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**DEFIANT LUKASHENKO SAYS BELARUSIAN OLYMPIC DEFECTOR WAS 'MANIPULATED'**

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10.08.2021

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EurActiv (9 August 2021)

President Alexander Lukashenko said on Monday a Belarusian sprinter who defected at the Olympic Games in Tokyo had been manipulated by outside forces and would not have fled abroad otherwise.

Sounding defiant on the first anniversary of an election which opponents said was rigged to let him win, Lukashenko denied being a dictator and said he was not involved in the death of an opposition activist found hanged last week in Kyiv.

Today Belarus is in the focus of the attention of the whole world, Lukashenko told an hours-long news conference at the presidential palace building in the capital Minsk.

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