

European
Elections monitor

from **Corinne Deloy**
Translated by Helen Levy

RÉSULTATS

Presidential «Election» in Belarus, 19th December 2010

Unsurprisingly Alexander Lukashenko retains his post. Several opposition candidates are imprisoned after a demonstration denouncing fraud.

As expected Alexander Lukashenko won the pseudo-election in the first round on 19th December with 79.7% of the vote. He came out ahead of former Deputy Foreign Minister and leader of European Belarus Andrey Sannikov and poet and leader of the movement Govori Pravdou (Speak the truth!), Vladimir Neklyaev, who won 6.1% each! None of the seven other candidates won more than 5% of the vote!

Turnout rose to 90.66% i.e. very slightly below the figure recorded during the pseudo election on 19th March 2006 (1.9 points less).

In office since 1994 Alexander Lukashenko has won for the fourth consecutive time! He achieved a score 2.9 points lower in comparison with March 2006. "The counting of the voting slips will probably not be fair and transparent. But – and this is a vital detail – if Alexander Lukashenko is declared winner with around 50% of the vote this might be credible. However a result of 75% of the vote or more may incite the opposition to brave the Arctic temperatures to demonstrate against the results," said Arkady Moshes, an analyst from the Finnish Institute of International Affairs before 19th December. On the appeal of the seven opposition candidates who wanted to protest against the expected victory Alexander Lukashenko around 10,000 people rallied in October Square in Minsk brandishing red and white flags of Belarus and blue and gold ones of the European Union shouting "For Freedom!" and "Long Live Belarus" but also "Elections without Lukashenko" and "Leave, Leave" addressing the dictator.

"Do not worry, there will be no one in October square this evening," declared Alexander Lukashenko earlier on in the day adding, "In no way can we speak of the falsification of the election." The opposition did however denounce massive fraud in the voting slips of those who fulfilled their civic duty early (estimated at around one third of the vote 31.3% in 2006) i.e. five days before the election. Early voting always escapes the control of international observers.

"This is where Belarus declared its independence in 1991 and this is where Alexander Lukashenko's dictatorship will end today. Alexander Lukashenko did not win the election, he cannot become President of the Republic. He is an usurper. In Minsk he only won 25% of the vote. A second round must be organised," declared Andrey Sannikov. The anti-riot police which had been placed on red-alert violently dispersed demonstrators some of whom tried to take the seat of the Presidency attacking its doors and windows. Several hundred people were arrested. Two candidates were injured: Vitali Rimashevski, co-chair of the Christian Democratic Party was taken to hospital after suffering a head injury during a police charge and Vladimir Neklyaev also suffering a head injury was evacuated by ambulance. "This election is fraudulent. A free vote is impossible under this dictatorship," he declared.

Seven of the nine opposition candidates – Vladimir Neklyaev, Andrey Sannikov, Nikolay Statkevich (Social Democratic Party), Ryhor Kastusyow (People's Front), Vitali Rimashevsky (Christian Democratic Party), Grigori Kostushev (Liberal Democratic Party), Alexey Mikhalovich (Modernisation Union) and Dmitir Us (director of the Tryvium Company) were arrested or imprisoned! President of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek condemned "the cowardly attack" suffered by Vladimir Neklyaev, and High Representative Catherine Ashton condemned the violence used against the oppo-

sition [1] . The USA denounced the use of force by the authorities. *"The USA condemns firmly the violence employed during the election in Belarus. We are particularly concerned about the excessive use of force by the authorities, notably with regard to candidates who were beaten and arrested as well as against journalists and members of civil society. We call on the government of Belarus to show restraint in the wake of the electoral process which must not be marked by more intimidation and violence,"* indicated the American Embassy in Minsk. In March 2006 demonstrators set up their tents in October Square before being evicted five days later by the police forces. Some people were then imprisoned.

