

ELECTION MONITORS: LUKASHENKA USED EVERY TRICK IN HIS OUTDATED PLAYBOOK TO SURVIVE

The presidential election in Belarus fell well short of international standards for transparent, free and fair elections, and saw a clear attempt by the authorities to manipulate the outcome, according to independent election monitoring organisations.

In a post-election statement (below), the election monitors – MEMO 98, the EAST Research Center, and Linking Media – said Belarus had failed to live up to its constitutional and international commitments, unduly restricting political rights and fundamental freedoms during the election period, and using excessive force against citizens expressing their free will, which has continued after the polls.

Ivan Godársky from MEMO 98, a co-author of the statement, commented: *“Lukashenka used every trick in his book to try and suppress the opposition and survive this election. But his playbook is outdated and while dominating all traditional state media, he ignored a vibrant, organic opposition movement on social media. The elections fell well short of the standards expected for a democratic process and we are now seeing the consequences play out on the streets of Belarus.”*

Authorities made a significant effort to stifle and obstruct campaigning by opposition candidates, including denying registration for three serious challengers on dubious grounds and severely limiting access to state media, which demonstrated a clear preference for the incumbent Lukashenka. Media coverage did not, therefore, enable voters to receive sufficient information about contestants.

Veranika Laputska, from EAST Center, commented: *“Initially, the Belarusian authorities clearly underestimated the power of social media as an instrument of self-organization and solidarity for the people. They decided to fight back in the only way they know: by blocking the channels and imposing repressions on journalists, bloggers, and influencers.”*

Belarus state TV, the dominant media platform, allocated 97 per cent of political news coverage to President Lukashenko. Four other candidates – Andrei Dmitryeu, Siarhei Cherechen, Hanna Kanapatskaya and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya – were not presented at all in the main news programming, while there was negative reporting on Viktor Babaryka, who was not permitted to register as a candidate. Despite all these restrictions, the opposition united behind one candidate and mobilised an unprecedented number of supporters and activists through an organic social media movement.

The work of citizens observers, coordinated by the Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections, was severely hampered by authorities on election day, with a number of restrictions preventing them from carrying out meaningful observation. Belarusian authorities had also failed to send a timely invitation to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), meaning there was no credible international in-country observation mission for the first time in 20 years.

The full post-election statement can be read here [m98_by_statement_final](#)

The press release in pdf is here [m98_by_press-release_final](#)

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NOTES TO EDITORS

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Additional resources

Pre-election [interim report](#) and [release](#).

About the organisations

MEMO 98 is an internationally recognized, independent, and non-profit specialist media institution, with 22 year-long experience of conducting media monitoring and research and assisting civil society groups. Using tested and approved methodologies and tools, we provide media analysis and media monitoring with tangible results, in particular during election periods. Having participated in more than 120 election observation missions and about 150 media & election-related projects and trainings in more than 55 countries (in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Balkan countries, but also in Africa, Asia, South America and Middle East), our experts provide assistance on media & electoral and other democratic arrangements.

EAST Center (The Eurasian States in Transition Research Center), launched in 2016, is an independent, interdisciplinary think-tank focused on post-Soviet and East European studies. The EAST Center's mission is to produce high-quality research on disinformation in Central and Eastern Europe, domestic and foreign policies in the eastern European countries, and the Eurasian Economic Union.

Linking Media is a Polish-based non-profit organization specializing in journalism training, media monitoring and analysis in Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine. It was founded by Alexey Leonchik in 2015 and has implemented dozens of projects focused on empowering civic society.