

Lukashenko Talks of Extraditing Baumgertner to Russia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko on Thursday raised the possibility of Belarus extraditing the imprisoned head of Russia's Uralkali, a sign that a potash trade dispute between the two countries may be nearing resolution.

Vladislav Baumgertner, chief executive of the world's top potash producer, was detained Aug. 26 while visiting the Belarussian capital, after the collapse of a potash sales cartel that infuriated Belarus.

"If Russian investigators are interested in the extradition of Russian citizen Baumgertner, arrested by us, I do not see any particular obstacles," Lukashenko said in a meeting of government ministers, RIA Novosti reported.

Belarus has accused Baumgertner of abuse of power after Uralkali broke up the trading agreement — a move that could push potash prices down 25 percent and prove a headache

for Belarus. Potash, a fertilizer ingredient, accounts for 12 percent of the ex-Soviet republic's state revenue.

The arrest put a new strain on the close but sometimes tense relationship between Russia and Belarus, which relies on Moscow for energy supplies and financial help but is important to the Kremlin as a military and economic ally.

However, Lukashenko said Thursday that the disagreement should not be allowed to drive the two countries apart or spoil relations with President Vladimir Putin.

"This potash scandal must in no way become a stumbling block in relations, not only between states but also between two presidents," he said, an allusion to past rows over Russian energy deliveries to Belarus.

"Do you know how difficult it was to restore these ties, we can not afford for them to be spoiled again," Lukashenko said.

Igor Sechin, the head of Russian state-owned oil behemoth Rosneft, appears committed to maintaining strong business ties with Belarus, a lucrative market for Russian energy firms due to an export tax waiver.

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