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Crisis in Belarus. How should the West respond?

Edited by
Adam Reichardt and Tomasz Stępniewski

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Adam Reichardt and Tomasz Stępniewski

Belarus after Presidential Elections 2020: Executive summary

The August 9th 2020 presidential election that took place in Belarus was followed by an unprecedented wave of social protests against the regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The spark that ignited these protests was the blatant falsification of the results of the election which declared Lukashenka the winner with nearly 80 per cent of the vote. In response to nationwide demonstrations and strikes, the regime responded with brute force, beatings and detaining thousands of protesters.

The West, represented by the European Union and the United States, was quick to denounce the violence. However, their response to the situation in Belarus lacks a coherent and consistent approach. In this policy paper, our authors take a closer look at how the EU and the US can and should respond to this crisis that is now unfolding in Belarus. They propose several courses of action which would aim at adding pressure on the Lukashenka regime to stop the violations of human rights and eventually lead to new elections and a transition of power. These actions include:

1) Sanctions

The EU and US have a wide range of options when it comes to implementing sanctions. This includes personal sanctions, imposed on both high members of the regime as well as on members of the riot police responsible for the beatings, high-ranking police officials, and judges and prosecutors who participated in the thousands of unlawful trials against peaceful protesters and activists. Economic sanctions should be targeted against large state enterprises with major export shares contributing largely to the Belarusian budget as well as those with assets abroad.

2) Supporting the Belarusian people

There should be no doubt that the immediate aim of the West's actions towards Belarus should be an immediate release of all political prisoners and the end to the violent repressions. The EU and US have already firmly declared that they do not recognise the election results. This should also mean that when Lukashenka's term officially expires in November, he should no longer be recognised as president of Belarus. In addition, the West should call for new, free elections to be organised with international observers on the ground to confirm its fairness. The West should also declare its support for Belarusians' right to self-determination. This declaration is more than symbolic as it carries legal consequences for the international community.

3) Preparing for a delicate transition period

The West should be long term in its strategy towards Belarus. A special "Marshall Plan" for the country should be offered for the transition period which would provide seri-

ous funding for restructuring the country's economy and be a comprehensive stimulus plan consisting of grants and loans along with preferential access to foreign markets.

Lastly, the West should not ignore the role of Russia in this process. Any strategy of a transition period should take into consideration (and potentially involve) Russia as well. The West needs to recognise that the current protests are neither pro-western nor anti-Russian. At the same time, the West should understand the Kremlin's intentions for Belarus and not allow for one brutal regime to be replaced with another.

This special series of IES Policy Papers is the result of collaboration between the Institute of Central Europe in Lublin, the *New Eastern Europe* journal, together with international researchers from American and Canadian universities including Harvard University (George Soroka), University of Alberta (David R. Marples), and European and Polish institutions such as: EAST Center and the German Marshall Fund of the United States, Warsaw office (Veranika Laputskaja), *New Eastern Europe* (Maxim Rust) and the Polish Academy of Sciences (Agata Kleczkowska). We would like to give our special thanks to the authors for their commitment to providing their input and analysis on Belarus's domestic situation and how the West should react. We hope that this special series of the IES Policy Papers will be well received by readers and will encourage experts who study Belarusian politics to continue their research.

Adam Reichardt, Tomasz Stępniewski
Kraków and Lublin, October 2020



David R. Marples

Breaking the impasse in Belarus

The Belarusian protests that broke out following the presidential elections of August 9th 2020 have continued now for many weeks. Though responding with extreme force, through the use of riot police, KGB troops and with army units standing by, the regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka has been unable to stem the mass demonstrations that on successive Sundays have numbered between 100,000 and 200,000 people.

Europeans face a dilemma in that several countries have placed faith in a dialogue with the Lukashenka regime as one that has taken some steps to defy Russian demands for closer integration, particularly through a revival of the 1999 Russia-Belarus Union, military exercises, economic clout and mass media propaganda. Though the European Union has agreed on renewed sanctions, they have not yet been imposed. Such reticence is understandable but unwise. The Europeans should take three steps to ease the impasse.

