

European  
Elections monitor

from **Corinne Deloy**  
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**ANALYSIS**  
1 month before  
the poll

# Presidential «Election» in Belarus, 19<sup>th</sup> December 2010

On 14<sup>th</sup> September the delegates of the Chamber of Representatives of Belarus (Palata pretsaviteley) voted by a wide majority (108 of 110 representatives) in support of a "presidential election" on 19<sup>th</sup> December next. In all likelihood the present holder of the post, Aleksander Lukashenko in office since 20<sup>th</sup> July 1994, is due to be reconfirmed to office at the end of the year and probably this will take place in the first round as it usually does in Belarus!

Aleksander Lukashenko may however find it a bit more difficult to win even though the opposition forces, qualified by him as enemies of the people do not believe in the organisation of free, transparent elections in a dictatorial regime.

The "electoral" parody is taking place three months early. The main reason for this is the present tension between Belarus and Russia. Moscow is accusing Minsk of not having honoured its promise as it has refused to acknowledge the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and of having granted asylum to Kurmanbek Bakiev. At the beginning of September Aleksander Lukashenko accused Russia of having organised a Molotov cocktail attack against its embassy in order to discredit the Belarus regime.

"The electoral campaign has been built around anti-Russian themes and direct accusations against Moscow. With what he has said not only has Aleksander Lukashenko infringed diplomatic norms but he has also transgressed those of human decency," declared Russian President Dmitri Medvedev (United Russia, ER). "The Belarus authorities are known for continually working to create an enemy to present to the people. Now it is Russia which is being promoted as Minsk's main enemy," he added. He was quick to point out Lukashenko's domestic problems asking him to bring to court several affairs of disappearances (or suspicious deaths) that have taken place in the country over the last few years. The most recent is that of 36 year old Oleg Bebenine, the founding journalist and leader of the biggest Belarus opposition internet site Charter97.org, who was found hanged in its dacha near Minsk on 3<sup>rd</sup> September last. In reaction to these accusations at the end of September Lukashenko accused Dmitri

Medvedev's administration of "orchestrating a flood of shameful lies, absurdities and disinformation about Belarus."

In this battle between the two countries Moscow has a weapon of size: its mineral wealth. Indeed Dmitri Medvedev recalled his Belarus "counterpart" that his country provided Minsk with oil and gas at preferential prices (185\$ per 1,000 m<sup>3</sup> of gas) for 4 billion \$ per year. Russia may therefore review its gas prices upwards (1,000 m<sup>3</sup> may rise to 200 \$).

Aleksander Lukashenko, who promised to raise the average salary (bringing it up from 430 to 500\$), perceived possible discontent amongst the population if gas tariffs went up (this usually happens at the end of the year and would cancel out the effects of any salary rises). It has therefore become urgent for him to organise a pseudo-election as quickly as possible.

## The Presidential Function

Belarus has been living under an authoritarian regime in which Aleksander Lukashenko holds all the power. Nostalgic of the Soviet era and an adept of its repressive methods he reigns over a country which he governs with an iron fist.

The Belarus regime controls the political parties – many political opponents are imprisoned – the unions, associations, media – all of the administration and finally society. The country holds the sad record of the

greatest number of European Parliament resolutions condemning the action undertaken by its authorities.

Shunned by the international community for its infringements of Human Rights, Aleksander Lukashenko is prohibited from travelling and staying in both the EU and the USA – he has closed Belarus which he has isolated from the rest of the world – having established there a State ideology taught in secondary schools and higher education establishments as well as in companies.

In November 1996 two years after his accession to the presidency (20<sup>th</sup> July 1994) Aleksander Lukashenko organised a referendum which enabled him to extend his mandate by a further two years and also his prerogatives – and this came whilst the electoral law prohibited any modification to the country's Constitution by referendum. He was then re-elected to the supreme office for a five year mandate on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2001 in the first round of voting with 75.6% of the vote against 15.65% for his main adversary, opposition candidate, Vladimir Goncharik. This election was acknowledged as valid by OSCE observers but was vigorously challenged by the opposition.

