minsk region, presents a divided region when it comes to political views. The results of presidential elections show strong support of democratic and nationally oriented opposition in the west of Viciebsk, and low support in the east of the region. The same concern linguistic preferences – west of the regions speaks more

Belarusian than the east of it.

The west of the region has a significant Catholic population and belonged to Polish republic until 1939, while the eastern part is orthodox and joined Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic earlier.

It appears as the most "Russian" region of Belarus, as the share of Russians here appears the largest of all Belarusian regions – 10.2%. The region has close ties with Russia, because relatives of many families have lived in Russia since soviet times or work there now.

Viciebsk city has retained some elements of civil activity. Civil campaign Naš Dom (Our Home) deals with all kinds of local policy issues and includes such famous figures of Belarus civil society as Valer Ščukin and Volha Karač.

Viciebski Kurjer presents a currently rare example of regional independent newspaper that still exists. Though it is registered and printed in Russia, local activists bring it to Belarus and spread among the citizens. This process sometimes turns into a kind of adventure, as local authorities try any means to prevent the distribution of the newspaper.

Viciebsk region governor, Aliaksandr Kosiniec, has been quite unremarkable during his stay in office since 2008. He has PhD in Medicine and previously held a position of the rector of Viciebsk medical university and then deputy prime-minister.

In recent years, Viciebsk became famous also as a terrorist capital of Belarus. Dzmitry Kanavalaŭ and Uladzislaŭ Kavalioŭ, the supposed organisers of the 2011 terrorist act in Minsk metro both come from Viciebsk city. The explosion killed 15 people and injured 203, and both organisers were sentenced to death. Earlier, two explosions occurred in Viciebsk in 2005, when around 50 people were injured. And most recently, in November 2012 another explosive device went off near a Viciebsk KGB building. Shortly afterwards, a woman was

detained and accused of this act of terror.

The Deserted Region



The region has quite poor soil and cold climate, so agriculture is not its strong point. But unlike Western Belarus, the east of the Viciebsk region has a more developed industrial sector, especially its oil and chemical industry.

The Naftan refinery based in Navapolack is one of two Belarusian refineries that live on cheap Russian oil and thus contribute considerably to the Belarusian state budget. The plant was involved in an [illegal scheme of export of solvents](#), which Russia subsequently demanded to stop.

As perhaps each of eastern regions of Belarus, Viciebsk has a serious problem of emigration of workforce. Drivers, builders, and simply men with hands are needed in thriving large cities of Russia, where they can get as much as 10 times the salary that they would get back home. In the villages, where income sources are more limited, one can sometimes hardly find a few young men, as they have all moved to Russia in search of an income.

Such an economy negatively impacts families, which remain separated for long periods of time. Emigration remains a major regional social and economic problem, to which government has no solution for so far. The regions risks to turn to the periphery and source of labour of Russian megalopolises if the business climate does not improve.