

# Lukashenka Remains Close To His People, Jobs for Ukrainian Refugees – Belarus State TV Digest

Over the past week, state TV Channel 1 covered Alexander Lukashenka's visits to state enterprises in the regional cities of Salihorsk and Barysau.

In their coverage, state TV journalists reported on the excellent personal connection the head of state had with ordinary Belarusians. They presented him as a politician who has always remained close to peoples' problems and is keen to discuss of any controversial issues at any given moment.

Coverage also touched upon recent developments in Ukraine and the growing number of refugees that the conflict in the east is creating. According to their coverage, Ukraine may go bankrupt in two years time. In this edition of our Belarus State TV digest we summarise these and other stories grabbing the headlines in Belarus.

## Ukraine

[A Cease-fire in Donetsk and Lugansk](#). According to Russia, the recent death of two of its reporters was a violation of the cease-fire in Ukraine. State-run Channel 1 showed Sergey Naryshkin, a speaker of the Russian Duma, demanding not only a genuine investigation of the tragic events, but that those responsible should be brought to justice for the death of the reporters.

Still, the overall number of casualties from the anti-terrorist campaign remains unclear. Although the Ukrainian

Ministry of Defence speaks about 147 soldiers died during the action, Jani Megazzeni from the United Nations stated that since the beginning of the anti-terrorist campaign, 386 people had lost their lives in Ukraine due to the conflict.

[Ukrainian Economy Barely Hanging On?](#) Standard & Poor's, the credit rating agency, gave a pessimistic forecast for Kyiv for the coming years. The country may even officially become bankrupt. Another problem facing the country is the growing number of refugees who are fleeing eastern Ukraine and seeking to settle elsewhere.

State TV also commented on a recent remark made by Anders Fog Rasmussen, the head of NATO, on the involvement of Russian special services (the FSB) in providing financial support to European ecological organisations which advocate against the extraction of shale gas. Greenpeace, the world's largest environmental activist organisation, reacted with irony to these insinuations, according to the report.

## **Domestic Affairs**

[Lukashenka Mingles with Ordinary Belarusians.](#) A dialogue with simple workers remained an inherent part of any visit of the Belarusian leader to the state company, states the reporter. This time the head of state visited the Belaruskali company in Salihorsk. He spoke with the workers, a majority of whom were upset by the scandal that erupted between Russia and Belarus that involved Belaruskali.

Lukashenka had previously come to the company back during his presidential campaigns in the 1990s. "That was a difficult meeting, I can recall it until now. And then I had promised you that if I were to become president, though I did not believe that I could have become the president then (...), I reassured you that I would have never sell off the interests of the miners", Lukashenka stated.

The Belarusian leader reassured the crowd that he "would not

forgive theft and appeasement" from the company's management.

In the coverage of the meeting, the video carefully depicts the Belarusian audience closely paying attention to every word Lukashenka spoke. Several times throughout the report, the narrating journalist points out how strong the line of direct communication is between the head of state and regular Belarusians.

**Belaruskali: Of Strategic Importance to the Belarusian Economy.** "The potash industry is always receives special attention from the President", states the narrating reporter.

He pointed out that Belaruskali had overcome last year's crisis and remained a worldwide leader in potash production. The problems that the state company faced were due to the jealousy of other companies. What then propped up Belaruskali during the crisis then was not only the state, but also "new technologies, and the great reputation of the company".

Lukashenka reassured his audience that everything associated with the company's future is seen as part of Belarus' national interests. During the meeting he demonstrated his interest in all of the technology used for mining, state TV boasts.

**The Authorities Once More Focusing on Ordinary Belarusians.**

The Belarusian head of state also visited another state enterprise, this time in Barysau. The meeting was broadly covered, and once more pointed out the excellent level of communication that the Belarusian leader and ordinary Belarusians enjoyed.

Workers asked Lukashenka a few questions, including a few about Ukraine and changes in the pension system. Throughout the meeting the Belarusian leader was joking around, but drew himself back whenever a topic demanded a more serious demeanour. People appeared be happy to hear him share his thoughts and seemed satisfied with his responses. The head of state also mentioned that his priority remained maintaining a

society where “a woman can safely go for a walk with her baby in a stroller”, an oft repeated phrase.

[Work for Ukrainian refugees?](#) – When posed a question by a member of the audience about the possibility of employing Ukrainian refugees, Lukashenka stated “we should not close the doors on them”. In his opinion Belarus should help the refugees, particularly because many of them have Belarusian roots. “We are ready to let them in, but in an organised manner. The country has a workforce deficit”, he asserted, alluding to the possibility of having Ukrainians come to work in Belarus.

[Raising the Pension Age?](#) – Another member of the audience asked what was to become of the pension age. “I think it will be raised”, he replied. In his words, Belarus is the only country in the region left that has not changed its pension system. Even Russia has already been working on this issue. The head of state explained that raising the age is due to Belarus' negative demographic tendencies. Belarusian women should give birth to more children, say at least three in a family. This, he said, would resolve the demographic problem and the issues facing any potential state pension age reform.

[Belarusian Pensioners to Remain the Youngest in the World.](#) The Belarusian Minister of Labour and Social Protection, [Marjana Ščotkina](#), assured Belarusians that it would not increase the state pension age. The report goes on to state, “as the minister noted, all of the necessary conditions have been set up for a person to stay interested continuing on with their professional activity after they have reached retirement age”.

“Regardless of the difficulties this year, the major financial document of the state (budget) has maintained its social orientation”, she added.

[Checking in with the State Committee for Forensic Investigations.](#) [Andrej Švied](#), Chairman of the State Committee

for Forensic Investigations, answered dozens of questions from ordinary Belarusians. Although the Belarusian leader established the Committee only a year ago, it has already brought several about benefits to the state. This benefits include 50bn BYR in savings, but the utilisation of more advanced techniques for fighting corruption in the country.

In the future, a suspected criminal presumed guilty of corruption will have to pay for their own defence, comments the report, a move that would significantly relief stress on the state budget.

*Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials available on the web site of Belarusian State Television 1 (BT1). 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.*