

## Warning: Opposition Continues to Unify as Lukashenko Continues Crackdown

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By George Barros

**President Alexander Lukashenko effectively dispersed limited protests on August 26.** There were almost no protests in Belarus on August 26, likely in part because NEXTA did not provide protest directions for August 26. A few hundred protesters arrived at the Belarusian parliament to initiate the recall of Belarusian MPs, but riot police dispersed the crowd and detained some participants.<sup>1</sup> Some protesters held small gatherings around Belarus, most of which consisted of fewer than 100 people.<sup>2</sup> Riot police dispersed these small gatherings, detaining some participants.<sup>3</sup>

**The Lithuanian government is deepening its support for the opposition despite Kremlin warnings against “foreign interference” in Belarus.** The Lithuanian Foreign Ministry proposed a list of targeted sanctions against 118 Belarusian officials, including President Lukashenko, for falsifying elections and committing violence against protesters on August 26.<sup>4</sup> Lithuania will ban the sanctioned individuals from entry if Lithuania’s interior Minister approves the sanctions.<sup>5</sup> Lukashenko and the Kremlin already accused Lithuania of “foreign interference” in Belarus and will likely reiterate those claims following these sanctions.<sup>6</sup>

**The Belarusian Investigative Committee continues to interrogate Coordination Council members.** The Investigative Committee summoned Coordination Council member and Belarusian Nobel laureate Svitlana Aleksievich for questioning on August 26.<sup>7</sup> Aleksievich’s questioning lasted approximately 40 minutes and ended after she refused to testify against herself.<sup>8</sup> Opposition figure and Coordination Council member Maria Kolesnikova received a summons on the morning of August 26 from the Investigative Committee to appear for questioning on August 27.<sup>9</sup> The Investigative Committee will likely continue interrogating and intimidating opposition leaders.

**More members of Svitlana Tikhanouskaya’s Coordination Council are reaching out to the Kremlin.** Aleksievich made a statement following her questioning that the Coordination Council cannot succeed without international support, including that of the Kremlin.<sup>10</sup> Aleksievich said the Coordination Council should engage in dialogue with Russian President Vladimir Putin because currently only Lukashenko represents Belarus in talks with Russia.<sup>11</sup> Aleksievich said, “unfortunately, our civil society is strong, but not yet so strong, so we need help from the world, perhaps from Russia, if we can attract it together.”<sup>12</sup> The Kremlin has not responded to Aleksievich’s comment as of this writing.

**NEXTA’s rhetoric is increasingly supportive of Tikhanouskaya and Coordination Council initiatives, potentially indicating opposition consolidation behind Tikhanouskaya.** NEXTA posted a statement at 12:51 am Minsk time that “Svitlana Tikhanouskaya is working more and more in the international arena every day, defending our interests. Today our President [Tikhanouskaya] addressed the European Parliament with a statement that: ‘We are no longer the opposition. We are the majority. A peaceful revolution is taking place in Belarus.’”<sup>13</sup> NEXTA has praised Tikhanouskaya before, but its rhetoric focused more on the Coordination Council than on Tikhanouskaya directly. This statement could be an indicator that NEXTA is working to unify the opposition under Tikhanouskaya and her Coordination Council – a key first step for Belarus’ opposition to consolidate a base from which to organize and optimize its activity.

**The Coordination Council launched new Telegram channel to organize recall petitions.** NEXTA promoted the Coordination Council’s new “Regional Support Service” (RSS) Telegram channel in a post at 12:34 am Minsk time on August 26.<sup>14</sup> Both NEXTA and the Coordination Council encouraged protesters to contact the RSS via the RSS’

Telegram channel, phone number, and email in order to gain information about how to recall representatives, prepare recall appeals, and safely hold events.<sup>15</sup> NEXTA and the RSS Telegram channels directed protesters to the website of a Belarusian civil society organization called "Honest People."<sup>16</sup> Honest People published tools on its website to help Belarusians find their officials and streamline the process of initiating recalls on August 25 or 26.<sup>17</sup> Kremlin-linked Belarusian opposition politician Viktor Babariko founded Honest People on June 9 in order to organize civil society activism regarding to the August 9 election.<sup>18</sup> Babariko served as the chairman of the Kremlin-affiliated Belgazprombank office in Belarus from 2000 to May 2020.<sup>19</sup> Babariko left his job at Belgazprombank in May 2020 to run against Lukashenko, but the Lukashenko-controlled Central Elections Commission blocked his candidacy on July 14.<sup>20</sup> Honest People's website claims Svitlana Alexievich supports the organization, indicating Alexievich may be linked to the Kremlin via Babariko.<sup>21</sup>

Belarusians initiated the process to recall 20 Belarusian deputies on August 26.<sup>22</sup> Kolesnikova first urged Belarusians to initiate legal petitions to recall officials on August 24.<sup>23</sup> ISW assessed on August 24 that Lukashenko will likely not allow recall petitions to remove any officials, but the process of Belarusian opposition activists collecting signatures may facilitate the emergence of a better organized indigenous opposition network necessary for sustained and more organized protest activity.<sup>24</sup>

**NEXTA is encouraging other activity that could lead to further local organization.** NEXTA posted a statement at 3:18 am Minsk time on August 26 calling on volunteers to contribute information to another Telegram channel called "Black Book of Belarus" – a Telegram channel collecting information on Belarusian security personnel involved in violence against protesters.<sup>25</sup> Black Book of Belarus' channel administrators are unknown as of this writing. NEXTA stated a "global plan" to "smash" the Lukashenko regime quickly "with minimal losses" is coming this week, suggesting NEXTA will continue to provide protesters detailed directions to coordinate activities, although NEXTA has not always followed through on promises to provide such directions in the past.<sup>26</sup>

