



18.5 Belarus: Between Europe and Russia

The word Belarus means “white Russia.” No one knows for sure why the color is part of the country’s name. It might refer to the snow that often covers the land. It might describe the white bark of the birch trees in its forests. The “rus” part of Belarus reflects its location next to Russia on its eastern border. On the west, Belarus borders Europe.

A Landlocked Country of Many Lakes This nation of rolling plains and dense forests is **landlocked**. In other words, it is surrounded entirely by land, with no access to the sea. Long ago, glaciers scraped across its plains, creating the 11,000 lakes that dot the Belarus landscape.

In the past, the economy of Belarus was based on agriculture and logging. While both activities are still important today, now about a fifth of Belarusian farmland and forestland can no longer be used. Tragically, this land was poisoned when the nearby Chernobyl nuclear power plant exploded in 1986. Much of this large area will never be safe for farming or logging again.

Belarus Looks East to Russia Russian influence is strong in Belarus, although the population of the country is approximately 81 percent Belarusian and only 11 percent Russian. During Soviet rule, Russian workers and government officials did much to develop Belarus. They cleared and drained its land to create farms managed by the government. They also brought manufacturing and industry to Belarusian cities. The Russians also shaped the Belarusian political system and influenced its culture.

Today Belarus still has close ties to Russia. Most of its foreign trade is with Russia, and it depends on Russian gas and oil to run its industries. The two countries have signed agreements to work together closely in the future.

However, relations between Belarus and Russia are not always smooth. The two countries disagree about labor and trade issues and have different ideas about how much power the government should have over its citizens and industries. Although the economy of Belarus is growing, there are many challenges ahead.

A Belarus Tractor Factory

Making farm machines is a large industry in Belarus. These tractors were built in Minsk, the capital of Belarus.

