

The ostensibly democratic presidential campaign in Belarus

Up to 11 candidates for president of Belarus submitted their letters of support, each containing at least 100,000 signatures, before the expiry of the deadline for registration on 29 October, including the incumbent Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The candidates who have been registered will take part in the presidential election on 19 December. Admitting numerous rivals to incumbent president is a gesture towards European Union, but it does not in fact mean any real liberalisation of the electoral process.

The opposition and independent candidates encountered far fewer obstacles from the government than during the 2006 campaign, thanks to which as many as ten of them were able to gather the required number of signatures. By allowing such pluralism, the Belarusian government is attempting to convince Western observers that it is ready to hold elections which meet international standards. However these actions do not threaten the re-election of Lukashenka, as none of his opponents enjoy support exceeding more than a few percent. It is also unlikely that the opposition will succeed in selecting a common candidate. Meanwhile, during the formation of the electoral commissions, the government rejected the majority of candidates put forward by opposition parties. In this way, even though it has made the path for the opposition easier during the campaign, the government has maintained its control over the process of counting the votes, which will be of decisive importance for the results of the elections. <kam>