On 17<sup>th</sup> October 2004 when general "elections" were organised and denounced as fraudulent by observers in charge of monitoring the election since the Constitution prohibited him from standing a third time, Lukashenko organised another popular consultation whereby he achieved the adoption of an amendment to the Constitution removing the limit on the number of elections of the same person as President. Lukashenko is therefore running for the fourth consecutive time.

### Candidates running in the Election

10 people are standing to date (the deadline for candidacy is set for 23<sup>rd</sup> November):

- Aleksander Lukashenko,
- Vladimir Neklyhiaiev, 64 years old, leader of the "Tell the Truth" movement, seen as the only true adversary. Allied to Aleksander Lukashenko in his first term in office he then went into exile abroad and for five years lived in Finland and then Poland. "I am there to bring you victory" is his chosen slogan saying that he has decided to take part in the election because of the lack of perspectives for opponents to Lukashenko;
- Rylhor Kastusyow, chairman of the People's Front;

- Dmitri Us, director of the Tryvium company;
- Nikolai Statkevich, co-founder of the Social Democratic Party;
- Jaroslav Romantchouk, a 44 year-old economist and deputy chair of the Civil Unity Party;
- Vitali Rimachevski, co-chair of the Christian Democratic Party;
- Andrei Sannikov, leader of European Belarus, a movement created in 2008 to promote the cause of Minsk's accession to the EU;
- Alexei Mikhalevich, lawyer and member of the Modernisation Union;
- Viktor Terechtchenko, former head of the international management institute of Minsk, chairman of the Council of the Association of SME's, the unfortunate candidate in the previous elections in 1994 and 2001. Anyone wanting to take part in the "election" has to collate an obligatory 100,000 signatures to be registered officially.

Aleksander Milinkevich, chair of the Freedom Movement, the only democratic opposition candidate in the election on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2006 (officially he won 6% of the vote but always maintained that he won 18%), chose not to stand. "I do not want just to be a stand-in and I cannot take part in elections that are not transparent," declared the man to whom European Parliament awarded the Sakharov Prize for the Freedom of Expression in 2006 and who, by refusing to participate, wants to highlight the illegitimacy of the election.

Aleksander Milinkevich believes that the 2010 election is very different from the one in 2006. "In 2006 power was greater and there was no conflict with Russia. Today Aleksander Lukashenko is weaker than ever, the economy is on the edge of the abyss and there is an information war on with Russia," he stresses.

He regrets the division of the opposition which in his opinion has lost its influence since 2007 the year when the internal fighting started. "The opposition's disunion is the main reason why I refused to take part in the presidential election. The Belarusians see this negatively which means that we shall not succeed in motivating the electorate," he declared.

Aleksander Milinkevich is expecting Aleksander Lukashenko's victory on 19<sup>th</sup> December next which he has already qualified as illegitimate. He will support the candidate he thinks the most committed to a rappro-

chement between Belarus and the European Union. At the beginning of November Guido Westerwelle (Liberal Democratic Party, FDP) and Radoslaw Sikorski (Civic Platform, PO) respectively the Foreign Ministers of Germany and Poland travelled to Minsk and met Aleksander Lukashenko. *"Belarus's path to the EU entails the holding of an honest, free presidential election,"* they declared. *"We see that there are no conditions for democratic elections in Belarus,"* indicated Ronald Pofalla, Head of the German Chancellorship. However Lukashenko re-iterated his determination to cooperate with Europe saying that his country needed Europe and that Europe also needed Belarus. *"The steps taken by the EU do not help in making rapid improvements to relations, I'm talking of sanctions and economic restrictions,"* he indicated. Brussels relaxed restrictions with regard to visas for several Belarus personalities in October. The behaviour of the Belarus authorities, caught between the tension with their Russian neighbour and

