

Belarus Opposition Leader Holds Online Vote on Regime Talks

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Svetlana Tikhanovskaya said the vote for negotiations with President Alexander Lukashenko's regime would be "a clear message to international partners." **Clemens Bilan / EPA / TASS**

Opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya on Thursday urged Belarusians to vote online to support her call for international negotiations with President Alexander Lukashenko's regime.

Tikhanovskaya said the first results of the vote through the website belarus2020.org/home would be announced next Thursday, the anniversary of Belarus's independence declaration in 1918.

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"Each of you knows that our country is in crisis. We can resolve it peacefully — by means of internationally mediated negotiations," Tikhanovskaya said in a statement.

Tikhanovskaya fled to neighboring Lithuania in August last year following a crackdown on mass protests after a disputed election in which she claimed victory against Lukashenko.

A political novice, former school teacher Tikhanovskaya only decided to run in the election after her blogger husband Sergei Tikhanovsky was prevented from doing so.

He has since been charged with planning a violent overthrow of the government and faces up to 15 years in prison.

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She has since lobbied international institutions and foreign leaders to support her call for new elections in Belarus without Lukashenko, who has ruled the country since 1994.

Western governments accuse Lukashenko of rigging the election and have adopted sanctions against top government officials.

Demonstrations against the regime have subsided, while activists, protesters and journalists are being prosecuted.

Tikhanovskaya said a vote for negotiations would be "a clear message to international partners to take action."

She said the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations were "ready to organize a platform and act as mediators as well as force the regime to negotiate."

The website allows users to vote anonymously from their phones using Viber or Telegram messaging apps. Shortly after launching at 9:00 a.m. GMT, it showed 10,710 people had voted in favor of negotiations.

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