

The Women's Unfeminine Holiday



March 8 in Belarus: a celebration of emancipation has turned into its opposite. An article by one of this website's authors on the occasion of the Women's Day.

Some countries of the former Soviet Union and Africa celebrate March 8 as the International Women's Day. This is perhaps the most "innocent" Soviet holiday which has not yet disappeared from our calendar. February 23 (originally Day of the Soviet Army), which in recent years actively establishes itself as a male counterpart of March 8, or, even more, November 7 (Day of the October Revolution) are highly politicized holidays. Therefore the tradition of celebrating them will disappear as soon the government takes a rational view on what should be celebrated as the Day of the Belarusian army. An even bigger question is whether it is worth for Belarus to celebrate anniversaries of the October revolution at all. March 8 is the only holiday which has no blood on it. It does not carry all these second-thoughts like holidays associated with the liberation of Belarus from Nazi occupation and the restoration of the Soviet dictatorship after that.

Nevertheless, the modern tradition of celebrating March 8 is an excellent example of how the Soviet government has been able to indoctrinate socialist ideology and system of symbols

in the people's everyday life. The struggle against religion plus a massive urbanization caused the rapid loss of many folk traditions in Belarus. To replace rural traditions there came official Soviet holidays: New Year, the eighth of March, twenty-third day of February, the Seventh of November. March 8 originally arose as a day of women's emancipation. It was a celebration of women's struggle for their rights and against their traditional role in family and society. Instead of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* women demanded things that are obvious today: the right to participate in elections, better working conditions, better wages. On the other hand, after eight decades of celebrating March 8, the people's culture has indeed transformed the feminist holiday into a patriarchal one.

The modern image of a woman you congratulate on March 8 is no way the image of an emancipated courageous female proletarian. 8 March is an occasion to congratulate your mother or your loved, but not a battle comrade. According to the tradition of the last decades, on March 8 men promise to protect women and care for them. Women, in turn, should kindly allow them to do so. Men demonstrate features of knights and gentlemen, and women demonstrate those of noble ladies. A completed patriarchal idyll. As a celebration of emancipation March 8 has turned into its opposite – a celebration of femininity and motherhood. Such is the irony of fate. Post-Soviet feast of March 8 counters the views of both conservatives (as a secularized and communist holiday) and feminists (as day of knighthood and care for the ladies).

Day on March 8 became something like a Soviet version of Valentine's Day. After the collapse of the communist dictatorship it has become one more traditional shopping race for members of the consumerist society and just an other cause for good of human emotions. Maybe it is better this way.

by Alexander Čajčyc for Naša Niva

[Read the original story in Belarusian](#)

The Russia-Belarus Oil Dispute Settled. At Least for Now.

According to the deal, Russia will deliver 6.3 million tons of oil to Belarus duty free this year. This is exactly the amount Moscow had promised at the beginning of negotiations. Russia agreed that Belarus will raise oil transit costs by about 11 percent.

It turned out, that despite announcements of Belneftekhim to the contrary, the Russian side indeed suspended supplying oil to Belarusian refineries at some point.

Apparently, the issue of oil duties has been linked to other projects, such as building the nuclear station in Belarus. However, full details of the deal has not yet been disclosed. According to the Financial Times:

Mr Sechin said Russia would allow Belarus to continue paying a favourable tax rate on oil supplied for its domestic needs in 2010. It was not clear how much tax Belarus will pay on oil it re-exports after processing in its own refineries.

Welcoming the deal, Mr Sechin said Russian officials had given up their New Year holidays to negotiate the settlement with Belarus. "Belarus' position was very tough for us," he said in a statement posted on the government website. "We agreed a series of compromises taking into account our special relationship with the brother republic and with the

people of Belarus.” Talks between the two sides about co-operation in gas and atomic energy are to continue in the coming weeks.

Read full text in [Financial Times](#).

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Belarus-Russia Oil Dispute: Nothing Personal, Just Business



A commentary by one of this website's authors on the Russian-Belarusian oil duties dispute, for [Novaja Eŭropa](#) on-line magazine

Let's admit, Belarusian authorities have no effective arguments in the current oil dispute with Russia. Therefore we must accept the fact that they will lose this fight sooner or later. In close future oil will become expensive, the Belarusian economy will face increasing difficulties, and a whole new stage of relations with Russia will come. Nothing surprising – we were going towards this all the past fifteen years.