their need for international recognition has relaxed its attitude with regard to the opposition. Hence candidates did not encounter any specific problems to collate the vital signatures for their registration with the Central Electoral Commission. In addition to this the latter adopted a resolution on 5<sup>th</sup> November authorising candidates to raise funds for their campaign. The money they have will be used to buy air time on TV or the radio, space in newspapers, to rent offices, pay for transport costs or for equipment etc ... The opposition parties which are greatly divided do not enjoy great support amongst the public who see in Lukashenko an element of stability which is vital for the country. On 25<sup>th</sup> April last local elections took place. Amongst the 25,035 people standing only 240 were opposition candidates. None were elected. Just one month before the election no one is forecasting that Lukashenko will not be confirmed as head of Belarus on 19<sup>th</sup> December next.

#### Reminder of the "Election" Results on 19 March 2006 in Belarus

Turnout: 92.6%

Candidates	% of votes won
Aleksander Lukashenko	82.6
Aleksander Milinkevich (Unified Democratic Forces)	6
Serguey Gaydukevich (Democratic Liberal Party)	3.5
Aleksander Kazuline (Social Democratic Party)	2.3

Source : BBC

## Presidential «Election» in Belarus, a round up one week before the vote

The Belarusians are being called to vote on 19<sup>th</sup> December to appoint their "President"! Sixteen people were running but only ten managed to collate the necessary 100,000 signatures to be able to participate. These are:

- the present "title" holder, Aleksander Lukashenko, in office sine 20<sup>th</sup> July 1994;
- Vladimir Nekljaiev;
- Jaroslav Romantchouk, Vice-President of the Civilian Unity Party;

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- Andreï Sannikov, leader of European Belarus;
- Viktor Tereshchenko, chairman of the council of the Small and Medium Sized Enterprise Association;
- Ryhor Kastusyow, chairman of the People's Front;
- Dmitri Us, Director of the company Tryvium;
- Nikolai Statkevich, co-founder of the Social Democratic Party;
- Vitali Rimachevski, co- chairman of the Christiane Democratic Party;
- Alexey Mikhalevich, lawyer and member of the Modernisation Union.

One thousand international observers are expected including 400 who belong to the OSCE led by Geert-Hinrich Ahrens. 5,000 Belarusians will also be observing the election. The rights of international observers have been extended since the Central Electoral Commission adopted a law whereby they may now attend the counting of the voting slips!

Another novelty is that from 22<sup>nd</sup> November to 3<sup>rd</sup> December each candidate had the opportunity to broadcast his programme on TV and on the radio for a 30 minute period. Lukashenko, omnipresent in the media, decided not to use his airtime! No arrests were recorded on 24<sup>th</sup> November when around 1,000 people representing an opposition party rallied in the Kastychnitskaya Square in Minsk to demand the holding of a real election in line with democratic rules. *"We have come so that we can win,"* declared Vladimir Neklyaev. Vitali Rimachevski and Nikolay Statkevich took part in the rally whilst Andrey Sannikov and Alexey Mikhalevich preferred not to. Nikolay Statkevich put forward the demonstrators' three demands: the right for each candidate to have a representative within the Electoral Commission (at present less than 1% of the local electoral commissions' managers belong to the opposition forces), the public counting of the votes and the abolition of the early vote which is being denounced as a means to falsify the results! Indeed the electoral law enables the Belarus to fulfil their civic duty five days leading up to the election. This early vote was abolished in Ukraine and Georgia after their respective "coloured" revolutions. *"I have a 70% approval rate whilst the opposition only has 1.5% why would I need to cheat?"* repeats Aleksander Lukashenko.

