



FROM THE HISTORY
OF THE BELARUSIAN REVOLUTION

W WARSAW
INSTITUTE

— SPECIAL REPORT —

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INTRODUCTION

On August 9, 2020, Belarus held a fraudulent presidential election, which was officially won by Alexander Lukashenko, who has been ruling the country since 1994. Even taking into account the whole spectrum of anti-democratic actions characterizing the regime in Minsk, it could be said that it was a kind of a breakthrough moment, after which the Belarusian society has said “enough.” This was additionally influenced by the economic situation of the country and disappointment with the actions of the authorities against the coronavirus pandemic. The Belarusian people decided to express their dissatisfaction by protesting on a scale which was unprecedented in the history of this country, at the same time attracting the attention of the whole world.

The Warsaw Institute Foundation, taking into account the historical and cultural heritage of Poland as well as the Central and Eastern Europe, actively supports all democratic movements in our part of the world. Guided by the spirit of solidarity with the Belarusian people, on August 24, 2020, i.e. after 15 days of protests, we launched a special program #BelarusAlert, which followed and described the situation in this country day by day. For the next 63 days we monitored current events, protests, reactions of the authorities and the international community up until October 27, 2020, the 78th day of the crisis and the failure to comply with the “ultimatum” issued by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya – Lukashenko’s opponent in the presidential election. Furthermore, we devoted numerous events and debates to the Belarusian cause, the most important of which was the “Round Table on Belarus” organized on September 30, 2020 along with leading Polish think tanks.

This Report is the outcome and conclusion of our activities to date. In addition to all the texts in the #BelarusAlert series and the report on the aforementioned debate, it also presents our assessment of the protests, the circumstances that led to them, Belarusian democratic changes as well as the future of Alexander Lukashenko and the whole country.



THE BELARUSIAN REVOLUTION: THE BEGINNING AND THE END (?)

Grzegorz Kuczyński

Mass protests following the rigged presidential election turned out to be the largest opposition movement against the authorities in the history of independent Belarus. Although Alexander Lukashenko continues to hold the reins of government, he lost legitimization and the majority of Belarusians are against him. He is in power only thanks to the loyalty of the law enforcement as well as the political and economic support of Russia. The post-election protests mark the definitive end of this

type of regime that Lukashenko had been building since the mid-1990s. This model based on tacit acceptance for his rule by the majority in exchange for a relatively low but stable standard of living and social security. Yet, it was the increasingly visible inefficiency of the economic model (the so-called Lukanomics) as well as the catalysts – the coronavirus pandemic and the government's policy towards this problem that caused social discontent. In fact, the political crisis began even before the election.

SOURCE: PEXELS/LINA KIVAKA



The beginning of the election campaign coincided with the spring wave of coronavirus. Lukashenko absolutely ignored the pandemic. The policy of pretending that the virus does not exist did not mean that people did not contract it. As a result, the Belarusians, accustomed to the social model of the state, suddenly felt abandoned by their country. Therefore, mass protests took on a different approach than those following the previous election. The protesters of different political views, even those who were not interested in politics at all, were united by the vision of Lukashenko's departure. Unfortunately for the president, this great discontent found its way out on the street – precisely because of the election campaign that had started. The first wake-up call for Lukashenko should have been the shockingly large attendance at the rallies of people intending to run in the election, where signatures were collected on candidate endorsement lists. However, the regime decided that it would be possible to neutralize this by using the methods that have worked in the past, i.e. not allowing some people to run at all and putting some people in jail on various charges. The latter affected three activists whom Lukashenko may have considered the most dangerous rivals: Viktor Babaryka, Valery Tsepkalo and Sergei Tikhonovskiy. He saw all three of them, not without a reason, as potential candidates who certainly have good contacts in Moscow or could even be supported by it. It should be noted that another novelty of this year's protests, besides their mass scale, was the positive attitude of the activists, and especially their leaders, towards Russia. Unlike in the previous years, the opposition did not have a national character, which was close to Belarusian nationalism, or a clear geopolitical orientation (closer to the West, further away from Russia). No wonder that almost until the end of the campaign Lukashenko opted for the alleged Russian threat, not the Western one. The most significant event was the detention of several dozen Russian mercenaries in a sanatorium near Minsk on July 29, 2020. Presumably they were travelling through Belarus to one of the countries where the Wagner Group operates and the Belarusian services knew about it very well. However, Lukashenko decided to

use their presence and make accusations of preparations for the coup, indirectly indicating that Moscow was behind it. The president went all-in to force the Kremlin to determine the actual attitude towards the events in Belarus. A short-term crisis ended with a telephone conversation between Lukashenko and Putin, during which the Belarusian leader probably heard that he does not have to fear Russia. It turned out, however, that the elimination of Tikhonovskiy and Babaryka was not enough, although Lukashenko ignored the candidacy of the blogger's wife, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. Meanwhile, more than 60,000 people attended her rally in Minsk on July 30. The turnout at the meetings of the opposition candidates must have deepened the concerns of the regime because even before the election Lukashenko reshuffled cabinet and the heads of some law enforcement agencies – clearly preparing for the possible large post-election protests.

In fact, the political crisis began even before the election.

Of course, the way the election was conducted allowed for the falsification of its results – votes could be cast from August 4 to August 8. On August 7, the Central Election Commission announced that the turnout had already exceeded 30 percent. The main election day was August 9. Five candidates run for the office, but from the very beginning it was clear that only two of them matter: Lukashenko and Tsikhanouskaya. Officially, Lukashenko received about 80 percent of the votes whilst Tsikhanouskaya about 10 percent (with 84 percent turnout). This meant that there was no need for the second round of the election. Of course, everyone expected the results to be rigged, but the scale of support that Lukashenko allegedly received was astonishingly large, it even looked like a provocation and only strengthened the protest. The regime was prepared for the demonstrations and in the first two days after the vote it tried to brutally suppress the



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protests. The scenario was supposed to be similar to the previous election when the authorities effectively pacified protests in the largest cities, mainly in Minsk. However, this time it did not work. The brutality of the militia mobilized people even more and after just a few days it turned out that the militia did not have the capability to disperse the crowds of thousands. What is more, the protests have proved to be widespread also in geographical terms. People took to the streets in small towns, not only in western Belarus, but likewise in the regions adjacent to Russia, up to now perceived by the regime as “safe.” It turned out that Lukashenko did not have enough forces to control the protests throughout the whole country, especially since many units had been brought to Minsk from other regions beforehand. At this point, the regime had to change its strategy – the militia discontinued attacking the protesters, law enforcement had to adopt a passive stance. What was worse for Lukashenko, Moscow remained silent. For several days in August the regime literally stood on the edge of the abyss. Two

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phone calls between Lukashenko and Putin (August 15-16) were crucial for the case. After them Russia declared its full support for the Belarusian regime, including the possibility of sending the forces of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs to Belarus. Apparently, the presidents reached an agreement. On the one hand, Lukashenko, alarmed by the scale of the protests, assured that he would make various concessions to Moscow, on the other hand, Putin was also concerned about the crisis in the neighboring country and feared that the situation might get out of control. He could not allow for the government to be changed by the protesters in an

allied post-Soviet country – even if the new one will continue to be pro-Russian (as, for instance, two years ago in Armenia).

After the change of the strategy, Lukashenko finally managed to take control of the situation. In the first phase, the militia continued to avoid brutality and harsh repression of the protesters, until the scale of the demonstrations began to decrease. Only on Sundays the mobilization of the opponents of the regime was noticeable. At the same time, the authorities cracked down on the newly formed leadership of the protest movement. Tsikhanouskaya, as the first one, was forced to emigrate to Lithuania by the KGB. Later, the Coordination Council, a body established by various groups to represent Lukashenko's opponents in talks with the regime, was targeted. Some members of the leadership were put under arrest, others, such as Pavel Latushko were forced to leave Belarus. The next stage involved the gradual intensification of repressions against street demonstrations, which undoubtedly contributed to the fact that the attendance on Sunday marches began to decrease significantly. It seems that the mistakes made by the opposition also contributed to Lukashenko's victory, at least the tactical one and for a while. Emphasizing that the opposition movement against Lukashenko is not a pro-Western one, and that the protesters see Putin even as the protector against the repression of the regime did not help. The Kremlin still supports its brotherly authoritarian regime, but for the West (perhaps apart from Poland and Lithuania) it was a clear sign that it is not worth getting involved in this matter. Actually, Tsikhanouskaya herself gave an alibi to Berlin or Paris not to exert too much pressure on Lukashenko and confirmed that Belarus belongs to the Russian sphere of influence – which the so-called old EU member states have demonstrably respected (as evidenced by phone calls between Angela Merkel or Emmanuel Macron and Vladimir Putin regarding Belarus in the initial phase of the crisis). It seems that the second serious mistake was the unwillingness to radicalize actions – especially at the time when Lukashenko could really be overthrown – and then

the much belated “ultimatum” that Tsikhanouskaya announced to the dictator. It ended with a spectacular defeat, which was foreseeable, because the general strike, which was supposed to be a response to Lukashenko's failure to meet the demands of the opposition (including his resignation), was completely unrealistic at the end of October. The regime had already managed – after all, it had plenty of time – to stifle resistance in large industrial plants. In August, or in September at the latest, there was a chance for the general strike which could actually bring

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down the regime. But the strikes of that time were not properly coordinated and supported. Instead, Lukashenko knew perfectly well that the paralysis of the economy was more dangerous for him than recurring street protests of thousands of people.

The fiasco of Tsikhanouskaya's ultimatum can be considered a symbolic end to the wave of protests related to the fraudulent election. Of course, demonstrations will continue to take place. Various actions showing public opposition to Lukashenko, and, on the other hand, increasingly violent behavior of the militia, should be expected. Lukashenko will conduct a “dialogue” with the “constructive” part of the opposition, pointing to the “hooligans” paid for by the Western services. This was heralded by the dictator's surprising visit to the KGB detention center, where he met with some of the imprisoned opposition activists. This is probably a preparation for a launch of a “constitutional reform,” which Russia expects from Lukashenko. However, the Belarusian leader will probably want to imitate the changes in this matter for as long as possible and delay the release of the activists whom he sees as potential



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“candidates of the Kremlin” for his office. One can expect Lukashenko to buy time and avoid Putin’s plan to bring about changes in Belarus in the future for as long as possible. Except, today Lukashenko’s position towards Moscow is incomparably weaker than before the current crisis.

In military terms, Belarus is in fact a part of the strategic space of Russia.

Due to the close relations between Belarus and Russia, it is natural that the external factor has the greatest role in Belarusian events. Especially since other serious parties accept the fact that Belarus belongs to the Russian sphere of influence. The situation is different than it was, for instance, in

the case of Ukraine in 2014. For this reason, mainly the neighboring countries are interested in how the state of affairs develops. Apart from Russia, which does not conceal the direct involvement on Lukashenko’s side, it is mainly Lithuania and Poland, but also Ukraine. What about the others? For example, Germany or the USA? As far as Berlin is concerned, the attempt to poison Alexei Navalny caused more outrage there than the rigged election and repressions (in addition to the arrests and tortures of hundreds of people there were also several fatalities). In fact, Merkel made it clear from the very beginning that she considers Belarus to be an exclusive zone of Russian influence. As for the US, the lack of its involvement was probably more due to the election campaign in America and the sense of failure of the “thaw” policy of American diplomacy towards Lukashenko in the last two years (e.g. Mike Pompeo’s visit). In terms of the West as a whole, the EU’s response has been very weak and announced too late. Initially, only personal sanctions were

imposed on a group of Belarusian officials directly responsible for forgeries and repressions. In this case there was a problem with making a decision too – it was blocked by Cyprus. After the second round of sanctions, Lukashenko was also included on the blacklist, published in early November.

Lukashenko has definitively lost the support of the majority of Belarusian society and can only rule using force.

It is natural that the Russian policy was, is and will be the most influential on the situation in Belarus. Only thanks to the Kremlin Lukashenko survived the worst crisis. Moscow's policy towards its neighbor is guided by several significant factors. One of them is, of course, a kind of solidarity with the authoritarian leaders (even if Putin and Lukashenko do not like each other personally), but the key is... geography. Belarus is a buffer zone separating Russia from the eastern flank of NATO, thus distancing the potential threat from Moscow. Belarus is a vital ally of Russia in the west. It is a loyal member of Moscow-dominated post-Soviet military, political and economic structures such as the Union State of Russia and Belarus, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (OUBZ), the Eurasian Economic Community and the Commonwealth of Independent States. In military terms, Belarus is in fact a part of the strategic space of Russia. Maintaining Belarus is crucial for Moscow because of the Kaliningrad region. If authorities in Minsk were replaced by the other ones seeking integration with the West or even advocating a neutral status, it would significantly deepen the isolation of the westernmost region of the Russian Federation. Moreover, it would complicate Moscow's war plans, by not being able to threaten NATO with occupation of the "Suwałki Gap." However, it would strengthen the security of the Baltic states and this is

certainly one of the reasons behind Lithuania's anti-Lukashenko policy and support for the opposition. Perhaps, the Russian plan for Belarus envisaged that Lukashenko would win the election, but he would be weakened by the good result of the opposition and therefore more likely to make concessions. The scale of the protests surprised both the Kremlin and Lukashenko. It was not until August 27 that Russia declared its support for the regime, including the use of force. After a series of telephone conversations, a meeting between Putin and Lukashenko took place in Sochi on September 14. It was the first one since the Belarusian election. Then, the key arrangements for further cooperation were made.

