

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. 689

Condemning the crackdown on peaceful protestors in Belarus and calling
for the imposition of sanctions on responsible officials.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 14, 2020

Mr. RISCH (for himself, Mr. MENENDEZ, Mr. MURPHY, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. GRAHAM, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Mr. CARDIN, Mr. ROMNEY, Mr. COONS, Mr. JOHNSON, Mr. PORTMAN, and Mr. Kaine) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

RESOLUTION

Condemning the crackdown on peaceful protestors in Belarus
and calling for the imposition of sanctions on responsible
officials.

Whereas Alyaksandr Lukashenka has ruled Belarus as an un-
democratic dictatorship since the first presidential elec-
tion in Belarus in 1994;

Whereas subsequent presidential elections in Belarus have
been neither free nor fair and have been rejected by the
international community as not meeting minimal electoral
standards, with the jailing of opposition activists fre-
quently used as a tool of government repression before
and after the elections;

Whereas, in response to the repression and violence during the 2006 presidential election, Congress passed the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2006 (Public Law 109–480);

Whereas, in March 2011, the Senate unanimously passed Senate Resolution 105, which—

(1) condemned the December 2010 election in Belarus as “illegitimate, fraudulent, and not representative of the will or the aspirations of the voters in Belarus”; and

(2) called on the Lukashenka regime “to immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners in Belarus who were arrested in association with the December 19, 2010, election”;

Whereas, in advance of the August 2020 presidential elections in Belarus, authorities acting on behalf of President Lukashenka arrested journalists, bloggers, political activists, and opposition leaders, including three leading presidential candidates (Syarhey Tsikhanouski, Mikalay Statkevich, and Viktor Babaryka), who were barred from running in the election by the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Belarus;

Whereas, while the three opposition candidates were imprisoned, two of their wives and one of their campaign managers, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Veranika Tsepkala, and Maria Kalesnikava, joined together and ran in place of the candidates;

Whereas thousands of Belarusian people demonstrated their support for these candidates by attending rallies, including one rally that included an estimated 63,000 participants;

Whereas, on August, 5, 2020, the Senate unanimously passed Senate Resolution 658, which calls for a free, fair, and transparent presidential election in Belarus, including the unimpeded participation of all presidential candidates;

Whereas presidential elections were held in Belarus on August 9, 2020, under undemocratic conditions with reports of malfeasance on the part of Lukashenka's government, including early voting ballot stuffing, ballot burning, pressuring poll workers, and removing bags full of ballots by climbing out of windows;

Whereas incumbent president Alyaksandr Lukashenka declared a landslide victory in the election and claimed to have received more than 80 percent of the votes cast in the election;

Whereas the leading opposition candidate, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya—

(1) formally disputed the government's reported election results;

(2) explained that her staff had examined the election results from more than 50 polling places; and

(3) found that her share of the vote exceeded Lukashenka's share by many times;

Whereas, on August 10, 2020, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya was detained while attending a meeting with the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Belarus and forced to flee to Lithuania under pressure from government authorities;

Whereas, on August 11, 2020, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius announced that Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya was safe in Lithuania and has continued to be one of the strongest voices supporting the pro-democracy

movement in Belarus within the European Union and globally;

Whereas, on August 11, 2020, the European Union High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, issued a declaration on the presidential election in Belarus stating that the elections were neither free nor fair;

Whereas, on August 18, 2020, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya announced the formation of a Coordination Council to oversee a resolution to the crisis in Belarus and a peaceful transition of power;

Whereas, on August 19, 2020, European Council President Charles Michel announced that the European Union would impose sanctions on a substantial number of individuals responsible for violence, repression, and election fraud in Belarus;

Whereas, on August 28, 2020, United States Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun declared that the August 9th election in Belarus was fraudulent;

Whereas, since the sham election on August 9, 2020, tens of thousands of Belarusian citizens have participated in daily peaceful protests calling for a new, free, and fair election, and the release of political prisoners;

Whereas according to Amnesty International, on August 30, 2020, Belarusians held one of the largest protest rallies in the country's modern history in Minsk and in other cities, which was attended by at least 100,000 people who demanded the resignation of President Lukashenka and an investigation into the human rights violations in Belarus;

Whereas women have played a leading role in the protests, including by forming peaceful solidarity chains of thousands of Belarusians symbolically dressed in white;

Whereas more than 7,000 Belarusian citizens have been detained by government authorities, mostly for taking part in or observing peaceful protests, with many of these arrests followed by beatings and torture at the hands of Belarusian law enforcement;

