



## Belarus Warning Update: Putin Pressures Lukashenko to Implement His Previous Integration Concessions

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**The Kremlin sent Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to Minsk on November 26, 2020, likely to secure the implementation of Union State integration concessions that self-declared Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko made on September 14.** Lukashenko reaffirmed his commitments to Moscow after Lavrov reminded him about his concessions to Russian President Vladimir Putin from their September 14 meeting in Sochi.<sup>1</sup> Lukashenko apparently agreed to a plan for coordinating Belarusian and Russian foreign policy and committed to the creation of a single market for natural gas.<sup>2</sup>

**Lavrov intensified efforts to exploit Lukashenko's constitutional amendment process, likely to formalize Belarusian integration with Russia via the Union State.**<sup>3</sup> Lavrov reaffirmed Kremlin support for Belarusian constitutional reform to “modernize” Belarus’ political system on November 26.<sup>4</sup> The Kremlin may have sent Lavrov to Minsk at this time in part to shape Belarusian constitutional amendments Lukashenko is preparing.<sup>5</sup> Lukashenko reiterated his support for Belarusian constitutional amendments after meeting Lavrov.<sup>6</sup>

**Lukashenko suggested he would relinquish power under a new constitution after meeting Lavrov.** Lukashenko told Belarusians he would not work “as the president” under a new constitution on November 27.<sup>7</sup> Lukashenko also claimed he is not rigging the new constitution to benefit himself, indicating Lukashenko likely seeks to assure Belarusians and / or the Kremlin that the constitutional amendments will entail a real transfer of power.<sup>8</sup> Lukashenko reportedly said that he would not seek another presidential term and that he is considering introducing a constitutional amendment on presidential term limits on October 10.<sup>9</sup>

**Lukashenko may not relinquish power even if he adopts a new constitution, however.** Lukashenko importantly stated it is unacceptable to give a new Belarusian constitution to a president “unfamiliar” with governing Belarus on November 27.<sup>10</sup> This statement contradicts Lukashenko’s previous comments that he would not be president under a new constitution or seek re-election.<sup>11</sup> Lukashenko is likely obfuscating his plans for constitutional amendments and may seek to retain power. Lukashenko has demonstrated sophistication and skill in stonewalling major political concessions before and is likely doing so again.<sup>12</sup>

**Putin will likely pressure Belarus for economic integration concessions at an upcoming meeting on December 11, 2020.**<sup>13</sup> Lukashenko said the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Belarus agreed to “finally solve” the problem of a single market for natural gas at this upcoming meeting.<sup>14</sup> Belarusian Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko said Belarus wants to expand cooperation on nuclear energy with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).<sup>15</sup> Both the EAEU and SCO are known vehicles the Kremlin uses to consolidate Russian control over former Soviet republics.<sup>16</sup>

**The Kremlin will prioritize integrating Belarus into Russia in 2021.**

**Putin will likely use Belarus’ upcoming 2021 chairmanship of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to further integrate Belarus into Russia.** Lavrov and Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei signed an agreement on foreign policy coordination in 2021.<sup>17</sup> Lavrov said Belarus’ upcoming 2021 chairmanship of the CIS

will advance Belarusian-Russian integration.<sup>18</sup> The CIS is a known vehicle for expanding Kremlin control over former Soviet republics.<sup>19</sup> The country-chair of the CIS changes annually and Belarus will assume that chairmanship on January 1, 2021. Belarus last chaired the CIS in 2014 and 2012.<sup>20</sup>

**The Kremlin will likely exploit the crisis in Belarus in its bid to legitimize the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) as a United Nations (UN)-recognized peacekeeping force in 2021.** Lavrov thanked the Belarusian Foreign Ministry for cooperation to develop the CSTO on November 26.<sup>21</sup> Lavrov explicitly said the Kremlin is prioritizing setting conditions to involve the CSTO in UN peacekeeping operations and to that end is actively adapting CSTO peacekeeping frameworks to align with the UN's Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System.<sup>22</sup>

This stated effort aligns with the Kremlin's assessed campaign to leverage the UN to justify Russia's international military deployments—an important hybrid war capability the Kremlin is developing.<sup>23</sup> Western leaders should pressure the UN not to recognize the CSTO as a legitimate peacekeeping force.<sup>24</sup>

**Lukashenko is leveraging the COVID-19 pandemic to stall Union State integration.** Golovchenko said Belarus would likely not be able to participate in a planned Union State Council of Ministers meeting in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic—an improbable reason given Belarusian authorities' previous cavalier attitude to the pandemic and that such a meeting likely could be held virtually.<sup>25</sup>

ISW will continue monitoring the situation and providing updates.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.mid dot ru/ru/maps/by/-/asset\\_publisher/Uwp6wJEbZrLO/content/id/4460315](https://www.mid dot ru/ru/maps/by/-/asset_publisher/Uwp6wJEbZrLO/content/id/4460315);  
<http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-lukashenko-softens-his-opposition-protests-seeking-leverage>; <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-lukashenko-and-kremlin-vie-control-over-future-russian-weapons>; [https://www.gazeta dot ru/politics/2020/11/26\\_a\\_13375843.shtml](https://www.gazeta dot ru/politics/2020/11/26_a_13375843.shtml)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.belta dot by/politics/view/u-belarusi-i-rossii-polnostiju-sovpadaet-zainteresovannost-v-ukreplenii-otnoshenij-lavrov-417396-2020/>; <https://news.tut dot>

