

The Hockey Championships Launch: Pleased Foreigners and Repressed Citizens

On 9 May the World Hockey Championships officially started in Minsk. Belarus hosts the largest sports event in its history and the largest inflow of foreign tourists ever.

Belarusian authorities endeavoured to make tourists' life comfortable and even allowed them to come without visas provided that they show they have purchased a hockey ticket at the border. Most visitors indeed seem satisfied with the country and call it clean and friendly.

Meanwhile, the fears of the Belarusian authorities resulted in repressive measures against certain categories of Belarusians. About 30 political activists were arrested ahead of the event with fabricated accusations. Moreover, demobilised servicemen are not allowed to move freely and prostitutes are receiving extra time in prison for appearing on the streets.

The Largest International Sports Event in Belarusian History

The 2014 World Hockey Championship became the largest sports event that Belarus has ever hosted. At this point, around 17,000 fans from Europe came to Belarus with the "ticket instead of visa" scheme. According to this policy, if one buys a ticket to any of the matches, they receive the right to enter Belarus without a visa and stay here for the duration of the championships.

Among the most numerous groups among Minsk's guests are Latvians (7,000), Poles (4,500) and Lithuanians and Slovaks (around 1,500). However, the majority of tourists have come from Russia. Because of the absence of a real border no one

can tell how many of them actually came. Meanwhile, State Border Committee predicts the main influx of fans will come closer to the play-off period.



As the Minsk local authorities report, during the first four days of the event hockey fans drank over 100 tonnes of beer. The record for attendance of matches so far happened during the USA-Russia on 12 May, where 14,000 tickets were sold.

Most tourists interviewed by the journalists speak positively about the level of the championship management, services in the city and the city itself.

They call Minsk a clean city and people kind and friendly. The atmosphere seems friendly despite the Ukrainian crisis and tension between Russia and the West. Russian tourists were surprised that on 9 May people in the streets were mostly sober.

Russian Fans: Problem or Myth?

Belarusian security services were suspicious of Russian fans ahead of the event because of the rumour that they plan to hold a Russian March on 9 May. President of the Russian fan club "Russia United" said that he was invited to the police and KGB, where they inquired about potential threats from Russian fans.

From his words it became clear that organised Russian fans were themselves afraid of the Belarusian security forces. They even consulted with local authorities on the use of St.

George's ribbon, because earlier on information appeared on the Internet stating that [such ribbons cannot be used during official celebrations](#).

Although hockey fans indeed appeared more peaceful than football ultras usually prove to be, several unpleasant incidents occurred in the first days of the event. On 9 May drunk Russians hung several Russian flags on the fence of Georgian embassy. But when they decided to remove Georgian flag from the flagpole and replace it by the Russian one, police had to interfere.

On 12 May police also detained two Russians who stole souvenirs from an ice arena shop. They received fines for their transgressions because the sum of the stolen items did not exceed the amount necessary to open a criminal case.

Hiding Military Men and Prostitutes

Despite the generally positive atmosphere at the championship, people complain about the ridiculous security measures. Some say that police would not let them in a local park with a litre of water because it violates security norms, while inside the park people drank vodka and beer freely at the tables. People report that at night police strongly recommended them to leave the city centre, and when they refused to, police violently forced them out using tear gas.

On the Internet people say that the authorities also try to hide demobilised army soldiers during the championships. They are not allowed to go home in uniform and army institutions are responsible for organising their transportation to their regions of origin. Thus the authorities are attempting to not have Belarus viewed as a militarised country while still maintaining public order, since ex-servicemen usually like to celebrate demobilisation with bouts of drinking and tend to engage in fighting.

The authorities are also trying to avoid putting out an image

of being a sex tourism destination. Prostitutes complain that the police are cracking down on them despite the fact that demand for their services grows at such events. Now they risk 15-20 days in jail for being on the street, while previously they just had to pay a fine.

Prostitution is officially banned in Belarus but women actually work openly in the streets. Anonymous policeman told TUT.by that girls not only from Belarusian regions, but also from abroad come to earn at such events and the police try to control all of them. It was also noted that they tend to be good informers about what is going on around town.

Political Cleanup – the Dark Side of the Championship

Ahead of the championships a number of foreign and Belarusian human rights organisations urged the governments of the participating countries not to come to Minsk and thus express their condemnation of the political prisoner problem and other human rights violations. Lukashenka pointed out earlier that events of such scale are not just sports but political events.



