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Russia, Belarus Decry Loss of 'Brotherly Trust' Ahead of Summit

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Vladimir Putin and Alexander Lukashenko / Kremlin.ru

Trouble may be brewing in the kingdom of the Russia-Belarus Union State.

Some 24 hours before he met Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko dropped a hammer with comments that he had stopped describing Russia as a "brotherly state."

Moscow and Minsk are traditional allies but relations became strained after Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimea peninsula in 2014, a step Lukashenko described as a "bad precedent." Additionally, Belarus believes it could lose $10.8 billion by 2024 due to Russia's recent changes in oil taxes that will see export duties being gradually cut in six years.

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“I do not say ‘brotherly nation,’ because I was informed that Russia is not receptive to it,” Lukashenko was quoted as saying by the Belsat TV outlet at a cabinet session Monday.

Not to be outdone, Russia’s First Deputy Prime Minister Anton Siluanov openly declared a “loss of trust lately” with its closest ally an hour before the high-level talks.

“We don’t trust the work of your customs,” Siluanov was cited by the RBC news website as telling reporters. He accused Belarus of letting through banned EU foodstuffs and skimming Russia of duties payments by exporting gasoline and other oil products under the guise of solvents and thinners.

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That did not stop the two men from shaking hands, however once the summit rolled around, where Lukashenko called on Putin to “not to drag old disputes into the New Year.”

“Even if we don’t reach final decisions today, you and I have agreed to hear each other out after all,” Putin told Lukashenko in his opening remarks.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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