

**OFFICIAL NAME:** Republic of Belarus

**CAPITAL:** Minsk

**SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT:** Unitary Multiparty Republic

**AREA:** 207,600 Sq Km (80,200 Sq Mi)

**ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION** 10,452,500

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**LOCATION AND GEOGRAPHY:** Belarus is a former republic of the USSR. It is bound by Poland and Lithuania to the west, Russia to the northeast and east, Ukraine to the south and Latvia to the northwest. The country occupies the western extremities of the East European Plain within the basins of the Dnieper, Zapadnaia Dvina and Neman Rivers. The country's terrain is characterized by the alternation of elevated flat and depressed areas, which are swampy and occupied by lakes in various regions. The southeast region is occupied by alluvial as well as glacial plains and as a whole, the terrain is the result of anthropogenic continental glaciation. The principal rivers are the Western Dvina, Bevezina, Dnepr, Pripyat (Pripet), Neman, Bug and the Sozh. Major Cities (pop. est.); Minsk 1,671,000, Homel 517,000, Vitebsk 373,000, Mahilyou 364,000, Hrodno 291,000 (1992). Land Use; forested 34%, pastures 15%, agricultural-cultivated 30%, other 21% (1993).

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**CLIMATE:** Belarus has a moderately continental climate that is influenced by the Baltic Sea and Atlantic Ocean. The summers are warm and winters are cold while the average annual precipitation ranges 546 mm (21.5 inches) to 693 mm (27.3 inches). Average temperature ranges are from 17.5 degrees Celsius (63.5 degrees Fahrenheit) in July to -7 degrees Celsius (20 degrees Fahrenheit) in January.

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**PEOPLE:** The principal ethnic majority are the Belarussians who account for 78% of the population while 13% are Russians and 3% are Ukrainians. Other ethnic minorities include Jews, Tartars and Lithuanians.

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**DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS:** Density; 50 persons per sq km (129 persons per sq mi) (1993). Urban-Rural; 67.6% urban, 32.4% rural (1992). Sex Distribution; 47.0% male, 53.0% female (1992). Life Expectancy at Birth; 66.3 years male, 75.6 years female (1990). Age Breakdown; 23% under 15, 22% 15 to 29, 21% 30 to 44, 18% 45 to 59, 11% 60 to 74, 5% 75 and over (1989). Birth Rate; 12.9 per 1,000 (1992). Death Rate; 11.2 per 1,000 (1992). Increase Rate; 1.7 per 1,000 (1992). Infant Mortality Rate; 12.1 per 1,000 live births (1992).

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**RELIGIONS:** Mostly Orthodox Christians with a Roman Catholic minority.

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**LANGUAGES:** The official language is Belarussian while Russian is also widely spoken and each ethnic minority also has its own language.

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**EDUCATION:** Aged 25 or over and having attained: primary or no formal schooling 23.0%, incomplete secondary 16.8%, completed secondary 49.4%, higher 10.8% (1989). Literacy; N/A.

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**MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993:** On Aug. 25, 1991 Belarus declared its independence, although prior to independence its history was closely tied with that of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). In Mar. 1953 Yosef Stalin died and was succeeded by Georgy Malenkov who was in turn forced to relinquish the party leadership to Nikita Khrushchev after a little over one week in power. In 1955 the Warsaw pact, militarily aligned the Soviet Union with other communist countries and in Nov. 1956 the Soviet Red Army invaded Hungary to quell uprisings. In 1957 three communist ministers unsuccessfully attempted to depose Khrushchev which resulted in their expulsion from the central committee. In 1962 under Khrushchev's rule the USSR was involved in the Cuban Missile crisis and in the same year relations with China were broken off as a result of ideological differences. In Oct. 1964 Khrushchev was forced to retire and was succeeded by Leonid Brezhnev.

In Aug. 1968 the Warsaw Pact forces led by the Red Army invaded Czechoslovakia to halt their Prague Spring reforms. In 1977 Brezhnev was elected President. In Nov. 1982 Brezhnev died and was succeeded by Yuri Andropov, the former head of the KGB. Andropov introduced limited economic reforms and established an anti-corruption program. In Feb 1984 Andropov died and was succeeded by Konstantin Chernenko who in turn died on Mar. 10, 1985. On Mar. 11, 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev was elected as Chernenko's successor and Gorbachev embarked on a program which restructured the USSR's relations with the West. Gorbachev also established Glasnost (openness) as well as Perestroika (restructuring and reform). In Apr. 1986 a meltdown in the reactor of the Chernobyl nuclear power station in Ukraine sent radioactive fallout across northern Europe. In Dec. 1987 the USSR and USA signed the Treaty on Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF). In Feb. 1988 a dispute erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh which resulted in mass demonstrations and strikes in the two republics. In Dec. 1988 an earthquake in Armenia killed some 50,000 people. In Apr. 1989 troops violently repressed demonstrations in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. In Dec. 1989 the Lithuanian Parliament adopted multiparty politics. In Jan. 1990 Gorbachev visited Lithuania and was met by some 250,000 pro-independence demonstrators. In Feb. 1990 some 18 people were killed in riots over housing discrimination in Tajikistan. In May 1990 Boris Yeltsin was elected President of the Russian Federation and on Nov. 1, 1990 launched a 500 day plan to give the Russian Republic a free market economy. In June 1990 Nakhichevan an Azerbaijani enclave bordering Iran declared its intention for a unification with Iran while a civil war was escalating between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In the same month around 150 people were killed during ethnic clashes in Kyrgyzstan. In Jan 1991 another 15 people were killed as the Red Army seized a television station in Lithuania while in Latvia the Soviet Black Berets killed 5 people in an attack on the ministry building. In the same month troops were being deployed in Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Moldova. In Mar. 1991 pro-Yeltsin demonstrators held a mass rally. On Aug. 18, 1991 as Gorbachev was vacationing in the Crimea, the Politburo hard liners attempted a coup to remove Gorbachev from power through the declaration of a State of Emergency under the control of a State Committee. Almost immediately republic leaders