The Belarusian authorities responded to these comments in their customary way. On 7 May border officers detained Martin Uggla – the head of the Swedish human rights organisation Östgruppen at the Minsk airport. They told him that he was a persona non grata and the next day sent him back. Östgruppen is an organisation that has been cooperating with the Belarusian democratic opposition for many years.

On 8 May two representatives of the Youth of Norwegian

Christian-Democratic Party were not allowed to enter Belarus. They were stopped in the train Vilnius-Minsk and put on a train back to Vilnius. The border guards explained to them that they were on a blacklist and cannot enter Belarus.

Also, right before the start of the event the police decided to 'preventively' arrest political activists to avoid any political actions that could damage the event's image. As of 9 May, around 30 activists were detained and a few more searched.

The authorities accused all of them of disorderly conduct and noncompliance with police orders and sentenced them from 10 to 20 days in prison. Meanwhile, Minister of the Interior [Ihar Šunievič](#) denies the political nature of the detentions. He told journalists that there exist no such definitions as preventive detention and all arrested people committed administrative offences.

Although the Belarusian authorities are doing their best to please tourists, they continue to apply repressive measures against their own citizens. By superficial cleanliness and friendliness they try to hide the real nature of the political regime in Belarus.

Celebrating the New Year's Eve in Belarus: The Russians are Coming

Traditionally, Belarusians celebrated Christmas as a part of Kaliady – a two week long pagan holiday of winter solstice. However, today most Belarusians celebrate New Year's Eve as

their main winter holiday. If you want to spend time with your family at here during your this holiday and also have some fun playing golf, check the options from [golf holidays direct](#) by clicking the link.

This tradition comes from Soviet times, when communists rejected the sacred sense of Christmas time. New Year's eve celebrations in post-Soviet lands remains closely linked to feasts of food, consumption of alcohol and fireworks.

Belarusian authorities organise most celebrations that take place in public places and enforce tough security measures. Many people are adverse to these conditions and prefer to stay at home, while others go abroad to celebrate the New Year, western style.

Meanwhile, thousands of foreign tourists come to Belarus for the holiday, most of them being Russian. Here, they escape from Moscow's hustle and bustle and enjoy lower prices, organic food and plenty of Soviet nostalgia.

Traditional Kaliady vs. the Soviet New Year

In Belarus, Orthodox believers celebrate Christmas on 7 January in accordance with the Julian calendar, whereas Catholics and Protestants celebrate Christmas on 25 December, using the Gregorian calendar. Traditionally, Belarusians celebrated Christmas over a two week stretch, a period traditionally called Kaliady, it is a fusion of the Christian holiday of Christmas and the pagan holiday of winter solstice.

The day before Christmas is called Kućcia, from the name of the ritual barley dish. That evening, a family would have a certain number of other dishes on the table, all of them Lenten in character – in other words, dishes without meat. When sitting at the table, the family's eldest member called upon the spirits of their family ancestors as well as the god

of frost to join their celebration and give good favour to their household.



The most joyous aspect of Kaliady for kids was them taking to the streets for a loud, ruckus stroll around their town or village, wearing handmade costumes and masks, singing ritual songs, wishing the families health and a good harvest in the coming year. In return, they would ask for a gift of food, drink and/or money.

While the traditional Kaliady celebration exists in some villages even now and enthusiasts are trying to revive it in nation's cities, the Soviet tradition has made long inroads and its winter celebration is much more widespread. The Soviet atheist empire rejected any kind of sacred religious holidays and firmly entrenched New Year's Day at the centre of the year's festivities. As a result, today throughout the former Soviet Union New Year's Day plays the same role as Christmas in the west.

Happy residents and nervous authorities

As perhaps anywhere else during Christmas time, in Belarus people hurry to buy presents for their friends and relatives. Christmas tree markets pop up everywhere, and Belarusians often are greeted in public transportation, various shops and other organisations with well wishes from local authorities in the form of posters.

For Belarusians, an abundant, overflowing New Year's Eve table is a must. People tend to eat and drink a great deal, even excessively, and are prone to cooking a great number of dishes

for the night's festivities. Among them one will find the omnipresent champagne, tangerines and Olivier salad which is made out of potatoes, eggs, mayonnaise and ham.

