

## Lukashenko and the Kremlin Consolidate Control of Belarusian Media Space

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By George Barros

**The Kremlin and Alexander Lukashenko consolidated control over the international information space ahead of a likely crackdown.** Belarusian authorities stripped accreditation from at least 17 international journalists working in Minsk and demanded they leave the country on August 29.<sup>1</sup> The journalists worked for major Western news organizations including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), the BBC, the Associated Press, Reuters, Agence-France Presse, Germany's ARD television, Deutsche Welle, and Radio France.<sup>2</sup> Belarusian authorities arrested at least two RFE/RL journalists while they were reporting live on air in Minsk on August 29.<sup>3</sup> Belarusian authorities additionally blocked *Naviny* and *Nasha Niva*—two of Belarus' remaining independent news agencies - and arrested the operator of the *KYKY* Belarusian news site on August 28.<sup>4</sup> Independent Belarusian media and foreign journalists are crucial for covering protests and security force responses in the absence of a free media space. Lukashenko partially blocked the internet on August 9 and Russian personnel began running Belarusian state media on August 19.<sup>5</sup> Lukashenko's coordinated effort to consolidate control over the Belarusian information space, primarily targeting international coverage, may be a prelude to a crackdown against protesters.

**Belarusian authorities did not try to disperse large protests in Minsk for the first time in a week on August 29.** Approximately ten thousand women marched in Minsk on August 29.<sup>6</sup> Riot police and security troops cordoned off the protest route and blocked at least four metro stations on the route but did not detain or disperse protesters.<sup>7</sup> Security forces detained at least one male protester but did not use force against female protesters.<sup>8</sup> Belarusian forces contained and dispersed small protests and resumed detaining protesters between August 19-28.<sup>9</sup> The absence of crackdowns on August 29 may encourage more Belarusians to participate in the large planned protests in Minsk on August 30.

ISW will continue monitoring the situation and providing updates.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/press-freedom/belarus-revokes-accreditation-least-17-journalists-covering-post-election-turmoil>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/press-freedom/belarus-revokes-accreditation-least-17-journalists-covering-post-election-turmoil>

<sup>3</sup> <https://twitter.com/HannaLiubakova/status/1299703908500230148>

<sup>4</sup> [https://lenta](https://lenta;); [https://kyky\(.\)org/news/ne-nadetsya-na-peremeny-a-delat-ih-nadya-zelenkova-o-tom-cto-budet-s-delom-sashi-vasilevicha](https://kyky(.)org/news/ne-nadetsya-na-peremeny-a-delat-ih-nadya-zelenkova-o-tom-cto-budet-s-delom-sashi-vasilevicha)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/background/warning-moscow-sets-conditions-kinetic-intervention-belarus-through-new-information>

<sup>6</sup> [https://meduza\(.\)io/feature/2020/08/29/desyat-tysyach-zhenschin-proshli-marshem-po-tsentru-minska-omon-pytalsya-im-pomeshat-no-ne-smog](https://meduza(.)io/feature/2020/08/29/desyat-tysyach-zhenschin-proshli-marshem-po-tsentru-minska-omon-pytalsya-im-pomeshat-no-ne-smog)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-belarus-election-protests-women/women-march-through-belarusian-capital-calling-for-lukashenko-to-step-down-idUSKBN25PoOP> ; <https://twitter.com/HannaLiubakova/status/1299705163909869575>

<sup>8</sup> <https://twitter.com/HannaLiubakova/status/1299705163909869575>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-lukashenkos-security-forces.html> ; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-lukashenko-appears-to-resist.html> ; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-opposition-continues-to-unify.html> ; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-lukashenko-targets-opposition.html>