

Belarus Under Russian 'Military Occupation': Opposition Leader

By [AFP](#)

November 14, 2022



Army vehicles during a military parade in Minsk, Belarus. **Tatyana Zenkovich / EPA / TASS**

Belarus opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya said that her country was under de facto "military occupation" by Russia on Monday as she urged the EU to maintain pressure on the regime of President Alexander Lukashenko.

Moscow used ally Belarus as a key launchpad for its invasion of Ukraine and is deploying thousands of troops to its close ally as part of a joint task force.

"I have to say that Belarus is de facto under military occupation," Tikhanovskaya told AFP after meeting EU foreign ministers in Brussels.

She said that Lukashenko does not "control the presence of Russian troops" or the stationing of Moscow's military equipment in Belarus.

"He just has to agree with everything because he knows that without [Russian President

Vladimir] Putin's support, he will not politically survive in Belarus."

The announcement of Belarus and Russia's joint deployment last month fuelled fears that Minsk could be gearing up to send its troops into Ukraine just as the Kremlin's forces have been pushed back.

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But Tikhanovskaya insisted that Belarusian soldiers would refuse to join Moscow's war, adding that "Lukashenko knows this."

She said that so far the opposition hadn't "seen any signs" that Russian nuclear weapons had been brought to Belarus following an announcement by Moscow in June that it would deliver missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

Tikhanovskaya lives in exile following Lukashenko's brutal crackdown on protests against his election in the country's 2020 presidential election, in which he supposedly beat Tikhanovskaya in a ballot that was widely seen as stolen by the international community.

She urged EU ministers not to "overlook" the ongoing repression inside Belarus as attention is focused on Ukraine, and to close loopholes in the bloc's sanctions aimed at draining Lukashenko's resources.

"The situation in Belarus is worsening. I have to say the number of political prisoners is increasing, detentions are continuing and people are sentenced to years and years in jail," she said.

"We are asking the world to be persistent, to be consistent and not to appease dictatorship, and not to forgive and forget what the regime has done and is continuing to do."

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