This is what Lithuania and Poland fear the most. From the point of view of Vilnius and Warsaw, the main criterion for assessing the events in Belarus is to strengthen or weaken Russian influence there. The current situation indicates the latter. Therefore, Poland and Lithuania are also very active on their own, lobbying on the EU forum for help to the opposition and for sanctions against the regime. These two countries have become a shelter for the opposition leaders. Historical sentiments connecting Lithuania, Poland and Belarus (but also Ukraine to a certain extent) should be kept in mind, but calculations regarding military security are crucial. The slow absorption of Belarus by Russia and even the mere increase of Moscow's military presence on Belarusian territory must influence NATO's military plans. However, the potential existence of large Russian forces in Belarus would aggravate Ukraine's strategic position the most, significantly prolonging the potential conflict with Russia. Kiev sees the Belarusian crisis as a threat which might increase Russian influence in this country, and thus constitute a bigger threat to the Ukrainian state. So far, Ukraine has managed to maintain good relations with Lukashenko, who decided to play the role of a mediator between Kiev and Moscow. However, the current crisis in Belarus has worsened relations between the Belarusian regime and Ukraine. Although Kiev initially tried not to involve in the events of its neighbor in the north, this



SOURCE: FLICKR/NATALLIA

quickly changed when Lukashenko did not release the previously detained members of the Wagner Group wanted by Ukraine for participating in the fights in Donbass and then began to criticize the authorities in Kiev. As a result, Ukraine de facto joined the EU states in refusing to recognize Lukashenko's legitimacy. However, after the events in Ukraine, Germany or France do not want to have another "eastern" problem. Hence, since the beginning of the crisis, consultations with Putin were taking place in order to obtain an assurance that there will be no bloodshed nor Russian invasion of Belarus. It seems that this is the only matter that most of the Western leaders care about. Although with time they also began to understand that there is no going back to the times when situation in Belarus was so peaceful that in many places in Europe it was forgotten that the Lukashenko's regime still exists.

Nothing in Belarus will be the same as it was six months ago. The current wave of protests, although

suppressed by Lukashenko, is the beginning of the end of this regime. The only question is how long will the regime last. Lukashenko has definitively lost the support of the majority of Belarusian society and can only rule using force. Russia is well aware of this. The Kremlin has to make a difficult choice. Overthrowing an autocratic ally would be a bad example for others and a proof of the ineffectiveness of Russian policy in its immediate vicinity. On the other hand, maintaining support for Lukashenko means increased political and economic costs for Russia. The position of Moscow will certainly have the greatest impact on how long Alexander Lukashenko will continue to govern Belarus. He will probably rule as long as Moscow does not have a replacement for him. This, in turn, opens up a chance for Poland or Lithuania to look for more or less overt allies in the Belarusian opposition, but also among the current top party officials. This will be useful when relations with the new authorities in Belarus will have to be established.

ROUND TABLE ON BELARUS: REPORT ON THE DEBATE

Warsaw, September 30, 2020

Observing the course of events in Belarus, the Warsaw Institute Foundation organized a “Round Table on Belarus” on September 30, 2020. Representatives of leading Polish think tanks and analytical centers met to discuss key issues for Poland and Central and Eastern Europe in the light of the events on NATO’s eastern flank as well as to analyze the possible influence of international organizations on supporting pro-democracy movements. The participants of the debate included:

- Janusz Tomaszewski, Representative of the National Security Bureau;
- Jerzy Marek Nowakowski, former Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to Latvia and Armenia, affiliated with the Institute for Eastern Studies;
- Jan Strzelecki, Analyst at the Polish Economic Institute;
- Marek Wróbel, President of the Republican Foundation;
- Anna Dyner, Analyst at the Polish Institute of International Affairs;
- Wojciech Konończuk, Deputy Director of the Centre for Eastern Studies;
- Paweł Musiałek, Director of the Center for Analysis of the Jagiellonian Club;

SOURCE: WARSAW INSTITUTE





SOURCE: WARSAW INSTITUTE

- Prof. Tomasz Grosse, Expert of the Warsaw Institute, lecturer at the University of Warsaw;
- Grzegorz Kuczyński, Director of Eurasia Program at the Warsaw Institute.

The experts discussed the issues of Poland's and the region's military security faced with the growing presence of Russian troops in Belarus, the capabilities of Poland to support Belarusian democratic movements as well as the strengths and weaknesses of international organizations in the face of the dynamic situation in Eastern Europe.

The first part of the debate entitled "The Belarusian matter and the military security of Poland and the region" comprised the following issues:

- Response of Polish Armed Forces as well as the armies of the Visegrad Group and NATO to the increasingly aggressive rhetoric of Alexander Lukashenko;
- Relocation of Belarusian troops to the border with Poland;
- Joint military exercises with Russia;
- Possibility of military intervention by Vladimir Putin.

At the end of the first part of the meeting, the experts recommended that Poland and the European Union support the United States in its clear opposition to the permanent bases of the Russian army in Belarus. However, this should be done while maintaining diplomatic balance in order not to give the Russians an excuse to repeat the Crimean scenario. Moreover, experts warned about using economic sanctions against Lukashenko's regime, because sanctions imposed on Belarus would in a way be a burden also for Russia, which would have to increase subsidies for Minsk as a consequence; this could be treated as an unnecessary provocation by Vladimir Putin. Furthermore, it was agreed that greater involvement of Russia in Belarusian policy inevitably means its increased military activity in the region. Poland should therefore prepare itself for military provocations at the border in addition to cyber and hybrid threats. However, Poland should not demonstrably seek to take advantage of the current situation to expand NATO's military capabilities or in-

infrastructure on its territory, as Lukashenko and Putin would use this to strengthen Russia's military presence in Belarus.

The second part of discussion – “Supporting Belarus in the face of democratic changes” – focused on the following subjects:

- Methods of supporting democratic movements and stimulating the Belarusian economy;
- Integration of Minsk with the West;
- Inefficiency of key international institutions in the face of growing disputes in Belarus;
- Conflict of interest among EU member states;
- International mechanisms of exerting pressure.

The experts recommended drafting a new Marshall Plan addressing the economic issues of Belarus and the implementation of a governmental support program for Polish companies operating in this country to contribute to the momentum of the local economy. In order to increase the entrepreneurial activity of Poles in Belarus, the government should take part of the risk within the framework of e.g. a subsidy. Furthermore, the participants of the debate have positively evaluated Poland's activities to date, such as opening the borders or inviting students. However, regional cooperation should be further extended and include practices that were already functioning in the past, such as learning contemporary media cultures. Additionally, it should be emphasized how Belarus can benefit from a closer cooperation with the West, especially in political and economic terms. Closer relations among the intellectual and academic environments are also advisable – it was suggested that the first step should be supporting Tsikhanouskaya's movement in drawing up a plan for democratic transformation. Additionally, the experts proposed the participation of Belarus in formats such as the Visegrad Group, the Three Seas Initiative, the Lublin Triangle or the Eastern Partnership, aiming at greater integration with the international community, emphasizing the observer status.

To sum up, the participants of the meeting came to the conclusion that Poland should use its position as one of the main destinations of the emigrating Belarusians by strengthening the integration of institutional, academic and scientific spheres. Moreover, as an immediate neighbor and one of the main partners in international trade, Poland has a chance to play a key role in shaping a free market culture in Belarus. Cooperation and aid should be focused on strengthening social, political and economic ties, but always respecting the will of Belarusians to preserve their institutional and cultural distinctiveness.

#BelarusAlert

REVOLUTION DAY BY DAY

Grzegorz Kuczyński
Jędrzej Duszyński

Underneath we present a collection of texts which constitute our dedicated analytical program #BelarusAlert, a project of the Warsaw Institute experts who for over 60 days, starting from August 24, 2020, followed the Belarusian protests, international reactions and the actions of the regime.



DAY 15

A record demonstration, scared Lukashenko

On a symbolic day – the anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Minsk hosted the largest demonstration in the history of independent Belarus. On August 23, over 100,000 people took to the streets of the capital. On that day, the demonstrations took place also in many other cities. The March of Free Belarus took place in a tense atmosphere. Already a few days earlier, Lukashenko threatened that a revolution supported by NATO interveners is attempted. On that day, he brought large forces of militia, Special Purpose Mobile Units (OMON) and spetsnaz to Minsk. Furthermore, a significant number of people in military uniforms, yet without any markings, appeared. Immediately, there was an assumption that it was the support from Russia, the proverbial “little green men”. Their presence, information about the arrival of Russian officers to Minsk as well as the statement by the head of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Sergey Lavrov, that the leaders of the Belarusian opposition were seeking bloodshed, all indicated Moscow’s support for Lukashenko. At least at this stage of the crisis. Lukashenko is becoming a “hostage” of Russia. Without its support, he will collapse quickly –

and he probably realizes that. Hence the astonishing “show” performed by the dictator at the time when the people on the streets of Belarus called for him to step down. Lukashenko flew to the presidential palace by a helicopter when the demonstration was slowly ending. He was wearing a bulletproof vest and carrying a machine gun (without a magazine), being accompanied by his teenage son armed to the teeth. Demonstrations ended without any clashes with the law enforcement. The Ministry of Internal Affairs reported that no one was detained. Lukashenko announced his victory, although in fact it was his opponents who won through the huge and peaceful mobilization, without yielding to the provocations of the forces. The longer the crisis lasts and the greater Russia’s involvement is, the more active other foreign players become. The President of Ukraine stated that if Lukashenko does not want to resign, he should organize a second election with the presence of international observers within a month. The EU does not recognize the results of August 9 election whilst a meeting between Sviatlana Tsihanouskaya and the US Deputy Secretary of State – Stephen Biegun was announced for August 24.

DAY 16

Hitting the leaders, another call to the Kremlin

Another demonstration in the center of Minsk took place without any obstacles or forceful actions of the regime. On Monday it was reported that Svetlana Alexievich – awarded Nobel Prize in Literature,

who sits in the seven-person presidium of the opposition’s Coordination Council, was summoned to the Investigative Committee on Tuesday. She is to be questioned in connection with a criminal

case initiated against the Coordination Council. On the same day, two other members of the Council's leadership were detained on the street under the pretext of administrative matters. Evidently Lukashenko punctually hits the leaders of the protests, being unable to cope with the scale of the demonstrations. Furthermore, another phone conversation between Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin took place on Monday. According to the Belarusian state news agency BelTA, the presidents agreed that the Belarusians will take part in the third phase of testing the Russian coronavirus vaccine. Moreover, Belarus is supposed to be the first country (after Russia) to receive the vaccine. It is interesting, however, that in the Kremlin's communiqué about the conversation there is no such information – only a statement that the presidents discussed the issue of cooperation in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Support of Russia for the Lukashenko's regime is not so unambiguous. This may be evidenced by the information that the Russian Ministry of Finance has prepared a set of rules to be followed by Russia when granting state loans to other countries. It turns out that Belarus (in addition to Armenia, Venezuela and Cuba) can forget about receiving such a loan on general terms. This would be a significant signal at a time when Belarus is plunging into economic crisis and it is already clear that without significant Russian subsidies Lukashenko will not save the economy from bankruptcy. Importantly, Putin has not yet personally spoken about the events in Belarus. He is still waiting for the events to unfold, not willing to repeat the mistake from Ukraine in 2014 when he bet on the underdog – Viktor Yanukovich.

DAY 17

First sentences, intriguer Lavrov, little green men

After many days, the Belarusian security forces began to detain the demonstrators again. Single arrests took place after a rally of several thousand people in the center of Minsk on the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of Belarus. At the same time, also in the center of the city, the rally in support of Lukashenko took place. Earlier on Tuesday, August 25, a court in Minsk sentenced two members of the opposition's Coordination Council to 10 days of imprisonment for the "organization of illegal gatherings." Meanwhile, the Eastern Human Rights Group – a Ukrainian NGO, alerts that in the part of Donbass, occupied by Russia, there is a recruitment of "volunteers" who claim to be going

to Belarus. The recruitment is to be handled by the administration of the "People's Republics" in Donetsk and Luhansk. This suggests that Moscow is preparing for a scenario in which the "little green men" will have to be transferred to Belarus in order to help Lukashenko or to influence the development of the situation in case of Lukashenko's fall and a revolutionary chaos. The radical rhetoric of the head of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs draws attention. A few days ago, Sergey Lavrov said that the leaders of the Belarusian opposition want bloodshed. On Tuesday, August 25, he stated that the opposition is "led" by Western countries – which ones, he did not specify. But on the same day he

met in Moscow with the US Deputy Secretary of State – Stephen Biegun. They talked about Belarus, among others, whilst Lavrov tried to drive a wedge between the members of the western community. He said that Russia urges the US and the leaders

of the European Union to “pay attention to those circles that, for example in Poland or Lithuania, express their dissatisfaction with the normalization of the situation in Belarus in every possible way.”

DAY 18

Weakening protests, more arrests, hard currency deficit

On Wednesday, August 26, the police detained at least 19 people in Minsk. The protesters were also detained in other cities of Belarus. The detainees are charged with participation in an illegal assembly, after which the court immediately passes a prison sentence, usually for a duration of 10 days. The most dramatic scenes took place in the evening on the capital's Independence Square. Special Purpose Mobile Unit (OMON) dispersed a crowd of about 1,000 protesters who had traditionally gathered there. Most people ran away, several dozen people took refuge in a nearby Catholic church. The police blocked them there for several dozen minutes. The next day, August 27, the authorities of the Catholic Church in Belarus strongly protested to the Belarusian authorities over the incident. On Wednesday, August 26, Svetlana Alexievich appeared before the Investigative Committee. The winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize for Literature refused to testify. Alexievich retained her status of a witness in a criminal case, initiated by the authorities, concerning the

establishment of the opposition's Coordination Council. Alexievich is a member of it. The authorities claim that the creation of the Coordination Council is an attempt to “seize power in the country.” Two members of the Presidium of the Council are serving ten-day arrests. The political crisis is deepened by the economic crisis. The national currency – Belarusian ruble, is weakening every day. Since August 9, the exchange rates of euro, US dollar and Russian ruble have already increased by about four percent. This has an impact on the increase in prices of many products in stores since Belarus imports a lot. Therefore, people and companies try to buy foreign currencies. However, there are issues in this matter in banks and exchange offices. Small sums could be bought only if someone else sells the given currency. In order to withdraw a larger amount of dollars or euros from a personal currency account, an application has to be submitted in advance.