First, it is essential that sanctions are imposed and at a level guaranteed to have some impact. The sanctions

should be both against individual actors such as Lukashenka and his long-time head of the Central Election Commission, Lidziya Yarmoshyna, as well as against state enterprises and assets abroad. Europeans and the North Americans cannot stand by and permit acts of murder and torture of innocent and unarmed civilians to be carried out with impunity in a Central European state. To do so would be to abandon the peaceful demonstrators seeking to uphold legality and advance the democratic society in the country.

The EU and US have stated firmly that they do not recognise the election results (Lukashenka with 80 per cent of the vote and his closest rival Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya a mere 10 per cent) and that when his term officially expires in November, Lukashenka will no longer be recognised as president of Belarus. They need to now back up that statement with action, to show that it is not simply rhetoric.

Second, the EU should continue its discussions with Moscow. The role of Russia as an interested neighbour with close ties to Belarus cannot simply be discarded. Yet Russia should be strongly discouraged from taking a more aggressive role or maintaining Lukashenka in power through the deployment or threat of force. Together, Russia and the EU, with the support of the United States, should convince Lukashenka to step down from office as the only certain means of defusing the crisis in Belarus. The former president is manifestly unpopular among most sectors of society.

Third, the EU, preferably with United States' backing, should demand the release of all political prisoners and the holding of new elections under the auspices of international observers, including the EU and Russia, with the participation of the OSCE. Yarmoshyna has stated that the

ballots from the August 9th election are no longer available. The evidence gathered by the Golos organisation indicates that from known polling results that were photographed, most people voted for Tsikhanouskaya. Thus, appended to the third demand should be the return of Tsikhanouskaya to Minsk with immunity from arrest and, if she wishes, to take part in new elections.

These are minimal demands that would assist a peaceful solution to what has been a violent confrontation to sustain Lukashenka in office for another term.



Veranika Laputka

How Europe can respond to the Belarus protests

The European Union turned out to be unprepared for the Belarusian post-election protests. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and internal issues, the August 9th presidential election in Belarus seemed to be something happening far away and following the usual scenario where its long-term leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka would win his sixth term.

This time, however, Belarusians mobilized themselves and became extremely engaged in the presidential campaign. New faces of alternative candidates, successful social media campaigns and frustration after many years of an authoritarian regime rule fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic initially ignored by the authorities, resulted in unprecedented rallies and civil actions, which united the whole country.

When the non-transparent elections led to mass protests and blatant cruelty imposed by the riot police unseen in Belarus since Nazi and Stalinist times shocked the international community, EU states were ready to come up with adequate measures. A huge solidarity campaign organized

by Belarusians from within the country and abroad managed to raise global awareness of what was happening in Belarus. Peaceful protesters and strikers demonstrated determination and creativity, self-organization and bravery and continued to show up at peaceful protests throughout the country on a daily basis.

The Belarusian authorities have been trying to quash the protests with a number of repressions, arresting people, expelling some from the country, and threatening and using physical force. What they did not understand, however, was that the scale of public discontent has reached its peak which was demonstrated by the number of protesters counting in the hundreds of thousands from all over the country – figures not seen in Belarus since the mid-1990s.

From the very beginning of visible violations and detentions before the election day, the EU became vocal in expressing concern and discontent with the Belarusian authorities. Yet, it took the EU several weeks, several deaths and thousands of detentions during the post-election protests, to develop a more determined approach towards the Belarusian leadership.

Unfortunately, strategies of different countries and regional blocs within the EU have failed to elaborate a unanimous EU-wide strategy towards the Belarusian events. Thus, the Baltic states and Visegrad countries took a strong line condemning the crackdown of the protests and unfair elections as well as offering multi-level assistance to Belarusians and lobbying for sanctions against those who initiated or took an active part in the repressions and falsifications. Western Europe, however, remains rather cautious and tries

to balance its reaction with a geopolitical view of Belarus's role in Russia's sphere of influence.

The same division between the European states is visible in the recognition of the alternative presidential candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and the non-recognition of Lukashenka as a legitimate president of the Republic of Belarus. The EU itself through its parliament and other bodies seeks concrete measures to tackle the political crisis in Belarus. Not only has the European Parliament awarded the Belarusian opposition with the Sakharov Prize and announced upcoming sanctions, it also continues to lobby for keeping the Belarusian question on the organization's agenda. Nevertheless, a few more steps are necessary to prove the EU's ability to act as a geopolitical power.

