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# Belarus Seeks 19 Years in Jail for Exiled Opposition Leader

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Svetlana Tikhanovskaya **Estonian Foreign Ministry (CC BY 2.0)**

Prosecutors in Moscow-allied Belarus have asked the courts to jail Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya and a close aide to nearly two decades behind bars as they are tried in absentia.

The recommendation reported on Belarusian state media is part of a long-running and brutal campaign to silence critics who led historic rallies in 2020 against strongman Alexander Lukashenko.

"The state prosecutor requested 19 years in prison for (Svetlana) Tikhanovskaya and (Pavel) Latushko," news agency Belta reported, adding that three other defendants had been called to serve 12-year terms.

**Related article**: Belarus Begins Trial in Absentia of Protest Leader Tikhanovskaya

Tikhanovskaya, who claimed victory in the 2020 presidential elections, faces a litany of charges including high treason, "conspiracy to seize power" and creating and leading an extremist organization.

Latushko is a former Belarusian culture minister and was a key figure of the massive demonstrations against Lukashenko who claimed a sixth term in the vote.

Both Tikhanovskaya, who was forced to flee to Lithuania in the European Union, and Latushko now live outside Belarus.

In an interview with AFP last month, Tikhanovskaya described the trial as a "farce" and said it was a given she would be handed "many, many years in jail."

Her trial comes after Belarusian authorities put in the dock a number of other critics, including her husband who was barred from running in the 2020 vote and Nobel Peace Prize co-winner Ales Bialiatski.

Lukashenko, who has been in power for nearly three decades, is a key ally of Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

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