

## Belarus Protests – The People’s Ultimatum With Hope to a Better Future!!!



Photo AP

Belarus opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya has declared The People’s Ultimatum on Sunday, October 27, 2020 as the final deadline for the illegitimate President Lukashenko to step down. The General Strike and the protests against Lukashenko will continue. The Eurasia Center adamantly supports the Belarus protesters and their brave campaign of nonviolence against this brutal dictator. The majority of Belarussians seek a change in leadership, democracy and the basic freedoms – Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Assembly, Freedom from Fear, Freedom from Want and Freedom to chose a democratically elected official and not have that choice stolen every election cycle. After Lukashenko’s security forces fired stun grenades at crowds of protestors and detained scores of people in a clampdown, Tikhanovskaya declared, "The regime once again showed Belarusians that force is the only thing it is capable of," she wrote in a statement. "That's why tomorrow, Oct. 26, 2020, a national strike will begin." Lukashenko has threatened to imprison anyone who joined the General Strike.

In November of 2020, the protests increased, especially after one protestor, Roman Bondarenko was severely beaten by Belarussian Security Forces and died in the hospital. He has become a martyr for the movement. That November 6, the European Union had finally placed sanctions on Lukashenko and his allies. However, Tikhanovskaya believes Europe can increase economic sanctions as well as the US. She believes that the Biden Administration should take a stronger approach against Lukashenko. Lukashenko is hanging on to power as long as his inner circle, the military and interior forces, stay loyal to him. A crippled economy may force people within his cabinet to withdraw. With Russian economic support, Lukashenko is getting a second lease on life for now. In December 2020, the European Union has sanctioned individuals and companies supporting the

Lukashenko regime. The United States adopted the Belarus Democracy, Human Rights and Sovereignty Act which sanctions not only Belarussians but also Russian individuals and companies supporting Lukashenko as well. Belarus' economy contracted 8% last year and will need Russian micro and macro financing to survive.

Despite harsh tactics by Belarussian security forces and an extremely bitter winter, Belarussians are staged massive protests in the Spring of 2021. "Every day our resources are increasing, and the resources of the regime are dwindling. Every day he has less money, fewer people, fewer supporters inside and abroad, worse and worse reputation and, accordingly, fewer opportunities," said Tikhanovskaya. Security forces have not switched sides to the opposition which remains a key factor removing Lukashenko. Providing some sort of amnesty to those who switch sides may be an essential ingredient to winning the revolution, otherwise the military and industrial enterprises will have to weigh in and make a drastic switch towards supporting the majority of Belarussians who yearn for stable representative and democratic nation; not a *President-for-life Republic*.

The Opposition staged a massive protest on March 25, the anniversary of the 1918 declaration of a short-lived independent Belarus. Opposition leaders united for their long march towards democracy.



Photo: Yahoo!NewsUk

***Thousands mourn the loss of Roman Bondarenko, Belarussian protestor beaten to death by security forces.***

Belarussians are tired of having major opposition candidates being placed in prison. Protesters are routinely beaten and tortured after they are detained. Belarus broke out of the Soviet bloc and tasted freedom in its early days but its road to democracy was diverted by Lukashenko and his police state. The Eurasia Center has a history of working with the people of Belarus – those affected by Chernobyl, its orphans, and outstanding people and diplomats who have had to work under this regime. Economically, Belarus was starting to look

westward toward a new relationship with the United States and Europe, however this relationship can only begin with its people. The regime can only run the country through fear and coercion. East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the former Soviet Union, and Ukraine are signposts which bear testimony to the failed repressive regimes that ignore the People's (Narod's) will. We urge all those in America, Europe and Asia to support the Belarussians in their time of need. Tikhanovskaya has claimed she has raised seven million dollars for the protestors and the General Strike.

### **History of the Protests:**

Opponents of President Lukashenko, who has remained in power for 26 years, say the vote was rigged to disguise the fact that he has lost public support. He denies losing, citing official results that gave him just over 80% of the vote. On August 12, the Minsk authorities estimated the damage from the riots: it amounted to 500 thousand Belarusian rubles (14.8 million Russian rubles).



### **Facts:**

- Thousands of people gather in the capital Minsk to voice their opposition to President Alexander Lukashenko and the violent crackdown he unleashed against protesters. People wave the opposition flag, white with a red stripe - and they carry flowers and balloons to show that their movement is peaceful.

