



BELARUS BIWEEKLY NEWS DIGEST

Center for Strategic and International Studies ■ Washington, D.C.

MARCH 18- MARCH 31, 2006

MARCH 19:

TENS OF THOUSANDS FLOCK TO THE CENTER OF MINSK TO CONTEST ELECTION RESULTS

Immediately after the presidential poll was closed, between 10,000 and 20,000 people gathered on October Square in Minsk. They were kept under close guard by hundreds of security forces personnel.

[EUOBSERVER](#) | [NO VIOLENCE IN BELARUS ELECTION PROTESTS](#)

MARCH 20:

LUKASHENKA DECLARED WINNER OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS WITH 82.6% OF THE VOTE

Central Election Commission chief Lidziya Yarmoshyna reported that Lukashenka scored a decisive victory in an election where participation was said to be at 93%. While election observers from Russia consider the elections to be fairly held, OSCE and other western observers contest the democratic legitimacy of the vote.

[RFE/RL](#) | [LUKASHENKA DECLARED WINNER OF BELARUS VOTE](#)

WEST CALLS ELECTION RESULTS FRAUDULENT

The U.S. and EU governments have released statements rejecting the legitimacy of Lukashenka's victory. They refer to the OSCE preliminary report, which documents that the election "failed to meet OSCE commitments for democratic elections."

[STATE.GOV](#) | [FRAUDULENT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN BELARUS](#)

[OSCE](#) | [STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS ON THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN BELARUS](#)

PROTESTORS DEFY COLD AND CAMP OUT ON OCTOBER SQUARE

The numbers of protestors dropped rapidly, though hundreds held out in what has turned into a tent camp on October Square.

[CHARTER97](#) | [MINSK, OCTOBER SQUARE, STRUGGLE CONTINUES](#)

[RFE/RL](#) | [BELARUS: PROTESTS APPEAR TO LOSE MOMENTUM AMID ARRESTS, TRIALS](#)

[NYTIMES](#) | [PROTESTERS CHARGE FRAUD IN BELARUS PRESIDENTIAL VOTE](#)

MARCH 24:

OCTOBER SQUARE CLEARED OF PROTESTERS ON THE FIFTH DAY OF DEMONSTRATIONS

Security Forces cleared tents and antigovernment protestors on the central square in Minsk in what was reported to be a quick operation at three in the morning. All participants in the peaceful demonstration were arrested and transported to detention centers.

[NYTIMES](#) | [BELARUS PROTEST DISPERSED AS POLICE ARREST HUNDREDS](#)

RUSSIA BLAMES THE WEST FOR DISORDER ON THE STREETS OF MINSK

In the first official reaction to the break up of peaceful demonstrations in Minsk, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov blamed the OSCE for stirring discontent with biased reporting of election falsifications.

[RFE/RL](#) | [RUSSIA BLAMES OSCE FOR TENSIONS IN BELARUS](#)

WEST CONDEMNS ARRESTS; EU RESTATES THREAT OF SANCTIONS

The OSCE called on Belarusian authorities to halt their persecution of opposition activists and release recently arrested protesters. In Brussels, the Czech republic led a group of eight countries calling for tougher sanctions on the Lukashenka regime. Lukashenka has “provided proof that he is a dictator and must be treated as such,” said Elmar Brok, chairperson of the committee for foreign policy in the European Parliament.

[EU OBSERVER](#) | [BELARUS PROTESTORS SWEEPED AWAY AS EU CONSIDERS SANCTIONS](#)

[OSCE](#) | [OSCE CHAIRMAN KAREL DE GUCHT CONDEMNS POLICE CRACKDOWN ON PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATORS](#)

[BBC](#) | [WEST TO PUT SANCTIONS ON BELARUS](#)

[DW-WORLD](#) | [BELARUS OPPOSITION FIGURE SEIZED](#)

MARCH 25:

SECOND ROUND OF DEMONSTRATIONS ENDS IN MASS ARRESTS

Despite a strict ban on public protests, approximately 7000 opposition supporters rallied on the streets of Minsk on the anniversary of the declaration of independence of the short-lived Belarusian republic in 1918. Security forces intervened with increasing violence, beating and arresting up to 100 participants. Among the arrested was opposition leader Alyaksandr Kozulin.

[RFE/RL](#) | [MINSK MARCH ENDS IN VIOLENCE, ARRESTS](#)

[BBC NEWS](#) | [BELARUS PROTESTS SPARK CLASHES](#)

OPPOSITION PROCLAIMS BELARUSIAN NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT

Alyaksandr Milinkevich has called for the creation of a united National Liberation Movement to fight for Freedom, Truth and Justice and for “free elections, without Lukashenka.”

[CHARTER97](#) | [ALYAKSANDR MILINKEVICH PROCLAIMS CREATION OF BELARUSIAN NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT](#)

MARCH 29:

NUMBER OF ARRESTS NEARS 1000

The overall number of detentions since the day of the election has reached 1000, according to lawyers and human rights activists. Several foreign journalists are reported to be among those held in special detention facilities.