The European Union has said it would grant Belarus 3 billion € if "the presidential election" was democratic. Facing Lukashenko is a divided opposition; the 9 other candidates offer different programmes. Jaroslav Romanchuk, who says he is the only professional economist

with a team of professional reformers at his disposal, has promised to create one million jobs if he wins. He said that he would order an inquiry into the disappearance of opponents during Aleksander Lukashenko's time in office. Andrey Sannikov is promising many changes if he wins – the true separation of power, a modification to the electoral law, the organisation of free local elections, the independence of the legal and Parliamentary systems, an improvement in the private sector, an increase in the benefit given for the birth of a child, a decrease in housing prices, an increase in retirement pensions and the modernisation of the economy. He is promising Belarus' entry into the WTO within the next two years and in the long run, membership of the EU. Andrey Sannikov is against his country joining NATO but hopes to reduce the length of military service to one year (at present it lasts 18 months, for university graduates service lasts 12 months). *"It is shameful that our country is qualified as the last dictatorship in Europe. We have an historic chance to rid ourselves of this odious regime and live in an independent European country,"* he said. He wants to do away with State ideology lessons taught in secondary and higher education and in companies. *"The country needs patriots and citizens more than obedient slaves,"* he stressed saying that he was certain that Aleksander Lukashenko would lose.

An interesting fact: Lukashenko's programme has been published in the State newspapers. But three of them refused to publish the programme put forward by Dmitri Us. He says that the electoral system is the same as that of Germany in the 1930's.

Vladimir Neklyaev and Andrey Sannikov said that they were going to form an electoral bloc to counter fraud. *"We shall do nothing against one another,"* stressed Vladimir Neklyaev who chose to enter politics "because poetry cannot change life just make it more beautiful, and I want to change and improve life. I know it can be done." Vladimir Neklyaev has said that he would offer

19,000 € to families for the birth of a child and that he would devote his first law to SME's.

Aleksander Lukashenko continues to maintain that the opposition is being funded from abroad notably by France, Lithuania, Poland and Germany. *"We know that Andrey Sannikov and Vladimir Neklyayev are being funded by Russia,"* he declared in the French daily, *"Le Figaro"* on 29<sup>th</sup> November last.

Relations between Minsk and Moscow have been extremely tense over the last few months. *"Not only has Aleksander Lukashenko infringed all diplomatic norms but also those of human decency,"* declared Russian President Dmitri Medvedev after the Belarus satrap accused Moscow of having organised a Molotov cocktail attack against the Minsk embassy in an attempt to discredit his regime. At the end of the September Aleksander Lukashenko said that Dmitri Medvedev's administration *"was orchestrating a flood of shameful lies, absurdities and disinformation about Belarus."*

Moscow demands the greatest loyalty of its closest neighbours and is accusing Minsk of not having honoured its promise since it refused to acknowledge the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia; it also granted asylum to Kurmanbek Bakyev, the former President of

Kirghizstan (2005-2010), who was forced to resign on 15<sup>th</sup> April last. The Russian authorities consider that the presence of autocratic leaders hostile to any reform in neighbouring countries reduces their own room to manoeuvre. However no one thinks that Moscow can question Aleksander Lukashenko's legitimacy if, as expected, he wins this so-called election. In addition to this Russia did not choose to support the opposition candidate. In the tense atmosphere that reigns at present both opposition candidates are standing as friends of Russia, since the Belarus population is traditionally very much in support of Russia.

Aleksander Lukashenko has no real challenger. The only real threat lies in turnout. He is extremely popular in rural areas of Belarus and amongst the elderly who are the greatest in number to vote. *"If Aleksander Lukashenko is in power it is because that when he makes a promise he keeps it whatever happens. People know this and appreciate it,"* maintains the dictator.

All of the polls forecast his victory on 19<sup>th</sup> December. Economist Yaroslav Romanchuk is due to come 2<sup>nd</sup>, followed by Andrey Sannikov then Vladimir Neklyayev according to a poll by the Ukrainian institute, Socium Research Centre.

