

Belarus Drops Fee on Forex Purchases by Companies

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A woman queues to withdraw money at an automated teller machine (ATM) of a bank in central Minsk.

MINSK — Belarus said it will scrap from Thursday a duty paid by companies on purchases of foreign currency, imposed last month in response to a currency crisis in Russia.

A government order published on an official judicial website on Wednesday made no reference to individuals, who have to pay a 10 percent duty on such purchases.

The former Soviet republic's Central Bank imposed a 30 percent duty in December on all purchases of foreign currency by companies and individuals because of increased demand following the Russian ruble's slide against the U.S. dollar.

It had already cut that duty twice before the publication of the new order on Wednesday.

The Russian ruble slid by around 40 percent against the dollar last year as Western sanctions over the crisis in Ukraine bit and oil prices plunged, hitting countries around the former

Soviet Union which trade mainly with Russia.

Belarus's Central Bank said on Monday it was lowering its official rate for the Belarus ruble by about 7 percent to 12,740 rubles per dollar. The currency lost about 20 percent of its value last year.

The bank said then that the situation on the currency market remained stable but Reuters data has put the ruble at between 14,200 and 15,200 per dollar this week.

More than half of Belarus's exports go to Russia, mainly trucks, tractors and industrial machinery. Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko, who keeps a firm grip on his command-style economy, said late last month he had demanded all transactions with Russia be carried out in dollars or euros.

Lukashenko has promised to protect Belarus from Russia's economic woes and sacked his prime minister, Central Bank head and top ministers in late December after warning them there would be dismissals if they missed his economic objectives.

In December, the Central Bank increased its overnight refinancing rate to 50 percent from 24 percent, but kept the key refinancing rate unchanged at 20 percent, and imposed currency controls to try to support the ruble.

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