



## Belarus Warning Update: Police Detain Demonstrators as Protests Escalate

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By George Barros

**Belarusian authorities continued their new phase of violent escalation against protesters on October 11.** Belarusian police detained at least 713 protesters on October 11, the highest single-day arrest total to date.<sup>1</sup>

At least one thousand protesters marched in Minsk on Monday, October 12, a higher number than most Monday protests have seen.<sup>2</sup> Belarusian police cracked down on these marchers with stun grenades and tear gas, detained at least 186, and flew five to six Mi-8 transport helicopters over Minsk.<sup>3</sup>

**Some Belarusian protesters began adopting aggressive barricade tactics evocative of the 2014 Ukrainian Euromaidan for the first time on October 12 although on a much smaller scale.** Several dozen protesters created street barricades with burning tires, plastic traffic barriers, and human chains to block traffic in several Minsk neighborhoods the evening of October 12.<sup>4</sup> Riot police dispersed and detained these protesters and dismantled barricades.<sup>5</sup> This escalation will likely prompt self-declared Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko to further accelerate efforts to end protests before they can become more serious.<sup>6</sup>

**Belarusian authorities warned they are prepared to use lethal force to suppress protests “if necessary” on October 12.** Belarusian police reiterated they will not back down and claimed that protests in Minsk have become “organized and extremely radical” due to extremists seeking a color revolution.<sup>7</sup> Authorities likely seek to persuade protesters to stop demonstrating rather than facing more forceful security force crackdowns.

**Lithuania-based Belarusian opposition leader Svitlana Tikhonouskaya demanded Lukashenko’s resignation by October 25 on October 13.** Tikhonouskaya also demanded that Lukashenko free political prisoners and end police violence by October 25.<sup>8</sup> She threatened that protesters will take to the streets en masse to block roads and that employees of all state-owned enterprises will strike if Lukashenko does not comply.<sup>9</sup> Lukashenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin will likely ignore Tikhonouskaya’s demands.<sup>10</sup> It is unclear that Tikhonouskaya can successfully marshal mass protests and strikes after October 25 given Lukashenko’s successful efforts to control protests and strikes so far.<sup>11</sup>

**The Kremlin suffered setbacks in the information operation surrounding its military exercises in Belarus.**

**Three planned participants withdrew from the Unbreakable Brotherhood Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) exercises in Belarus.**<sup>12</sup> Armenia withdrew its participation on October 5 likely due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.<sup>13</sup> Kyrgyzstan withdrew its participation on October 12 for unspecified reasons likely related to ongoing protests in Bishkek.<sup>14</sup> Kazakhstan downgraded its participation in the exercises by sending only seven military officers as observers.<sup>15</sup>

It is unclear how many foreign military personnel deployed to Belarus given last-minute Kyrgyz and Kazakh withdrawals.<sup>16</sup> The CSTO stated on October 7 that approximately 700 CSTO personnel would participate in Unbreakable Brotherhood after Armenia withdrew on October 5.<sup>17</sup> The Russian Ministry of Defense stated on October 12 approximately 140 Russian personnel – likely elements of the Samara-based Second Combined Arms Army – from Russia’s Central Military District deployed to Belarus via military transport aviation at an unspecified “earlier” time.<sup>18</sup> Russia similarly deployed armored vehicles, command and control, and chemical, biological,

radiological, and nuclear defense (CBRN), and mine-clearing equipment to Belarus via rail at an unspecified earlier time.<sup>19</sup>

Putin likely meant for Unbreakable Brotherhood to demonstrate his ability to marshal many former Soviet states into a cohesive military effort. It will instead likely be a smaller-scale version of the bilateral Russia-Belarus exercises held in September—a serious setback in Russia’s hybrid efforts.

### **The European Union added Lukashenko to its list of sanctioned Belarusian officials on October 12.<sup>20</sup>**

ISW will continue monitoring the situation and providing updates.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://t.me/nexta\\_tv/6442](https://t.me/nexta_tv/6442); <https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/news/2020/10/12/842876-v-belorussii-aktsiyah-protesta-II-oktyabrya-zaderzhali-713-chelovek>; <https://www.belta.by/incident/view/mvd-za-narushenie-zakonodatelstva-o-massovyh-meroprijatijah-II-oktjabrja-zaderzhany-713-chelovek-410572-2020/>; <https://t.me/nashaniva/18395>; <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-lukashenko-escalates-crackdown-likely-response-increased-risk>

<sup>2</sup> [https://ratel.kz/perimeter/protesty\\_v\\_belarusi\\_marsh\\_pensionerov\\_massovye\\_zaderzhanija\\_i\\_intervju\\_tihanovskoj](https://ratel.kz/perimeter/protesty_v_belarusi_marsh_pensionerov_massovye_zaderzhanija_i_intervju_tihanovskoj); <https://news.tut.by/society/703887.html>; <https://news.tut.by/society/703831.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://news.liga.net/world/news/siloviki-v-belarusi-razgonyali-marsh-pensionerov-s-pomoschyu-svetoshumovyh-granat-i-gaza-video>; [https://t.me/nexta\\_tv/6438](https://t.me/nexta_tv/6438); <https://t.me/nashaniva/18395>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-54507898>; <https://news.liga.net/world/news/v-minske-jgli-pokryshki-i-stroili-barrikady-siloviki-jestko-razgonyali-demonstrantov-video>

<sup>5</sup> <https://news.liga.net/world/news/v-minske-jgli-pokryshki-i-stroili-barrikady-siloviki-jestko-razgonyali-demonstrantov-video>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/10/belarus-warning-update-lukashenko\\_II.html](http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/10/belarus-warning-update-lukashenko_II.html)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snEieUhSTfU&feature=youtu.be>;

<https://twitter.com/franakviacorka/status/1315648487967645696>; [https://t.me/nexta\\_tv/6473](https://t.me/nexta_tv/6473)

<sup>8</sup> <https://t.me/tsikhanouskaya/261>; <https://meduza.io/news/2020/10/13/svetlana-tihanovskaya-ob-yavila-vlastyam-belarusi-narodnyy-ultimatum>

<sup>9</sup> <https://t.me/tsikhanouskaya/261>; <https://meduza.io/news/2020/10/13/svetlana-tihanovskaya-ob-yavila-vlastyam-belarusi-narodnyy-ultimatum>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/10/belarus-warning-update-protests-in.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/10/belarus-warning-update-putin-seeks.html>; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-kremlin-information-operations.html>

<sup>12</sup> [https://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12318949@egNews](https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12318949@egNews)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/10/belarus-warning-update-kremlin-will.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://ru.sputnik.kg/society/20201012/1050026946/kyrgyzstan-genshtab-odkb-ucheniya-voennosluzhaschie.html>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.tvr.by/news/obshchestvo/na\\_poligone\\_losvido\\_prodolzhaetsya\\_pervyy\\_etap\\_ucheniya\\_nerushimoe\\_bratstvo\\_2020/](https://www.tvr.by/news/obshchestvo/na-poligone_losvido_prodolzhaetsya_pervyy_etap_ucheniya_nerushimoe_bratstvo_2020/);

<sup>16</sup> The Kremlin-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) stated on October 7 that approximately 700 CSTO personnel will participate in annual Unbreakable Brotherhood exercises in Vitebsk, Belarus, from October 12-16.

<http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/10/belarus-warning-update-kremlin-will.html>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/10/belarus-warning-update-kremlin-will.html>

<sup>18</sup> [https://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12318949@egNews](https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12318949@egNews)

<sup>19</sup> [https://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12318949@egNews](https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12318949@egNews)

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/10/12/belarus-eu-adopts-conclusions/>