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Belarus

Police violence on a mass scale in Belarus

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Since the election, it has been two months of sustained leaderless protests, police violence, and local self-organization.

After relatively peaceful Sunday marches of past several weeks, amounting each time to 100+thousand people, Sunday 11 October saw resumption of police violence on the mass scale. More than 700 people were arrested that day, many beaten, and over a dozen hospitalized. The massive marches during the day were followed by neighborhood protests denouncing police violence. Notably, while the emphasis on peaceful protests remains, there were noticeable instances of people actively resisting the police (some even ending in street fighting) patience and anger are starting to boil over. Since 9 August more than 14,000 people have been arrested.

Over the weekend, Lukashenko met with political prisoners in the KGB jail. He announced the beginning of dialogue and constitutional reform, consulting with said prisoners for 4.5 hours. Needless to say, the image of "dialogue" behind prison walls is the height of absurdity. Nonetheless, this unprecedented gesture by an autocrat hoping to hold onto power shows that street protests are forcing his hand to recognize the legitimacy of mass uprising and acknowledge the fact of political prisoners.

Monday 5 October saw a spontaneous seniors march in Minsk. The participants were chanting "babushkas [grandmas] with the people, with the students" etc. Seniors announced their intention to come out on the streets every Monday, following the massive marches over the weekend. Monday, October 12 saw a massive showing of grandmas and grandpas, amounting to several thousands, in Minsk and similar actions took place across the country in the regions. Notably, seniors were traditionally Lukashenko's electorate.

Resistance continues in the government factories, especially in Minsk, Hrodna, and Salihorst, where several miners of Belaruskali in the past weeks chained themselves in the mines, refusing to leave (each time, they were forcibly removed and jailed).

Intense neighborhood self-organization continues. Local evening marches and celebrations, making of street art, have become a daily tradition. A new initiative was announced to elect local representatives of the neighborhoods to promote self-governance and independence from city officials and the police.

My analysis of the situation remains the same as in the [previous post](#). It is difficult to sustain protests, especially given massive repressions and pressure, for such a long time. This fact alone must be commended. The protests remains leaderless, as any conceivable leaders are either outside the country or in jail. Despite apparent lack of political gains (e.g., release of prisoners or resignation of Lukashenko), the balance of power is perpetually shifting it is a metastable state, where any misstep can cause a radical change in the situation. As much as it is difficult to sustain protests for a long time, it is even more difficult to hold onto power in the face of such pressure from the streets with ever increasing levels of local self-organization.

For the last month or longer, neighborhoods have created local chats in places all over the country, where they organized all sorts of initiatives from solidarity actions, to concerts with musicians and children's holidays, to neighborhood clean-up actions, etc. They often create resistance murals or display red-white-red in different forms. During the days, state workers remove said murals and other displays. Now, the Coordination Council has called for the elections of representatives. This is actually possible within the limits of current constitution. With 25 percent of

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signatures, these representatives become official (at least theoretically) and can legally govern the actions that take place in the neighborhoods. Within the same initiative, the Coordination Council also called for formation of kind of "security brigades" to protect the neighborhoods without resorting to the police. More than anything, I think, this would serve as a kind of political education and emergence of new representatives on the local scale that can take part, should the time come, in negotiations on a greater scale.

15 October 2020

Source [No Borders News](#).

PS:

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