

Poles can be understood — they want to see Belarus as a reliable partner and predictable neighbour. And this can be only a democratic, sovereign and European Belarus.

Vladimir Glod. Gdansk–Warsaw–Minsk. 29.09.05.

EUROPE' GROWING CONCERN WITH THE BELARUSIAN SITUATION

The European Parliament is pressing on the European Commission to facilitate democratisation in Belarus, while Moscow is pressing on Lukashenko in its own interests

In the last months, the European Parliament has taken several resolutions on the policy of the official Minsk, containing strict lines. The last resolution was dated 29 September last year. What should be done with this European enfant terrible? Among other measures, in item 17, the European Parliament «calls on the Council and the Commission to raise the issue of Belarus in the negotiations with the Russian authorities so as to outline joint responsibility for actions that would lead to concrete democratic transformations in this country». This thesis is repeated in different resolutions with small variations. Thus, if we look up the similar document of 7 July 2005, we will find actually the same wording in item 16. This refrain already causes noticeable irritation among a significant part of internal political opponents of Lukashenko. They think that such appellation to the Kremlin is like of a voice of one crying in the wilderness. Therefore, they raise a sharp rhetorical question: Is it time for the West to renounce its illusions about the beneficial role of Moscow in the hypothetical process of refinement of the Belarusian regime?

It is indicative that leaders of the right Russian opposition call on Europe to see the Kremlin not through rosy glasses. We had a talk in Brussels with Grigory Yavlinsky, leader of the Russian party «Yabloko». Visiting Brussels on the invitation of the European Parliament, this Moscow leader called Western colleagues not to close their eyes on the authoritarian character of the Putin regime, who started to curb democracy and civil freedoms in the country. We think it is useful to reproduce a fragment of our talk in literal terms.

The last resolution of the European Parliament on Belarus again has a note of hope: allegedly, Russians can in some way influence the Lukashenko regime and help to democratise the country. What do you think: to what extent are such hopes grounded, or are them illusions?

- **G. Ya.** These are illusions. The present regime of Belarus is the regime that Russia wants to see there. That is all. If it wanted to see another regime, this other regime would have been in place long ago.

Why then does Europe persistently repeat this thesis about the Russian factor from one resolution to another?

- **G. Ya.** Simply, because it does not know what to do. Because, this is a really complicated topic.

What should be done, in your opinion? It is too obvious that opposition forces are not sufficient. The country has a relative economic stability (another question is: what are the roles played by Russian subsidies). In any way, the society is sleeping today...

- **G. Ya.** These problems must be solved, to a significant degree, in Moscow. For example, I do whatever I can to help Belarus in this context. In general, any positive changes in Moscow will immediately lead to positive changes in Belarus. The fate of Belarus significantly depends on what will happen to Russia. I personally do not like to see Belarus as a battlefield between Europe and Russia.

What is your short-term prediction: will the Kremlin undoubtedly support Lukashenko during the 2006 elections?

- **G. Ya.** I do not know. The Kremlin will solve its own task: to retain Belarus within its sphere of influence. If Lukashenko is needed for this, he will remain. But if the issue can be solved without Lukashenko, the Kremlin will be happy to do without him. They will be purely pragmatic in their approach.

Also in the European Parliament in Brussels, a dialogue was held with the Chair of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Rene van der Linden. «In my opinion, Russia has to play an important role to turn Belarusian towards Europe», he stated. He also added that he was not a champion of the total isolation of Belarus.

The author of this message asked: Is it possible to believe in the Kremlin ability to help democratisation in Belarus, when many speak about the rapprochement between Putin and Lukashenko regimes? It turned out that the Chairman of the PACE did not quite agree with this. He agreed that Moscow has problems with freedom of mass media, human rights, etc. However, Mr. Van der Linden reminded that when last June the Council of Europe discussed the report on the progress of Moscow commitments before this organisation, members of the Russian delegation accepted many critical remarks in a constructive way.

Unfortunately, our interlocutor was pressed for time and I did not have time to remind that at the same, during the session in Strasbourg, the head of the Russian delegation and the Chair of the Duma Committee on International Affairs Konstantin Kosachev stated that his country planned to reduce its fee to the PACE budget. Though he asked not to correlate this with the strict formulations in the above report, it could not be thought accidental. Mr. Kosachev even did not try to conceal his indignation at the fact that PACE recommended Moscow to build its relations with Minsk depending on the democratic reforms in Belarus. He stated this immediately in Strasbourg, and then in Moscow, some days later. «We think absolutely improper the recommendation for Moscow how to build its relations with a third country which is not a member of the Council of Europe and has not any commitments to it. This recommendation is a colossal political blunder of the PACE». That's how the «Interfax» agency cited the statement of Kosachev at the press conference in the Russian capital on 27 June.