## Presidential «Election» in Belarus, 19<sup>th</sup> December 2010

**Unsurprisingly Alexander Lukashenko retains his post. Several opposition candidates are imprisoned after a demonstration denouncing fraud.**

As expected Alexander Lukashenko won the pseudo-election in the first round on 19<sup>th</sup> December with 79.7% of the vote. He came out ahead of former Deputy Foreign Minister and leader of European Belarus Andrey Sannikov and poet and leader of the movement Govori Pravdou (Speak the truth!), Vladimir Neklyayev, who won 6.1% each! None of the seven other candidates won more than 5% of the vote!

Turnout rose to 90.66% i.e. very slightly below the figure recorded during the pseudo election on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2006 (1.9 points less).

In office since 1994 Alexander Lukashenko has won for the fourth consecutive time! He achieved a score 2.9 points lower in comparison with March 2006. *"The*

*counting of the voting slips will probably not be fair and transparent. But – and this is a vital detail – if Alexander Lukashenko is declared winner with around 50% of the*

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vote this might be credible. However a result of 75% of the vote or more may incite the opposition to brave the Arctic temperatures to demonstrate against the results," said Arkady Moshes, an analyst from the Finnish Institute of International Affairs before 19<sup>th</sup> December.

On the appeal of the seven opposition candidates who wanted to protest against the expected victory Alexander Lukashenko around 10,000 people rallied in October Square in Minsk brandishing red and white flags of Belarus and blue and gold ones of the European Union shouting "For Freedom!" and "Long Live Belarus" but also "Elections without Lukashenko" and "Leave, Leave" addressing the dictator.

"Do not worry, there will be no one in October square this evening," declared Alexander Lukashenko earlier on in the day adding, "In no way can we speak of the falsification of the election." The opposition did however denounce massive fraud in the voting slips of those who fulfilled their civic duty early (estimated at around one third of the vote 31.3% in 2006) i.e. five days before the election. Early voting always escapes the control of international observers.

"This is where Belarus declared its independence in 1991 and this is where Alexander Lukashenko's dictatorship will end today. Alexander Lukashenko did not win the election, he cannot become President of the Republic. He is an usurper. In Minsk he only won 25% of the vote. A second round must be organised," declared Andrey Sannikov. The anti-riot police which had been placed on red-alert violently dispersed demonstrators some of whom tried to take the seat of the Presidency attacking its doors and windows. Several hundred people were arrested. Two candidates were injured: Vitali Rimashevski, co-chair of the Christian Democratic Party was taken to hospital after suffering a head injury during a police charge and Vladimir Neklyayev also suffering a head injury was evacuated by ambulance. "This election is fraudulent. A free vote is impossible under this dictatorship," he declared.

Seven of the nine opposition candidates – Vladimir Neklyayev, Andrey Sannikov, Nikolay Statkevich (Social Democratic Party), Ryhor Kastusyow (People's Front), Vitali Rimashevsky (Christian Democratic Party), Grigori Kostushev (Liberal Democratic Party), Alexey Mikhalovich (Modernisation Union) and Dmitir Us (director of the Tryvium Company) were arrested or imprisoned!

President of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek condemned "the cowardly attack" suffered by Vladimir Neklyayev, and High Representative Catherine Ashton condemned the violence used against the opposition [1]. The USA denounced the use of force by the authorities. "The USA condemns firmly the violence employed during the election in Belarus. We are particularly concerned about the excessive use of force by the authorities, notably with regard to candidates who were beaten and arrested as well as against journalists and members of civil society. We call on the government of Belarus to show restraint in the wake of the electoral process which must not be marked by more intimidation and violence," indicated the American Embassy in Minsk. In March 2006 demonstrators set up their tents in October Square before being evicted five days later by the police forces. Some people were then imprisoned.

