



## Belarus Warning Update: NEXTA Intensifies Campaign to Develop Local Opposition Leadership in Minsk

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**The NEXTA Telegram channel likely launched a new campaign to spur the development of local opposition leadership in Belarus on November 20, 2020.** NEXTA issued unprecedented directions for protesters to “build local connections” among their fellow protesters on November 20.<sup>1</sup> NEXTA instructed protesters in Minsk to gather in regional groups within their local neighborhoods for Sunday protests on November 22.<sup>2</sup> NEXTA called for these neighborhood-level groups to rendezvous with other local neighborhoods’ groups for larger localized marches in six larger protest areas in Minsk.<sup>3</sup> These six protest areas are all smaller than the single large protest location in downtown Minsk where the protesters historically congregated.

**NEXTA’s campaign likely seeks to develop nascent opposition leadership networks at the neighborhood-level within the larger opposition movement.** Protesters in Minsk historically have met downtown for the weekly Sunday protest in a single large mass – a protest format un conducive to protesters forming long-lasting relationships or networks. NEXTA is promoting the new protest format likely to develop such intra-opposition connections. NEXTA explicitly said the Lukashenko regime is trying to “return to an atomized society where there are no [civil society] associations, solidarity, [or protests].”<sup>4</sup> NEXTA’s effort to encourage local leadership likely seeks to counteract Lukashenko’s efforts to morselize the opposition.

The opposition likely has not developed effective local leadership as of this writing. The emergence of local leadership will likely increase the sustainability of the protest movement to supplement NEXTA’s control of protester movements.<sup>5</sup>

**Protesters changed their tactics in accordance with NEXTA’s new directions on November 22 and 29.** Thousands of protesters marched in a dispersed manner throughout Minsk’s neighborhoods for the first time on November 22.<sup>6</sup> Protesters repeated these tactics on November 29 after NEXTA released expanded directions for neighborhood-level protests in major Belarusian cities—Minsk, Brest, Grodno, Vitebsk, and Mogilev—on November 29.<sup>7</sup>

**These new tactics are stretching Belarusian security forces’ bandwidth.** Belarusian police crackdowns on November 22 and 29 were significantly less effective than similar crackdowns before the protesters adopted dispersion tactics. Police arrested at least 389 protesters in Belarus on November 22—a significant decrease from November 15 Sunday protests in which 1290 were detained.<sup>8</sup> Police detained at least 415 protesters on November 29.<sup>9</sup> Dispersed protests require the police to cover more ground outside of Minsk’s main downtown area—an area police have developed proficiency in controlling.

Minsk police announced plans to introduce increased patrolling in 43 residential areas on November 23.<sup>10</sup> These new patrols are likely the regime’s counteraction to deal with the protesters’ dispersion tactic.

**These new tactics could be an opposition adaption to counter the protests' decreasing participation.** Protests participation decreased consistently through November. NEXTA's directions to distribute a smaller number of protesters throughout a larger area in Minsk creates a perception that the protests are still "large" in that the protests occur throughout much of Minsk and its neighborhoods, not just in the main downtown area and in smaller numbers.

**Protests tactics remain peaceful despite Lithuania-based opposition leader Svitlana Tikhanouskaya's call to use force against the regime.** Tikhanouskaya called on Belarusians to physically capture Lukashenko, regime officials, and security forces responsible for carrying out Lukashenko's orders and promised amnesty for protesters who help capture these targets on November 13.<sup>11</sup> There is no evidence protesters have followed these directions as of this writing.

ISW will continue monitoring the situation and providing updates.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://t.me/nexta\\_tv/9712](https://t.me/nexta_tv/9712)

<sup>2</sup> [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/12232](https://t.me/nexta_live/12232)

<sup>3</sup> [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/12232](https://t.me/nexta_live/12232)

<sup>4</sup> [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/12225](https://t.me/nexta_live/12225)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-belarusian-protest-movement-likely-developing-local-organization>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.dw.com/ru/marsh-protiv-fashizma-demonstranty-pereshli-k-protestu-vo-dvorah/a-55693835>

<sup>7</sup> <https://twitter.com/HannaLiubakova/status/1332965552466370561>; [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/12290](https://t.me/nexta_live/12290); [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/12289](https://t.me/nexta_live/12289)

<sup>8</sup> <http://spring96.org/be/news/100542>

<sup>9</sup> <http://spring96.org/be/news/100682>

<sup>10</sup> <https://budzma.by/news/buduts-patrulyavats-43-dvary.html>; [https://minsk.gov.by/ru/normdoc/4432/pril\\_3705\\_17112020.shtml](https://minsk.gov.by/ru/normdoc/4432/pril_3705_17112020.shtml)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-belarusian-opposition-leader-directs-protesters-employ-force>