

linked to the presidential election in Belarus. The Belarusian leader once again lets both all his friends and foes abroad and his fellow countrymen see that absolutely nothing will change here after 19th March. Maybe it will not, indeed. But another thing is also true: after this date the official Minsk will definitely have less desire to make a fuss about integration.

Mikhail Dashuk. 19.01.06.

RUSSIAN BEETLE AND EUROPEAN BLOCK

Europe has never been in such consensus with regard to Belarus

The observers are unanimous: during the past weeks Europe displayed unprecedented fervency, or even ostentation, in tackling the «Belarusian issue». The degree of interest in this issue is rising as 19th March is approaching – the date of the presidential election in the country with a consistent reputation of the «last dictatorship in Europe.» At that, unprecedented attention is paid to contacts with top oppositionists. Alexander Milinkevich, a potential rival to the irremovable President Lukashenko, was given the green light to make an impressive tour of the Old World's political centers. After the New Year Milinkevich managed to meet Phillip Dust-Blazi, Foreign Minister of France, Polish President Lech Kaczynski, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso, and other EU leaders. A bit earlier he had met Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus. The leader of the Belarusian opposition also was given the floor in Poland's Seim, the European Parliament, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and, in addition, spoke at a series of important international forums and informal executive meetings. This is truly an unprecedented thing. None of the political opponents of the system had been honored with such a cascade of receptions in the Old World capitals. And this looks especially spectacular against the background of blind confrontation between the official Minsk and the West, whereupon President Lukashenko has not been invited to Europe for a long time.

In the meantime, harsher overtones have sounded in declarations made by European bodies on the «Belarusian issue». This concerns both assessments of the state policy and possible measures of retaliation to be applied to the top officials in the event of failing to ensure a fair election. Europe is preparing to make a massed lodgment of observers. Besides, Brussels accelerated the startup of a large project on independent broadcasting on Belarus. The leader of the Belarusian opposition himself thinks that «Europe has never been in such consensus with regard to Belarus.» Hot on the trail after his voyage through the Old World capitals, Alexander Milinkevich gave an interview to «Wider Europe» portal.

Summarizing the results of your tour – what is in the «dry residue»?

A.M. «It is of the greatest importance that Europe has seen a clear democratic perspective in Belarus and is willing to actively assist it as never before. Previously they took different positions with regard to the Belarusian issue over there. Some said that maybe he should not be messed with at all; if Belarusians love their president so much, let their society mature to democracy. Others advocated a very hard approach. At present, as I became convinced at my

meetings, practically the entire Europe has the same standpoint. It cannot leave this country in a grave, undemocratic condition.

«First of all, we border on the European Union. And a dictatorship is always unstable, unpredictable, and aggressive. Second, along with concern about its own security, Europe also feels morally indebted. Human rights, democracy, election in full compliance with the law — these are no idle words for the Europeans. I made sure: it is not true that Belarus allegedly is not welcome to Europe. I could see that during the meeting with our delegation foreign politicians had their eyes light up. They began to feel that Belarus is not such a bog of pessimism, as some of them had believed. They found that we have a strong and energetic alternative to the current power.»

Official Minsk claims that Europe is allegedly not burning with desire to butt in the Belarusian affairs, but is pushed by Washington... How would you comment on that?

A.M. «Any attempts to drive a wedge between Washington's and Brussels' positions concerning the «Belarusian issue» are hopeless. At present it is a single position. This is what the joint visit of high-rank US and EU representatives to Minsk was supposed to demonstrate. The Belarusian officials followed their ritual, refusing to issue them visas at the same time. As a result, Washington and Brussels jointly refused to visit, thus confirming their unified approach.»

Along with that, there is an opinion that Europe does not want to confront Russia because of Belarus...

A.M. «Naturally, Europe does not need confrontation with Moscow. It is very soothing for Europe when we persuade them that the Belarusian democratic movement is absolutely not anti-Russian; when we say that we are capable of building more honest, transparent, and predictable relations with Russia than the current establishment. Yes, we emphasize that independence is a holy thing for us. But it is exactly on the ground of independence that we can both take our relations with Russia to a new level and build relations with Europe from ground zero.»

There prevails an opinion that, despite all their good intentions, Western nations simply do not have effectual mechanisms to influence the situation in Belarus. Do you agree with that?

