

**Belarus 2020:**

**Presidential election**

**Protests**

**Repressions**

# Belarus

- Independent state since December 1991
- Population : 9.4 million (dominated by belorussians and russians)
- Economics
  - developing with very high ranking in the Human Development Index
  - GDP/p.c. ~20,000\$ (66<sup>th</sup>, 2020), GDP growths : 1.2% (2020)
  - large state-owned sector, large agricultural sector
  - main trade partners : Russian Federation and EU
- Political system : presidential republic
  - incumbent president : Aliaksandr Lukashenka (autocratic leader, in power since 1994)
- Democracy index rating is the lowest in Europe, the country is labelled as "not free" by Freedom House, as "repressed" in the Index of Economic Freedom, and is rated as the worst country for press freedom in Europe

# 2020 : the year of presidential election in Belarus

- 2020 was the year of hope for Belorussians
  - many citizens strived for changes in political climate and civil life, considering election as the only peaceful way to end Lukashenka's dictatorship
- Lukashenka runs for his sixth term in the office
- His main rival is Sviatlana Tsihanouskaya (teacher and interpreter). She has been nominated as a common candidate from opposition
- Many candidates were denied the registration on ridiculous grounds
- Members of initiative group of opposition candidates were threatened and intimidated by anonymous people
- One of the strongest opponents and critics of Lukashenka, Viktor Babaryka, former chairman of the management board of Bank “Belgazprombank”, is accused of tax evasion and financial fraud, denied registration by the Central Election Commission and imprisoned

# Programme of Tsihanouskaya

- Tsihanouskaya has repeatedly stated that her main goal as a potential winner of the presidential race would be to free all political prisoners and establish new and democratic election within six months of taking office
- She has also pledged to set a referendum on returning to the original draft of the 1994 Belarusian constitution, reinstating a limit of two terms for the president,
- Economic platform:
  - increase importance of small and medium sized businesses in the Belorussian economy
  - offer interest free loans to small and medium sized businesses
  - regulate the procedure of state inspections of private entities and provide legal protection for foreign investors
  - allow profitable state owned enterprises to continue to operate, while requiring unprofitable state owned enterprises to get help from outside professionals

# Presidential Election. Official Results and Independent Assessment

- Presidential election took place on August 9<sup>th</sup> 2020
  - the results of exit pools, published by the Central Election Commission the same evening, gave Tsihanouskaya 10% of votes and Lukashenka 80% of votes
- Independent online monitor platforms Golos (Voice) and Zubr (Bison) and the Honest People initiative have presented their report on Belarus's presidential election [1,2], stating that
  - elections were not legitimate, numerous falsifications were discovered;
  - final results published by the CEC contradict the official records from the polling stations across the country;
  - votes for Sviatlana Tsihanouskaya were significantly reduced

[1] <https://www.voiceofbelarus.com/golos-final-election-report>

[2] <https://www.desy.de/~rasp/Voice-Report-En.pdf>

# Protests and Repressions

- Supposedly fraudulent election caused indignation among Belorussians
- People went to streets of major cities, expressing their dissatisfaction and demanding fair count of votes
  - initial protests turn into confrontation of protesters and riot police; the latter used tear gas, rubber bullets and flashbangs
  - security forces arrested around 3.000 protesters
  - ~200 protesters and 21 policemen have been severely injured
- In the next days some opposition leaders were detained and then driven away from the country, some fled the country voluntarily fearing repressions
  - Tsihanouskaya was forced to leave Belarus and moved to Lithuania
- Leaders of opposition called for protesters to avoid confrontation with the interior troops and police and since August 12<sup>th</sup> protests took the form of peaceful rallies

# Protests and Repressions

- Since August 12<sup>th</sup> peaceful demonstrations took place every weekend culminating in two big rallies
  - August 16<sup>th</sup> : ~200.000 in Minsk (~300.000 across the country)
  - August 23<sup>rd</sup> : ~250.000 in Minsk (~500.000 across the country)
- Despite its peaceful character protests have faced violent crackdown by the riot police, interior troops and state security agencies
  - activists are detained, fined and sentences to imprisonment
  - the United Nation Human Rights Office cited on 1 September more than 450 documented cases of torture and ill-treatment of detainees [3]
  - the scale of repressions has been documented by the Human Rights Center “Viasna” (condensed information in form of charts is in [4])
- As a result of repressions protests ceased by the end of 2020 and full scale marches and rallies didn't resume in spring 2021

[3] <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26199&LangID=E>

[4] <https://www.desy.de/~rasp/FactsOfRepression.pdf>

# Repressions against Academic Community

- Since September 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 organized initiatives and individual activists from the academic community have expressed their civic position through participation in solidarity marches, peaceful protests on university sites, withdrawal from pro-government organization, sending petitions to the Human Rights Organization
- Activism in academic community have encountered strong oppression from the administration of universities and the security forces
- About 450 students and lecturers have been detained during protests
  - around 130 students have been expelled from universities
  - around 90 students have been fined
  - 13 students were sentenced to imprisonment on criminal charges [5]
  - more than 20 lectures were fined or forced to resign
- Many of repressed students have found refuge in Lithuania and Poland, where they continued education thanks to a numerous civil initiatives
- Belorussian Students' Association (BSA) has prepared document reporting on protests within and repressions against the Belorussian academic community [6]

[5] <https://zbsunion.by/studpolitze/en>

[6] [https://www.desy.de/~rasp/BSA\\_Report.pdf](https://www.desy.de/~rasp/BSA_Report.pdf)



# internet sources and web pages

- Site of Belorussian Human Rights Initiative “Viasna” (“Spring”)  
<http://spring96.org/en>
- Libereco – German-Swiss non-governmental organisation dedicated to the protection of human rights in Belarus and Ukraine  
<https://www.lphr.org/en/>
- Repression and resistance in Belarus: a monthly chronology  
<https://ifex.org/repression-and-resistance-in-belarus-a-monthly-chronology>
- Article on civil initiatives in Lithuania, supporting Belorussian students  
<https://neweasterneurope.eu/2021/02/15/expelled-and-persecuted-belarusian-students-find-refuge-at-lithuanian-universities/>