

I. Belarus and The European Union

ANTANAS VALIONIS: «THE CURRENT SITUATION ALLOWS US TO RECONSIDER THE EXISTING EU POLICY»

An exclusive interview of the Lithuanian Republic Minister of Foreign Affairs

Lithuania was one among the first European Union countries to ratify the EU Constitution. Following frustrated results of the referendums in France and Netherlands, the future of this document has become unclear. A crisis is obvious in the European Union. What is today's stand of Vilnius to overcome the difficulties?

- **A.V.** In the past, there have been instants when the EU member states could not reach agreement on important issues. However, the experience shows that, sooner or later, a consensus will be reached. Undoubtedly, it is very difficult to avoid contradictions when solutions are to be taken unanimously, as in the case of the new financial perspective or ratification of the Treaty on the Constitution for Europe. In our opinion, the EU Constitution is a document that should reinforce the EU, making the EU policy more consistent and helping the EU to reach a greater unity in the world. We have expressed this opinion by ratifying this document.

I think that «No» given at the EU Constitution referendums in some countries clearly proves the need of reforms in the EU. Voting against the Constitution, people expressed their disagreement with the existing situation. Even by voting against the treaty aimed at reforming the European Union, though it may seem paradoxical. We see also positive aspects in the current situation. It will allow us to reconsider the existing EU policy and will stimulate serious discussions about the future lines of development in Europe. This is positive, because it will allow the EU to cope with the exciting problems in a more effective way. It is essential to reach agreement on the most important issues; above all, an agreement on the new financial perspective. I am sure that there is a firm political resolve to do this. As regards the EU Constitution, following two unfavourable referendums in France and Netherlands, it has been ratified by four other countries.

One year after the accession to the European Union, the number of EU supporters in Lithuania is rather great. It is even greater than I expected; it means they are not disenchanted

with the EU membership. Before the accession, we had not given non-realistic pledges, and now citizens of Lithuania can feel the impact of the European policy.

The activism and positive dynamics of the Lithuanian foreign policy in the light of the European Union good neighbourhood policy in relation to the so-called «new neighbours» of the EU are widely recognized. It is not a secret that the EU policy is becoming more rigid, for example, in relation to such neighbour as Belarus. Hence, many observers are inclined to see that Vilnius shows, so to say, improvisation in its policy towards the Belarusian neighbour. That is, the demonstration of a less rigid approach. What is your attitude to opinions of these observers?

- **A.V.** I would like to state that Lithuania, as a member state of the European Union, agrees with the EU policy in relation to the Republic of Belarus, and our activity in relations with Belarus is not accidental. Firstly, we should not forget that Belarus is a neighbour state, related to Lithuania not only by a common border (which is the eastern border of the EU!), but also by close economic and social ties and a common historical experience. Secondly, Lithuania is not interested in restricting mutual relations with its neighbours; therefore, a rigid, sometimes even too rigid stand of the EU, may have impact on the already established mutually beneficial relations among neighbours. For this reason, this policy of Lithuania deserves the name of what you called «improvisation». We do not think that this is bad, because it proves, once again, that we have selected the right way in developing our relations with Belarus, both bilaterally and at the European level.

Both states try to preserve and further develop the links that are beneficial for the populations of our states, without breaking social ties and developing businesses. The EU is concerned about human rights and development of civil society, which is reflected in its policy. These aspects of relations are not alien to us; therefore, preserving our positions, we are trying to find solutions acceptable for both parties.

According to some mass media, Vilnius is concerned about the fact that the current scandal around the Russian-Estonian Treaty on the border signifies the beginning of a comprehensive review of the Moscow policy towards Baltic States, making it more rigid. Can we consider the fact of not inviting, defiantly, the President of Lithuania to the festivity in Kaliningrad as a manifestation of such more rigid policy of Russia?

- **A.V.** Russia made a decision that is difficult to understand — not to invite Presidents of Lithuania and Poland, neighbours and essential partners of the Kaliningrad Oblast, to attend festivities devoted to the Day of the City in Kaliningrad. We do not understand what were the objectives of the Russian party — they missed the opportunity to make a powerful impetus for developing neighbourhood relations and cooperation.

We could have seen various complicated issues in the relations between Lithuania and Russia; however, they have been resolved by mutual efforts in a constructive spirit. The fact of non-inviting is not beneficial for Russia itself and has not imparted any constructiveness to our relations. However, we are sure that this will not have a major impact on our relations.

There is a growing tension between Warsaw and Minsk, which is driven by the situations around the Union of Poles in Belarus. The festivities in Kaliningrad and the growing activity of the Russian «Gazprom» can hardly add any «warmth» to the cooled relations between Vil-

nius and Moscow. The rigid anti-Western policy of the official Minsk can be added to this list of negative events. What is your opinion, Mr. Minister: can we speak about some special situations around the region of Lithuania–Kaliningrad–Poland–Belarus?

- **A.V.** Expansion of the EU and NATO, democratic revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, their orientation towards European integration, the similar stand of Moldova have radically changed the situation in the Central and Eastern Europe. Very important geopolitical changes have taken place over a very brief period of time. For example, the Kaliningrad Oblast has become a neighbour of two countries from the European Union, which opens unprecedented opportunities for development in this region. Now, it is very important to find tools meeting the interests of the EU and Russia and to develop projects making this happening.

Belarus is a European country and the people of Belarus deserve living in a democratic, modern and prosperous state. Unfortunately, A. Lukashenko is more oriented towards the USSR of the period of stagnation, though we all know too well what happened to the USSR. The only way forward is democratization and reforms. Belarus, first of all, needs a strong civil society — this is the first step towards creation of a democratic and prosperous state.

What is, in your opinion, the future international event that can be considered the main event in the remaining months of 2005?

- **A.V.** I think that even the most important event will not turn the world over. More important are not the events, but problems and issues that should be solved. We know these issues; therefore, we will strive to find positive solutions to these issues through joint efforts of international public.

Questions were asked by Roman Yakovlevsky. 22.09.05.

BRONISLAW GEREMEK: «THE BELARUSIAN REGIME IS A DESTABILIZING FACTOR IN THE REGION»

Eleven known Polish public figures called to support Belarusian democrats.

Eleven known Polish public figures made a call to support Belarusian democrats. This call was signed by the film director Andrzej Wajda, one of the most known leaders of «Solidarity» Bogdan Borusewicz, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Wladislaw Bartoszewski ...

More and more Polish politicians openly speak about the fact that radical sanctions will be applied against Belarusian officials and their entry to Poland will be significantly restricted. In particular, the view on the situation was presented by Bogdan Borusewicz, one of the leaders of the Pomorsk region. When Mr. Borusewicz was the Vice Prime Minister, he was the head of the joint Belarusian–Polish Commission on interregional cooperation. Now he is member of the Senate (in the past, he was twice elected member of the Parliament) and says that he will personally initiate introduction of economic sanctions against Belarus. He explains this radical change of his views as follows: