

Landlocked Countries: Belarus

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Belarus (or White Russia) lies between Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia and has an area of 80,200 square miles and a population of 9.2 million.

The capital is Minsk which during the 9th Century was ruled by the Rurik dynasty of Kyiv, but became a separate principality ruled by Rurik princes from AD 1054. Early 14th Century it was incorporated with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In AD 1386, Lithuania and Poland were united when the rulers married each other, and in 1569 the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth was formed. It was dissolved 1795 as a consequence of the third partition of Poland, and what is now Belarus came under Russian rule.

During WWI, when large parts of Belarus were occupied by German forces, the first Belarussian state in modern times was proclaimed as the Belarussian people's republic (BNR) March 25, 1918. This state existed till January 1918, and its government in Minsk is said to have issued three stamps in 1918.



1918 issue of the Belarussian people's republic (BNR)



High and low values of the 1920 issue intended for use in any liberated area controlled by BNR, five values, same design, imperf and perforated.

this government live in many different countries, but the leader lives in Canada.

Led by general Bulak-Balakovich Belarussian forces attempted in 1920 to win control over an area around Dzvinsk in Belarus but were quickly forced to retreat. It is probable that a series of five stamps depicting a couple in national costumes were issued in connection with this campaign. These stamps never came in use in Belarus, but it is claimed that the Latvian authorities permitted some letters franked with them to be used on letters posted in Riga. The stamps are mentioned, but not catalogued in most catalogs, although my Danish AFA Eastern Europe catalog from 1987-88 catalogs them.

In 1950, the exile government issued several 'stamps', and in 1971 Belarussians in Great Britain organized a strike service with its own stamps.



1950 issues by the BNR exile government



1971 British postal strike post organized by exiled Belarussians

The Red Army entered Belarus in 1919 and the Belarussian Socialist Soviet Republic was established January 5, 1919. For a short period till 1921 it was part of a Lithuanian-Belarussian Socialist Soviet Republic, but when the war between Poland and the Red Army ended in 1921, Belarus was divided between Poland and what became the Belarussian Socialist Soviet Republic and which became one of the original member states of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, or for short, the Soviet Union.

Before WWII there were only two Soviet stamp issues showing subjects related to Belarus: one stamp in the series



Above, Soviet 1933 people of Belarus; right, Soviet 1937 state arms of the Belarussian Socialist Soviet Republic

nationalities from 1933, and one 1937 stamp as part of the series featuring the arms of the various Soviet republics.

In 1939 Germany and the Soviet Union invaded Poland and the parts of Belarus that had been under Polish rule were incorporated into the Soviet Union and most of it was added to the Belarussian Socialist Soviet Republic from October 28, 1939.

In 1940, the Soviet Union celebrated the incorporations of the Belarussian and Ukrainian western areas with a stamp series.

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Belarus was severely hit and more than a million people were killed, in fact the population only in 1971 reached the pre-war level.



Left, Soviet 1940 agricultural exhibition, Belarussian pavilion; right, Soviet 1947 elections for the Supreme Soviet, state arms of the Belarussian Soviet Republic

During the German occupation, German stamps were used, from November 1941 overprinted 'OSTLAND' ('Eastern Lands').

A Belarussian committee in Berlin was in 1942 allowed to issue a series of three stamps with motifs related to Belarus: Duke Vytautas, duke Olgerd, and the fortress in Vilnius.

After the war, Belarus kept the areas added to it in 1939 and in 1949, two stamps were issued to celebrate the 10th anniversary of this.



Ostland 1942



1942 labels issued by a Belarussian committee in Berlin

The liberation of Belarus in 1944 was remembered in 1964 for the 20th anniversary, in 1969 for the 25th anniversary, in 1974 for the 30th anniversary, and in 1984 for the 40th anniversary.



Soviet 1949 10th anniversary of the incorporation of Belarussian and Ukrainian west areas



Liberation Anniversaries: 1964 20th, 1969 25th, 1974 30th, 1984 40th

Besides the Soviet Union as such, the Belarussian and the Ukrainian Soviet Republics were founding members of the United Nations and were full members of both the United Nations and its specialized organizations, including the Universal Postal Union.

When the UPU reached 100 years in 1974, the Soviet Union issued three stamps, one for each of its UPU members (Soviet Union, Belarus, and Ukraine).



Soviet 1974 centenary of the Universal Postal Union, stamps for the Soviet Union, Ukraine, and Belarus (in the center)

Belarus issued a 2014 stamp for its 60 years membership of UNESCO, in 2015 for 70 years membership of the United Nations, and in 2016 for 60 years membership of UNICEF.



2014 60 years membership of UNESCO; 2015 70 years United Nations member; 2016 70 years member of UNICEF



After WWII several Soviet stamps had motifs or themes related to Belarus. The arms of the Belarussian Soviet Republic was among the stamps displaying the arms of all Soviet republics issued for the elections for the Supreme Soviet in 1947.

In 1949 the 30th anniversary of the Belarussian Soviet Republic was celebrated with two stamps. The 40th anniversary was celebrated with a single 1958 stamp, and in 1957, the 40th anniversary of the October revolution was marked with stamps featuring the flags of the Soviet Republics, including Belarus.



Soviet 1949 30th anniversary of the Belarussian Socialist Soviet Republic

Above, Soviet 1953 40th anniversary of the October Revolution, state flag of the Belarussian Soviet Republic; right, Soviet 1958 40th anniversary of the Belarussian Socialist Soviet Republic



In 1958 the capital cities of the Soviet Republic were featured on a series of stamps, one for each capital city, including Minsk in Belarus. The 900th anniversary of Minsk was celebrated on a 1967 stamp (page 3).



Soviet 1958 Minsk, capital city of Belarus

In 1968 there was a stamp for the 50th anniversary of the Belarussian communist party, and the 50th anniversary of the Belarussian Soviet Republic was celebrated on a 1969 stamp. There was also a stamp for the 60th anniversary in 1979.



1967 900th anniversary of the founding of Minsk; right, Soviet 1968 50th anniversary of the Belarussian Communist Party



Three stamps, Soviet 1969 50th anniversary of the Belarussian SSR
Lower left, Soviet 1979 60th anniversary of the Belarussian SSR



Soviet 1988 Belarussian fairy tale
Soviet 1980 Moscow Olympics, sights of Belarus

Motifs from Belarus are also present on the stamps issued for the Moscow Olympics 1980, on a 1988 series illustrating fairy tales from the different Soviet Republics, on the 1990 definitive stamps with motifs from the capitals of the Soviet republics, and also in 1990 on the series showing historic buildings in the Soviet Republics. One of the last issues of the



Left to right: Soviet 1990 definitive stamps featuring the capital cities of the union republics, here Minsk (also imperforate version); Soviet 1990 historic buildings, here church in Polotsk, Belarus; Soviet 1991 folklore, here from Belarus

Soviet Union was a series illustrating folklore from each of the Soviet Republics issued 1991, the last year of Soviet Union stamps.

Soviet leader Gorbachev's Perestroika policy led (unintentionally) to a growing nationalism in the individual Soviet republics, and the Belarussian Soviet Republic declared its stately sovereignty July 27, 1990. August 25, 1991, the name of the state was altered to the Republic of Belarus, and December 8, 1991, the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus agreed to dissolve the Soviet Union and replaced it by the new Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Belarus marked the 20th anniversary of CIS with a 2011 stamp, and in 2013 there was a stamp for Belarus holding the presidency of CIS that year. The 25th anniversary of CIS was also marked with a 2016 stamp.



Above, 2011 20th anniversary of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); 2013 Belarussian Presidency of CIS; right: 2016 25th anniversary of the Commonwealth of Independent States CIS

In 2015 a closer economic co-operation was formed between Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, the so-called Eurasian Economic Union and a Belarussian stamp was issued for the formation. There was also a stamp for the 5th anniversary in 2019.



Left, 2015 founding of the Eurasian Economic Union; right, 2019 5th anniversary of Eurasian Economic Union

During the initial years of independence, the national symbols of the 1918-19 Belarussian people's republic were revived as national symbols, but when Alexandr Lukashenko was elected President in 1994, he re-instated the symbols of the Belarussian Soviet Republic albeit removing the hammer and sickle from the flag and the arms (where a map of the country replaced them). In 2016 the ornamental border of the flag was slightly altered, and this version was used on a United Nations



Top row, 2016 new state flag and revised state arms; bottom left, UN 1983 flag series: the Belarussian SSR, right, UN 2020 flag series: Belarus

Originally, the flag of the Belarussian Soviet Republic represented Belarus in the U.N. flag series.

The first stamps of Belarus as an independent nation depicted the arms and flag of the 1918-19 republic. Especially the arms reflect the historical ties with Lithuania and these arms are very similar to the current arms of Lithuania. During 1992-93 there was a definitive series also featuring the 1918-19 arms.



Left, 1992-93 state arms definitive stamps; right, 1992 State arms and flag;

Belarus continued to celebrate the liberation from the German occupation during WWII, first in 1994 for the 50th anniversary, and then for the 75th anniversary in 2019.



1994 50th anniversary of liberation



2019 75th anniversary of liberation

In 1995 there was a stamp for the 50th anniversary of the victory over Nazi-Germany showing the Minsk monument honoring the Red Army. That monument was also shown on three 1995 definitive stamps. There have also been stamps for the 55th, 60th, 65th, 70th, and 75th anniversaries of the victory over Nazi-Germany.

1995 50th anniv. of the victory over Nazi-Germany



Left, 2000 55th anniversary of the victory over Nazi-Germany; right, 2020 75th anniversary of victory over Nazi-Germany



Left, 60th anniversary of the victory over Nazi-Germany; above, 2010 65th anniversary of the victory over Nazi-Germany



Belarus was, as mentioned, severely hit by the Nazi-German occupation and the Jewish population was almost completely exterminated. In 2008 Belarus issued a stamp to honor the victims

of Holocaust and in 2013 there was a souvenir sheet portraying prominent Israelites born in Belarus.



Left, 2008 victims of Holocaust; above, 2013 prominent Israelis born in Belarus

Right, 1995 new state arms and flag

In 1994, with Alexandr Lukashenko in power, two 1995 stamps were issued showing the new versions of the former Soviet era arms and flag.

Lukashenko also strengthened the ties with Russia and in 1996 a co-operation treaty was signed between the two countries, celebrated on stamps of both. In 2009 Belarus commemorated the 10th anniversary of a more comprehensive treaty between the two



countries, and the 20th anniversary of it was also commemorated with a souvenir sheet showing the arms of both countries.



Above, 2019 20th anniversary of union treaty with Russia; right, 1996 co-operation treaty Russia-Belarus (stamps from both countries)



In 1996 the definitive series showing the coat-of-arms from 1992 was replaced with a new definitive series showing the new 1995 coat-of-arms.

President Lukashenko was himself depicted on a 1996 stamp, and the same year a definitive series showed the slightly revised national arms.



1996 President Lukashenko



Left, 1997 Independence Day commemoration right, 2001 10th anniversary of independence

stamp, and in 2001 the 10th anniversary of independence was commemorated with a stamp.

The 60th anniversary of the integration of the former Polish areas in the west was commemorated on a 1999 stamp (not shown).



Above left, 2017 Centenary of the October Revolution; above right, 2019 Centenary of the Belarusian SSR; right, 2018 Centenary of Komsomol

Belarus also celebrated the centenary of the October revolution with a 2017 stamp and in 2019 the country celebrated the centenary of the establishment of the Belarusian Socialist Soviet Republic. An inheritance from the Soviet Union is the youth organization Komsomol, and Belarus marked the centenary of it on a 2018 stamp.



Belarus was severely hit by the radioactive emissions from Chernobyl in Ukraine and in 2001 Belarus issued a commemorative for the victims. More stamps followed in 2006 and 2011 for the 20th and 25th anniversary of the April 25, 1986 catastrophe.

Left, 2001 Chernobyl disaster; below left, 2006 20 years since Chernobyl disaster; below right, 2011 25 years since Chernobyl disaster



Belarussian language is one of the two official languages in Belarus, but a large majority of the population uses Russian as their everyday language. To promote the use of the Belarussian language there is annually a Belarussian Language Day hosted by a different city each year. Each year a pre-stamped envelope is issued to promote the day.



2006 pre-stamped envelope for the day of the Belarussian language



2017 pre-stamped envelope 25th anniversary of Belarussian stamps