Firstly, personal sanctions should be imposed not only on all of the members of the riot police, high-ranking regular police leaders but also to all the judges and prosecutors who actively participated in the thousands of unlawful trials against peaceful protesters and civil activists. Personal sanctions should also be put on all the heads of the precinct election commissions who failed to demonstrate adherence to the OSCE principles of free and fair elections. Many of them have called the police to detain voters who were demanding to see the final election protocols. In this way, election officials directly engaged in repressions against the Belarusian people.

Secondly, economic sanctions should target major Belarusian enterprises with major export shares contributing largely to the Belarusian budget. This measure should be combined with financial aid via independent trade unions to all the workers who went on strike and risk the well-be-

ing of their families and very often their personal freedom and health.

Thirdly, both the EU as a whole and its member states should continue to assist repressed and injured Belarusian citizens who seek medical, visa, education or relocation help or advice. The announced intention of the Visegrad countries to introduce a visa-free regime for Belarusians should be joined by the Baltic countries who share with Belarus historical, business, institutional and individual connections.

Fourthly, the EU should continue to demand that the investigation of all instances of human rights violations and the release of all political prisons remain non-negotiable for the re-launch of a full-fledged dialogue between the EU, its member states and the Belarusian leadership regarding further political, economic, sport and cultural cooperation. A recent initiative by the Latvian government to revoke Belarus's co-hosting of the 2021 joint ice hockey championship in case the Belarusian leadership does not change its behaviour towards the peaceful protesters, demonstrated how different instruments can be used to take a decisive stance towards the situation.

Fifthly, a special "Marshall Plan for Belarus" should be offered during the transition period. At the moment the Belarusian economy is losing substantial amount of money due to the COVID-19 consequences, but also largely due to the economic losses because of the protests, the relocation of multiple businesses and emigration of Belarusians following repressions. The longer the Belarusian authorities continue to ignore the request for a dialogue, the deeper the economic crisis will become and, as a result, the more foreign financial support will be needed to reconstruct the

economy. Russia can only offer such help in exchange for further integration with Belarus at the cost of its independence and this is what Belarus's European neighbours would rather want to avoid.

Finally, the more coherent and consistent the European Union's approach applies, the more effective its policies towards Lukashenka and his officials will become. Such a common front would give a clear signal to the Belarusian authorities that their neighbours are united and determined, and to the Belarusians that their struggle for freedom is recognized and appreciated.



Maxim Rust

The need for a long-term approach to Belarus changes

The unprecedented wave of mass social protests which have been taking place in Belarus since the August 9th presidential election, have become one of the main topics of international and European media. However, the situation in Belarus is often one-sided in the media's portrayal. Such one-sided reports can often build a beautiful, but not entirely true picture of the changes taking place in the Belarusian society. The European Union and the entire West, is now faced with the dilemma of what actions to take regarding Belarus. In order to avoid misunderstandings, I would like to bring to the readers' attention four very important dimensions of the dynamics of the socio-political situation in Belarus.

First, since the very beginning, the protests have neither been pro-Russian nor pro-western. They are primarily pro-Belarusian. This is their main advantage. The lack of unequivocal slogans relating to Russia, the European Union or NATO contributed to their large scale and prevented provocations by hostile forces. The lack of pro-EU slogans does

not mean, however, that the part of Belarusians who protest and want change does not share European values. It is completely different. Belarusians want not only freedom and democracy, but they demand respect for their basic human and civic dignity. This social uprising against the background of “post-political” Europe can be an example for the EU.

The lack of unambiguous pro-western slogans should also not be misread. More and more often we can hear declarations of some European politicians or experts that “if there are no clear pro-EU slogans, should we get involved in the internal affairs of one of the EU’s small neighbours?” Well, I warn against such misunderstanding. Everyone knows that regardless of the slogans and how the protests will end, even the possible EU perspective for Belarus is very vague and long-term. European values are universal. Every society that fights for its dignity and wants to belong to the community of free people should be supported. Especially on the border with the EU.

Second, the nature of the protests is not exclusively political or social. Issues such as freedom and democracy are the main themes. Yet, in addition to the mainstream slogans, the protests and demonstrations raise issues that are still problematic in some EU countries. These include issues such as the rule of law, independence of the courts or freedom of the press. The demands for equality are increasingly frequent during the protests – especially from discriminated groups, the LGBT+ community and women’s rights advocates. We should note that these characteristics illustrate that the Belarusian society is a modern European political nation.

