

# Landslide for Belarus Prez

EU, pro-West Opposition say poll mandate a sham

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**BELARUS** President Alexander Lukashenka was today re-elected for a third term with a landslide victory over his three rivals, including NATO-backed candidate Alexander Milinkevich, in the elections slammed by the country's Opposition and the European Union.

"Alexander Grigoriyevich Lukashenka has been re-elected for the third term with 82.6 per cent votes," chairperson of Election Commission Lydia Yermoshina said after counting of votes ended for yesterday's presidential polls in the former Soviet republic.

The 51-year-old incumbent, who has ruled the country since 1994 and has been



President Alexander Lukashenko AP

branded by the US as "Europe's last dictator", trounced his main rival, pro-West Opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich, who got 6 per cent votes. According to the Election Commission, nearly 66.14 lakh people voted in the election, a turnout of 93.3 per cent.

Milinkevich has already dismissed the vote as "farce" and

called for fresh elections. Addressing his supporters who took out a rally defying an election day ban, Milinkevich called for public protests similar to those in Ukraine and other ex-Soviet republics, which led to the ouster of pro-Russia governments.

The observers of European and Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) were critical of the polls saying they do not meet the European democratic standards.

"No one will be fooled by the election results or indeed by the whole election," European Commission vice-president Guenter Verhugen said. However, the head of observer mission from former Soviet states called the Belarusian elections open and transparent.