DAY 19

Manhunt for journalists, anti-Polish rhetoric, Putin threatens to intervene

The Belarusian regime is intensifying repressions against protesters day by day. The police detained over 250 participants of the demonstration in the center of Minsk in the evening of August 27. There was also a raid on the journalists reporting on it – at least 40 of them were detained. Most of the journalists were quickly released, but a few were arrested. The power of protests outside the capital is weakening. Alexander Lukashenko will probably continue this strategy of suppressing the protests without large-scale and brutal street pacifications. As part of this approach, he is threatening Belarusians, but mainly the West, with possible Russian intervention – the idea is to focus the EU, the US or large Western European countries on diplomatically deterring such a scenario and seeking cooperation with Moscow while Lukashenko will gradually pacify the protests without exposing himself to severe sanctions from the West. That was the aim of Vladimir Putin's words about the reserve forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs prepared in response to Lukashenko's request and ready for a possible transfer to Belarus. Putin's words about the need to comply with the law in Belarus mean that Lukashenko has eventually become a hostage to Russia. Moscow reserves the right to intervene with its neighbor not only in case of external aggression, which is provided for in mutual allied agreements, but also to protect the current regime,

against the opposition. Putin spoke about Belarus in an interview with Russian state television. On the same day, August 27, the heads of diplomacy of the two countries were on the phone. Sergey Lavrov and Vladimir Makei confirmed "The inadmissibility of external interference in internal political processes, attempts to destabilize the situation and the imposition of unilateral mediation services from the outside." Minsk and Moscow accuse the West of conspiring to overthrow the Lukashenko's regime. On August 27, he himself yet again accused Poland of counting on the annexation of the Grodno region "if Belarus breaks up." On Thursday, the Ambassador of Belarus to Poland was summoned to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in response to further such accusations. The MFA of Belarus responded with summoning the chargé d'affaires of the Polish Embassy in Minsk. Meanwhile, NATO Secretary General – Jens Stoltenberg called on Russia "not to interfere" in Belarus. Stoltenberg met with Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin on August 27. In the meantime, Ukraine strengthened its position towards the Belarusian crisis. Kiev joined the EU position expressed through the statement of August 11 on the presidential election in Belarus which declared that it was neither free nor fair. The head of Ukrainian diplomacy informed that all contacts with the Belarusian side were frozen.

DAY 20

Belarusian army maneuvers, Putin is playing the West

The regime continues its policy of gradually intensifying repressions. On the 20th day of the protests there were several dozen administrative trials across the country, in which fines and arrests of detained demonstrators were imposed. Throughout the day, several small protests took place in different parts of Minsk. The militia started to detain participants – only men, in the evening. On Friday, August 28, “complex tactical maneuvers” began in the Grodno region. As announced by the Ministry of Defense, the combined group of troops carrying out their training objectives included: mechanized, armored and airborne troops in addition to artillery, engineering units, drones and electronic combat units. The maneuvers were organized after Lukashenko ordered the strengthening of the military forces in the western part of the country, at the border with Poland, justifying it with an alleged threat from NATO countries. On Friday, Lukashenko argued that there is a risk of military aggression from the West, in which case Belarus and Russia would use a joint group of troops. Furthermore, the Belarusian leader announced that he would respond to possible sanctions from Western countries. He warned that his country would be closed to transit from the EU to China and Russia. Moreover, he declared that Belarus would redirect its goods being shipped through Lithuanian ports to other destinations

(Moscow has long wanted Belarusians to export through Russian ports). This would hit mainly the Lithuanian Port of Klaipėda. Annually, Belarus exports about 15 million tons of goods through it, which constitutes about 30% of the port’s transshipment. Meanwhile, Thursday’s threats by Putin to send Lukashenko the Russian police force for help, have had the effect expected by the Kremlin. Within one day, fears of Russian intervention in Belarus were expressed by the head of EU diplomacy – Josep Borrell, German Chancellor – Angela Merkel and French President – Emmanuel Macron. Macron’s idea to have the OSCE mediate in Belarus may suit Moscow, which has extensive influence over this organization. That way, Western leaders focus on appealing to Putin not to enter Belarus instead of putting pressure on Lukashenko. It is clear that the Kremlin is setting the stage for proposing a deal to the West: in exchange for neutrality or even a lack of a harder policy towards the Belarusian regime by the EU, Russia will guarantee that it does not invade Belarus whilst Lukashenko will refrain from more brutal and bloody repressions. Unfortunately, it seems that this solution would be suitable for many members of the EU – the Russian disinformation apparatus skillfully stirs up fears in Berlin, Paris or Brussels of a “second Ukraine” in Belarus.



SOURCE: PIXABAY

DAY 21

The regime gags the media, Women's Marches all over the country

A Women's March – an action of protest against violence and falsification of the recent presidential election, took place in the center of Minsk on Saturday, August 29. Militia tried to interfere with the March, but did not arrest the women. Instead, news broke out about the detention of men. In some cases, groups of women managed to prevent the officers from doing so. When a blockade of militia appeared on the road, women changed their route. Initially, the number of participants was estimated at several thousand, but by the end of it there were only a few hundred left. The Women's Marches took place also in other cities, such as Brest, Gomel, Zaslavye and Rechytsa. The authorities decided to drastically limit the possibilities of obtaining information about

what is happening in Belarus by independent and foreign media. The inter-ministerial committee for information security began to withdraw accreditations from the foreign media journalists working in Belarus. Among them are representatives of RFE/RL, Reuters, the AP, Deutsche Welle, the BBC, RFI and many others (including Russians working for German ARD). In the morning of August 29, it was announced that the Belarusian authorities have withdrawn accreditations from a total of 17 journalists. Most of them are Belarusian, working for foreign editors. The Ministry of Information of Belarus blocked two large independent Internet media during the night of August 28-29: Naviny.by and Nasha Niva. A week earlier, on the basis of

the Ministry of Information's decision, a number of other independent news portals were blocked, including RFE/RL and Belsat TV, among others. On August 29, President Vladimir Putin spoke again on Belarus. He said that: "Russia recognizes

the legitimacy of the presidential election in Belarus, which took place on August 9." Furthermore, he accused the West that it did not send observers to monitor the vote, because it intended to undermine the outcome of the election in advance.

DAY 22

A record demonstration in Minsk, Lukashenko will go to Moscow

On Sunday, August 30, after a few days, when it seemed that the social resistance was beginning to fade, up to 200,000 people took to the streets of Minsk. This is a new record in terms of the number of protests in the history of independent Belarus – more than a week before. In addition, demonstrations took place in other cities. The one in Minsk lasted for about four hours. The presidential palace, which was reached by the participants of the protest, was surrounded by the police and military forces. Then the protesters started to disperse. Only at the beginning of the demonstration there were arrests and attempts to intervene by OMON. The Ministry of Interior informed about the detention of 125 people during the first two hours of the action.

Sunday's demonstration was very important because it showed Lukashenko, Moscow and the world that the opponents of the regime still have huge mobilization abilities, despite the recent, steadily increasing repressions. On the same day, Lukashenko's 66th birthday, Putin called him. The presidents agreed that their meeting in Moscow would be held soon. The Kremlin's press service said that the orientation towards expanding cooperation between the two countries, including strengthening allied ties, was confirmed. It is possible that during Lukashenko's visit new agreements, which will deepen Belarus' dependence on Russia, will be concluded. That will be the price Lukashenko has to pay for Moscow's current support.

DAY 23

Detention of protest leaders, attack against the Catholic Church

The leader of the protest committee in the Belaruskali production plant in Salihorsk was detained on Monday, August 31. On the same day, Anatoly Bokun was sentenced by the court to 15 days' imprisonment for "participation in illegal action." On the other hand, the financial police detained Liliya

Ulasava, who belongs to the board of the Coordination Council, formed by the opposition. Ulasava was detained by the Financial Investigations Department of the State Control Committee. The detainee's house was searched. The Belarusian Ministry of Interior informed that a total of 173 people were

detained throughout the country on Sunday, during “illegal actions.” The authorities did not allow the head of the Catholic Church in Belarus to enter the country on Monday, August 31. No reason was given why the Metropolitan of Minsk and Mahilyow – Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, was detained by the border guards – he was informed about an entry ban at the border crossing with Poland. Archbishop Kondrusiewicz holds the citizenship of Belarus. Earlier he spoke on the protests, calling for an end of authorities’ violence against the protesters. It is already known when the meeting between Putin and Lukashenko, announced a little earlier, will take place. A spokesman for the Kremlin informed that the President of Belarus will appear in Moscow in the first half of September. Furthermore, Dmitry Peskov spoke on the possible use of the Russian

“reserve of forces” of the Russian Ministry of Interior on the territory of Belarus. He emphasized that such an intervention at the request of the authorities in Minsk does not require the consent of the Federation Council. Such actions are already regulated by two agreements ratified by the Parliament: the Agreement on Establishment of the Union State of Belarus and Russia as well as the document on the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Moreover, Peskov confirmed Lukashenko’s earlier words about a possible refinancing by Moscow of the loan taken out by Belarus. The US administration spoke again on the Belarusian crisis. The White House Press Secretary – Kayleigh McEnany, stressed that the authorities in Minsk cannot continue to ignore the protesters’ calls for democracy whilst Russia must respect the sovereignty of Belarus.

DAY 24

Student protest, split in opposition, Catholics in the spotlight

On September 1, students of various universities took to the streets of Minsk. They were attacked and detained by the militia, which blocked their access to the Ministry of Education. They intended to file a petition demanding the resignation of Alexander Lukashenko and the release of political prisoners there. A total of 70 people were detained. During the evening protests in various parts of Minsk the militia did not intervene. On Tuesday, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published a report, in which it speaks of 450 documented cases of torture and brutal treatment of people by the Belarusian authorities. The report shows that six people are still missing after the protests. There is information about rapes and beating even of women and children. Meanwhile, it could be observed that the regime decided to turn the Catholic Church into an institution allegedly im-

plementing the policy of the West and inciting Belarusians. “Attempts to exert pressure on the Catholic Church mean that persecution of the Church is taking place, although nobody talks about it directly” – stated on Tuesday the Auxiliary Bishop of Minsk-Mohilev – Yury Kasabutski. He is in charge of the structures of the Catholic Church in Belarus in the absence of Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, who was barred by the regime from entering into the country. This is a violation of the law, which does not provide for the possibility of refusing own citizens to enter the homeland. Furthermore, the authorities of the Catholic Church were not invited to a meeting of the Interfaith Advisory Council, organized by the state with the representatives of various denominations. During this meeting, the delegates of the regime fiercely attacked the Catholic Church. Simultaneously, the first serious differences

begin to appear among the opposition. The staff of Viktor Babaryka informed about the plans to create a new party. The founders of the Wmiescie (Together) party put changes in the constitution in the first place. Moreover, Babaryka said in his appeal from behind the bars that “we did not manage to win the election.” According to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, this is a harmful attempt to change the key political agenda by moving on to a discussion on constitutional reform – it is worth remembering that it is Lukashenko who talks about such a change, stipulating that he can only talk about it with “reasonable” people, not those who take to the streets. Tsikhanouskaya believes that the first step should be Lukashenko’s resignation, release

of political prisoners, settlement of those guilty of repressions and fair elections, only then the reform of the constitution. Meanwhile, Lukashenko is pacifying the trace amounts of incomplete loyalty in his surroundings, having dismissed the ambassadors to Slovakia and Spain. Unofficial reports from the American administration indicate that the US is considering sanctions against seven Belarusian citizens for their participation in the fraudulent presidential election and violence against protesters. Moreover, US sanctions against Russia are still possible if it decides to intervene in Belarus. This was the warning that was to be given during last week’s visit of the US Deputy Secretary of State – Stephen Biegun, to Moscow.

DAY 25

Makei in Moscow, Russia intensifies anti-Western rhetoric

Vladimir Makei – head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, paid a visit to Moscow. The Russian Foreign Minister – Sergei Lavrov, after a meeting with Makei on September 2, condemned the interference of foreign forces in Belarusian affairs. He attacked NATO and the EU for their declarations on Belarus and accused Ukraine of sending about 200 “trained extremists” to Belarus in order to destabilize the country. Makei, in turn, announced that Belarus would impose retaliatory sanctions on people from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The day before, these three countries imposed sanctions on 30 representatives of Belarusian authorities, including President Alexander Lukashenko. Lavrov made it clear that Moscow does not intend to contact the opposition’s Coordinating Council at all because it was not established in accordance with the law and there are people who hold an anti-Russian position in it. Chiefs of the General Staff of Belarus and Russia – Alexander

Volfovich and Valery Gerasimov – discussed on September 2 the military cooperation between the two countries and preparations for joint maneuvers. The conversation took place by phone. The generals spoke about, among others, the upcoming Russian Caucasus 2020 strategic command and the joint Belarusian-Russian-Serbian Slavic Brotherhood 2020 wargame, which will take place on the territory of Belarus. “The Russian Foreign Intelligence Service is closely following what is happening in Belarus, as well as the plans of the West in relation to this country,” said Sergey Naryshkin on September 2. The head of the SVR RF assured that he remains in contact with the Belarusian special forces. At a press conference in Washington on Wednesday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the United States is demanding an immediate end to violence against citizens and the release of political prisoners from the Belarusian regime. The head of American diplomacy confirmed that the US and European

countries are working on sanctions. Pavel Latushko – a member of the leadership of the opposition’s Coordinating Council, came to Poland on Wednesday. The Belarusian state media reported a fake news that Latushko slipped out of the country in the car of the Polish ambassador in Minsk. In fact, he left legally, invited to the Economic Forum in Krynica. According to Latushko – also the former ambassador of Belarus to Poland, this is the beginning of his trip abroad, during which he wants to seek support for the protests in Belarus. In Poland he plans meetings

with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the government, then he goes to Lithuania, where he will meet with diplomats, parliamentarians and MEPs. Later he intends to return to Belarus. The question today is whether he will be allowed to come in. The regime has shown that it will use every opportunity to get rid of people considered dangerous to the authorities. Tsikhanouskaya has been forced to emigrate whilst only recently Archbishop Kondrusiewicz – head of the Catholic Church in Belarus, has not been allowed to enter the country.