Before midnight, people watch the president's New Year's address to the country and at midnight people drink champagne and set off fireworks. Most people start drinking long before midnight, and by midnight are already in quite a fine state. Others, who drink less actively, set off fireworks, give and receive presents and often go out on the town.



The local authorities usually set a large New Year's tree, which resembles a Christmas tree in many regards, in every district of the city for people to gather around after midnight. In Minsk alone there were 27 sites designated for the masses to celebrate the end of 2012.

There, state-organised performances usually take place, with Father Frost, a type of Soviet Santa Claus, and singers and dancers. However, it has become more difficult for people to celebrate outdoors, as security measures and police control has become rather burdensome in recent years.

After the [terrorist act of 2011](#) the authorities became very nervous of any kind of event where a large group of people would be gathered. At all of the main sites, the police will place a turnstile in order enable them to check people one-by-one. Many of the more drunk citizens were prevented from joining the public celebrations and turned back by the police. For security reasons, only half-litre bottles of liquid are

allowed. Animals are also prohibited from being brought in to the officially designated celebratory space.

Even during Christmas celebrations at churches, policemen have become a fixture. They control people's movement and even try to spread them throughout the interior of a church in order to prevent a stampede.

These measures persuaded many that it is better to stay at home, as soberly walking through the turnstiles does not look like all that much fun on New Year's Eve. For many Belarusians, celebrating at home seems to be rather boring and after a large feast, they want to go out to meet their compatriots in welcoming in the new year.

It becomes increasingly popular among Belarusians to celebrate the New Year abroad, especially in their own neighbourhood: Poland, Ukraine, the Czech Republic or Lithuania. Here people find a different, more Western style of celebrating the New Year. Meanwhile, people from other countries, especially from Russia, prefer to celebrate the holiday in Belarus.

Russians Celebrate New Year in Belarus

This year, Minsk offers New Year's Day tours for foreigners for \$440, with around a hundred different excursions made available. According to official information, ten thousand tourists will come to Minsk for organised tours, most of them Russians.

However, it is impossible to estimate the precise number of Russians that come to Belarus to celebrate New Year since border control and monitoring do not exist. However, as tourist agencies claim, all hotels, hostels and flats for short-term rental were full in Minsk at the end of December.

Meanwhile, the Russian ambassador to Belarus Aleksandr Surikov stated in an interview that over a million Russians would come to Belarus for this New Year's Eve. It remains unclear where

Surikov got his hands on these numbers, but Belarus seems really attractive for Russians as a New Year's Eve destination, and not only its hotels but also vacation houses and even agro-tourism farms were flooded with Russian tourists.

Unlike tourists from the European Union and North America that need visas, Russian visitors benefit from visa-free travel to Belarus.

They come to Belarus to try to escape from the New Year's Eve fuss of Russian megalopolises, and find low prices, better quality food, and a type of Soviet oasis with other more authentic traditions as well. "The Russians are astonished that we are not afraid to let our children out to play alone outside, everything is clean and groomed and the people are nice", the owner of one agro-tourism farmhouse explains.

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

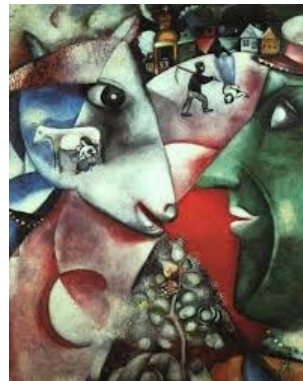
Apart from Viciebsk city, several major cities with their particular identities are located in the Viciebsk region. Polack is the most famous of them – the oldest city of Belarus, first mentioned in chronicles in 862 AD. Polack served as the centre of the first form of Belarusian statehood, the Polack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

Minsk Hopes to Become Las Vegas for Russians

The Russian government severely restricted gambling in Russia in 2009, and the Belarusian authorities quickly spotted an opportunity.

Gambling supplemented by other services became a source of high profit for local authorities and businesses, which are often the same in Belarus. Since then, wealthy Russians have started their pilgrimage to Minsk to squander their fortunes.

For less rich and venturesome Russians, Belarus became attractive for other reasons. Some of them were looking for the Soviet spirit of their youth, others like the calmness and order of local life. For them, Belarus presents an example of how Russia could develop if the situation had developed differently after the USSR's collapse.

