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Belarus Leader Accuses Opposition of Trying to 'Seize Power'

By AFP

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Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko addresses employees of the Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant (MZKT), in Minsk, on August 17, 2020. **Nikolay Petrov / BELTA / AFP**

Belarusian strongman Alexander Lukashenko on Tuesday accused the opposition of attempting to seize power in the wake of mass protests against disputed presidential elections in which he claimed victory and a sixth term.

During a meeting of his security council, Lukashenko said the opposition's creation of a Coordination Council was "an attempt to seize power," according to the state-run Belta news agency.

"They demand nothing more and nothing less: to transfer power to them," Lukashenko said.

Belarus's security forces brutally dispersed massive street demonstrations that erupted in the wake of the August 9 presidential vote which the opposition said was rigged to ensure

Lukashenko's victory.

The authoritarian leader's closest rival Svetlana Tikhanovskaya fled to neighboring Lithuania after declaring victory in the vote and announced the creation of the Coordination Council to ensure the transfer of power.

Lukashenko warned that the authorities would take "adequate measures" against opposition figures who participated in the council, saying that any response would be taken within the limits of the law.

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Yet the Belarusian leader has come under fire from EU governments and rights groups for arresting nearly 7,000 demonstrators who took to the streets to protest the elections, with many detainees complaining of inhumane treatment and torture in detention centers.

Lukashenko also accused the opposition of preparing to cut ties with Minsk's most powerful ally, Russia, which has said it is ready to intervene in post-election turmoil if needed.

He said the opposition wanted to tear up the "union state" agreement with Moscow linking their economies and militaries and suggested they were planning curbs on the use of the Russian language and on Russian businesses.

Tikhanovskaya ally Maria Kolesnikova denied the opposition wanted to rupture any existing agreements between Minsk and Moscow.

"We see Lukashenko's claims as an attempt to manipulate and deceive," she said in comments carried by the Interfax agency.

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