

**PERC Steering Committee (virtual)
Monday, 14 September 2020:**

**Belarus democracy crisis, workers' protests and the
trade union response**

The situation after the presidential elections on the 9th of August in Belarus has seen mass protests of an unprecedented scale against the regime. Elections were, unsurprisingly, fraudulently conducted. The main opposition candidates were harassed and not allowed to compete. Despite clear evidence to the opposite, the authorities announced the landslide re-election of President Lukashenko on 9 August 2020. People took to the streets in many parts of Belarus, claiming 'electoral theft' had taken place. ITUC family member BKDP is the only independent and democratic trade union in the country and unites 10,000 members. Then, there is the "official" Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, which claims to represent 96 percent of workers, about 4.5 million people. (The figure is grossly inflated.) This entity is not internationally recognized by the democratic trade union movement, and its head is also the head of Mr Lukashenko's presidential campaign.

Since the start of the protests, the level of police brutality against peaceful participants has risen rapidly. As the flow of wounded and brutally maimed people to hospitals has swelled, shocked medical staff have organised collective action to protest the violence. Then, workers at major state-owned companies and factories in chemical, transport, food manufacture and construction sectors have started collective actions and established strike committees. At some workplaces, people are quitting the state-supported trade unions. Currently in the country protesting workers are joining "work-to-rule" or so-called "Italian" protests, as national legislation practically prohibits proper strikes, and especially on political grounds.

Since the beginning, the ITUC and ETUC, together with PERC, have been following the situation and keeping communication with colleagues on a daily basis.

A special "country meeting" will be called by PERC to discuss international solidarity support to independent unionism in Belarus.

Some statements in chronological order:

<https://www.ituc-csi.org/belarus-rigged-presidential>

<https://perc.ituc-csi.org/Situation-in-Belarus-joint-ETUC-PERC-statement> (with link to first BKDP statements translated into EN)

<https://perc.ituc-csi.org/Letter-sent-to-Presidents-von-der-Leyen-Michel-and-Sassoli>

(Letter sent to the presidents of the European Commission, European Council and European Parliament: - President von der Leyen; President Michel and President Sassoli after EU High-Representative declarations on the Belarus situation and the announcement of the president of the EU Council of an extraordinary summit to be held on Wednesday 19 August).

<https://www.ituc-csi.org/belarus-strikes-and-protests>

<https://www.etuc.org/en/pressrelease/sanctions-need-hit-lukashenko-and-cronies-hard>

<https://www.etuc.org/en/pressrelease/belarus-eu-foreign-ministers-must-support-right-strike>

BKDP has informed us about the serious retaliatory measures to which workers of the Belaruskali Company (mining), MAZ (truck plant), MTZ (tractor plant) BelAz (heavy-duty trucks), NAFTAN (oil refinery), MZKT (wheeled tractors) and Grodno Azot (chemical company) have been exposed to in response to organizing strikes and peaceful assemblies. After this, on the 26th the ITUC sent a letter to the ILO with a request for urgent intervention. Since then, we were informed about [additional cases where chairs of strike committees or independent union activists were arrested and sentenced](#), mainly under Article 23.34 of the Administrative Code (participation in an unauthorized event).

The ITUC and ETUC joined the LabourStart campaign:

https://www.labourstartcampaigns.net/show_campaign.cgi?c=4488

The ITUC and ETUC addressed OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Edi Rama by letter and held a meeting on the 1st of September with incoming OSCE Chair Ann Linde (the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden).

The ITUC human rights network called member organisations to organise meetings or protest actions in front of the Embassies of Belarus in respective countries.

[BKDP received statements of support of protesting and striking workers from many ITUC affiliates](#), particularly from neighbouring countries.

Different meetings are held with allied organisations, such as Human Rights Watch, to coordinate information and actions.

Mr Aliaksandr Yarashuk has been invited to take part in a meeting of the EU Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights on Monday, the 7th of September.

Following ITUC request, [The Director-General of the International Labour Organization, Guy Ryder, has called on the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, to prevent human rights violations and “ensure full respect for workers’ rights and freedoms” during the wave of protests that have swept the country in recent weeks.](#)

Other actions are planned and prepared based on possibilities.

Articles published for the more general public:

<https://www.equaltimes.org/once-working-people-mobilise-as#.X1dCS4tS82x>

<https://www.equaltimes.org/cuando-los-trabajadores-se?lang=es#.X1dCsItS82x>

<https://www.equaltimes.org/quand-les-travailleurs-se?lang=fr#.X1dC8ItS82x>

<http://column.global-labour-university.org/2020/08/belarus-new-country-on-map-of-europe.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/20/opinion/belarus-strikes-workers.html>

<https://fpc.org.uk/the-key-role-of-workers-in-belarus-post-electoral-upheaval/>

Feature and opinion articles in Russian trade union newspapers on strikes and worker protests:

<https://www.solidarnost.org/articles/chto-proishodit-v-belorussii-profsoyuznyy-vzglyad.html>

<https://www.solidarnost.org/articles/lokaut-dlya-lukashenko.html>

<https://www.solidarnost.org/Blog/Shershukov/lukashenko-i-profsoyuzy.html>

And Russian mainstream press:

<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4465251?query=%D1%8F%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%88%D1%83%D0%BA>
