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Kremlin Predicts Swift Resolution of Belarus Unrest

By AFP

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Sergei Supinsky / AFP

The Kremlin said Saturday that President Vladimir Putin and his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko agreed in a phone call that the "problems" in Belarus would be swiftly resolved.

The phone call came after Belarus leader who claims to have won a disputed presidential election on Sunday said he needed to contact Moscow over growing protests against his rule.

"Both sides expressed confidence that all the problems that have arisen will be resolved soon," the Kremlin said in a statement.

Russia has been the only neighbor of Belarus to back Lukashenko during the mass protests that have gained growing support from Belarusians and drawn international condemnation of police violence and vote-rigging.

The Kremlin in its account of the exchange between Putin and Lukashenko said that "the most important thing is to prevent destructive forces from taking advantage of these problems."

It said these forces "are striving to harm the mutually beneficial cooperation of the two countries in the union state."

It said the two sides agreed to continue regular contacts and their "intention to strengthen their relations as a union."

Belarusian riot police have used extreme violence and detainees have reported beatings and torture in prison.

Lukashenko, in charge of Belarus for the past 26 years, has a history of playing Russia off against the neighboring European Union when it suits him but Belarus is highly economically dependent on Russia.

Lukashenko issued criticisms of Russia during his election campaign and Belarus detained 33 Russians on suspicion of planning riots ahead of polls.

However he has since changed his rhetoric to blame protests on provocateurs coming from countries including Poland and the Netherlands.

Russia in statements supportive of Lukashenko's election victory has stressed the importance of strengthening the alliance between the two countries, which are formally a union state and until the coronavirus pandemic had no border restrictions.

Lukashenko has said that he opposes full unification with Russia.

In a gesture towards Russia, Belarus on Friday handed back all but one of the 33 detained Russians without charging them.

It earlier issued an embarrassing claim for Russia that they were mercenaries in Wagner, a shadowy private army reportedly funded by a close ally of Putin.

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