*ISW will continue monitoring the situation and providing updates.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://twitter.com/HannaLiubakova/status/1298670145154494464>;

<https://twitter.com/HannaLiubakova/status/1298676180523114497>;

<https://twitter.com/HannaLiubakova/status/1298695335557160967>

<sup>2</sup> [https://t.me/tutby\\_official/12273](https://t.me/tutby_official/12273); [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/9564](https://t.me/nexta_live/9564); [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/9559](https://t.me/nexta_live/9559); [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/9549](https://t.me/nexta_live/9549);

[https://t.me/nexta\\_live/9542](https://t.me/nexta_live/9542); [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/9546?single](https://t.me/nexta_live/9546?single)

<sup>3</sup> <https://twitter.com/HannaLiubakova/status/1298689573237686272>

<sup>4</sup> <https://tass.com/world/1193911>; [http://www.baltic-course.com/eng/baltic\\_states\\_cis/?doc=158626](http://www.baltic-course.com/eng/baltic_states_cis/?doc=158626)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.therepublic.com/2020/08/26/eu-lithuania-belarus-2/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/lavrov-vmeshatelstvo-v-belarus-izvne-proishodit-s-tseljju-navjazat-svoe-porjadki-403367-2020/>;  
<https://lv.sputniknews.ru/Latvia/20200815/14213027/My-ne-lezem-v-Belarus-Rinkevchs-nazval-bredom-slova-Lukashenko-o-inostrannom-vmeshatelstve.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/5f464dd39a7947609eb8ecd2>

<sup>8</sup> <https://gazetaby.com/post/dopros-aleksievich-dlilsya-40-minut-kak-tak-vyshlo/168299/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://lenta.ru/news/2020/08/26/kolesnikova/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://t.me/dimsmirnov175/14005>; [https://www.znak.com/2020-08-](https://www.znak.com/2020-08-26/svetlana_aleksievich_prizvala_privlech_putina_k_obcheniyu_s_belorusskoy_oppoziciei)

[26/svetlana\\_aleksievich\\_prizvala\\_privlech\\_putina\\_k\\_obcheniyu\\_s\\_belorusskoy\\_oppoziciei](https://www.forbes.ru/newsroom/obshchestvo/407813-nado-mozhet-byt-i-putina-privlech-aleksievich-zayavila-chto-belorusskoy-nobelevskogo-laureata-svetlany-al);

<https://www.forbes.ru/newsroom/obshchestvo/407813-nado-mozhet-byt-i-putina-privlech-aleksievich-zayavila-chto-belorusskoy-nobelevskogo-laureata-svetlany-al>

<sup>11</sup> <https://t.me/dimsmirnov175/14005>; [https://www.znak.com/2020-08-](https://www.znak.com/2020-08-26/svetlana_aleksievich_prizvala_privlech_putina_k_obcheniyu_s_belorusskoy_oppoziciei)

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<https://www.forbes.ru/newsroom/obshchestvo/407813-nado-mozhet-byt-i-putina-privlech-aleksievich-zayavila-chto-belorusskoy-nobelevskogo-laureata-svetlany-al>

<sup>12</sup> <https://t.me/dimsmirnov175/14005>; [https://www.znak.com/2020-08-](https://www.znak.com/2020-08-26/svetlana_aleksievich_prizvala_privlech_putina_k_obcheniyu_s_belorusskoy_oppoziciei)

[26/svetlana\\_aleksievich\\_prizvala\\_privlech\\_putina\\_k\\_obcheniyu\\_s\\_belorusskoy\\_oppoziciei](https://www.forbes.ru/newsroom/obshchestvo/407813-nado-mozhet-byt-i-putina-privlech-aleksievich-zayavila-chto-belorusskoy-nobelevskogo-laureata-svetlany-al);

<https://www.forbes.ru/newsroom/obshchestvo/407813-nado-mozhet-byt-i-putina-privlech-aleksievich-zayavila-chto-belorusskoy-nobelevskogo-laureata-svetlany-al>

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- <sup>13</sup> [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/9534](https://t.me/nexta_live/9534)
- <sup>14</sup> [https://t.me/rada\\_vision/26](https://t.me/rada_vision/26) ; <https://t.me/rksby2020/5> ;
- <sup>15</sup> <https://t.me/rksby2020/5> ;
- <sup>16</sup> <https://t.me/rksby2020/5>
- <sup>17</sup> <https://honest-people.by/> ; <https://t.me/s/rksby2020>
- <sup>18</sup> <https://vkurier.by/206208> ; <https://babariko.vision/news/v-belarusi-zapustili-iniciativu-chestnye-lyudi-kak-prisoedinitnya> ; <https://www.instagram.com/p/CBEDgCBgD4A/> ; <https://www.facebook.com/honestpeople.by> ; <http://borovljany.com>. Its website was registered on June 8 according to Whois information available at <https://research.domaintools.com/research/whois-history/search/?q=honest-people.by>, last accessed 8/26/2020 at 3:45 p.m..
- <sup>19</sup> <https://belsat.eu/en/news/banker-and-philanthropist-babaryka-may-stand-in-2020-presidential-election/> ; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-belarussian-opposition-reaches.html>.
- <sup>20</sup> <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/russia-in-review-turmoil-in-belarus.html>
- <sup>21</sup> <https://honest-people.by/>
- <sup>22</sup> <https://news.tut.by/economics/698211.html>
- <sup>23</sup> <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-lukashenkos-security-forces.html>
- <sup>24</sup> <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-lukashenkos-security-forces.html>
- <sup>25</sup> [https://t.me/nexta\\_tv/3840](https://t.me/nexta_tv/3840) ; <https://t.me/s/BlackBookBelarus>
- <sup>26</sup> [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/9534](https://t.me/nexta_live/9534)