Nothing to answer with

Note, Russia proposes to continue to charge no export duties for oil supplied for internal Belarusian needs. The new duties

will only affect the (bigger) portion of the oil supply which enables the Belarusian state oil refineries to gain excess profits. Thus, it will first strike the rent part of the Belarusian economy which rather benefits from artificial privileges granted by Russia instead of creating a product competitive on the market.

Some Belarusian journalists support the official Belarus' position on the reasonable ground that a customs union, which our countries seem to be building together with Kazakhstan, by definition means removal of customs barriers and not their introduction. Nevertheless, the full terms of the customs union treaty have not yet been published.

In any case, it would be strange to see Belarusian authorities talking of the implementation of signed agreements as long as they themselves are responsible for actual sabotage of so many previously signed agreements – of all those treaties on a common currency with Russia and on integration with it in “unions” and a “union state”.

Fundamentally, Moscow has the stronger arguments in the dispute. Belarus, unfortunately, has nothing to oppose Russia's pressure with. In late 2009 Russia launched the first string of the Eastern Oil Pipeline (ESPO), which runs from Russia to China. The construction of the pipeline will be completed in 2014. Russians have diversified markets for their oil, so its price for Belarus and Western Europe will now only grow. Why didn't Belarus, in turn, diversify its sources of energy?

The cursing miracle

Whatever the result of the Russian-Belarusian oil war, lessons for both sides were evident before and will be stressed again.

In a comment to the New Year's greetings by opposition leader Aliaksandr Milinkievič on the website of the newspaper Naša

Niva, one reader wrote that he could not imagine this politician holding tough negotiations with the Russians on gas prices.

But as a matter of fact, tough negotiations with Russian monopolists shouldn't have become a New Year tradition for Belarus at all. Latvia, Poland or the Republic of Lithuania do not conduct annual dramatic negotiations with Russia on oil and gas, as they have no preferences and pay the market price. The Czech Republic has even built a gas pipeline from Germany to provide access to Norwegian gas.

To the contrary, the strategy of the Belarusian regime in the last decade has been the exploitation of Russian post-imperial phobias and the struggle for the preservation of politically motivated preferences in regards of oil and gas supplies. Sooner or later it had to end. Playing manipulatory games with the Kremlin is neither perspective nor moral, even though the game has so far been successful for Belarus. Relations between our two countries should be market-based: Nothing personal, just business.

Politicians make reforms only when the absence of reforms threatens the stability in the country more than the changes. Another new year's oil crisis has once again shown that the reforms had to begin a long time ago and that the so-called *Belarusian economic miracle* of the recent years was in fact a curse for the country. Belarusian authorities have had a major source of cash but the economy could remain unreformed and non-upgraded. Now the cash source disappears but market reforms in Belarus, according to Belarusian businesspeople, still haven't got the proper quality.

Finally, the independence of Belarus means market-based relations with Russia, plus the diversification of energy sources, plus market reforms in the country.

Rebooting relations

The news about Belarus' intention to cut Russian electricity transit to the Kaliningrad region could only have brought you a sad sarcastic smile: the verbal "everlasting brotherhood" of Russia and Belarus has actually turned into open hostility. It is noteworthy that Belarusian authorities have begun to threaten Russia with leaving the just created customs union almost since the very beginning of this conflict.

For Russia the dispute must therefore be another demonstration that any integration initiative can become an arms against Russia in the hands of official Minsk. The Belarusian regime can use every opportunity to accuse the Kremlin of sabotage of the "brotherly integration".

Therefore, both Belarus and Russia need a rigorous audit (and possibly termination) of the empty "unions". Not only is the pathos of the Belarusian-Russian integration untrue, it also discredits the very idea of any constructive relations between our countries for decades ahead.

The hangover from the long-standing pseudo-integration extravaganza will for a long time spoil the atmosphere of Belarusian-Russian contacts. Constructive relations with the largest neighbor are absolutely necessary to Belarus, but they apparently will have to start from scratch. The time for it is coming.