Third, we should be cautious when discussing the protests and avoid using general expressions and mental con-

structs such as “the revolution has already won in Belarus”. The protests have lasted for over two months, the situation is still very dynamic and it can change at any moment. We do not know what the real support for Alyaksandr Lukashenka is among the Belarusian society. This is crucial since for any change to happen, the protests cannot lose momentum. In the near future, the mobilization potential of this part of society, which has so far remained apolitical and has not participated in protests, may play a key role.

Fourth, the Belarusian ruling elite should not be underestimated. It is true that the social and political crisis has weakened it greatly, it is no longer monolithic and it has largely lost legitimacy in the eyes of many ordinary Belarusians. Yet, the power elite is still the main player and the most important political actor in the system. Betting only on new social leaders is too hasty. It would be advisable to closely follow the changes that are taking place among the ruling elite in Belarus. Particular attention should be paid to the middle level of the *nomenklatura*, which, like the majority of the population, is tired of Lukashenka’s politics. The new independent political leaders are very important, but the middle-level ruling elite is likely to be most responsible for the relatively calm transfer of power and the launch of political, economic and social reforms.

In the end, I appeal for farsightedness and an understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of the processes that are taking place in Belarus. A superficial analysis and a quick but ill-considered reaction (e.g. imposing sanctions quickly) might only make the situation worse. We have to accept the fact that what is happening in Belarus is not a sprint, but a marathon.



George Soroka

The crisis in Belarus: A US perspective

As large-scale protests against the 26-year reign of Alyaksandr Lukashenka enter their second month, the United States finds itself at a critical juncture. Its response to the events in Belarus is primed to set the stage not just for Washington's future relations with Minsk, but also with Moscow. How the Trump administration reacts to Lukashenka's heavy-handed tactics against the opposition, which has come to encompass a true cross-section of Belarusian society in socio-economic as well as geographic terms, likewise has the potential to redefine US relations with such key regional allies as Poland and the Baltic states for years to come.

Washington has thus far been careful to signal that it does not regard what is occurring in Belarus as part of a geopolitical struggle between the US and Russia, but rather as a domestic matter that the Belarusian people themselves need to resolve. Although it is unlikely an increasingly paranoid Kremlin will accept such a stance at face value, the position is a pragmatic one, especially as the dynamics in Belarus are

notably different from those in Ukraine during the Maidan protests of 2013-2014. However, this should not be taken to imply that the United States does not have a preferred outcome (i.e., a democratic Belarus that is not antagonistic towards the West) or see a role for itself in facilitating an end to the crisis, either acting alone or (preferably) in conjunction with its European partners.

In this regard, there exist six specific arenas on which US diplomacy would do well to concentrate:

1. Maintain open lines of communication with Russia. Oppositionists do not currently exploit anti-Russian rhetoric, and such appeals would not resonate with large swaths of Belarusian society in any event. Nonetheless, Russian President Vladimir Putin is obviously concerned that the overthrow of Lukashenka might be a harbinger of things to come for him. In this context, the US must convey to the Kremlin that it has a unique opportunity to act as an honest broker in resolving this crisis peacefully (and that doing so would go a long way in improving its relations with the West). At the same time, it should unambiguously stress that any military encroachment into Belarusian territory or attempts to fast-track political integration between the two states as per the largely unimplemented 1999 Union State Treaty (which Lukashenka might seek in a last-ditch attempt to retain a modicum of power or avoid prosecution) will cause US-Russian relations to deteriorate even further in ways that are patently dangerous to both sides.

2. Unequivocally support free elections, a free media sphere and free-speech rights. To these ends, the US should help coordinate a multi-lateral response (the OSCE forms a natural venue for this) backing the immediate release of

all political prisoners, the safe return of exiled opposition figures such as Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, and the full and transparent investigation of human rights abuses connected to the protests. Insofar as possible, it must also push for a repeat of the fraudulent August 9th presidential election under the auspices of international election observers from the OSCE/ODIHR.