[by/economics/709626.html?utm\\_campaign=recirculation\\_relap&utm\\_medium=main\\_news&utm\\_source=%7Bsource%7D&mainnews=](by/economics/709626.html?utm_campaign=recirculation_relap&utm_medium=main_news&utm_source=%7Bsource%7D&mainnews=)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/10/belarus-warning-update-putin-seeks.html>; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/10/belarus-warning-update-putin-likely.html>; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/warning-lukashenko-deports-opposition.html>;  
<https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/warning-lukashenko-begins-targeting.html>; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-kremlin-information-operations.html>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.mid dot ru/ru/maps/by/-/asset\\_publisher/Uwp6wJEbZrLO/content/id/4460693](https://www.mid dot ru/ru/maps/by/-/asset_publisher/Uwp6wJEbZrLO/content/id/4460693)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-kremlin-information-operations.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.belta dot by/president/view/lukashenko-novaja-konstitutsija-dolzha-byt-vygodnoj-dlja-strany-417645-2020/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.belta dot by/president/view/lukashenko-novaja-konstitutsija-dolzha-byt-vygodnoj-dlja-strany-417645-2020/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.belta dot by/president/view/lukashenko-novaja-konstitutsija-dolzha-byt-vygodnoj-dlja-strany-417645-2020/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-putin-likely-disrupts-lukashenko%E2%80%99s-plan-defusing-protests>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.belta dot by/president/view/lukashenko-novaja-konstitutsija-dolzha-byt-vygodnoj-dlja-strany-417645-2020/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-putin-likely-disrupts-lukashenko%E2%80%99s-plan-defusing-protests>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russia-review-belarus-update-lukashenko-uses-oil-tariffs-delay-integration-russia>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.belta dot by/president/view/lukashenko-vokrug-eaes-skladyvaetsja-ochen-serjeznaja-obstanovka-idet-ekonomicheskaja-vojna-417895-2020/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://news.tut dot>

[by/economics/709626.html?utm\\_campaign=recirculation\\_relap&utm\\_medium=main\\_news&utm\\_source=%7Bsource%7D&mainnews=](by/economics/709626.html?utm_campaign=recirculation_relap&utm_medium=main_news&utm_source=%7Bsource%7D&mainnews=)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.belta dot by/economics/view/belarus-zainteresovana-rasshirit-svoe-uchastie-v-rabote-energeticheskogo-kluba-shos-golovchenko-417942-2020/>

<sup>16</sup>

<http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Putin%27s%20Offset%20The%20Kremlin%27s%20Geopolitical%20Adaptations%20Since%202014.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.belta dot by/politics/view/u-belarusi-i-rossii-polnostiju-sovpadaet-zainteresovannost-v-ukreplenii-otnoshenij-lavrov-417396-2020/>

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<sup>18</sup> [https://www.mid dot ru/ru/maps/by/-/asset\\_publisher/Uwp6wJEbZrLO/content/id/4460443](https://www.mid dot ru/ru/maps/by/-/asset_publisher/Uwp6wJEbZrLO/content/id/4460443); [https://www.mid dot ru/ru/maps/by/-/asset\\_publisher/Uwp6wJEbZrLO/content/id/4460443](https://www.mid dot ru/ru/maps/by/-/asset_publisher/Uwp6wJEbZrLO/content/id/4460443)

<sup>19</sup>

<http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Putin%27s%20Offset%20The%20Kremlin%27s%20Geopolitical%20Adaptations%20Since%202014.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.cis.minsk dot by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=4807>; <http://www.cis.minsk dot by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=3617>

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.mid dot ru/ru/maps/by/-/asset\\_publisher/Uwp6wJEbZrLO/content/id/4460580](https://www.mid dot ru/ru/maps/by/-/asset_publisher/Uwp6wJEbZrLO/content/id/4460580)

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.mid dot ru/ru/maps/by/-/asset\\_publisher/Uwp6wJEbZrLO/content/id/4460580](https://www.mid dot ru/ru/maps/by/-/asset_publisher/Uwp6wJEbZrLO/content/id/4460580)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russia-review-putins-%E2%80%9Cpeacekeepers%E2%80%9D-will-support-russian-wars>; <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Hybrid%20Warfare%20ISW%20Report%202020.pdf>; <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Putin%27s%20Offset%20The%20Kremlin%27s%20Geopolitical%20Adaptations%20Since%202014.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russia-review-putins-%E2%80%9Cpeacekeepers%E2%80%9D-will-support-russian-wars>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.belta dot by/politics/view/golovchenko-i-rapota-obsudili-dalnejshee-vzaimodejstvie-v-sojuznom-gosudarstve-417392-2020/>; <https://www.belta dot by/politics/view/golovchenko-i-rapota-obsudili-dalnejshee-vzaimodejstvie-v-sojuznom-gosudarstve-417392-2020/>