By Alexander Čajčyc

[Read original story](#)

Russian-Belarusian Oil Row Continues

Belarus, a small post-Soviet state once hardly distinguishable from Russia and chronically misspelled in the Western press, has been making more and more headlines lately. And if the Russian-Belarusian military exercises with deployment of Russia's most advanced S-400 air defense system weren't enough, the 2010 Russian-Belarusian oil row is bound to make the West anxious. Moscow and Minsk failed to close a new deal after Russian-Belarusian agreement on crude oil export tariffs expired on the New Year's Eve. As the two states argued over pricing, Russia had briefly halted supplies to the Naftan and Mozyr refineries to show Minsk who the boss is. Flows were restarted on Jan. 3.

To pacify its customers in the EU, Russia promised that the export flow would continue with no further interruptions. Western Europe is slow to celebrate, however; it remembers that last January similar steps preceded a complete shutdown of gas flow through Ukraine. The dispute has already pushed oil prices up to \$81 a barrel, their highest in nearly 15 months.

Today, on the so-called Old New Year's Eve, Moscow again warned of reducing the oil flow, complaining that oil firms are unwilling to confirm volumes. To spite Moscow, the national electric company of Belarus threatened to stop transmission to Russia's Kaliningrad in return. What are Minsk and Moscow arguing about? The obvious aspect of the argument is financial. The 1.3 million barrels of oil passing each day through the Belarusian part of the Druzhba pipeline feed both the internal market in Belarus and the EU markets. Last year, Belarus imported Russian oil at only 35.6 percent of the current crude export tariff.

This year, Moscow wants Minsk to pay in full for about 14.5 million tons a year of crude that is mostly refined and re-exported. Russia graciously allowed Belarus to continue buying the oil for its domestic needs (about 6 million tons) duty-free. This is not enough for Minsk, however. The less obvious aspect of the argument is political. It is Belarusian loyalty that explains why the country enjoyed some of the lowest energy prices of any post-Communist state since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Importantly, the profits from reselling Russian oil have been the main buttress of Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's authoritarian regime. Today, nearly two decades since the Soviet collapse, Belarusian loyalties are shifting. Although he still remains persona non grata in the EU, in the past few years Lukashenka has been conspicuously flirting with the West as he charts a foreign policy course increasingly independent from Moscow.

Lukashenka released political prisoners, pardoned American lawyer Emanuel Zeltser, refused to recognize the breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and even expressed readiness to participate in the EU's Eastern Partnership. Angered by Minsk's disobedience, Moscow used sticks and carrots to pull Belarus back into its "brotherly" embrace. The sticks have so far had an opposite effect, however. After Moscow had banned Belarusian dairy exports last summer, Minsk boycotted the CSTO summit in Moscow. In 2009, Russia canceled the last \$500 million tranche of its \$2 billion loan to Belarus, but Belarus did not budge, having received generous financial aid from the IMF. It is continuing on the path of defiance as it is trying to secure cheap oil prices from Moscow today, used to the preferential treatment from Russia and aware that the Druzhba pipeline transmits nearly one third of European oil.

The smoke signals from the Russian Belarusian union state are indicating a change in the relationship between Russia and the states that Moscow used to diminutively refer to as "the Near

Abroad". As Russia's "satellites" increasingly seek to leave its orbit, big political changes are looming for Europe, and the European Union should be prepared. Jeffrey Mankoff, associate director of International Security Studies at Yale, writes in his excellent article on the Russian-Belarusian dispute in [Foreign Policy](#):

Moscow's long-term goal is to take control of energy distribution infrastructure throughout the former Soviet Union. This aim is clearly stated in Russia's energy policy, and the previous round in the dispute between Belarus and Transneft-which also sparked a brief cutoff of Russian oil supplies-was ended in part by an agreement for the Russian pipeline monopoly to take a 50 percent stake in Belarusian pipeline operator Beltransgaz. Gazprom has exerted similar pressure on Ukraine over Kiev's outstanding debts. If Moscow were to succeed in completely taking over the Belarusian energy distribution network, it would not only be in a stronger position to influence Minsk's foreign policy, but the move would also improve Moscow's market power, and hence its political leverage, vis-à-vis Europe. Uncertainty about deliveries through Belarus could also lead to higher global oil prices, just as Western economies are beginning to emerge from the recession. That in and of itself should be reason enough for the Europeans – and their U.S. allies – to pay close attention to a seemingly obscure customs dispute.

Read the full text of the Foreign Policy article at foreignpolicy.com.