A.M. «Certainly, one can throw many such stones... But the «fault» of the unified Europe is limited, perhaps, only to its being democratic for a long time and has unlearned to «handle» dictatorships. Therefore, it is indeed necessary to seek effectual mechanisms. After all, if the Belarusian authorities are unwilling to cooperate and brush aside all proposals, it is their problem. But at the same time this country has a civil community, mass media, parties, trade unions... It is they who should be closely cooperated with, and we accentuated this in our discussions all the time. We were persuading them, for instance, that it would be worthwhile to provide an easier visa issue policy for Belarusians. By the way, some European parliamentarians took up the idea and took it further, speaking of issue of visas free of charge. Naturally, this is a complicated problem and it cannot be solved in a day. Just making visas cheaper will be a success. The more average Belarusians are able to see with their own eyes how Europe

lives and what it is inspired by, the more our society will be convinced that the current authorities retarded and suspended this country's development.»

The official Belarusian propaganda claims that opposition leaders arrange their personal business abroad. They allegedly prepare alternate landing sites for themselves over there and soon they will surely escape, exposing their naïve rank-and-file supporters...

A.M. «While traveling around the country, I have more than once announced to our fellow citizens that we united for real and for long. Until the complete victory of democracy. I mean our coalition, which last fall conducted the Congress of the Democratic Forces in Minsk. And I, as a leader elected by the Congress, am not going anywhere. I have a settled intention to work in Belarus under any political climate – not to seek refuge in the West, but do everything to create decent standards of living for all Belarusians in our common home. So that my fellow countrymen, my children and grandchildren would live in a prosperous and free country.»

And still, not to mince words — what can your international activity give to your country and its average citizens?

A.M. «Educated and active young Belarusians understand that it is impossible to improve prosperity of their homeland without cooperation with the community of democratic nations. Let me reiterate myself: they are ready to open a door for us. In the event of democratic changes, Belarus will receive investments and new technologies. New modern plants will be built and new jobs will be created. Belarus will be transformed! Currently we are closed. Fear reigns in the society. Performance figures are achieved by means of a whip. We will destroy this atmosphere of fear. Belarusians are fully entitled to a decent life.»

During meetings in Strasburg, Brussels, and other political centers of the Old World you accentuated the issue of assistance to non-governmental mass media and independent awareness-building among your countrymen. What are the motives behind this?

A.M. «It is because of the information blockade in our society that fear and apathy became so wide-spread. We are grateful to Europe for its willingness to help us break through this blank wall. In the course of discussions, our delegation emphasized that such assistance should be provided in a number of lines. It is important to pay attention not only to organization of TV and radio broadcasting from abroad, but also to help those who deal with independent awareness-building within this country, which is anything but simple. Over here, in spite of the horrendous pressure, there are still newspapers that courageously fight for truth. They should be supported in every way. The Internet is becoming an increasingly important means of communication, especially for the young. Thus, radio and television are certainly quite significant, but it is also of importance that such projects should not become something like a fashion and not shadow other areas. In general, provision of free information to the Belarusian society calls for an integrated approach.»

Do you believe that the European Union launches media projects for Belarus for real and for long, and not just to «tick it off,» as Brussels' critics claim?

A.M. «I am absolutely sure of this. One hundred percent sure, since I have had substantive discussions on this point and seen a number of documents with my own eyes.»

What is your action program for the culminating point of the election campaign, considering the forecasts by independent experts that the authorities will rigidly stick to its scenario, with the official leader taking the game with a «smashing score»?

A.M. «We are not going to play by the script of the authorities. It is clear that they on high are preparing to announce unconditional victory of the current leader. But we are placing our stake on people's intelligence, common sense, and courage. I am sure that on the Election Day the society will clearly realize that this power has completely lost its authority. And even its proponents will feel that this system is not worth supporting».

Thus, you do not think that, as pessimists keep saying, «the score of the match is already known»?

A.M. «If I had not traveled the length and breadth of this country, I possibly would not have become so convinced that we have accumulated a tremendous potential for change. I am absolutely sure that we are able to get over 50 percent of the vote. The most important thing is for people to clearly understand that this victory has been achieved, that we have won. This is what we preparing ground for. In case the authorities announce the results that are contrary to people's will, the worse for them. This will mark the beginning of the end of this system».

