

## Review: Europe's Last Dictator

Winner of the award for 'Best Documentary' at the London Independent Film Festival, Europe's Last Dictator is an exposé of Alexander Lukashenko's tyrannical reign. [Stephen Thorne](#) reviews

Tuesday 8 January 2013



**Director:** Mathew Charles, Juan Luis Passarelli

**Starring:** Joanna Lumley

**Length:** 55 Minutes

**Rating:** ★★★★★☆

Since 1994 Alexander Lukashenko has ruled Belarus with an iron fist. His sham presidency is a shocking remnant of the old Soviet Bloc regimes. Matthew Charles and Juan Luis Passarelli's documentary tries to raise awareness of the plight of Lukashenko's many victims, focussing specifically on Irina Bogdanova as she attempts to free political prisoners in her homeland.

Remarkably, Irina had little interest in politics until her brother, Belarus' main opposition leader Andrei Sannikov, was beaten, tortured and thrown in prison after a rigged election in 2010. From hearing Irina speak at the Q&A session during the film screening, it's not hard to see how she has maintained her position as a reluctant figurehead of rebellion since. I, for one, wish her campaign all the best.

The subject matter itself is an effective reminder of the dark shadow hanging over parts of Eastern Europe. Foreign journalists are banned from Belarus so the documentary had to rely on amateur footage for scenes of police brutality and oppression. If anything, this gives the film a more hard-hitting edge and potency. Also, interviews with fugitives of the regime are all frank and insightful. As such, my sceptical inertia towards human rights issues was radically transformed; I fully converted to the cause of justice.

However, more could have been said about Lukashenko himself. He's an egotistical and cruel despot with a penchant for dramatic rhetoric. Adolf Hitler is one of his heroes and he refuses to be filmed from behind because of his embarrassment over his bald-patch. Indeed, Lukashenko is so open about his authoritarian style it is hard to understand why British politicians refuse to take action. This dictator strikes such a surreal figure that it is surprising Charles and Passarelli neglect to explain his rise and consolidation of

power in more depth. What motivates the man? How do we stop him?

Nevertheless, if you have even the slightest care for global politics, check out [Europe's Last Dictator](#). It will certainly provide food for thought.



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