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Belarusian Visa Price Has Risen to EUR 180 if Issued at the Airport



The main aim of a visa regime is to regulate migration flow and to prevent eventual illegal immigrants from entering the country. What kind of illegal immigrants could come to Belarus from the EU or the USA?

How is Belarus going to become one of the world's top 30 economies by easiness of doing business, which the government has declared as its goal, if it has one of the most expensive visas in the world? The solution should definitely be to ease the visa regime or even its de-facto cancellation, as it has been done in Ukraine and Georgia.

The explanation for this Soviet-styled decision, however, seems simple: the West is still seen by the Belarusian government as a potential threat and a potential source of danger for the regime. In the past, visa issues have been used as a tool to [force several Polish Catholic priests from Belarus](#). Along with Polish priests, who have presumably been promoting Polish nationalism instead of doing their primary spiritual work, foreign journalists, human rights activists and observers can easily be forced away from the isolated country in the middle of Europe.

However, if investment attraction is priority for Belarus, the visa regime for the EU and the US should definitely be liberalized. Besides, the EU itself could initiate this by lowering the Schengen visa price for Belarusians from the current EUR 60.

Starting 2010 the price for a Belarusian visa has risen to

180 euros for the citizens of the EU. First of all this concerns those who receive visas at the airport upon arrival to Belarus, the consular department of Belarusian Foreign Ministry told. The cost increase for Belarusian visas is due to new amendments to the Tax Code of the Republic of Belarus.

As explained in the Consular Section of the Minsk National Airport, potential tourists from the European Union, who wanted to come to Belarus, could previously have received a single journey short-term visa for USD 60. The new visa price is EUR 180. Long-term visas for citizens of the EU and the United States cost more than EUR 200.

Since the New Year the Belarus authorities charge for visas in Euros, not US dollars. Another change was introduction of three types of visas: transit, short-term and long-term. There is no separation between tourist and business visas, the Belarusian edition of RFE/RL reported.

“They have a choice, either to get the visa at an embassy of Belarus in their country for EUR 60 or at the airport for EUR 180,” – representatives of the consular department of Belarusian Foreign Ministry said.

In the consular at the airport “Minsk-2” noticed that foreign nationals are paid and the new tariffs. “Nobody yet refused”, – reported at the airport.

Tourism agencies say that foreigners are beginning to refuse to travel to Belarus because Belarusian visas are among the most expensive visas in the world.

[Read the original story at Telegraf.by](#)

2000s for Democracy in Belarus: a Decade of Disappointment



An article by one of this website's authors for the on-line magazine Novaja Europa:

January 1, 2010 will not be just the beginning of a new year but the beginning of a new calendar decade. It is a formal and conventional event, but that's the way our perception is constructed – it is easier for us to view history in decades. Swinging Sixties, Greedy Eighties, Noxious Nineties. The 2000s (or “noughties”) will be a separate segment in systematized history of mankind.

For Belarus, it was a decade of dictatorship. The first full calendar decade under the unlimited authoritarian power of Aliaksandr Lukašenka.

We have entered 2000 under the red-green flag of the Lukašenka regime and leave 2009 with it still over our heads. In the 1990s the key year for Belarus was 1996, when, after the infamous [referendum](#), Belarus turned into a country where the whole power is concentrated in the hands of one man. 2006, with its tragic and disgraceful defeat of the opposition at the [presidential elections](#), has become a landmark year in the 2000s. The lesson we should learn from these years is that 2016 is either unlikely to become the year of Belarus'

liberation from dictatorship.

In 2000, that seems so recent, one might have thought that Lukašenka is there for not a long time. A year, or two, or three, and Belarus will at last be free. Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004 has spread much hope that was not destined to turn into reality. The noughties have been a decade of disappointment for Belarus, a decade which has completely turned Belarus into a very special country on the European continent.

Thirteen years have passed since the coup d'état of 1996. During this time a whole new generation of Belarusians has grown up – another generation of people with Soviet mentality, even though it's been almost twenty years since the Soviet Union itself doesn't exist any more. We may remind ourselves of 1957, thirteen years after the Nazi occupation of Belarus has been replaced back by Soviet occupation. By that time the anti-Soviet partisan movement in Belarus and neighbouring Soviet republics has almost completely vanished. Perhaps, this was not least because the society had realized that the Soviets came to stay. The same can be said about today's Belarus, with its tired, demoralized and split opposition; with the fact that Belarusians have mainly concentrated on consumption and primitive physical survival so that even the economic crisis does not initiate political protest.

