

## **3<sup>rd</sup> International Automotive Workers Conference** **November 20-24, 2025 in Pune, India**

### **Country Report Belarus**

**The modern Belarusian automotive industry is a dynamically growing sector, although the most important companies were founded during the Soviet era.**

There are 15 companies in total. The largest are MAZ (Minsk Automobile Plant), which produces heavy trucks, buses, trolleybuses, road vehicles and special-purpose vehicles. BELAZ (Belarusian Automobile Plant), a world-leading manufacturer of extremely heavy trucks for mining, develops robotics and electrical engineering.

MZKT (Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant) produces special chassis for military and aerospace vehicles as well as heavy vehicles. |

More than 75% of mechanical engineering products are exported to around 140 countries. In 2024, 195,800 people were employed in mechanical engineering in Belarus. This corresponds to approximately 19.5% of total industrial employment. Gender distribution: men are in the majority with 70.6%. Proportion of women: 29.4%. Average age of employees: 42.7 years.

As far as the labor movement in this sector is concerned, an independent trade union movement, including in mechanical engineering, emerged in Belarus in the late 1980s and early 1990s as an alternative to the official trade unions.

The impetus for this movement came from the April 1991 strike, which became a powerful expression of social and political protest in the final months of the Soviet Union.

The strike movement began spontaneously but massively. On 3 April 1991, workers, outraged by the drastic price increases, downed tools and took to the streets. Dozens of engineering companies across Belarus joined the strike, including the Minsk Automobile Plant (MAZ) and the Minsk Tractor Plant (MTZ).

Some of the economic demands, such as wage increases, were met. Political demands (resignation of those in power) were not met.

The April strikes of 1991 marked an important milestone in the history of Belarus and demonstrated the working class's ability to organize itself. The strike committees gave rise to the first independent trade unions.

Belarusian Independent Trade Union (BITU): The largest association, founded in 1991 as a miners' union, later expanded to other industries / also active in engineering companies such as Belshina in Babruisk.

Republican Trade Union of Radio and Electronics Industry (REP): Founded in 1990, it united workers in the high-tech engineering industry. In the early 2020s, it had around 2,000 members.

There have been at least three attempts to form a political party based on trade unions.

The protests of 2020 marked a turning point in the history of the labor movement/labor protests in Belarus, becoming an important part of the mass social movement.

The workers' protests were a reaction to the events following the presidential elections on 9 August 2020. The official results, which gave incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko over 80% of the vote, were perceived as massive electoral fraud.

The protest movement in the factories took various forms: mass demonstrations and strikes, petitions.

The authorities used a variety of means to suppress the labor movement: police were deployed in the factories and activists were arrested. Active protesters were dismissed and prosecuted. Many were forced to flee abroad.

The adoption of amendments to the Labor Code increased the pressure on activists and independent trade unions. In July 2022, the Supreme Court banned all independent trade unions. This measure effectively ended the legal existence of an organized, independent trade union movement in the country.

Despite brutal repression, we are now seeing new initiatives abroad, such as the Rabochiy Rukh (Workers' Movement), which is campaigning for the rights of Belarusian workers, including those in the automotive industry. I hope that Belarus will be represented at the next 4th Congress by activists from the revived and increasingly strong Belarusian labor movement.