It is noteworthy that the fact that Belarus, due to violations of human rights, has remained the only country in Europe which is not a member of the Council of Europe is presented almost as a valour! Perhaps, neither Strasbourg nor Brussels read the reports about this press conference? Or they did not hear a series of statements by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs defending the official Minsk? Anyway, even following this happening, resolutions of

the European Parliament persistently reproduce the thesis about the need «to raise the issue of Belarus at the negotiations with Russian authorities».

«There are two models for replacement a regime: conventionally speaking they are American and European models. Naturally, I am a champion of the European model». That was the answer to my question in Brussels by Graham Watson, leader of the third most important factions in the European Parliament «Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe». The issue is, whether the united Europe has any real levers to influence the Belarusian situation. (This conversation, just as a series of others, took place during the visit of Belarusian journalists to the European Parliament on the invitation of the Vice Speaker Janusz Onyszkewicz and the group «Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe».)

«We are amazed that countries which had some degree of welfare in the time of the Soviet Union are now rolling towards dictatorship», stated Mr. Watson. He also added: «We welcome the fact that the Belarusian opposition has joined its forced and elected a single candidate». As the leader of the group put it, now Europeans «understand better what is happening in Belarus». Graham Watson also stated that «concern about the Belarusian situation in Europe is increasing». «In my understanding, Belarus is part of Europe», stressed the member of the Parliament. At the same time, he agreed with the opinion that not everyone in the European Union feels it. «Most of the people in our countries are concerned with their own problems», noted the interlocutor. He acknowledged that statements of the European Parliament are rather declarative in their character. However, this British deputy added that, «We, in the European Parliament, are trying to push on other institutions of the European Union». According to Mr. Watson, the Council of the European Union pays more attention to elaboration of a common external policy and security policy. The head of the group hopes that fruits of the coordinated and strong policy of the European Union towards Belarus can be seen soon. Mr. Watson added that no forced measures are meant: «We are not going to send troops to change the regime in Belarus». The interlocutor noted that the EU can influence the situation in Belarus by using «three tools», i.e., economic impact, diplomacy, and support of democratic forces in the country.

It should be also pointed out that representatives of the «Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe» are in favour of a more active approach by the European institutions to the issue of democratic reformations in Belarus. In particular, members of the group promote the project of the independent radio broadcast for Belarus. On 1 July 2005, the head of the group Graham Watson and the Vice Speaker of the European Parliament Janusz Onyszkewicz (also a member of the same faction) visited Minsk so as to study the situation in the country and establish contacts with Belarusian politicians. In particular, these European deputies had a meeting with Aleksandr Milinkevich, who was later elected as a single candidate from the democratic forces for the 2006 presidential elections.

In his turn, Janusz Onyszkewicz, answering in Brussels to my question about whether the united Europe sees any effective tools for influencing the Belarusian situation, assured that deputies of the European Parliament would, in the future, continue their pressure on the European Commission so as to help democratisation in Belarus. The interlocutor acknowledged that opportunities of the European Union in terms of influencing this country are rather limited,

although it has financial resources to support reformation processes in different states. According to this politician, the problem is that the Belarusian leaders do not show readiness to really develop relations with the united Europe. On the other hand, as Mr. Onyszkewicz noted, there is also a problem of inertia of European institutions. This prevents them from elaborating a more flexible policy towards Belarus. «The bureaucratic machine of the European Commission is very slow and inert, however, we will move faster little by little», summed up the interlocutor.

The author of this article could not but ask the following question: Do you believe that Moscow can help in democratizing Belarus? Janusz Onyszkewicz answered that regimes of Putin and Lukashenko do come closer to each other. According to the Vice Speaker of the European Parliament, the Kremlin supports the current authorities in Minsk because, following its defeat in Ukraine, «it cannot afford a similar scenario in Belarus». At the same time, according to this politician, «in a certain situation it may become not beneficial for Moscow to have such a partner, isolated from the entire world»; then, it may put its stake on another leader. In this context, the Vice Speaker recalled a well-known story, whether an anecdote or a true one, that when Stalin was irritated by Krupskaya, he warned her that it was possible to find another wife of Lenin...