In 1999 there could still be doubts, but the noughties have proven one thing to us. Belarus might have gained juridical independence simply following the trend set by Baltic countries and Ukraine, who had really struggled for it. However, we couldn't have got democracy the same way. A whole range of specifically Belarusian problems came into play: weak national self-identification of the people, lack of political culture and absence of national elite, the unfinished process of formation of the Belarusian nation as such. All the dark legacy of the Soviet age, which might not be so noticeable to an outside observer, has realized its potential in the 1990s

and became institutionalized in the 2000s.

Belarus enters 2010 as a very specific European country. A political system that rather resembles the relationship of a feudal and his serfs. An archaic economy, where the government has woken up with reforms twenty years after liberation of the socialist camp and where it is not clear, if there is still something to be reformed. A nation that missed the train of 20th century's romantic nationalisms and represents a mechanistic community of pragmatic and indifferent people without native language and historical memory.

Any difference is a potential advantage. Belarus may be able to transform its difference into an advantage, to realize its potential as a land untouched by investors in the middle of Europe or as a cradle for a post-nationalistic pluralistic traditionalism. Otherwise this potential will be spent in vain with sad consequences for the country. There is no third option, and there's not much time left till we find out the answer. It is, of course, necessary to hope for the better, but it may be far more useful to be prepared for the worst.

[Read the original story in Belarusian](#)

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Santa Claus Beaten up by Belarus Police



One Santa, 14 Snow Maidens, and 5 New Year's Bunnies marched in downtown Minsk Dec. 22 protesting restrictions on the public activities of unregistered organizations. The

group hoped to register a petition to the Parliament asking to abolish Article 193.1 of Belarus' Criminal Code. The petition had to be left in the Parliament's mailbox instead.

Two days later, police had beaten up an opposition Santa on the stairs of the Belarusian Parliament. Dressed as Santa was a former MP Valery Shchukin, who was trying to attract public attention to Article 193.1 of the Criminal Code of Belarus.

Article 193.1 allows punishing the "illegal organization or activities of public associations, religious groups or foundations or participation in their activities" with fines and six months to two years in prison. Allowing the authorities to harass and stop activities of unregistered NGOs at any time, the article violates the right to association and prevents the development of the civil society in Belarus. The article was introduced into the Belarusian Criminal Code in 2005.

A similar petition was delivered during a public action to Belarus' prosecutor-general in November. On Oct. 15, 2009, a number of "Santas" went to the General Prosecutor's Office in Minsk and handed in a declaration, in which they admitted to being a part of an unregistered Santa Claus organization and to participating in unsanctioned Santa Claus activities.

Article 193.1 contradicts provisions set out in Article 20 and 23(4) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; Article 8 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; International Labor Convention 87 on Freedom of Association and the Right to Organize. It also contradicts the Belarusian Constitution, which guarantees the right to freedom of association. Belarus is the only post-Soviet state where the activity of unregistered organizations is criminalized.

Seventeen persons have been convicted under the article since it came into force in 2006. Many Belarusian NGOs lost their official registrations in recent years. New organizations have been denied official registration many times for ungrounded reasons. The Belarusian Helsinki Committee is the sole remaining independent human rights organization in Belarus.

Read more about this topic at [Radio Free Liberty](#). A more detailed story appeared in Russian in [Kommersant](#).

A Belarusian Music Producer About Doing Show Business in Belarus

A little insight on how show business is done in Belarus. For rock and indie music the conditions are quite hard in Belarus, where there is no developed market and infrastructure and where the radio stations are under state-pressure and self-censorship. Despite that, modern bands keep existing and appearing in Belarus just as in any neighbouring country and often become recognized abroad. Sadly, sometimes they get better recognition overseas than in Belarus.