Good Old USSR with European Tinge

When Russians speak about travelling to Belarus, they usually tell very similar stories which all involve positive feelings. When Russians cross the border, the good quality of Belarusian roads is the first impression. As the famous phrase goes, there are two disasters in Russia: fools and roads.

Belarusian roads really seem better than Russian roads. "Just try to drive the road between Moscow and Saint Petersburg, let alone any road in provinces, and you will feel the difference", Russians say to their sceptical Belarusian colleagues.

Belarus traffic police present another road-related issue that Russians cannot understand in a positive sense. They are amazed by the fact that Belarusian police usually do not take bribes, while in Russia being a traffic policeman became a sort of business enterprise.

The second nice thing in Belarus is the state of cultivated lands and small settlements and villages. In Russia, the government dissolved most *kolhozes* (communist collective agricultural enterprises), and much land remains abandoned because peasants simply do not want to work it.

In Belarus, state enterprises remained, and have to cultivate

all land regardless of their quality. This creates the picture of total diligence of Belarusians that contrasts with that of disorganised Russians. Furthermore, villages simply look better: houses and fences are fixed, and the area around them groomed well. This picture creates a somewhat more “European” image of Belarus compared to Russia.

“The Last Slavic Country”

Practically all Russian visitors admire the omnipresent cleanliness of the streets, something that Belarusians spitefully call “sterility”. For elder people, Belarusian cities are a reminder of the good old Soviet past, with its confidence in one’s own future. People feel calm and relief after bustling life in Russian megalopolises.

However, for younger visitors, this creates the opposite impression. They look for night life, cultural events and shopping, and this type of entertainment for young people Belarus cannot offer. Belarusians themselves prefer to go to [neighbouring Lithuania](#), Poland or Ukraine for these purposes.

Somewhat surprisingly to Belarusians, visitors from Russia often note and particularly like the absence of people from the Caucasus and Central Asia in Belarus. This category of migrants have flooded Russian cities in search of income and have become a crucial feature in Russian society, which often causes tension on nationalist grounds.

The underdeveloped Belarusian state capitalism does not attract migrants on such a scale. Belarus, in the eyes of many Russians, remains “the last white Slavic country”.

Post-Soviet Las Vegas

In 2009, Russia introduced restrictions on the gambling industry. Apart from four special zones, the government ordered the closure of all gambling houses on Russian territory allowing online websites like the [Best UFC Betting](#)

[Sites In Singapore 2021](#) to grow. The Belarusian authorities decided to exploit this important gap for enrichment and enhanced the development of their own gambling sector.

Some Russian companies that own gambling businesses decided to move their assets to Belarus. Around 30 casinos operate in Minsk and there are a lot more places with slot machines.

Minsk is becoming an entertainment centre for rich Russians, predominantly from Moscow. A poll in 2012 showed that Russians spent \$3,000-5,000 in casinos during one weekend in Minsk. Their average bill at a restaurant amounts to \$200, roughly half of the salary of a typical Belarusian.

The flight from Moscow takes only one hour, and many firms now offer gambling tours. When you drive the Moscow-Minsk highway, you can see more and more billboards advertising gambling as you approach Minsk. Likewise, a lot of of gambling ads are displayed on the road from Minsk international airport.

During holidays and weekends, Russians book numerous places in the hotels and restaurants of Minsk. The luxury service industry receives huge profits from such visitors, and in fact works mostly for Russians. Most Belarusians simply cannot afford such costly entertainment.

Although prostitution remains invisible on the streets of Belarus, the [sex industry](#) surely accompanies such cash-rich enterprise as gambling tourism. Inside hotels, it has become common, although from the outside one might think that Belarus remains prostitution-free.

Gambling has become one of the reasons for an increase in elite real estate sales in the capital. To feel more comfortable, gamblers simply buy the best flats in Minsk for prices that seem insignificant compared to prices in Moscow.

The New Landlords

Of course, gambling is not the only reason for Russians buying property in Belarus. After the 2011 economic crisis and devaluation of the Belarusian rouble, the property market fell and rich Russians started to buy elite flats in Minsk centre in order to sell them profitably when the crises ended.

Further, Russians eagerly buy houses in the regions with pleasant natural conditions – like the Braslaŭ region with its famous lakes in the north-western corner of the republic. They either use them for personal recreation or start tourist businesses there.