Mr. Onyszkewicz is convinced that the united Europe must help in the development of civil society and political pluralism in Belarus. In his opinion, to avoid the «Romanian scenario» in the country, it is necessary to try to change mentality of those who are at power. «They managed to do this in Poland, and there was roundtable instead of a revolution», indicated Mr. Onyszkewicz, keeping in mind the negotiations between the government of Jaruzelski and the opposition, organised in 1989, which were the beginning of the democratic transformation of the Polish society.

Janusz Onyszkewicz is a veteran of the legendary «Solidarity», a former political prisoner, and he knows what he is speaking about. He recollected an episode from his own biography: it was 1983, martial law in Poland and the peak of repressions. He was professor of mathematics and a member of the opposition, in handcuffs. And then, all of sudden, a security officer said to him in private, that they, who were meant to prosecute and suppress, were talking in low voices among themselves about what would the then prisoners do to them when they came to power. According to the member of European Parliament, members of the state machine must feel that today's authorities are not for ever. To this end, champions of public changes should show their force and unity. Therefore, the Vice Speaker of the European Parliament stressed that «it is a pleasure to know that the opposition has its single candidate for the presidential elections».

The recent return to Minsk of the Polish Ambassador Tadeusz Pauliak was assessed by his compatriot Mr. Onyszkewicz as a normal and logical step. We should remind that the ambassador was recalled to Warsaw in July last year, at the peak of the diplomatic crisis, related to the attack by the Belarusian authorities at the «too independent» leaders of the Union of Poles in Belarus. The return of Mr. Pauliak was considered by a number of politicians and political scientists as a manifestation of the lack of consistency and the weakness of Poland's policy in the Belarusian direction. Mr. Onyszkewicz does not fully agree with this assessment.

He stressed that his country did not declare a diplomatic war on Belarus, but only recalled the head of its mission for consultations. According to Mr. Onyszkewicz, now, following the consultations, the Polish ambassador had a broad field of activities. At the same time, he did not think that the recent meeting between the Lithuanian Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas and his Belarusian counterpart Sergey Sidorsky was a well-thought step on the part of Vilnius.

It should be added in this respect, that Kiev's statements about its readiness to export to Belarus the fruits of its orange revolution started to subside. Recently, the new Ukrainian Prime Minister Eranukhov visited Minsk; a meeting between Lukashenko and Yushchenko cannot be ruled out in the foreseeable future. The Ukrainian leadership obviously is not willing to spoil rapidly developing trade and economic relations with its northern neighbour. Or, to aggravate the internal political situation after the split in the «orange» team on the eve of parliamentary elections that will be difficult for Yushchenko and his colleagues.

These pragmatic approaches have brought about some disenchantment among the Belarusian champions of democracy, who were earlier inspired by the «orange revolution». In general, analysing unexpected courtseys of the neighbours to the official Minsk, some Belarusian political scientists, for example, make a conclusion that the Lukashenko regime has more chances to successfully oppose the pressure both from the West and from the East. Yes, there is some pressure from Russia, too. But what is this?

It is indicative that the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lavrov, speaking in Paris on 11 October, supported the official Minsk and called on the West to avoid black-and-white assessments of the situation in Belarus. In the past, too, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has several times spoken against «export of democracy» to the post-Soviet states. It is obvious that Moscow gives the West a new a clear message: Do not touch the country which is within our sphere of influence! Now the ball is in field of the West.

Aleksandr Klaskovsky. Brussels–Minsk. 24.10.05.

VACLOV STANKEVIČ: A BROAD AND PEACEFUL FRONT IS NEEDED FOR BELARUS' DEMOCRATIZATION

Interview with the member of the Lithuanian Parliamentary Commission on NATO

Politicians and analysts continue to comment on the statement made by the Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus to the German newspaper «Welt» about possible attack by Lukashenko troops on his country. Mr. Stankevič, you have expressed in press the opinion that the journalist is rather misinterpreted the idea of the President. Nevertheless, there is no smoke without fire... Possibly, Lithuanian leadership sees some grounds for concern about security of their country related to the policy of the Belarusian regime?

- V. S. I am very closely related to the issue of the national security, because I am the head of the Parliamentary Commission on NATO. In no way do we perceive Belarus as a po-