

Belarus Promises Tough Response to Sanctions

January 20, 2011

The  **Moscow Times**

MINSK — President Alexander Lukashenko warned on Thursday that he would take tough countermeasures against countries that imposed sanctions on Minsk following his disputed re-election.

Lukashenko did not say what action Minsk could take.

"If someone tries to introduce economic or other sanctions against the country, we must react immediately and prepare countermeasures, including the toughest ones," Lukashenko told a government meeting, state news agency BelTA reported.

Western governments have urged Lukashenko to free scores of activists, including four challengers for the presidency, rounded up during mass protests after the Dec. 19 presidential election that the opposition denounced as fraudulent.

European Parliament President Jerzy Buzek said Thursday that the legislature was backing EU moves to reimpose travel restrictions on leading Belarussian officials unless opposition

leaders were immediately released.

The European Union imposed sanctions on Belarus after a disputed ballot in 2006 but suspended their application in 2008 to encourage democratic reforms in the country.

Several EU member states and EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton have said they may implement a ban when EU foreign ministers meet in Brussels on Jan. 31.

Meanwhile, ambassadors from EU nations in Belarus will skip Lukashenko's inauguration Friday, said an official who works at the embassy of an EU nation in Belarus.

The web site of a university in neighboring Lithuania said the envoys were expected to visit on Friday and meet with Belarussian students who were expelled from Belarus.

Lukashenko, who accused German and Polish security services earlier this month of plotting a coup against him, said Thursday that he would "not bow to anyone."

"This applies to absolutely everyone who tries to pressure and block the country, be it a particular group of countries or even the European Union as a whole," Lukashenko said.

(Reuters, AP)

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