

'Brazen' Import Ban Prompts Belarus to Close Russian Pipeline

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Alexander Lukashenko Kremlin.ru

The president of Belarus has ordered the closure of a Russian oil export pipeline for repairs in retaliation to Moscow's "brazen" import ban.

Belarus and Russia have seen a new flare-up in bilateral tensions barely two months after an amicable [meeting](#) between their presidents in Sochi. In late March, the two countries' Foreign Ministries [exchanged](#) a war of words, straining talks of merging the sides into one country.

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Russia's Federal Veterinary and Phytosanitary Inspection Service [banned](#) the import of apples and pears it says are embargoed EU fruits starting Friday. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko compared the import ban to sanctions and [ordered](#) his deputy prime minister to close the Russian pipeline for repairs.

Belarus plans to overhaul five segments of the Europe-bound Druzhba oil pipeline, the oil operator was [quoted](#) by the Russian state-run TASS news agency as saying.

Only engineers and other specialists would be able to say when the 54-year-old pipeline will reopen, said Andrei Verigo, chief engineer of Gomeltransneft, according to Belarus' [Belsat](#) news channel.

During the heated cabinet session on Thursday, Belarusian President Lukashenko ordered his government to draft response measures to Russia's import bans, the BelTA news agency [reported](#).

The Kremlin disputed Lukashenko's characterization of the import bans as sanctions.

"We cannot agree with Alexander Grigoryevich. Russia does not impose any sanctions," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov [told](#) reporters, according to TASS.

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