3. Maintain and expand sanctions. Unlike the European Union or Canada, the US never removed or significantly modified the targeted sanctions it imposed on Belarus after the 2006 presidential election was determined to have violated basic democratic criteria (these involved nine state-owned firms and sixteen individuals, including Lukashenko and electoral commission head Lidziya Yarmoshyna). In the present situation, these must be reinforced and expanded in coordination with relevant European actors so as to avoid the patchwork approach previously applied. Concurrently, care must be taken to message that the sanctions are not being imposed to harm the overall Belarusian economy, but rather to punish specific businesses and individuals connected to Lukashenko's repressive regime.

4. Develop economic incentives. The US should propose and pressure its regional allies (and ideally Russia as well) to formulate a comprehensive economic stimulus plan for Belarus consisting of grants and loans along with preferential access to foreign markets, the inception of which would be contingent on holding free and fair elections and meeting basic benchmarks of human rights. However, there is a need for caution: measures must be taken to avoid the appearance of profiting off of Belarus's misfortune and credible assur-

ances would need to be given to Moscow that Russia's extensive financial interests in the country would be respected.

5. Keep the focus on the human rights situation. The regime's aggression against largely peaceful demonstrators protesting a blatantly falsified election should be addressed in the international arena. As mentioned above, there must be a call for those violators of human rights to be aggressively prosecuted, either domestically or abroad (though the latter would be difficult to achieve, especially as Belarus is not a party to the 1953 European Convention on Human Rights). At the same time, however, it would be highly advisable for the international community to clarify that it will not object to current state officials, including those within the security organs, who have not committed crimes from keeping their positions (subject to a reasonable vetting process) if Lukashenka is ousted from power, the point being to incentivize them to view the costs of tolerating protesters as being lower than the costs of repressing them.

6. Let diplomacy work. Finally, the United States should, despite the present challenging conditions, persist in its policy of trying to re-establish substantive relations with Belarus, of which the Lukashenka regime is far from the sum total. Following US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Minsk in February 2020, the Trump administration proposed returning an ambassador to Belarus, a post that has been vacant since 2008. But despite hearings having been held in early August, the nomination of Julie Fisher, a career diplomat, is languishing in the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, with some members fearful that appointing an ambassador at this time would broadcast the wrong message. The reality is just the opposite; confirm-

ing the nomination will not aid Lukashenka, but will send a clear message to the Belarusian people that Washington has not forgotten about them and will work to normalize ties once a democratically-elected government comes to power in Minsk.

Obviously, there are many more specific steps that the United States could take, but the above represents a good start if the immediate goal is to make it more difficult for Lukashenka to employ violence against his own people in an attempt to silence popular outrage over a stolen election.



Agata Kleczkowska

Three reasons why the international community should engage with the situation in Belarus

The determination of protesters contesting the results of the presidential elections held in Belarus on August 9th 2020 brought the attention of many foreign observers, including not only the media, but also states and international institutions. For Alyaksandr Lukashenka, such statements amount to nothing more than interference in the domestic affairs of the state. He has already accused Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, the European Union and NATO for subverting and financing the civil unrest (although he did not show any evidence to prove it). This rhetoric is fully endorsed by Russian President Vladimir Putin as well as finding support in statements made by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

However, Lukashenka can neither prohibit international engagement in Belarus nor does it amount to a violation of international law. In the arguments below, I submit three reasons why the international community is legally allowed

to engage in the situation in Belarus and recommend how it may do so in the most effective way.

First, since the beginning of the protests, the Belarusian regime is reported to have committed serious violations of human rights against peaceful protesters, which is confirmed and condemned by international organisations such as the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. From among these organisations, the EU has at its disposal the most far-reaching tools of putting pressure on the Lukashenka regime, including the possibility to impose sanctions on individuals responsible for violence, repressions and the falsification of elections. However, initially the EU encountered problems with their adoption due to the veto submitted by Cyprus which used it to bargain for its own interests in a completely different matter, unrelated to Belarus.

When it comes to international organisations of global scope, there has been little support from the United Nations as for now. As long as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights took the decisive stand and strongly condemned the Lukashenka regime for the human rights violations, the passive position adopted by the UN's main bodies may be at least surprising. Today, violations of human rights are no longer considered to belong to the "essential" domestic jurisdiction of a state under Article 2 (7) of the UN Charter, but are a matter of concern for the whole international community. In the past, both the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council dealt with violations of human rights. Meanwhile, the protests in Belarus were discussed before the Security Council on August 18th during a closed meet-

ing on Yemen in the segment of “other business”; there was an informal online meeting of the UN Security Council with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya; as well as the UN Secretary General issued a laconic statement at the outset of protests.

