

Belarus Outlaws Silent Rallies

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Belarus' parliament on Wednesday outlawed the "silent" protests that have swept across the country in recent months as it struggles to overcome a financial crisis.

Belarus devalued its ruble by 36 percent in May, pushing consumer prices up and prompting thousands of Belarussians to protest.

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko has described such rallies as part of a plot to overthrow his government. Police have routinely dispersed such protests and arrested hundreds of participants.

Amendments to the law approved on Wednesday classify any "mass presence of people in a public place agreed beforehand ... aimed at performing actions agreed beforehand or inaction ... to express political views or protest" as picketing that requires official approval.

The protests, usually coordinated through social networking web sites, took place at least once a week for most of the summer.

Participants would gather in agreed locations without any banners and just stand silently or

clap in unison. By September, however, the protests had mostly died out.

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