

More Than 20 Detained At Belarusian Potash Mine For Backing Worker's Political Demands

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Belarusian police have detained more than 20 people at a potash mine for supporting a second worker who has refused to return to the surface in protest against the state company's management and President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's government.

"Now [the miners] are being dealt with. Maybe some will be released. It will take time to find out who participated in the action and who did not. It is also possible that not all the miners have been detained," Serhiy Chabatarov, a spokesman for the Minsk regional police, told RFE/RL.

The protesters were supporting Aleh Kudzyolka, who handed a protest note to his labor union co-workers at the Belaruskali mine at the end of his shift on September 21 saying he would remain hundreds of meters underground until his demands were met.

According to the miners' union, Kudzyolka's demands include the resignation of the company's director and the release of other miners who have been detained in recent weeks while joining the political protests [that have roiled Belarus](#).

Kudzyolka also demanded that Belarusian security forces stop detaining and beating demonstrators who have marched in Minsk and elsewhere in nearly daily demonstrations against Lukashenka.

Kudzyolka was the second miner at the Belaruskali potash mine in Salihorsk, 130 kilometers south of Minsk, to have staged a strike in solidarity with protesters. The other miner, Yury Korzun, was forcibly removed on September 10 after he spent more than four hours [chained to a piece of machinery in the mine](#).

State-owned Belaruskali is one of the world's largest producers of potash, used in fertilizer. The company employs around 16,000 people and is an important source of hard currency for the Belarusian government.

Employees at Belaruskali and other state enterprises have staged sporadic work outages, in support of the protests that erupted after the August 9 presidential election. Local prosecutors, meanwhile, have threatened criminal charges against strike organizers.

Lukashenka, who has ruled the country since 1994, was declared the winner of an August 9 presidential election; opposition groups say their candidate won and that the figures were falsified. He has refused to meet with the opposition or agree to call a new election.

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