

Economy in recession, protests continue despite repressions – Belarus civil society digest

For a whole month, starting from August 9th, Belarusians continue daily protests demanding new presidential elections. The traditional [Sunday's rallies](#) gather hundreds of thousands of people in Minsk and thousands in regions. Last Sunday, on September 6th, for the first time, peaceful protests were overshadowed by police provocations.

- **Protests and solidarity actions** across the country become decentralized and self-organized. The bright example is the [Minsk courtyard on Chervyakova](#), where neighbors persistently restore a mural with *DJs of Change* and hang white-red-white flags every time the police removes them. [Students](#) and [university teachers](#), [athletes](#), [IT sector](#), [women](#) continue civic resistance in different forms.
- **Strikes.** Amid intimidation and new [arrests](#) of strike committee leaders, focal resistance continues. Miner [handcuffs himself](#) to protest election results and lawlessness. On September 11, the Minsk Court considered the [legality of the strike](#) at Belaruskali enterprise; those who came to the courthouse to support the workers were [detained](#).
- **Economy in recession.** During the month of protests, the exchange rates of the dollar and euro [rose to a record](#) by 18%-27% since the beginning of the year. Fearing devaluation, the population is buying up the currency and [withdrawing deposits](#) (\$226 million during the last month). In August, the National Bank spent 15%

of its gold and foreign exchange reserves to support the Belarusian ruble. In 2020, the [budget is in deficit](#) and is \$2.4 billion.

- **Civil society** continues monitoring, financial and other [support](#) to victims of repression. [Belarus Free Theatre](#) initiates a global artistic solidarity campaign with Belarus. The [Inclusive Barista](#) initiative offers a free cup of coffee to protesters. The [Belarusian National Platform](#) urges to postpone the launch of Belarusian NPP due to the political crisis. CSO leaders are [detained](#), while a number of CSOs are ordered to report on the [use of foreign aid](#) (grants) since the beginning of the year.
- **Coordination Council.** Six out of seven leaders of the Coordination Council were either detained or forcibly taken abroad. [Maria Kolesnikova](#) averted expulsion by tearing up her passport and later was [arrested](#) in a criminal case on the seizure of power. Only Nobel laureate [Svetlana Alexievich](#) is currently at large but tells that strangers terrorize her – [EU Ambassadors](#) visited her at home to support. The opposition leader [Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya](#) [encourages](#) everyone to become members of the Coordination Council.
- **Repressions.** The authorities increase the degree of brutality but have not yet reached the level of the first days of repressions. Lukashenka [states](#) that “sometimes there is no time for laws, and tough measures must be taken to stop all the rubbish.” At least [10,500 people were detained](#) during the month of protests. [Criminal cases](#) are initiated against over 100 participants of post-election protests. [58 political prisoners](#) remain in jail, including 9 new political prisoners this week – [Maria Kolesnikova](#), [PandaDoc IT company](#) staff, and others.

- **Crackdown on independent media.** The Ministry of Information issued the [3rd warning](#) to [TUT.BY](#) portal, while two warnings during the year are enough to block the website. RT, a Russian state-controlled TV network, confirms that [32 Russian journalists](#) work in Belarus now. [Investigative Committee](#) responded to BAJ that its appeal concerning the detention of 47 journalists was “abstract”. The new public campaign [MediaSOL](#) raises money to help independent media and journalists.
- **International reaction.** The [U.S.](#) calls on the Belarusian authorities to end the violence against their own people. The [EU High Representative](#) expects the Belarusian authorities to engage in an inclusive national dialogue. [Lithuania](#) recognizes Tsikhanouskaya as the “leader elected by Belarusian people” and is prepared to [assume leadership](#) for mediating the dialogue in Belarus. Three “brave women,” Tsikhanouskaya, Kalesnikava, and Tsapkala have been [nominated](#) for Sakharov Prize. [PACE](#) sets up an international body to investigate human rights crimes in Belarus. Lukashenka will [visit Moscow](#) next week.
- **COVID-19.** Over 73,000 Belarusians positively tested for and 738 died [due to COVID-19](#). Meanwhile, the UN data indicates that the mortality rate for the first half of the year in Belarus [beats a five-year record](#) and is 5,600 people more than a year earlier. IMF [refuses](#) to allocate \$940 million to Belarus to counter the pandemic consequences.

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories already available in English-language media.