declared the emergency committee illegal as well as unconstitutional and began to barricade their parliaments as troops and tanks were deployed throughout the republics. By Aug. 20 senior officers had refused to order their troops to use force against the civilians and on Aug. 21, 1991 the coup collapsed as troops were ordered to return to their barracks. Immediately following the unsuccessful coup many republics suspended or purged the communist party and on Sept. 5, 1991 after 3 days of debate the 74 years of centralized communist control came to an end. In Jan. 1992 Belarus became a founding member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The Belarus leadership which consisted solely of former communists decided not to adopt a presidential form of government so that the Supreme Soviet, headed by Stanislau Shushkevich became the organ of state power. Throughout 1992, the leadership remained divided on the issue of Belarus' policy within the CIS. Prime Minister Vyacheslau Kebich favored a confederation of of equal states and the emergence of a successor state to the Soviet Union while Shushkevich favored the CIS as a purely transitional arrangement with the establishment of closer ties to Europe. In May 1992 Belarus introduced its own rouble bank notes which became the sole legal tender in November. In June 1992, Poland and Belarus recognized each other's borders and settled their differences. In July 1992, after a joint session of the Russian and Belarus governments in Moscow, military and economic agreements were signed that involved a "high-level of real integration" of the two states. Immediately afterwards, Shushkevich contradicted his prime minister by declaring the agreements were contrary to CIS and Belarus law. Also during 1992, industrial production fell by 14% while the GDP was expected to fall by 16%. Belarus had also announced its intention to become nuclear free with the last tactical nuclear warhead leaving Belarus territory in May with all long-range nuclear weapons to be transferred to Russian over the next 7 years. In February 1993, Belarus voted to adhere to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and ratified the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) with some 80 intercontinental missiles to be transferred to Russia by the end of 1994. During 1993 there were further economic woes for Belarus with market reforms curtailed by the Supreme Soviet. Further economic problems also caused periodical halts to energy supplies for which Belarus is reliant on Russia for 90% of its energy imports. Political life was dominated by the

continuing conflict between Prime Minister Kebich and Supreme Soviet Chairman Shushkevich over the question of joint military and economic unions with Russia. In September 1993, the Belarus parliament with the support of powerful reactionary grouping, the Belarus Faction, agreed to enter an economic union with Russia and in November to form a monetary union, both against the protest of Shushkevich and the Belarussian Popular Front. Also during 1993, there were growing concerns over the 1986 Chernobyl-Ukrainian atomic power plant disaster with the number of thyroid cancers among children rising dramatically as a result of nearly 40% of the country's territory being contaminated by radioactive fallout.

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**CURRENCY:** The official currency is the Rouble (R) (also known as the Zaichik) divided into 100 Kopecks.

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**ECONOMY:** Gross National Product; USD \$29,306,000,000 (1993). Public Debt; USD \$1,489,400,000 (1994). Imports; USD \$3,038,000,000 (1994). Exports; USD \$3,680,000,000 (1994). Tourism Receipts; N/A. Balance of Trade; USD \$ -542,000,000 (1994). Economically Active Population; 4,826,000 or 46.9% of total population (1993). Unemployed; 7.5% (1992).

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**MAIN TRADING PARTNERS:** Its main trading partner is the CIS.

**MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS:** Buckwheat, Chalk, Chloride, Clay, Limestone, Peat, Potassium, Quartz Sand, Rye, Sodium Chloride, Sugar Beets, Timber, Tobacco, Wheat.

**MAJOR INDUSTRIES:** Bicycles, Clothing, Farm Machinery, Fertilizers, Food Processing, Furniture, Glass, Motorcycles, Motors, Oil Refining, Paper, Potash Processing, Prefabricated Houses, Radios, Textiles, Tools, Wine Making, Wood Processing.

**MAIN EXPORTS:** Farm Machinery, Fertilizers, Glass, Machine Tools, Synthetic Fibers, Textiles.

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**TRANSPORT:** Railroads; route length 5,587 km (3,472 mi) (1990), passenger-km 16,525,000,000 (10,268,000,000 passenger-mi) (1989), cargo ton-km 81,734,000,000 (55,980,000,000 short ton-mi) (1989). Roads; length 48,100 km (29,888 mi) (1990). Vehicles; cars 498,700 (1988). Merchant Marine; N/A. Air Transport; passenger-km 5,754,000,000 (3,575,000,000 passenger-mi) (1989), cargo ton-km 49,000,000 (34,000,000 short ton-mi) (1989).

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**COMMUNICATIONS:** Daily Newspapers; total of 10 with a total circulation of 1,899,000 (1992). Radio; receivers 3,185,000 (1993). Television; receivers 2,775,000 (1993). Telephones; units 1,814,400 (1993).

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**MILITARY:** 98,400 (1995) total active duty personnel with 51.3% army, 0.0% navy and 27.4% air force while military expenditure accounts for 1.8% (1993) of the Gross National Product (GNP).