DAY 26

Russian PM’s visit, KGB head change, Poland in the crosshairs

Two important events took place in Minsk on Thursday, September 3: Lukashenko made personnel changes in the leadership of the force structures, and also met with the Prime Minister of Russia. The President of Belarus appointed a new head of the State Security Committee (KGB) and a new secretary of the Security Council. In fact, it was a transfer from one position to another. The former head of the KGB – Waler Wakulczyk, became the secretary of the Security Council. He was replaced in the KGB by Ivan Tertel – the former head of the State Control Committee (KGK), having had extensive experience serving in the army and KGB Border Guard. For the time being, Tertel’s former deputy – Wasil Hierasimou, will head the KGK. Lukashenko again reached for the harsh anti-Polish rhetoric. During the appointment of new heads of local authorities in the Gomel Region, the president announced that Belarus would never agree to display Polish flags in Grodno. Lukashenko once more accused Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Ukraine of allegedly interfering in the internal affairs of Belarus. His

words about Belarusian Poles may be a cause for concern – in the past, the regime has repeatedly persecuted the Polish minority in this country, accusing it of disloyalty to Minsk. Speaking of Lukashenko’s anti-Western rhetoric, his words from a meeting with Russian Prime Minister – Mikhail Mishustin, cannot be overlooked. “We have deployed actually a half of our Belarusian army. We actually placed under control the western borders with Lithuania and Poland. And, as I frequently say, we have actually encircled Grodno,” Lukashenko said. Thursday’s anti-Polish rhetoric of the Belarusian president was in line with Moscow’s attitude. A spokeswoman for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that: “The Polish leaders are at the forefront of the EU’s unfriendly policy towards Belarus.” Maria Zakharowa accused Poland of exerting pressure on Belarus and supporting Belarusian opposition forces. In terms of Prime Minister Mishustin’s visit to Minsk, it is worth noting that he was accompanied by two Deputy Prime Ministers and five Ministers. The visit was of a technical nature – it

served to establish the details of new agreements deepening the integration of Belarus and Russia as well as defining Russian aid for Minsk (for example, gas and oil prices) before Lukashenko's upcoming visit to Moscow. Most probably these arrangements will be announced then. Meanwhile, on September 3, the protests in Belarusian cities were clearly weaker. The regime continues the repressions. A case of

non-payment of taxes was initiated against Liliya Ulasava – a member of the presidium of the opposition's Coordination Council. Furthermore, administrative proceedings are underway against two other members of the presidium: Syarhei Dyleuski and Volha Kavalkova. Both of them were sentenced to 15 days in jail. On the other hand, two journalists were sentenced to 10 days' imprisonment.

DAY 27

Diplomatic struggle

The European Union's attitude towards the Belarusian crisis has been incoherent from the very beginning and raises objections – on the one hand, of the supporters of a hard course towards Lukashenko, on the other, of the sceptics warning against going to the proverbial war against the dictator. Work on sanctions against those responsible for the repression of peaceful protesters and electoral fraud in Belarus is continuing since mid-August. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are strongly in favor of sanctions against Lukashenko. These countries, without waiting for the EU's decision, have already imposed their own restrictions on 30 representatives of Belarusian authorities, including Lukashenko. The head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania – Linas Linkevičius, even urged to the EU to state that since August 9 Lukashenko is the former president of Belarus and that his actions are illegal and unacceptable in Europe. However, it is already known that the sanctions of the entire EU will be much less severe for Lukashenko's regime. There is talk of sanctioning several people, but not Lukashenko himself. According to EU diplomats,

the list is to be published within the next two weeks. The leader of the Belarusian opposition – Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, called on the UN on Friday to condemn the brutal violence used by the security services against the protesters. She called for a UN observation mission to be sent to Belarus. Governmental cooperation between Belarus and Russia is increasingly getting stronger. After the meeting of the Heads of Diplomacy and later Lukashenko's with Prime Minister Mishustin, the Belarusian Minister of Defense visited Russia. "The destructive forces in Belarus, encouraged by Poland, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Ukraine, tried to change power. State authorities opposed this," announced General Viktor Khrenin on Friday, September 4. The head of the Ministry of Defense spoke at the meeting of ministers of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Collective Security Treaty Organization (OUBZ) in Kubinka near Moscow. Minister Khrenin argued that Western countries tried to organize a color revolution in Belarus. However, they failed and are now moving on to a hybrid war.



SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/HOMOATROX (CC BY-SA 3.0)

DAY 28

Women's march and student protest

A women's march took place in Minsk on Saturday, September 5, with an estimated 10,000 people taking part. The militia allowed them walk on the streets of the capital without stopping any of the participants. The police forces were more brutal in handling another protest that took place in Minsk that day. The students took to the streets in solidarity with their colleagues detained in the previous days (on Friday, September 4, the militia even broke into one of the universities). This time more than 20 people were detained. On the same day, several hundred people demonstrated in Gomel, where the militia detained at least two people. The Polish government confirmed that Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

will visit Warsaw on September 9 and meet with Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. The main representative of Tsikhanouskaya in Belarus – Volha Kavalkava, was forced by the authorities to leave for Poland. Kavalkava was sentenced to 10 days in prison on August 25. When she served her sentence, she was imprisoned for another 15 days. However, the KGB deported the woman and left her on a no man's land on the Belarusian-Polish border. On Saturday she spoke at a press conference in Warsaw together with the head of the Polish Prime Minister's office. Michał Dworczyk reminded that any person subjected to political repressions in Belarus can count on the support and care of the Polish state.

DAY 29

March of Unity in Minsk, protests also in other cities

More than 100,000 people took part in the March of Unity, which took place on September 6 in Minsk, on the central street of the city – the Prospectus of the Winners. This is another Sunday’s mass protest after the falsified presidential election. The authorities mobilized large forces of OMON and militia, heavy equipment was brought to the city center and blockades were set up. A particularly strong perimeter was established around the presidential palace, towards which the protesters marched. Furthermore, the authorities tried to disrupt communication – on their orders, Internet operators had to reduce the speed of data transmission. At least tens of thousands of people reached the palace. When the demonstrators began to disperse and small groups of

people remained opposite to the cordon of security forces, arrests began. When one of such groups of people took refuge in a café, plainclothes officers smashed the glasses in windows and doors of the premises. They were commanded by one of the high police officers. Violent arrests, including those of minors, occurred in Grodno. The militia were to use tear gas there. “Over 100 people were detained during the protest action on Sunday,” said the Belarusian Ministry of Interior. The Viasna Center informs about at least 193 detainees in Minsk alone. There were also arrests in Grodno (about 30 people), Brest, Baranovichi, Mogilev and Vitebsk (over 10 people).

DAY 30

Abduction of Coordination Council members

Representatives of the opposition’s Coordination Council – Volha Kavalkava and Pavel Latushko, who are currently residing in Poland, informed in a statement issued on Monday that since August 9, over 10,000 people have already been detained, over 450 people have been subjected to torture, in addition to those who were killed and are still missing. Since Monday, September 7, among the missing ones are three members of the Coordination Council. The Foreign Ministries of Germany and Great Britain expressed their concerns about the disappearance of Maria Kolesnikova. According to witnesses, Kolesnikova was detained in the city center, probably by the plainclothes officers. The Ministry of Internal Affairs denies that she was detained. Kolesnikova

was the coordinator of the staff of Viktor Babaryka, a would-be candidate, arrested before the election. Kolesnikova is a member of the Presidium of the Coordination Council. Furthermore, two other members of the Coordination Council disappeared. During Sunday’s protests 633 people (including 102 in Grodno) were detained in Belarus, 363 of whom were placed under arrest, informed the Ministry of Internal Affairs on Monday, September 7. The regime claims that there were about 30,000 people protesting in the whole country. According to the opposition, there were at least 170,000 of them, including more than 100,000 in Minsk alone. Anastasiya Zacharevich was sentenced by the court to seven days’ imprisonment for “participation in an

illegal assembly” on Monday. The journalist writing for the ecological Green Portal was arrested on Friday. On September 7, the Ministry of Information of Belarus issued a written warning to the independent portal TUT.by “for disseminating inaccurate

information that may harm the interests of the state or society.” This is a second warning, the first one was issued on August 7. According to the law, if two or more written warnings are issued within a year, access to the website may be restricted.

DAY 31

The regime is stepping up repressions, the border incident, Lukashenko’s interview

On Tuesday, September 8, the fate of the members of the Coordination Council who had disappeared the day before has become clear. It turned out that all three of them had been kidnapped by the security forces and deported to the border with Ukraine. The Lukashenko’s regime wanted to get rid of them and deport out of the country. Eventually Anton Radnianski and Ivan Kraucou crossed the border, but Maria Kolesnikova resisted to do so and when they were already in the neutral zone, she ripped her passport. In such a case she could not be forced to cross the border. The forces took her in an unknown direction. The staff of Viktor Babaryka claims that the woman is imprisoned in a border guard unit in the Gomel region. On Tuesday, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya called on the authorities in Minsk to release Kolesnikova. Moreover, Tsikhanouskaya stressed that new election in Belarus should take place before the new constitution is passed and not afterwards. “Alexander Lukashenko does not have any legitimacy as the President of Belarus and no longer represents the country,” Tsikhanouskaya said in a video address

to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). On September 8, the Russian RT television published an excerpt from Lukashenko’s interview for the Russian media. The Belarusian dictator says in it that if his regime falls now, then Russia – that is, Putin’s regime – will be next. Lukashenko said that behind the protests in his country is the United States, which operates through centers in Poland and the Czech Republic, reported Russian journalists with whom he spoke. Lukashenko did not rule out early presidential election, but after the reform of the constitution. Furthermore, Lukashenko announced that he would not talk to the opposition’s Coordination Council. OMON officers in addition to people in masks and uniforms without markings started to detain en masse the participants of the peaceful protest in Minsk, organized in the evening. Attacks on groups of several hundred or several dozen protesters took place in different parts of the capital. The brutality of the militia is growing every day and it has already started to detain women, which it did not do before.

DAY 32

Coordination Council members charged; Attorney General changed

The Investigative Committee of Belarus reported that Maria Kolesnikova and Maxim Znak were formally arrested on September 9 as suspects in a case of calling to seize power or acting to the detriment of state security. They both sit in the presidium of the Coordination Council. They may be subject to 2-5 years in prison. Znak was arrested on Wednesday. Kolesnikova was kidnapped on Monday and it was attempted to forcibly deport her to Ukraine. When this failed, she was taken into custody in Minsk. Among seven members of the presidium of the Coordination Council, only Svetlana Alexievich – a writer and Nobel Prize winner, is currently free. The other ones are under arrest or were forced to go abroad. Women participating in the action of solidarity with the arrested Maria Kolesnikova were arrested in Minsk on Wednesday evening. A group of several dozen people was pacified by men in masks and uniforms without markings – which has already become the norm in the capital of Belarus. President Alexander Lukashenko appointed Andrei Shved the

new General Prosecutor on September 9. The former General Prosecutor – Alexander Koniuk, has held this position for nine years. Lukashenko said he now wants to prove himself in diplomacy. However, independent media point out that Koniuk's son works for an IT company, which is in serious trouble with the state for supporting the protesters. On Wednesday, Lukashenko's entire interview for Russian state media was published. He referred to the plans of constitutional reform again, but asserted that Belarus should have a strong president. Lukashenko said that the opposition should have the form of political parties, whilst these only exist on paper so "there is no opposition." Meanwhile, a spokesman for the Kremlin assured that there is no discussion about Belarus joining Russia or being absorbed by it. Dmitry Peskov denied that this was to be discussed during President Alexander Lukashenko's visit to Moscow. It will most likely take place on September 14.

DAY 33

Prosecutor's Offensive

On Thursday, September 10, the Ministry of Internal Affairs gave official information about the protests in Belarus the day before. The police detained a total of 37 people, mostly in Minsk. Also on Thursday Lukashenko introduced the employees of the Prosecutor General's Office to their new boss – Andrei Shved. The new Prosecutor General announced that the measures will be stepped up, saying that "Any cases of violence, extremism, and disturban-

ces of public order should be nipped in the bud." According to Lukashenko, the prosecutor's office has not yet reacted strongly enough to the actions of the opposition. The signal of the more decisive actions of the prosecutor's office is that two members of the Coordination Council – Maxim Znak and Maria Kolesnikova, have been arrested and charged with an attempt to illegally seize power. Kolesnikova's attorney claims that her client stated that during an

attempted deportation from Belarus to Ukraine, she was put on a bag over her head and threatened to be killed. In her statement, the oppositionist listed the following crimes committed against her: kidnapping, illegal imprisonment and the threat of death. On September 10, the Investigative Committee announced that it saw no grounds to carry out investigations into the high-profile case of the arrest of journalists when they were reporting a protest in Minsk on August 27. The militia detained a total of

47 representatives of the domestic and foreign media then. Most of them were released after a few hours, some of them were deprived of their accreditation. The last member of the Presidium of the Coordination Council remaining free and in Belarus, a Nobel Prize winner – Svetlana Alexievich, along with the President of the Association of Journalists of Belarus and Secretary General of “Reporters Without Borders”, called on the UN to send an observation mission to Belarus to defend the media.

DAY 34

Detention of journalists, Vatican envoy in Minsk

The independent Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) reported that on September 11 journalists were arrested in Vitebsk, Babruysk and Gomel. On the same day a court in Minsk sentenced Dzmitry Siemczanka – a former journalist of ONT state television, to 15 days’ imprisonment “for participation in an illegal action.” On Friday, the court in Minsk declared the August strike in the state potassium corporation Belaruskalij illegal. It is one of the largest companies in Belarus. In 2019 its share in the world production of potassium chloride fertilizers was about 20 percent. On September 11, Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher – the Holy See’s Secretary for Relations with States, began his visit to Belarus. In Minsk he met with Vladimir Makei – Belarusian Minister of Foreign Affairs. In recent weeks, the Lukashenko’s regime has been exerting pressure on the Catholic Church in Belarus whilst on August

31 its Head – Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, was not allowed to enter the country. According to unofficial information, Cyprus is blocking EU sanctions against Belarus, demanding a stronger EU position towards Turkey regarding Ankara’s offshore gas drilling in the eastern Mediterranean. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed on Friday that Alexander Lukashenko’s visit to Moscow will take place on September 14. Importantly, the visit is supposed to be a working one and no bilateral documents are planned to be signed. In recent days Moscow has hosted the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense of Belarus whilst Minsk hosted Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin. On the day of the meeting between Putin and Lukashenko, Belarus-Russia military exercises will commence in the Brest Region in the west of Belarus.