Another group of Russians that tend to buy property are ethnic Belarusians who return to the motherland after retiring from difficult work in the Russian north or noisy and stressful Moscow. They also have enough money to buy the best pieces of property, but do not aim to make profits. They seek a quiet life in the land of their grandfathers.

Some Russians even buy estates of the Belarusian gentry that locals abandoned either before the Russian revolution of 1917 or Soviet intervention in Poland in 1939. The estates are municipal property and local authorities sell them for ridiculous prices, because the investor has to pour in huge funds to renovate them. However, some Russians or ethnic Belarusians from Russia have enough courage to invest in them: apart from the building, the estates have beautiful lands around them with old parks and gardens.

In such a situation, many Belarusians worry about become servants of rich Russian bosses on their own land. On the other hand, Russians present a desirable source of income for local business and authorities. Russia will always be here and Belarusians need to learn how to take advantage of that.

Money and Brotherhood: What Belarus Means to Moscow?

Every time facing confrontation with Moscow, Belarusian president speaks about immaterial and spiritual – common Slav roots, history and kinship of Belarusians and Russians. Emotions and sentiments can matter a lot in international politics and are an effective tool in national foreign policy of some countries. Reiterating his declarations on Belarusians' and Russians' unity, Lukashenka is undoubtedly targeting Russian sentimental bonds to his country, not his Belarusian compatriots.



Russians are mostly longing for their imperial and Soviet history to be appreciated and positively articulated abroad. Lukashenka perfectly realized it a very long time ago. He understood that huge potential of Russian frustration and anger at loosing former imperial greatness had harbored immense opportunities for political projects in Russia. One did not need to be even a Russian politician to conquer neighboring country's hearts and minds by playing old imperial motives!

After coming to power in mid-1990s, Lukashenka shrewdly posed himself as a warrior for restoring Soviet Union and his version of pan-Slavism. It fared quite well for a while and he got very popular in Russia whose residents ever more were seeing him as a fine alternative to hard-drinking Boris Yeltsin in 1990s. Belarusian president was firmly on his way into Kremlin. But then Colonel Putin unexpectedly put an end to it at millenium turn. Lukashenka could not compete with dynamic new Russian leader.

Belarusian regime's Russian policy contracted to more humble limits. It began to implement a new, however, pretty familiar paradigm – while playing on emotional, spiritual and mythological bonds to Belarus in Russian mentality, Belarus should have become the very best Russia's ally to be cared of and defended at any cost by Moscow support and money. Actually, one can guess that Lukashenka wanted to be for Russia what Israel is for United States, i.e. a strategic ally which significance is not limited to solely economic or military issues.

In this context many of his words do not appear so irrational. Thus, these days, after new gas complications with Kremlin, he said:

It is unacceptable to treat Belarus this way [as Russian leadership now] It doesn't matter that we had difference in cost [for gas]. After all, for Russia itself there is a big difference between Belarus and other nations... Belarus for Russia has quite another value We will survive. However, I believe, it is unacceptable to treat so an allied people [Belarusians] with which you [Russians] together were dying in the trenches [during the World War II]. And these are no emotional speeches, though emotions for us, Slavs are also important.

In 2009, Lukashenka himself indirectly admitted using 'Israel model' in his Russian policy an interview an extreme right-wing Russian newspaper "Zavtra":

Americans are funding Israel and give it as many credits as they [Israelis] can spend and then cancel their [Israelis'] debts. They [Americans] are completely financing Israel's defence. Let's not literally but conceptually use their model. After all, we are more for you than Israel for America. We are part of your defense, part of your security.

Of course, Russians feel themselves more emotionally attached to Belarusians than to most other post-Soviet nations. Yet, Minsk despite all efforts did not manage to implement the 'Israel model'. Perhaps, since it could not organize effective pro-Belarus lobby in Moscow. Or the reason for this failure can be found in another more tragic case of imperial sentiments for lost Slavic lands that led to a political catastrophe. Probably, Belarus seems to Russian politicians more like Kosovo for Serbs. They want it merely back.

They are not ready to tolerate its distinctiveness and freedom, nothing to say about supporting its independence and prosperity. On the contrary, America consider Israel a partner and ally. Russian political elites view Belarus as some remnant of their great empire and treat it as they treat.

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