Whereas authorities in Belarus have consistently restricted press freedom as part of the crackdown, including—

(1) the arrest of dozens of journalists, six of whom report for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty;

(2) blocking more than 50 news websites that were covering the protests;

(3) halting the publishing of two independent newspapers; and

(4) stripping the accreditation of journalists working for foreign news outlets;

Whereas internet access in Belarus has been repeatedly disrupted and restricted since August 9, 2020, which independent experts and monitoring groups have attributed to government interference;

Whereas after employees of state media outlets walked off the job in protest rather than help report misleading government propaganda, Lukashenka confirmed that he “asked the Russians” to send teams of Russian journalists to replace local employees;

Whereas Lukashenka appealed to Russian President Vladimir Putin to provide security assistance to his government, if requested, and Putin confirmed that a reserve police

force was ready to be deployed if “the situation gets out of control”;

Whereas the Belarus Ministry of Defense threatened to send the army to confront protestors, warning that in case of any violation of peace and order in areas around national monuments, “you will have the army to deal with now, not the police”;

Whereas, according to the Viasna Human Rights Centre, at least 450 detainees have reported being tortured or otherwise ill-treated while held in incommunicado detention for up to 10 days, including through—

- (1) severe beatings;
- (2) forced performance of humiliating acts; and
- (3) sexual violence and other forms of violence;

Whereas at least four Belarusians have been killed at protests, and dozens of Belarusians who were detained during the protests are still missing;

Whereas, on or around September 6, 2020, the opposition leader, Maria Kalesnikava, and members of the Coordination Council, including Anton Ronenkov, Ivan Kravtsov, and Maxim Bogretsov, were detained by authorities who sought to forcibly expel them to Ukraine;

Whereas opposition leader Maria Kolesnikova tore up her passport at the Ukrainian border in a successful effort to prevent this expulsion, subsequently disappeared, and was discovered in a Minsk prison on September 9, 2020;

Whereas the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, done at New York December 19, 1966, was ratified by Belarus in 1973, guaranteeing Belarusians the freedom of expression and the freedom of association; and

Whereas, in 2006, President George W. Bush issued Executive Order 13405, titled “Blocking Property of Certain Persons Undermining Democratic Processes or Institutions in Belarus”, which authorized the imposition of sanctions against persons responsible for—

- (1) undermining democratic processes in Belarus; or
- (2) participating in human rights abuses related to political repression in Belarus:

Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) finds that—

3 (A) the elections held in Belarus on Au-
4 gust 9, 2020, were neither free nor fair; and

5 (B) the results announced by the Central
6 Election Commission of the Republic of Belarus
7 are invalid;

8 (2) stands in solidarity with the people of
9 Belarus, including human rights defenders, bloggers,
10 and journalists, who are exercising their right to
11 freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, and rule
12 of law;

13 (3) recognizes the leading role of women in the
14 peaceful protests and pro-democracy movement in
15 Belarus;

16 (4) condemns the unrelenting crackdown on, ar-
17 bitrary arrests of, and violence against peaceful pro-

1 testers, opposition leaders, human rights activists,
2 and independent media by authorities in Belarus;

3 (5) condemns the unjustified detention and
4 forced or attempted expulsion of members of the Co-
5 ordination Council in Belarus;

6 (6) demands the release of all political prisoners
7 and those arrested for peacefully protesting, includ-
8 ing those arrested before the August 9, 2020, elec-
9 tion;

10 (7) applauds the commitment by foreign dip-
11 lomats in Minsk to engage with Coordination Coun-
12 cil member and Nobel Laureate, Svetlana Alexievich,
13 and encourages an ongoing dialogue with her and
14 with other leaders of the democratically oriented po-
15 litical opposition in Belarus;

16 (8) calls on the Government of Belarus to up-
17 hold its human rights obligations, including those
18 enumerated in the International Covenant on Civil
19 and Political Rights;

20 (9) calls on the United States Government to
21 impose targeted sanctions, in coordination with the
22 European Union and other international partners,
23 against officials in Belarus who are responsible
24 for—

1 (A) undermining democratic processes in
2 Belarus; or

3 (B) participating in human rights abuses
4 related to political repression in Belarus;

5 (10) encourages the United States Government
6 to continue working with its partners in Europe,
7 particularly the Organization for Security and Co-
8 operation in Europe, to support the people of
9 Belarus; and

10 (11) supports—

11 (A) the continued territorial integrity of
12 Belarus; and

13 (B) the right of the Belarusian people to
14 determine their future.

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