

Lithuania accuses the Lukashenka regime of crimes against humanity

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On 30 September, officials from the Lithuanian Ministry of Justice submitted a request to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague on behalf of the Republic of Lithuania to initiate an investigation into the situation in Belarus under Article 14 of the Rome Statute. The Lithuanian government accused the regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka of crimes against humanity, including forced deportations and the persecution of Belarusian citizens in exile, as well as other actions that contravene international law. Lithuania highlighted that some of these crimes had been committed on its territory, thereby falling under the Court's jurisdiction, even though Belarus is not a party to the Rome Statute.

The government in Minsk has yet to issue an official statement regarding the matter. However, on 2 October, it announced the extension of its ban on the import of selected goods (including beer, wine, vinegar, clothing, and tyres) from Lithuania to Belarus until 1 April 2025, citing "unfriendly actions by the Lithuanian government" as the rationale for its decision. In September, Lukashenka asserted that he was not fearful of international criminal accountability.

Lithuania, the first country to demand that the Belarusian dictator be brought to justice, seeks to demonstrate to the international community that Lukashenka's regime is as criminal as that of Putin's.

Commentary

- **Lithuania has successfully invoked Article 14 of the Rome Statute on one previous occasion, thereby mobilising the international community against the regime in Russia.** In a request submitted on 28 February 2022, it urged the ICC to investigate the situation in Ukraine, including war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the Russian invasion, which Belarus supported. Forty-two other countries subsequently joined the request; the ICC has since issued six arrest warrants, including one for Putin. Putting Lukashenka on trial before the ICC would demonstrate to the international community the necessity of holding the Belarusian dictator accountable not only as an accomplice of the Kremlin but also as the perpetrator of years-long repression against his own people.
- **The request submitted to the ICC demonstrates Lithuania's strong cooperation with the Belarusian opposition, which has long sought to hold the regime in Minsk accountable for its crimes.** The evidence compiled by Belarusian organisations in exile, which have

been documenting the Lukashenka regime's crimes and maintaining contact with the victims, constitutes a key part of the document. A **significant** contribution was made by the National Anti-Crisis Management, led by Pavel Latushka, who is the deputy to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya in the interim government **functioning** as a quasi-government of Belarus in exile. On 1 October, during the presentation of the request at the Lithuanian embassy in The Hague, both Tsikhanouskaya and Latushka accompanied officials from the Lithuanian Ministry of Justice.

- **The Belarusian opposition will present the request submitted to the ICC in The Hague as a demonstration of its effective lobbying in Vilnius and its capacity to take concrete action against the regime on the international stage.** In recent months, some exiled activists have criticised opposition leaders for being passive and for limiting their activities to Tsikhanouskaya's foreign trips, as well as for the failure to influence the decisions of Western political elites.