The way the pseudo election was run, the size of Alexander Lukashenko's victory and his management of the opposition demonstrations may be decisive in the development of relations between Belarus and the European Union. Lukashenko seemed more concerned about giving the European Union guarantees than about relations between Moscow and Minsk over the last few months. "We want to react to western journalists' comments who qualify our leader as the last dictator in Europe," declared Pavel Legky, spokesperson for the Alexander Lukashenko's Presidency. Indeed the latter has been banned from staying in the EU and the USA since 2002 because of his repeated Human Rights infringements. Belarus holds the sad record of the greatest number of European Parliament resolutions condemning the behaviour of its authorities. Its status as special guest at the Council of Europe has been suspended since 1997. Before the closure of the polling stations Geert Hinrich Ahrens, head of the 400 OSCE observers declared that the election had taken place in "better conditions than on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2006."

Although the campaign was freer than that of the previous election of the same type in 2006 opponents and many political analysts believe that it was just a simulation of democracy with the aim of achieving a satisfecit on the part of OSCE observers and this completely relative liberalisation will not go beyond the election period. "It's all playacting. Behind the scenes we can see that the regime is getting harder," says sociologist Oleg Manaev.

1. [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/118638.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/118638.pdf)

On 24<sup>th</sup> November around 1000 people representing some of the opposition forces rallied in the Kastychnitskaya Square (Independence Square) in Minsk to demand the holding of a real presidential election in line with democratic rules and no arrest was reported although the demonstration was prohibited. All of the candidates were allowed to speak for 30 minutes on TV and the radio during which time Andrey Sannikov was able to call on Belarusian's to "*chase the pig from the garden*". "*The executive facilitated candidates' airtime and Belarusian citizens discovered politics,*" said Viktor Tereshchenko, former director of the international institute for management in Minsk and present chair of the board of the Association of SME's. For the first time international observers' rights were extended since the Electoral Commission adopted a decision authorising them to attend the counting of voting slips.

Alexander Lukashenko, aged 56 originally from Vitebsk, is a graduate of the History Faculty of Moguilev and of the Agricultural Academy. Former teacher of communist ideology for the Red Army and former political captain for the border guards he became manager of a sovkhوزه (collective farm) in 1987. Elected to the Supreme Soviet of Soviet Belarus in 1991 (he was the only member of the Belarus Parliament to vote against the treaty dissolving the Soviet Union), he was appointed president of the parliamentary anti-corruption committee of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus two years later. On 20<sup>th</sup> July 1994 he became the President of the Republic. Two years later whilst Belarus had banned any modification to the Constitution by referendum Alexander Lukashenko organised a popular consultation enabling him to extend the term of his first mandate by two years (which ended in 2001) and to extend his prerogatives. He was

re-appointed as head of State in the first round on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2001 for a five year mandate by 75.65% of the vote against 15.65% for his main rival Vladimir Gontcharik. This election, the results of which were challenged vigorously by the opposition, was not acknowledged by OSCE observers.

On 17<sup>th</sup> October 2004 the last day of the general elections, since the Belarus Constitution prohibited him from running for a third term, Alexander Lukashenko organised a second referendum to stay in power - the former were denounced as fraudulent by the observers who were responsible for monitoring the transparency and honesty of the election. By means of yet another illegitimate popular consultation and according to results that were deemed false by all of the international organisations responsible for observing the election Lukashenko won 77.3% of the vote and the adoption of an amendment to the Constitution lifting the limit on the number of times any one person can be re-elected as President of the Republic. Alexander Lukashenko was therefore re-appointed on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2006 against Alyaksandr Milinkevich who was awarded the Sakharov Prize by the European Parliament the same year. This pseudo election like all of those organised under his reign was declared to be out of line with international democratic standards.

Belarusians will start 2011, as the fourteen previous years, with Alexander Lukashenko as head of the country. "*There will certainly be some political changes but power will not change hands in Belarus,*" he warned just a few days before the pseudo-election. When interviewed by a journalist about his possible cooperation with the opposition forces he answered that he would talk with "*normal*" people but not with "*bandits*".

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