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

DAY 35

Meeting of the law enforcement, statement of the Coordination Council

More than 40 people were detained by the militia during Saturday's protests in which women took part. The officers as well as men in balaclavas and unmarked suits acted violently, some women were badly beaten. Several journalists were also detained. Hundreds of women appeared in the afternoon of September 12 at several locations in Minsk. Independent media estimated the total number of participants in the march at 10,000. According to the official data of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs, on Friday, September 11, 32 people were detained throughout the country for violating the regulations on gatherings. Eighteen of them are to appear before the administrative court – they are facing a fine or arrest for up to 15 days. Meanwhile, Maria Kolesnikova's defenders appealed against the decision to arrest her. Kolesnikova, a member of the

opposition's Presidium of the Coordination Council, was detained on September 7, after which the KGB tried to take her to Ukraine by force – unsuccessfully. Later on, she was transferred to the detention center in Minsk, but on Saturday her lawyer informed that the oppositionist was transferred to the detention center in Zhodzina, about 55 km from the capital. On Saturday the Coordination Council informed that it intends to continue its activity. The Council's decisions, if cannot be made by the members of the Presidium, will be reached by the whole Council by a simple majority of votes. Six out of seven members of the Presidium are under arrest or in forced emigration. Two days before the start of the Slavic Brotherhood military exercise with the participation of Russian troops, the Minister of Defense said that "The activity of NATO forces near the Belarusian

borders continues to worry Minsk, an adequate response to the situation on the border will continue.” Viktor Khrenin announced the end of the exercises “in the Grodno tactical direction.” In Minsk, the

Minister of Defense, along with other heads of law enforcement, took part in a meeting with Lukashenko.

DAY 36

Another Sunday of mass protests

The Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs informed in the evening of September 13 that several hundred people were detained on that day, including over 400 in Minsk. The largest protest took place in the capital. About 150,000 people took to the streets. In Minsk the militia and army forces were reinforced and special equipment was delivered. The Ministry of Internal Affairs confirmed that a member of militia in the capital city gave a warning shot in the air. This was supposed to happen at the Prospectus of the Winners, when a crowd of protesters wanted to free a few detained people from the hands of the militia. This is not the only sign of an increased tension between the protesters and the authorities, which have been gradually increasing the brutality of actions for a long time. In Brest, where about 1,000 people protested, a water cannon was used to disperse the crowd. In Novopolotsk three militia

vehicles were damaged during the pacification of the protest, while in Minsk, in a district inhabited by the high members of the authorities, when a crowd of several thousand people approached the house of the head of the Central Election Commission, the militia used stun grenades. Furthermore, on Sunday, the street protests took place in Gomel, Grodno, Mogilev, Pinsk and Vitebsk. On September 13 the regime struck the strike committee in Belaruskali – two of its members were arrested in Salihorsk. Sunday’s protests showed that the level of anti-government mobilization continues, despite repressions of the authorities and the weeks that have passed since the rigged elections. The high turnout at the protests this Sunday certainly did not strengthen Lukashenko’s position before his visit to Sochi and the meeting with Vladimir Putin, scheduled for Monday.

DAY 37

Lukashenko in Sochi, Russian soldiers in Belarus

On Monday, September 14, a meeting between Vladimir Putin and Alexander Lukashenko took place at the Russian President’s residence in Sochi. This is the first foreign visit of the Belarusian president after the August 9 election. The talks lasted over four hours. Only a part of the meeting was open

to the media. Lukashenko said that recent events showed that Minsk should cooperate more closely with Moscow, especially in terms of economy. In this context, he called Russia the “elder brother” of his country. The most important arrangement of the conversation (now publicly known) is the promise

of a \$1.5bn loan from Russia to Belarus. It was also confirmed that Lukashenko, with the approval of the Kremlin, would implement the scenario of a “constitutional reform” as a way to extinguish the crisis. Putin confirmed Russia’s allied commitments to Belarus. According to him, the military cooperation will be strengthened. On Monday, the Belarus-Russia Slavic Brotherhood-2020 wargame began near Brest, in the western part of the country. The maneuvers, which will last until September 25, will be attended by 800 soldiers (including 300 Russians) and 170 units of equipment (including 70 Russian ones). The core of the exercising forces will be constituted by the airborne troops. The maneuvers under the code name Slavic Brotherhood are being held since 2015 and include armed forces of Russia, Belarus and Serbia. This time, however, Belgrade cancelled its participation, claiming that it is under pressure from the EU (Serbia is applying for EU membership). On the day of the meeting between Putin and Lukashenko, a statement to the Russian authorities was issued by the opposition’s Coordination Council. The Council warned that “the Russian authorities’ support for the law enforcement, a policy of repression instead of dialogue, will undoubtedly have a negative impact on bilateral relations.” At the same time, it assured that the opposition does not want to worsen relations with Moscow. On Monday, the courts handed down nearly 50 sentences to

those detained during the weekend protests. In Salihorsk three activists of the strike committee of the Belaruskali concern were arrested for 15 days each. According to the information of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, about half a thousand people are still awaiting trials in custody. Last week the number of detainees has been growing again, only on Sunday it was equal to 774 (500 in Minsk alone). On Monday another member of the Coordination Council was arrested. On September 14, the Catholic Church in Belarus informed – citing the response from the State Border Committee – that the authorities had cancelled the passport of Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz. This was supposed to be the reason for not allowing the head of the Belarusian Catholics to enter the country. The Hierarch was diverted from the border crossing with Poland on August 31 when he tried to return to Belarus. Meanwhile, another Belarusian ambassador condemned the authorities’ forcible actions against the protesters. Following the representatives in Spain and Slovakia, the violence was condemned by the Ambassador of Belarus to the Netherlands – Andrei Yeudachenka. At the same time, he pointed out that good relations with Russia are essential and the opposition needs a leader other than Tsikhanouskaya, someone “with a lot of experience.” Following this statement Yeudachenka will most probably be dismissed from the post, similarly to the ambassadors from Slovakia and Spain before.

DAY 38

Criticism from the EU, Vatican joins the case

Tuesday, September 15, was marked by further sentences for weekend detainees as well as new detentions of protesters. According to the independent Human Rights Center “Viasna,” at least 270 sentences were handed down in Belarus on that day – the courts in Minsk, Grodno, Vitebsk, Gomel,

and Brest, among others, ruled arrests and fines. Among the convicted are journalists. On Tuesday, although no major protests took place in the country, several people were arrested in various places. The actions of the Lukashenko regime were condemned by the head of the European diplomacy – Josep

Borrell, who stated, among others, that the election was rigged and Alexander Lukashenko is not the rightful head of state. The head of EU diplomacy once again called on the Belarusian authorities to find a way out of the crisis, stop repressions and enter into dialogue with the opposition. Meanwhile, the Vatican joined the case of the head of the Catholic Church in Belarus – Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, whom the authorities did not allow to enter the country. “We urge to allow the bishop to return to his diocese in order to continue guiding his faithful,” said Cardinal Pietro Parolin – Secretary of State of the Holy See. The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted a statement in which it assessed

that the election in Belarus were neither free nor fair and supported the imposition of EU sanctions on those responsible for electoral fraud and violence against protesters. Only 228 people voted in favor of the statement in a 450-person parliament. On the other hand, the Council of the Republic – the upper house of the Belarusian Parliament, declared that the resolution of the Lithuanian Seimas, which recognised Tsikhanouskaya as the “leader of the people of Belarus,” was a serious interference in the internal affairs of Belarus, contrary to international law. This resolution was adopted by the Seimas on September 10.

DAY 39

Shoygu in Minsk, Lukashenko on the Western Conspiracy

On Wednesday, after the meeting with the Minister of Defense of Russia – Sergey Shoygu, Lukashenko announced that he approached Russia regarding new types of armaments. This was supposed to take place in a conversation with Putin in Sochi. However, the Kremlin denied Lukashenko’s words the same day. “Russian President Vladimir Putin did not discuss supplying Belarus with new weapons when he met President Alexander Lukashenko for talks this week,” the Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. Lukashenko deprived the diplomatic rank of the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, a Member of the Opposition Coordination Council – Pavel Latushko, in addition to the Ambassador to Latvia and the former Ambassador to Slovakia. External “aggressors” have been preparing a seven-stage action plan against Belarus for the last 10 years, President Alexander Lukashenko declared on September 16. According to him, the USA and its “satellites” in Europe were behind these actions

and the goal was a color revolution. The oppositionist – Maria Kolesnikova, was accused of calling for actions to the detriment of state security, the Belarusian Investigation Committee informed on Wednesday. She is facing imprisonment of two to five years. Russian Finance Minister – Anton Siluanov, announced on Wednesday that Russia will provide Belarus with the first tranche of the one billion dollars loan by the end of this year and the remaining half a billion dollars in 2021. The loan is expected to help Belarus meet its current payment obligations. To put it briefly, it is a loan that enables repayment of earlier loans, especially to Russia. Lukashenko announced that the launch of the Belarusian nuclear power plant near Astravyets is planned for November 7 – the Day of the Great October Socialist Revolution, a public holiday in Belarus. The power plant, consisting of two blocks, is being constructed by Rosatom and financed mostly from a loan granted to Minsk by Moscow.

DAY 40

Lukashenko closes borders, except for one

On Thursday, September 17, Aleksander Lukashenko declared that he is closing the borders with Lithuania and Poland. In the case of Ukraine, only enhanced control measures are to be applied. This is argued by the alleged threat from the western neighbors, Lukashenko is at the mercy of Russia. The day after Sergey Shoygu's visit, Lukashenko said that he was forced "to build joint defense for the Union State with the Russian President and the Minister of Defense in the last few days." On the evening of September 17, the independent media reported that the flow of people through the border checkpoints was as usual. Meanwhile, the West is looking for ways to help Belarusians. These include opening up the EU to Belarusian entrepreneurs and setting up a stabilization fund, perhaps with

the participation of the IMF. On Thursday, Polish-Lithuanian intergovernmental consultations were held in the Lithuanian capital under the leadership of Prime Ministers Mateusz Morawiecki and Saulius Skvernelis. Following them, Morawiecki spoke about at least 1 billion euros in the aforementioned fund. We support the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Belarus – could be read in the declaration, which was signed in Vilnius on September 17 by the Prime Ministers of Poland and Lithuania. Meanwhile, 17 member countries of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) have set up an independent mission to investigate alleged human rights violations in Belarus in connection with the presidential election.

DAY 41

Lukashenko closes borders, except for one

On September 18, it turned out that the borders of Belarus with Poland and Lithuania had not been closed, as announced the day before by Lukashenko. In response to the threat from the Belarusian leader, Lithuanian Prime Minister – Saulius Skvernelis, announced that if Belarus closes its borders, Poland and Lithuania will close their borders for Belarusian goods going to the West. On Friday, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on Belarus. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya spoke at the Council's forum via a video connection. According to the resolution, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights – Michelle Bachelet, is to present a report on the situation in Belarus before the end of the year. 23 countries voted in favor of the resolution, while 2 were against it and 22 abstained. Russia, which does not have the right to vote in the

Council (it is an observer) attempted to prevent the adoption of the resolution. The Russians submitted several amendments, but all of them were rejected. The resolution was criticized by the head of Belarusian diplomacy. Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus – Vladimir Makei, also warned that Minsk would respond to possible EU sanctions with its own personal sanctions. Such a list is said to be already prepared. Furthermore, according to Makei's statements, the presence of foreign media in Belarus may be limited. Meanwhile, Maria Kolesnikova's attorney informed on Friday that the oppositionist, accused of calling for actions detrimental to state security, will remain in custody until November 8. Maxim Znak, another member of the Coordination Council, who was charged with the same allegation, declared a hunger strike on September 18.

DAY 42

Another women's march, falling attendance

The Human Rights Centre “Viasna” reported on Saturday evening that at least 342 people were detained during the women’s protest in Minsk, some of whom were quickly released. About 2,000 people took part in a traditional Saturday’s women’s march in the capital on September 19. The participants of the protest were detained by OMON officers and masked men in unmarked suits. The attendance at the women’s march on September 19 confirms the decrease of Belarusians’ involvement in the protests. A week earlier about 10,000 people took part in the protest. This time, however, there were far more arrests – a week earlier only about 50, nearly seven times less than on September 19. Meanwhile, it was the first time that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had made such a strong reference to the international activity of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. A

spokeswoman of the Ministry – Maria Zakharova, stated that the invitation of the Belarusian oppositionist to the meeting of the foreign ministers of the EU countries is a violation of the Charter of the United Nations. This is a reaction to the information from Brussels that an informal meeting of the head of EU diplomacy – Josep Borrell and the foreign ministers of the Member States with Tsikhanouskaya is to occur on Monday, September 21. The meeting will take place on the day when the EU Council is scheduled to discuss the introduction of sanctions against the Lukashenko’s regime. On the other hand, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus announced that Tsikhanouskaya’s invitation to the meeting of EU Heads of Diplomacy will be a direct interference in the affairs of Belarus.

DAY 43

The March of Justice in Minsk, protests all over Belarus

During Sunday’s protests in Belarus more than 200 people were detained overall. Most of them (at least 152) in Minsk, where another protest against rigged election took place – the March of Justice. Again, more than 100,000 people took to the streets. Similarly, the law enforcement was much more brutal than 2-3 weeks ago. The officers detained people at the beginning and the end of the protest. That is when OMON managed to divide the march into several smaller columns, which were attacked by the militia. Moreover, there were arrests in other cities. In Brest the militia used tear gas and one of the officers fired a warning shot in the air. Fur-

thermore, protests and arrests took place in Gomel, Grodno, Lida, Mogilev and other cities. Conventionally, the authorities recognize the protests as “illegal mass actions.” Large militia and army forces were brought to Minsk before Sunday’s march. A cordon of security forces surrounded some buildings in the city center. More often than during previous Sunday marches of the opposition – a regular weekly show of strength of Lukashenko’s opponents – the militia used the tactics of placing blockades in various locations of the city, depending on the development of the situation. As usual, there were problems with access to the Internet from cell phones in the center

of Minsk on Sunday. Meanwhile, personal data of 1,003 militia officers involved in breaking up protests and detaining people appeared on the Internet. This data was probably stolen as a result of hacking into the Ministry of Internal Affairs' databases. On September 20, Russian Finance Minister – Anton Siluanov, said that about 330 million dollars from

Russia's new loan of 1.5 billion dollars to Belarus, Minsk will immediately transfer to Russian accounts to cover Belarus' outstanding debt to Gazprom. Moscow is to transfer the first billion dollars to Belarus by the end of this year. The remaining half a billion in 2021.