The way the pseudo election was run, the size of Alexander Lukashenko's victory and his management of the opposition demonstrations may be decisive in the development of relations between Belarus and the European Union. Lukashenko seemed more concerned about giving the European Union guarantees than about relations between Moscow and Minsk over the last few months. *"We want to react to western journalists' comments who qualify our leader as the last dictator in Europe,"* declared Pavel Legky, spokesperson for the Alexander Lukashenko's Presidency. Indeed the latter has been banned from staying in the EU and the USA since 2002 because of his repeated Human Rights infringements. Belarus holds the sad record of the greatest number of European Parliament resolutions condemning the behaviour of its authorities. Its status as special guest at the Council of Europe has been suspended since 1997.

Before the closure of the polling stations Geert Hinrich Ahrens, head of the 400 OSCE observers declared that the election had taken place in *"better conditions than on 19th March 2006."*

Although the campaign was freer than that of the previous election of the same type in 2006 opponents and many political analysts believe that it was just a simulation of democracy with the aim of achieving a satisfaction on the part of OSCE observers and this completely relative liberalisation will not go beyond the election period. *"It's all playacting. Behind the scenes we can see that the regime is getting harder,"* says sociologist Oleg Manaev.

On 24th November around 1000 people representing

some of the opposition forces rallied in the Kastychnitskaya Square (Independence Square) in Minsk to demand the holding of a real presidential election in line with democratic rules and no arrest was reported although the demonstration was prohibited. All of the candidates were allowed to speak for 30 minutes on TV and the radio during which time Andrey Sannikov was able to call on Belarusian's to *"chase the pig from the garden"*. *"The executive facilitated candidates' airtime and Belarusian citizens discovered politics,"* said Viktor Tereshchenko, former director of the international institute for management in Minsk and present chair of the board of the Association of SME's. For the first time international observers' rights were extended since the Electoral Commission adopted a decision authorising them to attend the counting of voting slips.

Alexander Lukashenko, aged 56 originally from Vitebsk, is a graduate of the History Faculty of Mogilev and of the Agricultural Academy. Former teacher of communist ideology for the Red Army and former political captain for the border guards he became manager of a sovkhose (collective farm) in 1987. Elected to the Supreme Soviet of Soviet Belarus in 1991 (he was the only member of the Belarus Parliament to vote against the treaty dissolving the Soviet Union), he was appointed president of the parliamentary anti-corruption committee of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus two years later. On 20th July 1994 he became the President of the Republic. Two years later whilst Belarus had banned any modification to the Constitution by referendum Alexander Lukashenko organised a popular consultation enabling him to extend the term of his first mandate by two years (which ended in 2001) and to extend his prerogatives. He was re-appointed as head of State in the first round on 9th September 2001 for a five year mandate by 75.65% of the vote against 15.65% for his main rival Vladimir Gontcharik. This election, the results of which were challenged vigorously by the opposition, was not acknowledged by OSCE observers.

On 17th October 2004 the last day of the general elections, since the Belarus Constitution prohibited him from running for a third term, Alexander Lukashenko organised a second referendum to stay in power - the former were denounced as fraudulent by the observers who were responsible for monitoring the transparency

1. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/118638.pdf

and honesty of the election. By means of yet another illegitimate popular consultation and according to results that were deemed false by all of the international organisations responsible for observing the election Lukashenko won 77.3% of the vote and the adoption of an amendment to the Constitution lifting the limit on the number of times any one person can be re-elected as President of the Republic. Alexander Lukashenko was therefore re-appointed on 19th March 2006 against Alyaksandr Milinkevich who was awarded the Sakharov Prize by the European Parliament the same year. This pseudo election like all of those organised under his reign was declared to be out of line with international democratic standards.

Belarusians will start 2011, as the fourteen previous years, with Alexander Lukashenko as head of the country. *“There will certainly be some political changes but power will not change hands in Belarus,”* he warned just a few days before the pseudo-election. When interviewed by a journalist about his possible cooperation with the opposition forces he answered that he would talk with *“normal”* people but not with *“bandits”*.

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