Papa Bo: "We can develop in Belarus only by earning abroad"

By Taciana Šachnovič for Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi – Papa Bo, also known as Aliaksandr Bahdanaŭ, 23 years old. Twelve of them he studied at two music schools in the class of domra, cello, violin and piano. His father – a Russian poet – lives in the Rostov region of Russia. His mother is a school teacher of chemistry and biology. According to his passport, Papa Bo was born in Mačulišчы. After graduating from music schools he entered the Philology Faculty of the

Belarusian State University. But he only studied there for a short time: informal musical subculture took more and more his time. At first, as there were no stages available, he organized so-called House concerts. Now under his patronage are the bands Serebryanaja svad'ba, Cassiopeia, Petlia Pristrastija, PortMone, Addis Abeba, RockerJocker, Botanik Project, Sergei Pukst and Pukst Band, Nagual, CherryVata, Vom, Mokh, Sibarity. – Once upon a time, two young progressive-minded boys took themselves just for fun the nicknames Papa Bo and Don Ochen and in their dreams divided the city of Minsk in two parts. And though childhood is long gone, the nickname for Aliaksandr Bahdanaŭ remained the same – Papa Bo. And he now controls 13 Belarusian groups performing alternative music. Last summer Artemiy Troitskiy (a famous Russian music producer – transl.) appreciated his efforts by granting him the Steppenwolf Music Awards, ignoring several experienced and well-known Russian producers. The hero himself does not consider himself a producer. "I just earn money, as it is well known that any sh...t can be made popular", confessed Aliaksandr. "But the main criterion here is my own musical taste. If I like it, I'll put in the original music time, money and knowledge. This group, which for many years cooked in its own juice, they are at no similarity and produce a product that reflects their vision of good music, not a vision of the masses." **"In the club there sits the club owner who knows nothing about music"** Five years ago, Papa Bo got engaged in administration of the band Nagual, with which he visited many places of the Post-soviet area and Europe. "A club in Belarus is a discotheque premises, where there sits the club owner who knows nothing about the cultural life and the latest music trends. I suggest to him: 'We want to organize a concert of a certain well-known group. We guarantee that 500 people will come.' 'Why should I? – the owner answers. – I would rather pay \$30 to a local DJ and get a thousand students drinking vodka at the bar. Why do I need your hairy hippies?..' Once we came to the

art director of one of the famous Minsk clubs and offered to organize a concert of TequilaJazz (a famous Russian rock-band – transl.). He didn't know anything about them. When I explained that it was a famous rock group, he perked up: 'Oh, let's give on their arrival a party in Latino style, with salsa, cactus everywhere and sombreros!..' At the same time, I only need one phone call to organize a concert of the Belarusian band Serebryanaja svad'ba in Moscow: 'Hi, we'd like to come to you in March...' We come to Moscow and see our posters all around the city, the club is well equipped and has an experienced sound engineer. We give the concert and take 90% of ticket sales. At the same time we know that the remaining ten per cent were spent on advertising and the sound engineer. Everything is transparent and clear. In Minsk we get the same club without a scene, without lights and sound. For just getting the empty space we have to pay \$1000. There is zero payback. It is almost impossible to earn money on concerts. Perhaps in 5 to 10 years something will change. But today we can develop here only because we earn abroad.

"Belarusians do not need anything?" – You used to talk about having a mission: to bring real music to the Belarusian masses. – I've had enough of that. The last club concert I organized in Minsk was Students Day. Only twenty people have then bought tickets for the concert of Serebryanaja svad'ba and two bands from St. Petersburg at the Minsk Concert Hall. I ended up with a loss of five thousand dollars. – Who are the most successful of the bands you manage? – As long as the situation with concerts is the way I described – people just don't come to these concerts! – I plan to do only Serebryanaja svad'ba, which is profitable. Today, out of 13 teams only Serebryanaja svad'ba, Nagual, Cassiopeia and Addis Abeba break even. At the moment Serebryanaja svad'ba is the only band, besides Liapis Trubeckoj (the well-known Belarusian band – bielar.us.), that lives off of concerts. Mostly concerts