### **The Timeline:**

- August 9<sup>th</sup>, Alexander Lukashenko ran for his sixth term as a president. His presidential rival was a political novice - Svetlana Tikhanovskaya.
- August 10<sup>th</sup>, official results – Lukashenko wins 80% of votes, while Tikhanovskaya wins 10% and claims victory and calls on her opponent to step down. Protesters clash with police - 2,000 arrested one dead.
- August 11<sup>th</sup>, Tikhanovskaya makes “difficult decision” to leave for Lithuania. Fresh protests occur with 1,000 people arrested.
- August 12<sup>th</sup>, Police in Brest city use firearms against protestors and a second protester dies.
- August 13<sup>th</sup>, 700 protestors arrested. Russia accuses outside forces of attempts to destabilize Belarus.



- August 14<sup>th</sup>, Tikhanovskay calls for “peaceful protests” in all cities. Meanwhile, Lukashenko accuses several countries, Russian opposition figures of being behind the protests.
- August 15<sup>th</sup>, The Kremlin said Russian President Vladimir Putin had told Lukashenko Moscow was ready to assist Belarus in accordance with a collective military pact if necessary and that external pressure was being applied to the country. Several of the largest Belarusian enterprises went on strike, including the Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant (MZKT), the Minsk Tractor Plant (MTZ) and MAZ.
- August 16<sup>th</sup>, tens of thousands protests in Minsk, the biggest opposition rally in the country’s history. Lukashenko rejects the idea to organize new election, while Tikhanovskay says in video from exile that she is ready to take over the country’s leadership. Authorities say over 2,000 of 6,700 people arrested are freed.
- August 17<sup>th</sup>, authorities have responded with a level of brutality remarkable even during Lukashenko’s rule. Police have dispersed protesters with tear gas, stun grenades, water cannons and rubber bullets and severely beat them with truncheons. Lukashenkao allowed elections to be held after the adoption of the new Constitution. Earlier, Lukashenko said that there would be no re-elections in Belarus. According to him, the country will perish as a state if it agrees to hold repeated elections. He noted that the elections were held "in a civil way."
- August 18<sup>th</sup>, Lukashenko accuses the opposition of attempting to seize power. Journalists, in particular, have been targeted. Boris Goretsky, vice president of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, said more than 20 reporters are currently in custody, waiting to see a judge, and several more have already been sentenced to jail terms ranging from 10 to 15 days.
- August 19<sup>th</sup>, Tikhanovskay urges EU leaders to reject the result of the presidential election. In addition, a third protestor dies. EU rejects election result, to impose new Belarus sanctions. the UN High

Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet urged Belarusian authorities to release immediately all those unlawfully detained and investigate rights abuses.



The tension surrounding Belarus is boiling as it serves as bridge between the old Soviet Union, Russia under Putin and Belarus, which was starting to turn westward. The younger generation has finally renounced the fact that there will be a President for life. Similar to the Czech Velvet revolution, the more the current government cracks down on the opposition, the more the people will rise up and become a united force against the president. Putin has lent a billion dollars to keep Belarus afloat but this money may run out as the Belarussian ruble is collapsing. Central to the future of this country is its search for freedom which was hijacked after they received their independence in the early 1990s. Such a promising future was squandered on the concept of the President for life and although Lukashenko maintained some popularity with older pensioners...his increasing irrelevance and method of behavior is mirroring Viktor Yanukovich from Ukraine. They may soon be bunking together in Russia, that is if Putin does not decide to invade Belarus as the Soviets did in Prague back in 1968. Europe and the United States are once again trying to support the opposition while not starting any pretense for a general war in Northern Europe. Ultimately, it will be the people – the Narod – who must determine their fate and freedom against all odds. Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution may serve as an example for Belarus.

Now there is a new investigative video, similar to the one released by Alexey Navalny regarding Putin's Palace, called "Lukashenko. Goldmine." It has been produced by the Belarusian opposition news outlet NEXTA and claims that Lukashenko has spent millions of dollars on gilded residences, planes and cars for himself. Nearly

four million visitors have viewed the video on YouTube. As 2021 draws to a close, Belarus is still suffering under the current regime, protesters still remain in prison while opposition candidates are hunted down and captured. An alternative narrative was offered by Lukashenko during a current interview with CNN, in which he dismissed all reports of his crimes as fabricated. Authoritarian regimes can last as long as they instill fear in their populations through their instruments of political and psychological pressure, a police state and interior forces which rely on certain perks and privileges. Break these instruments are hard, and in fact extremely difficult as the martyrs of the Maidan found out. However, rule of law, the respect of a democratic vote, and its outcome are important to maintain the legitimacy of power. In this case, Lukashenko's regime is not recognized by the West and a large number of international states. Putin, and the former allies of the Soviet Union, such as Saddam Hussein, Gaddafi, and Assad and were grandfathered in as allies of Russia. Ultimately, a number of these dictators failed. Failed as rulers, failed their people. Like Yanukovich, Lukashenko has used force against his own people to retain political power, despite corruption and the basis failures in promoting a civil society. Only time will tell, what will be the breaking point, for a regime and its people.