DAY 44

More Russian troops in Belarus, EU is debating sanctions

The effects of Lukashenko's conversation with Putin in Sochi and shortly after Sergey Shoygu's visit to Minsk are already becoming visible. On Monday, the Belarusian Ministry of Defense informed that about 1,000 Russian soldiers will take part in the second stage of the Slavic Brotherhood maneuvers (September 22-25). There will be many more soldiers taking part in the second stage than in the first one, which was originally established a long time ago. There will be as many as 6,000 soldiers and 500 units of equipment present, including about 1,000 military and about 100 units of equipment from Russia. It could be observed that the exercises have not only been extended, but the scale of the project has also been significantly increased. For the first stage of the maneuvers, near Brest, Russia has sent only about 300 military and about 70 units of equipment while Belarus about 500 military and about 100 units of equipment. Meanwhile, the European Union rejects Lukashenko's rule. Following the meeting of EU foreign ministers on Monday, EU head of diplomacy – Josep Borrell declared that the EU does not recognize Alexander Lukashenko as a legitimate president. Consequently, after the end of Lukashenko's current term in the office (November

5), the EU's diplomatic relations with Belarus are to be downgraded. The meeting of the heads of diplomacy of EU countries did not result in an agreement on sanctions against representatives of the Belarusian regime, responsible for repressions and electoral fraud. The sanctions are not supported by Cyprus which is demanding restrictions on Turkey because of illegal drilling by this country in the eastern Mediterranean. In this situation, the issue of sanctions will be addressed by the heads of states and governments at the EU summit on 24-25 September. On Monday, a court in Minsk rejected a motion to repeal the arrest of the Belarusian oppositionist Maria Kolesnikova. This means that Siarhei Babaryka's colleague (also remaining in custody), who is a member of the Presidium of the Coordination Council, will remain in custody. She is accused of calling for actions detrimental to state security. Employees of the Belaruskali company in Salihorsk in the south of Belarus, who participated in a support initiative of the protesting miner – Aleh Kudziolka, who refused to come back to the surface, were arrested. The state concern Belaruskali produces potassium fertilizers. In 2019, it controlled about 20% of the world market in this sector.

DAY 45

Sanctions for Lukashenko will be delayed

The Viasna Human Rights Center announced that since the beginning of the presidential campaign in Belarus over 250 criminal cases have been initiated against campaign participants and staff in addition to people taking part in post-election protests. Most frequently the charges are made from articles of the penal code concerning mass riots, organization or active participation in group actions violating public order, opposition to officers as well as violence or threat of violence against an officer. One of the tools used by the regime are repressions for alleged fraud. The article of the penal code on tax evasion was used to detain, among others, Viktor Babaryka's

staff and employees of companies that helped the opposition. Meanwhile, a good information for Lukashenko appeared. The EU summit announced for September 24-25 is postponed to October 1-2. The reason? Coronavirus in the surroundings of Charles Michel. This means a delay of potential sanctions against Belarus. During the meeting of the heads of diplomacy of the EU, it was not possible to reach unanimity on this issue (opposition of Cyprus), so the decision had to be made at the summit of EU leaders. It turns out that this will happen next week at the earliest.

DAY 46

Lukashenko sworn in, Belarusians on the streets, international boycott

On September 24, Russia transferred further airborne units to Belarus for Slavic Brotherhood maneuvers. This happened on the day of the unannounced inauguration of President Alexander Lukashenko. The inauguration was kept secret and the state media informed about the swearing in after it happened. Following the inauguration, Lukashenko appeared before the military, which then took an oath of allegiance to Belarus. The inauguration of Lukashenko, who was declared the winner of the fraudulent election, was not recognized by the Belarusian opposition nor any country. The Coordi-

nation Council called on Belarusians to begin a civil disobedience campaign. The opposition demands a rerun of the election and does not recognize Lukashenko as president. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya declared that the orders given by Lukashenko to the law enforcement are invalid and not enforceable. In response to Lukashenko's secret oath and calls from the opposition leadership, protesters took to the streets of Belarusian cities. In Minsk, law enforcement and people without markings brutally dispersed spontaneous protests and detained people. Shots were fired and tear gas was used. Water



SOURCE: PEXELS/ARTEM PODREZ

cannons were used in various places to disperse the protesters. At least a few people were wounded. In the evening, drivers started to block the streets in various locations of the city. The protest also took place in Grodno, Vitebsk, Mogilev and Brest, among others. In the whole country at least 165 people were detained until the evening. Lukashenko's swearing in caused a strong international reaction, more and more countries started to declare that they do not recognize the legitimacy of the dictator. "Lithuania does not recognize Alexander Lukashenko as the rightful leader of Belarus," President Gitanas Nausėda said on Wednesday. "The United States cannot consider Alexander Lukashenko the legitimately elected leader of Belarus," the spokesperson

of the US Department of State said, stressing that the announced results of the presidential election in Belarus on August 9 were falsified. British Foreign Minister – Dominic Raab, said that the secret swearing in ceremony of Alexander Lukashenko for another term as President of Belarus discredits him even more. "Germany does not recognize Alexander Lukashenko as the president of Belarus, even after his inauguration ceremony," German government spokesman Steffen Seibert said on Wednesday. Swedish Foreign Minister – Ann Linde, said on Twitter that Lukashenko has lost democratic legitimacy to govern Belarus. Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Ukraine do not recognize Lukashenko's authority as well.

DAY 47 and 48

State TV hacked by cyber-partisans

In response to the EU's announcement to impose sanctions on Belarus, the Belarusian Foreign Minister – Vladimir Makei, said that these sanctions would be “nothing but attempts to bring chaos and anarchy to [their] country to make Belarus lose many years of development.” Moreover, in a speech recorded for the UN General Assembly, Makey said that “Interference in our internal affairs, (...) are harmful for absolutely everyone.” The UK has been collaborating closely with the US and Canada on sanctioning top Belarusian officials.

The internet broadcast of news by the state TV channels “Belarus 1” and “ONT” was interrupted by a group of cyber-partisans. In place of an interview with the Minister of Health – Dmitry Pinevich, hackers aired drastic recordings of the

militia brutally pacifying the protesters. Shortly after the start of the attack, the TV stations completely stopped broadcasting. A group of hackers, who admitted to the attack on the website, announced that “If Belteleradiocompany does not want to show people the truth, [they] will show it.”

Meanwhile, during the seventh, though equally attended weekend of protests, Nina Baginskaya – a 73-year-old women who had become an icon of frustrated Belarusians, was arrested. In Sunday protests attended by more than 100,000 Belarusians, at least 50 people were detained in Minsk alone. Furthermore, more than 150 people gathered outside Belarusian Embassy in Moscow, of which seven were arrested.

DAY 49

People's Inauguration of Tsikhanouskaya

Three days after Lukashenko's notorious inauguration, Minsk's residents gathered to express their support for Tsikhanouskaya who, in a rightful manner, should have been sworn in. During the rally, 106 people were detained. Later that day, a group of musicians was arrested for playing a Soviet-era hit “We Want Change” in an underground passage, which performance enjoyed significant popularity from the crowd. Meanwhile, the legitimate victor of the presidential election was hosted by BBC. In particular, she spoke about the role women have played in the pro-democracy demonstrations.

Tsikhanouskaya stressed that Belarusians do not want their children to be “slaves” of Lukashenko's

system and regime. She also commented on the dictator's secret inauguration pointing that it is a show of his weakness and fear of the frustrated nation, adding that the ceremony will not help him “become legitimate.”

An end-to-end encrypted messaging platform has been increasingly popular amongst Belarusians. It enables protesters to organise not only marches but also opposition concerts, soccer matches, and lectures, without the government interfering in their communication or identifying the participants.

Hungarian prime minister Victor Orban said that Cyprus should not be pressured to support sanctions against Belarus and that it is their right to disagree

and stand by their position. The EU has harshly criticised the Hungarian leader for flouting democratic principles.

As stated by the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lukashenko's choice in favour of supporting Russia will inevitably lead to a confrontation

between Belarus and Ukraine, igniting potential risks for the latter. Moreover, Ukrainian President refused to meet with Lukashenko and suspended their joint international and regional projects until the end of the political havoc.

DAY 50

Further Sunday's protests

Traditionally, on Sunday, a weekly culmination of the peaceful protests against the Lukashenko's regime took place. Several tens of thousands of people took part in the protest in Minsk, fewer than in previous Sunday marches. This march was announced as a symbolic inauguration of Tsikhounouskaya. Numerous participants had her pictures and paper crowns. This was a reference to the swearing-in of Alexander Lukashenko on Wednesday. In Minsk the militia was detaining the participants of the protests in various locations of the city. The city center was practically blocked by the militia. At the request of the authorities, mobile Internet was turned off. The protests also took place in other cities. The law enforcement acted with great brutality. In Gomel the militia used pepper spray and fired shots into the air. Stun grenades were used

in Mogilev. Moreover, violent arrests occurred in Grodno. The protests were also organized in other localities, such as Brest and Vitebsk, among others, resulting in a number of detained. According to the data released in the evening by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, more than 200 people were arrested in Minsk, Grodno, Brest, Vitebsk, Mogilev, Gomel, Salihorsk, Maladzyechna, Zhodzina and other towns. Meanwhile, President Emmanuel Macron stated in an interview published by the French press that Lukashenko "must go." Macron stressed that most of the protesters do not question the exceptionally close relations between their country and Russia. The French President is to visit Lithuania and Latvia. Macron's meeting with the Belarusian opposition in Vilnius cannot be ruled out.

DAY 51

Alexievich leaves Belarus

None of the seven members of the top leadership of the opposition's Coordination Council are operating freely within the country at the moment. Some of these people were arrested, most of them are in exile. The last one – Svetlana Alexievich, awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, left for Germany.

She assures that she went to be treated and plans to return to Belarus. The Viasna Human Rights Centre informed on Monday morning that 380 people were arrested during Sunday's protests. On the same day, the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs informed about the detention of more than

350 participants of Sunday's protests. The Ministry reported that 22 protests took place throughout the country on Sunday. Jahor Marcinovič – the editor-in-chief of the Internet newspaper "Nasha Niva," was fined on Monday, September 28, for participating in an illegal action on the night of August 10-11. Moreover, he is not allowed to leave the country due to criminal investigation for defamation. Meanwhile, the Minister of Energy of Russia – Alexander Novak, raised the forecast regarding the volume of supplies of Belarusian products, which would be redirected

from Lithuanian ports to Russian ports, on the air of one of the Russian TV channels. "Belarus can deliver 4-6 million tons of petroleum products via Russian ports as it redirects its cargo flows from the seaports of Lithuania to Russia," Alexander Novak said. The Head of the Ministry raised the forecast, as he spoke of 3-4 million tons in early September. He expressed hope that "agreements will be reached in the near future." Belarus can utilize the capacity of the ports of St. Petersburg, Ust-Luga and Primorsk, the Minister pointed out.

DAY 52

Macron meets Tsikhanouskaya, further western sanctions, Russian intelligence chief warns

On Tuesday, September 29, Minsk hosted the Forum of Regions of Belarus and Russia. Due to coronavirus pandemic, the Russian delegation participated in it only remotely. The presidents of both countries spoke during the Forum. Alexander Lukashenko announced that Belarus is ready to talk to Russia about all proposals that strengthen economic security. The Ambassador of Belarus to Russia confirmed that both countries have resumed talks on the road maps for deeper integration within the Union State. The Prime Minister of Belarus stated on Tuesday that trade contracts worth USD 700 million and about 70 agreements were signed during the forum. In a video recording played during the Forum, Vladimir Putin said that Belarus has been under "unprecedented external pressure" since the August presidential election. The Head of Russian intelligence – Sergei Naryshkin, who provided more "information," spoke in a similar manner. The Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) stated that the USA plans to include "extremist elements" in the protests in Belarus and that such activists are being trained in Poland,

Georgia, Ukraine and the Baltic States. Naryshkin said that a provocation against the Catholic Church is being prepared. "The USA wants to involve the Vatican, so far showing moderation, in the events in Belarus," said the Head of SVR. Meanwhile, the West is demonstrating support for the Belarusian opposition and rejects the Lukashenko's regime. On Tuesday, September 29, the President of France, who is visiting Lithuania, met with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya in Vilnius. Emmanuel Macron assured that he will do everything in his power to support the Belarusian people. The crisis in Belarus was one of the main topics of the two-day official visit of the French President to Lithuania. Macron said that fighting this crisis also requires "dialogue with Russia, talks with Vladimir Putin." While Macron paid a visit to Lithuania, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus announced that Minsk is introducing sanctions against the Baltic States in response to their restrictions. On August 31, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia announced sanctions lists, including Alexander Lukashenko and 29 other Belarusian officials. On September 25, the list was extended by another 100

people. On September 29, the United Kingdom imposed sanctions on the President of Belarus, his son and six other high-ranking members of the Belarusian regime. The introduction of sanctions was coordinated with Canada, which restricted the same people. The sanctions include a travel ban and asset freeze of Alexander Lukashenko, his son Victor Lukashenko and Igor Sergeyenko – the Chief of Staff to the President. Other individuals subject to

sanctions comprise: the Minister of Internal Affairs – Yuri Karayev, his Deputy and Chief of public security police – Alexander Barsukov, another Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs and Commander of internal troops – Yuri Nazarenko, his Deputy – Khazalbek Atabekov and the Commander of the Special Purpose Police Unit (OMON) – Dmitry Balaba.

