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Belarus Sets Election Day in October, Lukashenko Poised to Run

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Alexander Lukashenko

MINSK — Belarus on Tuesday named Oct. 11 as the date for a presidential election which is almost certain to usher in a new five-year term for veteran Alexander Lukashenko.

Lukashenko, 60, who has been in power in the ex-Soviet republic since 1994, has said several times he will stand for what will be a fifth consecutive term in office.

Lukashenko has been ostracised by the West for most of his rule because of alleged human rights abuses and his clampdown on political dissent which has eradicated any real political opposition.

His re-election for a fourth term in 2010 brought huge street demonstrations that were dispersed by riot police. Several opposition candidates were beaten up and detained and dissenters rounded up.

In past interviews with Western journalists, Lukashenko has appeared almost to revel in being

branded a dictator by Western governments, though he has recently appeared to be seeking better ties with the West by showing greater independence of opinion from Russia.

But Belarus's largely state-run economy is closely integrated with that of Russia which supplies most of its energy needs, while diplomats say the country's state security apparatus has close ties with Russia's.

After Belarus's central election commission had proposed the Oct. 11 date, Lukashenko said he would provide international observers with full access for the election.

"We will not prevent anyone from observing these elections," he said.

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