We often hear that international law is ineffective and that the international legal order evidently is unable to enforce decisions on states in a binding way with or against their will. That is supposed to be the diagnosis of the failure of many international initiatives of the previous decades. However, in case of violations of human rights in Belarus, international organisations and their member states have many tools at their disposal. They may impose sanctions on those responsible for persecutions, support those being persecuted politically and financially, as well as give a voice to the victims. But as long as international law may create opportunity for states to act, it cannot get good will out of them.

Second, under international law, Belarusians have the right to self-determination. This is an important statement since it produces some serious legal consequences for both Belarusians themselves and for the international community. The right to self-determination means that Belarusians are entitled to pursue their political, economic, social and cultural development within the framework of the state's structures. The falsification of the results of the presidential election and the retention of power by a president who was not supported by the people in a democratic vote certainly violates this entitlement. In addition, the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations – one of the most impor-

tant legal instruments ever adopted – allows Belarusians, crushed by persecutions ordered by Lukashenka, to request, in pursuit of their right to self-determination, help from third states in a manner consistent with international law (i.e. they cannot ask third states to use force against Belarus, etc.). The assistance provided by other states could take different forms: first and foremost, it could be diplomatic aid, to pave the way for representatives of the Belarusians in international fora (e.g. meetings which Tsikhanouskaya had with the UN Security Council or the Council of Europe). By supporting the opposition and people persecuted by the regime financially and logistically, states and international organisations can also help them endure in the fight against the regime. What's more, states may force the oppressive regime to make concessions by adopting sanctions, either individually or through international organisations.

Third, while the situation in Belarus is mostly regarded as an issue of human rights and democracy, the international community cannot forget that the scope of Russian influence is also at stake. A potential overthrow of Lukashenka and Belarus's closer relations with Europe would deprive the Kremlin of control over the state. That is why the matter of an armed intervention is mentioned in conversations between Putin and Lukashenka. Russia has already suggested two legal grounds for an intervention.

On the one hand, Lukashenka could ask for military assistance from Russia due to internal unrest. Under international law, any state is entitled to request such assistance from another. The consent of the requesting state is grounds for a military presence – this is how the prohibition of the use of force is not breached. In case of relations between

Russia and Belarus there are two treaties which include norms allowing for intervention in the “brotherhood state” upon request: the Treaty Establishing the Union State; and the Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation. Nevertheless, in case of a treaty norm authorising military assistance, *ad hoc* consent of Lukashenka would be needed anyway. The second justification for a Russian presence in Belarus would be sending “a Russian law enforcement contingent” to support the Belarusian police forces in case the protests continue.

Both as in the case of Ukraine and Georgia, seemingly well-prepared Russian legal argumentation has substantial flaws. As long as military assistance on request could be indeed grounds for the presence of foreign troops, the question is whether Lukashenka still has a mandate (or will have a mandate at the moment he will make such request) to ask Russia to send their forces if he has no legitimate support among Belarusians. Does he have effective power to make such decisions? Moreover, a request to import foreign troops must be voluntary – would it be the case here? These doubts are sufficient to undermine the legality of a potential Russian intervention. The rhetoric of sending an “enforcement contingent” and not regular army troops, does not change much, as the world has already witnessed Russian troops in different disguises.

The EU and NATO states should show their strength and unity and send a strong signal to Moscow that they will not allow a repeat of the Ukrainian scenario to play out. The demonstration of force is not a tool of peace but standing by in the face of another potential offensive prepared by the Kremlin will not help peace either.

As for now, states are not using all the legal tools at their disposal to influence the situation in Belarus. First and foremost, they should demonstrate unity by adopting sanctions against those responsible for the violations of human rights and speak with one voice about the current developments. As time is running out, both given the situation of the protesters and the patience of Moscow, states and international organisations (not only regional, but also universal ones, like the UN) should mobilise to demonstrate that the rule of law may win against an order based on lies and force.



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The August 9th 2020 presidential election that took place in Belarus was followed by an unprecedented wave of social protests against the regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The spark that ignited these protests was the blatant falsification of the results of the election which declared Lukashenka the winner with nearly 80 per cent of the vote. In response to nationwide demonstrations and strikes, the regime responded with brute force, beatings and detaining thousands of protesters.

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