DAY 53

Merkel to meet Tikhanovskaya

Further to Macron's meeting with Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, Angela Merkel said to German MPs on Wednesday that she looked forward to meeting Tikhanovskaya "soon". Moreover, she praised Belarusian women on standing against the regime, saying that she found it "really impressive". The legitimate president of Belarus will visit Berlin on 5 October.

On Thursday 1 October, the ban on Tut.by will come into force. The news site will have its media credentials suspended until 30 December, because of their engagement in covering the protests against Lukashenko. The Ministry of Information announced the court's ruling that the news outlet had published

prohibited information. Despite the officials' decision, Tut.by's representatives announced they will continue to operate even "without the status of a media outlet."

Belarusian state news agency reports that in response to sanctions from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, Minsk will respond by retaliatory sanctions. As a consequence, approximately hundred officials from each of the Baltic states have been prohibited from entering Belarus. Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that they will continue to respond to pressure measures, but "will never initiate such steps".

DAY 54 and 55

Polish plan for Belarus approved by European Council. Belarus reciprocally sanctions EU

On Friday, Polish PM – Mateusz Morawiecki, announced that the European Council had approved the Polish "economic plan for a democratic Belarus". He added that organisations such

as International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Investment Bank will hopefully be involved. The agenda includes the es-



SOURCE: FLICKR/NATALIA RAK (CC BY-NC 2.0)

establishment of a 1bn euro stabilisation fund, support for small and medium-size companies, visa facilitations and opening of EU's single market to Belarus. Moreover, it is to initiate long-term investments in infrastructure, as well as negotiations of a new economic agreement and support for Belarusian energy security.

In a recent online interview, Tikhanovskaya said she was going to ask Angela Merkel to mediate in the conflict within Belarus. She was also hoping to discuss the ways to put further pressure on current leaders in Belarus, because “only with pressure can [they] force the authorities into dialogue with the people”. When asked what she would tell Vladimir Putin if they had a conversation, Tikhanovskaya replied: “I would say I’m pleased to hear from you, Vladimir Vladimirovich. Let’s discuss the fact that the Belarusian people in their own country want to make decisions about with whom they want to build the country, and the Belarusian people can no longer live under dictatorship, because we have changed.”

In the meantime, Belarus undertook further measures to facilitate censorship of independent media. As a response to EU sanctions, Minsk cancelled accreditations for all foreign journalists. The Foreign Ministry said in a statement that they needed to “update” the procedures because former media regulations were “outdated”. They added that new, “streamlined” accreditations will be available to apply for on Monday, October 5th 2020. This has been done under the pretense of securing “information sovereignty”. In addition, the Belarus introduced reciprocal sanctions on EU representatives, though they will not disclose which officials were targeted. It has been stated that Belarusian authorities are “determined, albeit not without regret, to respond to unfriendly actions (...) to protect [their] national interest”. Furthermore, the Foreign Ministry has also recalled its ambassadors from Poland and Lithuania for “consultations” and invited the two countries to reduce personnel at their embassies in Minsk. Poland and Lithuania have firmly refused.

DAY 56

Continuous high turnout for the opposition marches

On Sunday, October 4, more than 240 people in total were detained during the protests, according to the information collected by the Viasna Human Rights Centre. The majority of them were arrested in Minsk, but also in Brest, Grodno, Vitebsk, Mogilev, Babruysk and Salihorsk. Several journalists were detained as well. In one of the smaller towns – Babruysk – the militia detained nearly all participants of the march, demanding the release of political prisoners. Traditionally, the largest Sunday protest took place in the capital city. The Intefax-Zapad agency estimated the number of participants at over 100,000. The militia detained people with white-red-white flags, used by the opposition, and other opposition's symbols. The protesters marched in columns in different parts of the capital. In one of the places where several thousand people gathered,

the militia used water cannons. The Belarusian writer Svetlana Alexievich said on Sunday that she does not plan to stay in exile and intends to return to Belarus. However, the Nobel Prize winner is afraid whether the authorities will let her into the country. After her stay in Germany, Alexievich stayed in Italy for the weekend. She assessed that during the political crisis Belarus remained alone, and the reason for this is the unspoken agreement between Europe and Moscow that Belarus is the Russian sphere of influence. The Head of EU diplomacy Josep Borrell, in a statement issued on Sunday, criticized Belarus for its demands to reduce the number of diplomatic staff in the embassies of Lithuania and Poland in Minsk. Such a demand was made by the Belarusian MFA. Borrell finds this incomprehensible.

DAY 57

Diplomatic clash with neighbors, Tsikhanouskaya about Putin, pensioners' protest

On Monday, pensioners took to the streets of Minsk to protest against the official election results. Approximately 200 people attended the demonstration. When the protest was over and the participants were dispersing, the militia detained two people. On October 5, a search was carried out in the editorial office of the independent portal Silnyje Novosti from Gomel, in eastern Belarus. The journalist, who was arrested while reporting on the opposition's demonstration, was sentenced to 15 days' imprison-

ment. He is the husband of the editor-in-chief of the portal, who was detained on Saturday and charged with participating in an illegal protest action on September 27. Silnyje Novosti is the most popular news portal in Gomel and reports on the opposition's actions. On Monday, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya travelled from Vilnius to Berlin where she met with representatives of the Belarusian community. An informal leader of protests in Belarus announced that she would like to meet with the president of

Russia. “To understand why she supports Lukashenko,” explained Tsikhanouskaya, who was invited by Chancellor Angela Merkel to a meeting on Tuesday, October 6. Once again, Lukashenko attacked Poland and the Baltic States. During the meeting with the head of the customs department, Lukashenko said that if Belarus “tackles” the transit from Lithuania and Latvia, then “the logistic centers of Lithuania will not receive about a quarter [of cargo traffic flow].” On Monday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania informed that it is calling its ambassador in Minsk Andrius Pulokas for consultations. The

communiqué noted that Lithuania is coordinating its activities with Poland and other EU countries. On the same day the Ambassadors of Belarus to Poland and Lithuania returned to Minsk for consultations. The decision about their dismissal was made on Friday, when the European Union introduced sanctions against 40 representatives of the Belarusian authorities for fraudulent presidential election and repressions against those protesting against the falsifications. The Belarusian MFA also demanded that the embassies of Poland and Lithuania limit the number of their diplomats in Belarus.

DAY 58

Tsikhanouskaya meets Merkel, the staggering scale of repressions

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Tuesday, October 6. The former presidential candidate, currently an informal opposition leader in political exile, said that a new presidential election in Belarus needs to be organized in the near future. The German ambassador left Belarus on Tuesday. Manfred Huterer was called for consultations in Berlin. The day before, the ambassadors of Poland and Lithuania, Artur Michalski and Andrius Pulokas, left. Meanwhile, a group of members of the strike committee in Belaruskali was sentenced to 10 or 15 days of imprisonment. On Tuesday, courts have been hearing cases of many people detained in the last few days. Most often the accusation is under the article about participation in an illegal assembly. Proceedings were initiated against 19 people for disseminating data about militia employees, informed TUT.by on Tuesday, referring to the statement of the militia. Law enforcement authorities are establishing the identity

of individuals who publish information about militia officers and their families on the Internet. Within two months, the Viasna Human Rights Centre collected information about more than 500 victims of torture that took place in custody. However, there is no information that the persons responsible for the violence were prosecuted at least a single time. Courts and detentions affected already around 12,000 people in the summer and fall. Those responsible for the violence remain unpunished and can even count on being rewarded by the authorities. Although at the end of August, under the aegis of the Prosecutor General’s Office, an inter-ministerial commission was established to examine the applications of citizens who reported that they had been beaten and humiliated by the militia following their arrest, there is no information about the activities of this commission. Likewise, the Prosecutor’s Office of Minsk refused to provide information about its activities in connection with the torture of detainees.

DAY 59**Tikhanovskaya on Russia's wanted list**

Russia's Ministry of the Interior announced that Belarus' opposition leader, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, has been put on their wanted list on "a criminal charge". TASS – a Eurasian giant's leading news agency – reports that Tikhanovskaya had already been on a wanted list in Belarus, which means the warrant against her would already be executed because of agreements between the countries. Although the Ministry did not disclose the rationale behind their decision, Russian state news agency – RIA Novosti – identified it to be the same as in Belarus: making public calls to harm the country's security, including calls to seize power. However, there has been no confirmed information from the Belarusian government regarding Tikhanovskaya's wanted status. When asked about it, Belarusian

Interior Ministry spokeswoman, Olga Chemodanova, answered "So far, I don't have information that I could tell you." In response to the entire situation, Tikhanovskaya's campaign office told the Russian Interfax news agency: "We don't know about this. Svetlana did not receive any messages. But this is actually of little interest [to us]."

The opposition leader's international recognition has been growing. This has been reflected in her recent meetings with Emmanuel Macron, Angela Merkel, and many other politicians of high-rank. When asked about her increasing role on the international forum, Vladimir Putin replied: "Madame Tikhanovskaya is not in Belarus. One can hardly say that she is somehow involved in Belarus' life."

DAY 60**Did Minsk use EU funds
to buy surveillance drones?**

On Thursday 8th October, Lithuania froze a cross-border EU payment of 5.8m euro to Minsk. The Deputy Interior Minister of the Baltic State explained this was due to the suspicion that previous donations had been misused. Lithuanian police channelled EU funds to Belarus in May to purchase drones. While they were destined to support border operations tackling illegal immigration and people trafficking and thus improve the overall quality of life in those regions, 40 EU lawmakers recommended a thorough investigation of how the purchased equipment was used. In a public letter, they warned that a bureaucratic execution of projects without consideration of current affairs might result in "je-

opardizing the safety of Belarusian people." It is possible that the drones were used in containing the peaceful protests against Lukashenko.

Bulgaria, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic followed Poland and Lithuania in recalling their ambassadors from Minsk as an act of solidarity with the Baltic states.

In response to Putin's comment on Tsikhanouskaya, the Belarusian opposition leader stressed that they need to pay attention to Belarus rather than Russia. She also called it "a pity" that the rights of Belarusians are not supported by "some leaders."

DAY 61 and 62

Lukashenko Consults Constitutional Reform with Jailed Opposition

Belarusian autocrat's press office announced that imprisoned members of the opposition agreed to engage in a five-hour discussion about the constitutional reform and to keep it "secret". In a clip shared by official service, Lukashenko says to the group of his political opponents that he is trying to convince not only their supporters, but also the entirety of the society to look at "things" more broadly. Referring to the current protests, he added that the constitution cannot be rewritten "on the streets." Svetlana Tikhanovskaya commented that no dialogue can be held in a prison cell. The international forum has seen this as an expression of Lukashenko's weakness.

On Friday, 9 October, Britain became the latest European country to withdraw its ambassadors from Belarus as an act of solidarity with Poland and Lithuania. The two countries have so far recalled 35 diplomats from Belarus. Although Minsk's Foreign Ministry said that the demand to Poland and Lithuania to reduce their diplomatic staff was not intended to curtail dialogue with the EU, eight European countries have now withdrawn their ambassadors from Lukashenko's autocratic country.

DAY 63

The brutality of the regime, fewer protesters

More than 400 people were detained on Sunday during the protests in various cities of Belarus. There are over 40 journalists among them. The vast majority of the arrests took place in Minsk, but the militia also detained demonstrators in other cities, including Babruysk, Brest, Vitebsk, Mogilev, Grodno, Maladzyechna, Zhlobin and Kobryn. Traditionally, the largest protest took place in the capital, but it was still significantly smaller than previous Sunday marches. Several thousand people, at most, took to the streets of Minsk. For the duration of the demonstration the authorities closed all subway

stations and forced the speed of mobile internet in the city to be slowed down. The militia acted very brutally – the last time it did so was in the first days after the election. In the center of Minsk, the militia used water cannons and stun grenades to disperse the crowd. The detainees were cruelly beaten with batons. According to the Prosecutor's Office in Minsk, since the beginning of the protests, i.e. since August 9, a total of about 3000 people have been administratively punished in the capital. Approximately 2000 people were imprisoned, about 1000 fined.

DAY 64

Pensioners' protests, sanctions will hit Lukashenko

On Monday evening the supporters of the opposition attended protest actions in various districts of Minsk. They blocked the passage and erected barricades. The largest protests took place in the northwest and southeast parts of Minsk. There were arrests, while men dressed in civilian clothes, wearing masks on their faces, controlled cars on the streets. Earlier the militia used stun grenades and tear gas against pensioners protesting in the center of Minsk. Detentions took place there. Less numerous protests of pensioners also occurred in Grodno, Brest, Salihorsk, Gomel and Lida. The Ministry of the Internal Affairs warns that in case of further radicalization of demonstrations, even

firearms may be used against protesters. On Monday the Ministry of Internal Affairs announced the official number of detainees during Sunday protests. It is a daily record, as many as 713 people. Also on Monday, two members of the Coordination Council, detained a few days earlier, were sentenced to 15 days' imprisonment each. Former presidential candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya refuses to enter dialogue with repressive authorities and calls for the re-election of the head of state. In Luxembourg, during a meeting of EU foreign ministers, a consensus was reached on another set of sanctions against Belarus. This time it will also affect Alexander Lukashenko.

DAY 65

Lukashenko given ultimatum

On Tuesday, October 13, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya announced that she would stage a national strike if Alexander Lukashenko does not meet the following three demands of the opposition by October 25: end violence against protesters, release all political prisoners and announce his resignation from office of the president. Lukashenko's main rival in the presidential election was also an online guest at the Forum 2000 conference in Prague. Tsikhanouskaya said that presidential election in Belarus should be held under international observation. She repeated that protests against Lukashenko's regime are not a geopolitical clash between Russia and the European Union, but an internal matter of Belarus. The Ministry of Internal Affairs claims that 186 people were detained throughout the country during Monday's demonstrations. This is much higher than the number reported by the independent Human

Rights Center "Viasna" (72). On Tuesday, the Coordination Council informed that the last free member of its presidium left Belarus. The leader of the strike in Minsk Tractor Works (MTZ) – Syarhei Dyleuski, left for Poland with his wife and son. He informed that he was forced to emigrate due to threats from the KGB. Meanwhile, on Tuesday, the US Secretary of State called on the Belarusian authorities to allow the Archbishop of the Minsk and Mahilyow metropolitan area – Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, to return to Belarus. For over a month now, the Lukashenko's regime does not want to allow the head of the Roman Catholic Church in Belarus to enter the country. "I urge the Belarusian government to right this wrong," wrote Mike Pompeo in a statement published on the website of the US Department of State.