So, Brussels have activated its politics at the Belarusian front. Along with that, observers note that the leader of the Belarusian opposition, inspired by the results of his busy trip, may somewhat exaggerate the degree of unanimity and activeness of Europe with respect to promoting democratization of his country. In the opinion of critics, the recent PACE resolution on the Belarusian issue once again abounds in generalizations. And the specifics, such as threats to expand the «black list» of Lukashenko's officials, who are not going to be allowed in the West, do not look overly scary to the top officials either, since they are used to isolation. Experts have questions about organization of tenders for broadcasting to Belarus, as well as about the effectiveness of the very concept of this broadcasting.

Observers note inconsistent policies pursued by several neighboring countries with regard to the official Minsk. In particular, supporters of a more flexible approach to contacts with Belarusian authorities are strong in Lithuania. Critics call this unscrupulous flirting with the dictatorship. Proposals on simplifying visa policies for Belarusians stumble upon the fence of bureaucratic machinery and fears of the tide of illegal migration.

Also, a question is often asked as to the effectiveness of regular appeals of European authorities to the Kremlin with the purpose of impelling it to do some «educational work» with the Belarusian leaders. In any case, at a recent PACE session the Russian delegation ardently defended its ally. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that at a major news conference in Moscow on 31st January Vladimir Putin gave a rather equivocal answer to the question by France Press concerning Moscow's support of Lukashenko's rule. «As for my meetings with the President of Belarus, they have to do with support of the Belarusian people, who are fraternal to us, rather than support of the regime, as you have put it,» the Russian leader remarked. In saying that, Putin emphasized that «we run integration processes with Belarus. These processes are anything but simple, quite complicated. They often lead to a very sharp debate, as it happened

two years ago when «detaching» prices for energy sources for Belarus from Russian domestic prices. Everyone should remember this. Therefore, it is absolutely wrong to say that we are supporting a particular political figure at all costs.» This way Putin recalled the «gas war» of 2004, forgotten by many, when Belarus became the first, long before Ukraine, to experience Moscow's special weapon — interruption of the natural gas supply. A few days earlier Alexander Lukashenko also recalled that «gas war» in a large interview to the national TV channels. He could hardly hide his apprehension speaking of the inevitable growth of gas prices and the need to convert to resource-saving technologies and mitigating power dependency on Russia. Can this be a pure coincidence?

Just a small flashback: after the two presidents' December meeting in Sochi there were talks of Lukashenko's receiving Moscow's approval to run for his third presidency not for free, but in return for a promise to trade off BelTransGaz shares. The gas transporting system of Belarus has long been a coveted catch for Gazprom. The version of backroom agreements has been heated up by statements by top-managers of Gazprom itself, which made believe that the Belarusian «pipe» was basically a put-up job. However, Lukashenko's and his high-rank officials' latest statements dispersed illusions on that score. Minsk still evaluates BelTransGaz at USD 5 billion, which is unacceptable for Moscow. Besides, the Kremlin is apparently irritated by the obstinacy of the Belarusian side in discussion of the draft Constitutional Act of the Union State and its unwillingness to introduce the RF rouble as a single currency for the two countries. Observers believe that in both cases the authoritarian Belarusian ruler does not want to sacrifice a penny-weight of his individual power.

In the opinion of some experts, Russia may start seriously pressurizing Belarus. However, it will not be because of the appeal from the West and definitely not for the sake of sublime ideas of democracy, but will be conditioned by Russia's economic interests and great power aspirations. Nevertheless, the «last dictatorship in Europe» is at risk to find itself between the beetle and the block.

Vital Voronovich. 06.02.06.

SECURING INSECURITY: THE EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF THE EU'S INTERNAL SECURITY REGIME AND ITS EASTERN NEIGHBORS

The evolution of the EU amidst the continued dramatic changes in Europe and the world has been radically changing its fundamental concepts, institutions and policies. Security is one such area where the speed and scope of transformations have been most stunning. It has been steadily losing its internal/external dichotomy and while the shaping of the CFSP and the ESDP is still underway, Justice, Freedom and Security (JFS or JLS — the French acronym) that is more and more often used in place of «Justice and Home Affairs» (JHA) are acquiring an external dimension and demand enhanced cross-pillar coordination, as well as new forms and mechanisms for coping with the external environment. Internal security experienced two