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BELARUS ELECTION ALERT #5

Election observers restricted and detained during early voting

On August 9, 2020, presidential elections take place in Belarus, in which the incumbent Aleksander Lukashenka is standing for the sixth time. Early voting took place from August 4 to August 8. Election observers complain about criminal and administrative prosecution of opposition politicians and their supporters, pressure on voters to cast their votes ahead of time and the massive restrictions on independent election observation. Against the backdrop of refusals to admit observers to polling stations and their removal from polling premises, the international community is deeply concerned over electoral violations and the human rights situation in Belarus. Below you can read about the recent developments and find the latest reports on early voting in Belarus.



Photo: Sergei Gapon / AFP. Belarus' riot police officers watch opposition supporters in Minsk

Early voting ended on August 8, 2020. The Central Election Commission (CEC)'s imposition of [restrictions](#) on the number of observers for the period of early voting made this stage of the election campaign completely closed to independent public observation, with numerous observers being [detained](#) during the first days of early voting or [deprived of accreditation](#). Most of the observers admitted to the polling stations represent pro-government NGOs, as stated in the [report](#), produced by Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections (HRDs).

Ongoing repressions and arrests raise concerns about interference with and violations of rights to freedom of expression, particularly media freedom and political speech, and freedom of assembly. Many of the arrests seemed [timed](#) in such a way as to keep those detained locked away until at least after the elections. In the light of electoral violations and violence against peaceful protesters across the country, the EU [appealed](#) to the Belarusian authorities to respect fundamental freedoms.

According to [official data from the CEC](#), 41.7% of voters took part in all five days of early voting, which is a record number of participants compared to the previous presidential elections. However, [voter turnout](#), according to HRDs, was significantly overstated. Observers also recorded cases of organized, forced participation in early voting of certain categories of voters.

The whole [election campaign](#) took place in unequal conditions - there were multiple reports of obstacles to holding mass campaigning events. Moreover, the incumbent made extensive use of administrative and propaganda resources of the ruling government, pro-government NGOs and the media, while opposition figures faced severe limitations and had to rely on social media and messaging platforms, neglected by the state. According to a recent report on traditional and social media by [MEMO 98](#), these efforts by the opposition primarily focused on highlighting ongoing political repression and protests, rather than articulating an alternative political vision.

More reports on the election campaign in Belarus can be found on the website of the “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections” [here](#).

More news on Belarus also available at www.epde.org

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