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DAY 66

Deputy Minister's meeting with Russian Ambassador

On Wednesday 14 October, Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister met with Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Russia in Minsk. The main points on their agenda were the plans for the development of Russia-Belarus cooperation and the interaction in the integration associations and international organizations. As Lukashenko met with the CSTO Secretary General on 15 October, he said that his forecast regarding the pandemic and developments after the election “proved 100% accurate”. He added that Western countries have become “too active” and have gone “too far” in the internal affairs

of Belarus. Indeed, he blamed external pressure for causing the havoc inside Belarus. According to the autocrat, Belarus is an incredibly peaceful country and, as in his words, “only in Minsk people cannot decide how to live further”.

Despite the recent escalation of protest following Tikhanovskaya’s ultimatum, Lukashenko visited an agricultural district to praise the “hardworking workers”. Instead of focusing all efforts on trying to solve the political skirmish, the autocrat “was made familiar with the technology used to prepare potatoes for storage”.

DAY 67

Tech giant accused of censorship

In search of an end-to-end encrypted platform to organise peaceful protests and rallies, the people of Belarus have turned towards an instant messaging app called Telegram. Due to its security, the autocratic government has no power of banning or invigilating the service, thus allowing Belarusians to gather and express their condemnation of the government's deeds – the only measure they are able to take to spark a change. However, the American technological giant – Apple, a monopolistic distributor of Telegram on iOS devices, has requested Telegram to delete all the contents that identify the security agents and police. Although this may go hand in hand with their policies, striving to keep the platform a politically 'clean' cyberspace, Belarusians and foreign actors have accused the corporation of depriving Eastern European protestors of their last resort. In response, Apple said that these steps are

aiming to prevent violence against the police, whose personal details are allegedly disclosed on Telegram. Tatiana Martynova – a Belarusian activist who fled to Ukraine, argues that Lukashenko's government constantly shares vulnerable data of the protestors and they are the only actor using widespread violence including tortures, rapes, deprivation of basic human rights, etc.

This is not the first time Apple has engaged in severe internal clashes. In July, the company completely banned HKmap Live app, which was used by Hong Kong demonstrators to track police movements. Unlike China, however, Belarus holds no economic influence over Apple and thus it is highly doubtful that the actions are a result of pressure from Belarusian rulers.

DAY 68 and 69

Tsikhanouskaya nominated for Nobel Peace Prize.

Belarusian Minister of Internal Affairs calls protestors “animals”

Belarus' Ministry of Internal Affairs announced that security forces are prepared to use special gear and military weapons against the protestors. One of the Heads of the governmental unit said in an interview that firearms will be “humanely” used for, what he called, protecting the citizens, law, and order. In addition, he referred to the protestors as immoral “sharp-hoofed animals.” In fact, in last-weekend rally attended by tens of thousands of

people, water cannons, barbed wires, pepper gas and the like have been as present as never before. Moreover, there are videos available of shots being fired from the window of a minibus with no license plates whatsoever.

Sunday 18th October marked the last day of the vote against Lukashenko's recent plans of constitutional amendments. Over 450,000 Belarusians expressed

their views, breaking a record of attendance in independent, modern Belarus. The main demands of the un-official referendum are to hold new fair elections, to remove political prisoners, and to prosecute those responsible.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Maria Kalesnikava, and Veronika Tsepkalo have been nominated for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize. Norwegian MP Geir Toskedal said that these three women played a key role in the fight against the totalitarian regime in Belarus.

DAY 70

Sunday Marked by Protests

At least 30,000 people participated in Sunday's opposition march in Minsk. Moreover, demonstrations took place in other cities of Belarus. The militia detained over 100 people across the country. The arrests took place mostly in Minsk, but also in Vitebsk, Brest, Gomel and other smaller cities. The most violent events occurred in the capital where protesters were detained by unmarked individuals with faces covered with balaclavas or helmets. The militia shot rubber bullets into the air and, according

to unconfirmed reports, used stun grenades as well. An hour before the start of the demonstration in Minsk, nearby subway stations were closed. During the march there were issues with communication via mobile Internet. October 18 fell on another Sunday, or the day of the week when the greatest mobilization of opponents of the regime takes place. However, this demonstration in Minsk as well as protests in other parts of the country are becoming less and less numerous.

DAY 71

Arrests of Journalists, Pensioners' Protest

On October 19, Minsk hosted two pensioners' protests: supporters and opponents of the regime. The opposition's demonstration was several times bigger than the pro-government one. Both protests took place in the same location – on Independence Square. They were peaceful and the militia did not intervene. Furthermore, the pensioners' protest took place in Brest and Grodno. On Monday the court in Minsk sentenced five journalists detained during the demonstration to several days' imprisonment. The main charges included disobedience to the police officers' orders and participation in an illegal action. The Ministry of the Internal Affairs announced on

Monday that 280 people, including 215 in Minsk, had been detained the day before for violating regulations on mass gatherings. According to the Viasna Human Rights Center, 242 people were imprisoned on Sunday. Most of them were arrested during the opposition's march in Minsk, but also in other cities, including Brest, Gomel, Svietlahorsk and Vitebsk. Meanwhile, Wital Szklarau, a political scientist and advisor, detained in July on charges of "organizing activities that violate public order," left the KGB detention center. The court changed his preventive measure to house arrest. The authorities had done the same with Ilya Saleya, the lawyer of Maria Kale-

snikava, arrested on September 9. Both Szklarau and Saleya participated in a meeting between Lukashenko and the opposition in KGB custody on October 10. Liliya Ulasava was also present there. On Monday

it was announced that she was also transferred to the house arrest. Ulasava was imprisoned on August 31 and accused of tax evasion. She is a member of the presidium of the opposition Coordination Council.

DAY 72

Tsikhanouskaya Calls on the Law Enforcement, Lukashenko Threatens the Protesters

On Tuesday, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya called on the law enforcement to switch sides and join the protesters by the end of the week. The informal leader of the opposition promised the officers that they would avoid being vetted after the overthrow of Lukashenko. The ultimatum issued by Tsikhanouskaya to Lukashenko on October 13 is also set to expire on Sunday, October 25. She announced that if Lukashenko does not meet the opposition's demands by that time, including his resignation, Belarus will go on a nationwide strike. At the moment, however, there is no indication that Lukashenko's authority is actually under threat. The regime gains more and more control over the situation every day. There will be no general strike, because the strike leaders in major companies have been pacified. The situation at the universities is also under control. On Tuesday it was announced that rectors of three universities, whose students took part in the protest actions, were

replaced. Simultaneously, the authorities are continuing a two-pronged approach against protests. The establishment starts to build the foundations of a "systemic opposition" with which it will engage in "dialogue" and introduce "reforms," while repression of the protesters will be stepped up. On Tuesday, Lukashenko spoke harshly of the participants of the protests. He threatened that the authorities would find every person and everyone would "be held accountable for their actions." Furthermore, the regime is intensifying propaganda aimed at making leaders of the political emigration look like they are following orders of the West. An element of such a strategy is also the recognition of the Nexta-Live channel on Telegram as an extremist material by the court in Minsk. This opposition channel played a huge role in popularizing protests – it has about two million subscribers. It belongs to the Belarusian blogger Stepan Putilo, who is currently in Poland.

DAY 73

Lukashenko running out of time

Lukashenko puts everything at stake and plans to organise a mega rally against the opposition in Minsk. According to the reports, regional authorities have received an order which obliged them to provide a certain number of participants to the rally. Allegations are that some people are offered bonuses

for joining in the event. Some institutions, such as the Minsk Linguistic Humanitarian College, were forced to send all their staff to the pro-government assemblage. The rally is expected to take place on the weekend of 24-25 October.

Meanwhile, the autocrat is running out of time set by Tsikhanouskaya to fulfil People’s Ultimatum. In a statement on Telegram, the legitimate victor of the elections encouraged the nation to endeavour a strike on Monday 26 October. She said that the end of the regime is already on their way, but every day of its existence is very expensive for Belarus and its people – also in financial terms. The nation that has united, she said, deprived the regime of fear – its “eternal weapon.” Amongst the ways of strike, she listed not coming to work or study, going out on

marches, closing establishments and offices, using government services, or withdrawing all money from bank accounts. Tsikhanouskaya assured that once legality in the country is restored, the new, lawful government will provide guarantees against those who suffered economic repressions due to expressing their disapproval of the autocrat and his people. She declared that all fines, non-payment of utility bills, convictions and administrative fines will be cancelled.

DAY 74

Belarusian protesters awarded by European Parliament

Minsk’s Director for Metropolitan Security signed an order from the government requesting nearly all of the city to be closed. This means that all metro stations will be out of service on October 25, the day People’s Ultimatum ends. Additionally, the official agreed to make all necessary adjustments in case of force majeure and auxiliary mobile units of former and retired officers from the Main Directorate for Combating Organised Crime and Corruption will be sent for duty at Minsk’s metro stations.

The European Parliament awarded the Sakharov Prize, its highest human rights honour, to all Belarusians actively engaged in opposing Lukashenko’s dictatorship. The movement led by Tsikhanouskaya has

been recognised for its relentless fight for democracy, the “truth” being named the weapon against the brute forces of the regime.

Estonia, who since 2011 has been involved in development cooperation with Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Belarus, has opened a call for proposals for funding projects with the aim of supporting the civil society in the last standing regime of Europe. The Foreign Ministry said that proposals should be focused at supporting independent media, providing medical aid or rehabilitation to victims of repressions, and supporting education professionals and education programmes. In total, 500,000 euro has been earmarked.



SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/HOMOATROX (CC BY-SA 3.0)

DAY 75 and 76

Clock is Ticking for Lukashenko

Although clock is ticking for Lukashenko as there are only two days left behind People's Ultimatum, the dictator plays unbothered visiting the Slutsk region visit fields, farms and pursue the planned "tastings." In one of the meetings there he stated that the prices for the agricultural products will be rigorously controlled and declaring it the government's task to distribute "vegetables" and "potatoes" in a way that will keep their prices stable in winter.

It has been reported that people did not want to attend Sunday's pro-Lukashenko rally despite being offered 50-100 rubles (17-33 euro). On Friday morning the stages assembled in preparation for the pro-government gathering were dismantled. Later that day officials announced that the event would not take due to coronavirus. The rationale later transformed into protester safety and prevention of their "trampling each other." The dictator

said that he never favoured the idea even though, as he claimed, "a great many people – around 250,000-300,000" had been planning to come to Minsk on that occasion. An informal gathering of Lukashenko's supporters took place on Saturday, though no more than twenty people participated.

At a meeting with students, Prosecutor General Andrei Shved told the audience that the government has enough resources to detect every single illegitimate act, adding that, if necessary, they could be expelled from the university within 24 hours. He official also recommended the youth which Telegram channels to follow. The following day Tsikhanouskaya held an online meeting with university students where their support for the People's Ultimatum was discussed. She also expressed gratitude to the student community for active support in the fight for democracy.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya addressed religious communities of Belarus with words of gratitude for sheltering protesters in churches. She named specific priests who had been punished for offering help to people fleeing from the violent police.

On Saturday afternoon, US State Secretary called Lukashenko and emphasized that the US supports the sovereignty of Belarus and sees prospects for the development of cooperation between the two countries. This is the first time Lukashenko answered a call from the West.

DAY 77 and 78

Tsikhanouskaya's General Strike

On Sunday, about 100,000 people attended the People's Ultimatum rally in Minsk. The militia used stun grenades against protesters in at least two locations in the city. When people ran away, scared by the explosions, officers were grabbing them and escorting to the militia vehicles. During the protests on Sunday over 500 people were arrested. On Sunday, October 25, the ultimatum given by Tsikhanouskaya to Lukashenko expired. Of course, Lukashenko did not meet the demands, so Monday, October 26, was to be the beginning of a general strike. Moreover, the opposition leader called on private business to support the national strike. In the morning, some employees of large companies, such as Grodno Azot, Minsk Automobile Plant (MAZ) or Minsk Tractor Works (MTZ), did not start their work, instead organizing a so-called sitting strike on the premises of their firms. Students at several universities went on strike in a similar way. Several thousand people took to the streets of Minsk: protesters supporting the strike in this way, participants of the March of Pensioners in addition to students. Over 300 demonstrators were detained in Minsk, Brest, Grodno, Mogilev and Lida on Monday. If the opposition hoped that the strike would turn into a real general strike on its first day, it was wrong. Indeed, the authorities admitted that there had been "some unrest in the factories," but they assured that it did not cause any economic damage. As the Minister of Industry said, state enterprises were working as usual and production was not disrupted. The strike

took place only in some companies. One of the main reasons why the protests, which have lasted for more than two months, have not led to the collapse of the regime, is the attitude of the law enforcement. The KGB, the militia, OMON – all maintain total loyalty to Lukashenko. It is no coincidence that recently Tsikhanouskaya started to address them directly. On Sunday she called upon the law enforcement to switch sides and join the protests. They are defending Lukashenko for fear that after the fall of the regime, they will be held accountable for their brutal actions. Not without significance is also their privileged social status (e.g. high wages) as well as ideological work on the personnel. There is no shortage of political officers who convince, for example, that the opposition is in the pocket of the West. With the loyalty of the law enforcement and the support of Russia, Lukashenko managed to control the situation in the country for the last few weeks to such an extent that the general strike turned out to be such in name only. There are many indications that the opposition decided to take such a decisive step too late. Considering the scale of social mobilization, such an initiative would have been successful about a month ago. Currently, Lukashenko seems to be in control of the situation. However, he has already lost the support of the majority of his fellow citizens for good. The protests will be repeated, slowly weakening the regime – Lukashenko's departure, which seemed so close in mid-August, was only postponed.

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Beneficiary bank name: PKO BP SA

SWIFT bank code: BPKOPLPW

Payment title: Donation

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