



## Belarus Warning Update: Putin Seeks Belarus' Integration with Russia via Belarusian Constitutional Amendments

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By George Barros

**Self-declared Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko is adopting tactics for passing constitutional amendments similar to those that Russian President Vladimir Putin used to pass Russian constitutional amendments in early 2020.**<sup>1</sup> The Lukashenko regime began soliciting constitutional amendment proposals from Belarusian citizens on October 3 with a deadline to submit all proposals by October 25.<sup>2</sup> Lukashenko likely seeks to create the impression among Belarusian citizens that they possess political agency. Lukashenko, however, likely has predetermined which constitutional amendments to adopt.

**Putin is likely pressuring Lukashenko to adopt constitutional amendments to formalize the Union State.** The Kremlin and Kremlin-linked Belarusian opposition leaders have repeatedly expressed a desire for Belarusian constitutional reforms, framing amendments as a way to solve issues between the disgruntled Belarusian people and Lukashenko.<sup>3</sup> Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on August 31 that the Kremlin is prepared to help Belarus by sharing the Kremlin's "experience" in writing constitutional amendments—a reference to the Kremlin's changes to the Russian constitution in July 2020.<sup>4</sup> Putin will push for the amendments to formalize Belarusian integration with Russia via the Union State mechanism. Lukashenko may continue efforts to stall or weaken that process. Lukashenko will insist, for his part, that any reduction in his power or control over Belarus be cosmetic.<sup>5</sup> Putin and his allies or proxies may push for more dramatic weakening of Lukashenko's dictatorial hold either as leverage to drive him to accept integration or to create future openings to manipulate the political situation in Belarus.

**Lukashenko is tightening control over the international media space over Belarus.** Belarus' Ministry of Foreign Affairs canceled all foreign journalist accreditations on October 2.<sup>6</sup> Lukashenko is likely setting conditions to intensify his censorship campaign.

**Lukashenko's intensified detention campaign likely degraded participation in the weekly Saturday women's march.** A few hundred protesters participated in the weekly Saturday women's march on October 3—a significant decrease from the last women's march, which had approximately 2,000 participants.<sup>7</sup> Protesters did not march as a single mass but marched in a dispersed manner throughout Minsk as individuals or small groups of two to six people.<sup>8</sup> Women's march participation has steeply declined for the past three weeks and will likely continue to decrease as winter approaches.<sup>9</sup>

**Protesters and police in the Sunday march were slightly more aggressive than in recent weeks.** Approximately 100,000 protesters marched in Minsk in the weekly Sunday march on October 4.<sup>10</sup> Protesters unsuccessfully attempted to dismantle a police mobile water cannon truck for the first time.<sup>11</sup> Belarusian riot police more actively detained protesters during the march; police previously arrested isolated groups of protesters before and after most protesters congregated.<sup>12</sup> Police detained no fewer than 317 people, including at least 17 Belarusian journalists.<sup>13</sup> Conflict between riot police and protesters may intensify further in future Sunday marches.

ISW will continue monitoring the situation and providing updates.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/vladimir-putins-staged-power-play>; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/07/russia-in-review-putin-deploys-new.html>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.b-g\(.\)by/news/deputaty-predlozhili-belorusam-do-25-oktyabrya-prisyilat-svoi-predlozheniya-po-obnovleniyu-konstitucii/](https://www.b-g(.)by/news/deputaty-predlozhili-belorusam-do-25-oktyabrya-prisyilat-svoi-predlozheniya-po-obnovleniyu-konstitucii/); [https://news.tut\(.\)by/economics/702688.html](https://news.tut(.)by/economics/702688.html)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/putin-remains-dissatisfied-with.html>; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/warning-kremlin-linked-belarusian.html>; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/warning-lukashenko-deports-opposition.html>; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/warning-kremlin-linked-belarusian.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-kremlin-information-operations.html>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.b-g\(.\)by/news/deputaty-predlozhili-belorusam-do-25-oktyabrya-prisyilat-svoi-predlozheniya-po-obnovleniyu-konstitucii/](https://www.b-g(.)by/news/deputaty-predlozhili-belorusam-do-25-oktyabrya-prisyilat-svoi-predlozheniya-po-obnovleniyu-konstitucii/); [https://news.tut\(.\)by/economics/702688.html](https://news.tut(.)by/economics/702688.html)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.mfa.gov\(.\)by/press/news\\_mfa/edfd3a91aec30891.html](https://www.mfa.gov(.)by/press/news_mfa/edfd3a91aec30891.html)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/belarus/30871847.html>; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/belarus-warning-update-kremlin-may-have.html>

<sup>8</sup> [https://people.onliner\(.\)by/2020/10/03/zhenshhiny-s-cvetami](https://people.onliner(.)by/2020/10/03/zhenshhiny-s-cvetami); [http://belapan\(.\)com/archive/2020/10/03/ru\\_1062429/](http://belapan(.)com/archive/2020/10/03/ru_1062429/); <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/belarus/30871847.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/belarus-warning-update-kremlin-may-have.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/europe/thousands-take-streets-minsk-ongoing-protests>

<sup>11</sup> <https://twitter.com/BFreeTheatre/status/1312735056960589824>;

<https://twitter.com/NowBelarus/status/1313095122100289537/photo/1>

<sup>12</sup> [https://twitter.com/Den\\_2042/status/1312774556596219904](https://twitter.com/Den_2042/status/1312774556596219904)

<sup>13</sup> [https://naviny\(.\)media/new/20201005/1601895745-mvd-v-voskresene-akciyah-protesta-byli-zaderzhany-317-grazhdan](https://naviny(.)media/new/20201005/1601895745-mvd-v-voskresene-akciyah-protesta-byli-zaderzhany-317-grazhdan);

<https://twitter.com/HannaLiubakova/status/1313005310320218112>