The Moscow Times
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Belarus Opposition Leader Criticizes Putin's Talks With 'Usurper' Lukashenko

September 14, 2020

Svetlana Tikhanovskaya. **Valdemar Doveiko / EPA / TASS**

Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskya has criticized Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to hold talks with "usurper" Alexander Lukashenko rather than the Belarusian people.

Tikhanovskaya's statement comes ahead of one-on-one talks between Putin and Lukashenko in Russia's Black Sea resort of Sochi on Monday. The talks follow a month of mass protests that broke out after Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus for 26 years, claimed a landslide victory in a disputed presidential election.

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"No agreements made in Sochi will be considered legitimate," Tikhanovskaya said in a message on her official Telegram channel. "All accords signed with the illegitimate Lukashenko will be reconsidered by the new government because the Belarusian people

refused Lukashenko their trust and electoral support."

Tikhanovskaya claims to have won the Aug. 9 presidential election and fled to neighboring Lithuania following the election under pressure from the authorities.

While Western governments have rejected the official election results that handed Lukashenko his sixth term, Moscow has thrown its support behind the man commonly referred to as "Europe's last dictator."

Putin and Lukashenko are expected to discuss further integration between their countries as well as key trade and energy projects. The leaders do not plan to sign any agreements or hold a press conference after today's talks, the Kremlin has said.

Tens of thousands of Belarusians rallied against Lukashenko and his harsh crackdown on the opposition on Sunday. Many demonstrators also carried signs with anti-integration slogans, accusing the Russian leader of attempts to "grab" Belarus.

Tikhanovskaya herself has stressed that Belarus' protest movement is not anti-Russian.

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