

Belarus Detains Dozens at Candlelight Protest

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A protester being detained in central Minsk on the anniversary of last year's presidential election protest.
Vasily Fedosenko

MINSK — Belarussian police detained dozens of people who took part in a candlelight protest marking one year since President Alexander Lukashenko was re-elected for a fourth term in a vote his opponents criticize as fraudulent.

The Minsk police department said Tuesday that 32 people faced court hearings on charges such as taking part in illegal protests and hooliganism. In Belarus, those can lead to fines or arrest for up to two weeks.

Dozens of people commemorated the event Monday by lighting candles at the site of the protest. Many were detained by police, although the majority were released soon afterward, human rights group Vesna-96 said.

"The police were rather rough. They grabbed those who lit candles," an eyewitness said. "They would grab one or two people out of the crowd, drag them to the ground and put them

into buses."

Separately, women's rights group Femen from neighboring Ukraine said Tuesday that three of its activists were seized by police in Belarus, forced to strip, threatened with violence and then abandoned naked in woodland.

"They were blindfolded and driven all night in a bus. They were taken into a wood. Oil was poured on them. They were forced to strip and were threatened with being set on fire," a statement by the group said.

"They were threatened with a knife, which was later used to cut their hair," it said. They were later abandoned naked in woodland without their identity papers, the group said, appealing for help in tracing them.

KGB offices in Minsk refused to comment.

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