[LATIMES](#) | [ARRESTS CLIMB TO 1,000 IN CRACKDOWN IN BELARUS PROTESTERS](#)

MARCH 30:

GAZPROM READY TO SIGNIFICANTLY RAISE GAS PRICES IN BELARUS

Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller told a Belarusian delegation that Russian gas deliveries to Belarus are to be charged at European prices by 2007.

[INTERFAX](#) | [BELARUS SHOULD PAY EUROPEAN PRICES FOR GAS IN 2007](#)

KOZULIN FACES CRIMINAL CHARGES FOR LEADERSHIP ROLE IN PROTESTS

Alyaksandr Kozulin, arrested while leading a march toward a detention center, faces charges of organizing group actions and hooliganism, which could carry six years in prison, Belarus' federal prosecutor said.

[NYTIMES](#) | [BELARUS PLANS TO CHARGE DEFEATED CANDIDATE WHO LED PROTEST](#)

MARCH 31:

AFTER HIS TRIP TO POLAND, MILINKEVICH TO BE GREETED IN AUSTRIA

During a visit to Poland, Opposition Leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich discussed the future of EU support for opposition forces in Belarus. In an unprecedented decision, Warsaw took concrete steps to admit expelled Belarusian students to its state universities. Milinkevich is scheduled to meet with Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel on Monday to enlist the European Union's support for a strong follow-up.

[CHARTER97](#) | [POLAND TO ADMIT EXPELLED BELARUSIAN STUDENTS](#)

[REUTERS](#) | [BELARUS PROTEST LEADER TO SEEK EU BACKING IN VIENNA](#)

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STAGE AND POLITICS IN BELARUS
BY ALINA TOURKOVA AND FRANZISKA WELLER

With the end of the Belarusian elections, and the suppression of a series of protests that have followed the election, Belarusian politics have entered a new chapter. This is Act 2 of the saga of Belarus' struggle against oppression, force, and violence. During Act 1, the pre-election phase, the embryonic democratic forces of Belarus were the leading protagonists. Since the election, the well-established international powers have taken the stage; the European Union, United States, and Russia. The conflict that is to be played out on the international stage is not a localized struggle of a few thousand people against their government, but a showdown of the international gurus on the backdrop of strategic interests and alliances.

Despite the opposition's undying domestic efforts to support its "National Liberation Movement", as coined by Alyaksandr Milinkevich, this new phase highlights the role of international players in Belarusian politics. Undoubtedly, over the last twelve years the Lukashenka government has enjoyed a level of relative economic stability, a phenomenon that has been widely regarded as a byproduct of Russia's supply of natural gas at subsidized prices. Continual contact between the two leaders and the creation of a Belarus-Russia union have further demonstrated Russia's strategic interests in maintaining a leading position in Belarusian political developments. On the Western side of the spectrum, the European Union, Belarus' "new neighbor" and major trade partner, has emerged as a strong political player. The United States dominates the third spotlight, as the champion of democracy and freedom across the world.

Although little change in the character of the EU and U.S. policies toward Belarus is expected, some would argue that Russia is going through an extensive process of self-development and character formation. Moscow desires to regain the international recognition it once held, while continuing to face growing criticism of its anti-democratic social and economic policies. Internal conflicts in the North Caucasus region as well as oppressive policies toward independent media and regional elections, have led many to question Russia's true commitment to democracy and its place among major international powers. Russia will soon chair the G8 as well as the Committee of Ministers in the Council of Europe. Russia's role in the Belarusian elections thus seems to be incongruent with Western values of freedom and democracy, and of course, the right to free and fair elections.

However, things are not always so black and white whether in theater or on the international stage. Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller has recently announced Russia's readiness to charge European prices for its gas deliveries to Belarus, a move that can be interpreted as a sign of Russia's decreasing support for Lukashenka and his government. What does this mean in the international context, and what does this mean for Belarus? Is Russia finally demonstrating a true commitment to join the West in its mission to personal and civil freedoms, or is this another PR campaign ahead of the G8 and COE presidency? Has the recognition of being a key international player become a worthy reward for letting go of imperialistic tendencies in the post-Soviet space, or is Lukashenka simply too hard to manage, and a more compliant dictator will be recruited soon?

Russia's true intentions remain unclear, but the international community should remain watchful of this critical development in Moscow's foreign policy, as well as its democratic aspirations. Western governments must voice a clear message of approval of Russia's democratic efforts in the evolution of Russia's policies. Russia must be encouraged to actively support and implement agreements that it is party to under the Council of Europe, including the European Convention on Human Rights. It is the responsibility of the international community to continue to urge Russia to pursue policies that are consistent with universal values and thus preserve the integrity of international institutions such as G8 and the Council of Europe. This is the most effective way to continue the spread of democracy, and to directly help those burgeoning efforts in Belarus. Keeping the spotlight on the politics of Eastern Europe will sustain Belarusian and international democratic forces.