outside Belarus. This project, which is not really in demand in Belarus, but is adored around the world. For New Year we are going to Slava Polunin (a Russian clown – bielar.us), who lives in Paris. That's because Polunin is a fan of Serebryanaja svad'ba. In spring of last year Serebryanaja svad'ba gathered a full Minsk Concert Hall. The hall was packed with about one and a half thousand people. The band played the concert and earned for that... one hundred dollars in total. While in Moscow it can earn more than ten times more. In Belarus the legal framework and possibilities do not allow to do normal business on that. Therefore you do not want to work here. **"Success through conformism"** – So what are you doing here, drowning in the Belarusian swamp? – Yes, I am really drowning. But I can not, roughly speaking, just drop 50 musicians who are counting on me. I can not tell them: 'Guys, so long, I'm leaving for Switzerland!' Because about half of them do not know how to use a the computer. The other half I just recently bought cell phones so that they were in touch. Musicians do not have the expertise to promote their music to the masses. They are people who live in their own worlds. So now I'm trying to introduce such a working scheme that would enable the machine to work independently under my distanced control. After that I plan to leave the country, because I'm bored and depressed here. – But there are prospects here. – I do not want to wait for them. Why waste your nerves and resources to beat my head against the wall? I'm, of course, still nervous, but less than earlier. – It turns out that in Belarus there is practically no demand for alternative music. Why then pull the cargo, which no one needs? – Alternative music is needed here, just yet by fewer people. For example, I am sure that a 80% of the female population of Belarus are potential listeners of Serebryanaja svad'ba. But to succeed here you need to adapt. – The rock band Petlia Pristrastija is today very popular in Moscow but virtually unknown in Belarus... – Yes, unknown. Here rock music must be played in Belarusian

language. Even the [Russian speaking] band J:Mors started singing in Belarusian. There are rock bands who want to succeed, and there are rock bands who want to bring their own music to the people. I want to bring out the music of my friends, and the band J:Mors wants to succeed. But this does not mean that we are better and they are worse. It's just that everyone has his own goals. – Rock in Belarusian language is more in demand? – To some extent, yes. This musical wave has formed an own specific target group. And if you want to succeed, you need to adapt. But conformism is alien to us (smiles). I do not have this sickness of being a patriot, in the conventional sense of the word. I don't get pathetic about it and I don't understand people who believe that a Belarusian band should sing only in Belarusian language. After the festival Mozhno, which I organized in Moscow and where ten Russian-speaking Belarusian music groups performed, I was overrun by critics: "What a shame, how can a non-Belarusian-speaking band represent Belarus abroad?" This position is so typically Belarusian: better to criticize someone instead of doing it yourself. **"To change the country one place could be enough"** – Why, instead of Moscow, don't you make a festival in Minsk? – Paradoxically, but in Moscow it is easier for Belarusians to hold a festival. Having paid for a giant bus, for food, a lot of advertising and fees. If I did it here without sponsorship, as I did in Moscow, the festival would fail. Therefore, there surely will be a festival here, but only after I find sponsors for it. Because I'm not a billionaire. – What does have to change so that you'd change your mind and stay in Belarus? – There must be a concert site, a club. One place could be enough to change the country. In every European country there is one most famous club, where the main cultural events take place. If it were possible to completely run such a place in Belarus, then I have an idea how this place could be brought up to an international level. And if there would be such a place, then life would go on.

// Translated by Bielar.us. See [Original article \(in Russian\)](#)

Forbes: Currency devaluation a shock for Belarussians



MINSK, Jan 8 (Reuters) – A surprise 20 percent devaluation of the Belarussian currency has sent people rushing to shops before prices go up. The devaluation shocked many in this ex-Soviet state where President Alexander Lukashenko, widely known as 'Batka' or 'Dad', insulated the population from the turbulence of world markets by keeping much of the economy in state hands.

But the global turmoil has caught up with Belarus and has forced it to seek a \$2.5 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund. The devaluation may have been linked to the loan as freeing up the currency system, cutting social spending to balance budgets and wage controls are common conditions set by the IMF for its loans to help rebalance ailing economies.

On Dec. 31 Minsk agreed to the IMF loan and on New Year's Day it devalued the rouble to 2,600/\$ from 2,200/\$. Belarussians rushed to the shops the next day to buy what they could in anticipation of steep price rises once the next set of imports hit the shelves. 'I don't remember such queues since the Soviet times,' said Marina, a 38-year-old housewife, out shopping in Minsk. 'I saw a woman grabbing onto a fridge and shouting that she got it first, while a man was telling her

that he had ordered it.' 'We sold 10-days worth of stock in three days,' said Tatyana, a furniture store assistant.

'Today, there were a lot of unhappy people. People couldn't believe that we've sold out.' Read full text at [Forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com).