

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-

tential enemy. In no way! I think that the President Adamkus, if you ask him now, would not confirm the opinion about Belarus as a potential threat to Lithuania. On the other hand, we have political views on the global processes that are different from the views of the Belarusian leaders. Perhaps, when Mr. Adamkus gave his interview, he meant, first of all, the style of government in Belarus. This country is governed, putting it mildly, not always according to the laws. Many decisions are taken through presidential decrees.

That is to say, a feeling of threat can appear among the neighbours because of unpredictable behaviour of the official Minsk, cannot it?

- V. S. Indeed, one thing is when a country is ruled by democracy, with a democratic parliament and deputies vested with due powers, like, say, in Lithuania. Then, the policy of the country is predictable. And it is quite different when everything, or almost everything, depends on the will of one person. Then, of course, there is a moment of unpredictability. But I want to stress once again: this does not mean that we, in Vilnius, see Belarus as a country that can attack us tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, or in a month. Belarus is a very important economic partner for us. I say this not as a witticism — this is really so. For Lithuania, a country which is three times smaller than Belarus, its market, cargos coming through our territory, have a high significance. And from this point of view, it is not wise to view Belarus as an enemy.

Another argument is, to attack Lithuania, or, say, Latvia today means to attack NATO. I think Belarusian authorities also understand this. By the way, working in NATO entities, I know very well: they think Belarus also as a very important partner. Again, this is not merely a compliment — it is really so. In Brussels, they have an opinion that Minsk plays a worthy part in the programme «Partnership for Peace». In the last three years, I have regularly attended NATO summits and can argue that Belarus has a good reputation in terms of cooperation. Let us see the following: if a country is praised by the NATO entities for cooperation within the programme which has such a clear name as «Partnership for Peace», then what kind of war can we talk about?

You have noted that economic cooperation with Belarus, including transit, etc., is very important. In this relation, I recollect a recent meeting of your Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas with his Minsk counterpart Sergey Sidorsky. It had ambiguous repercussions, in particular, among EU politicians. Don't you think that sometimes members of the European Union, due to economic considerations, somewhat put aside democratic principles, closing their eyes on violations of human rights, and build relations with Minsk based on the pragmatic interests?

- V. S. I would not agree that someone closes his eyes. On one hand, Belarusian transit is really very important — and not only this. For example, we have many joint ventures. Economic cooperation is facilitated by the fact that, virtually, we do not have a language barrier. In general, we understand each other well, because we have come from the same system and have similar mentality.

However, we never close our eyes on the violations of democracy which really take place in Belarus. And if you ask today about this our Prime Minister Brazauskas, he would, for sure, give the same answer. Lithuania will inevitably speak about violations of democracy. And it speaks about it today — though Minsk does not always like it. You know that we orga-

nize seminars and conferences on the Belarusian issue. We do not conceal this fact. We speak openly that we support opponents of the regime ruling in this country.

At the same time, we think that the stronger the Belarusian businesses as well as the Belarusian economy integration into the economies of democratic countries are, the sooner the process of democratization in this country begins. But if we begin to turn away from each other in such fields as economy and culture, then we will move farther apart from one another. But we have to come closer. And for this reason, we should develop economic ties in every possible way. Therefore, if the Prime Minister Brazauskas meets with his Belarusian counterpart, this is quite normal. In the long run — and I always emphasize this — there is a difference between the President Administration and the Government of Belarus. Ministers are more economically-biased than politicians.

In general, I am among those people in Vilnius who think that our governments must cooperate, to put it simply, to the full extent. I am sure that this will help to begin the process of democratisation in Belarus in a much faster way.

You mentioned seminars organised in Lithuania on the Belarusian issue and the support to political opponents of Lukashenko. Recently, this issue was raised by General Dementei from the Belarusian KGB, presenting a bill on counteracting extremism in the Parliament. According to his words, some support bases to exert impact on Belarus are being formed in the neighbouring countries, including Lithuania. In this context, tracking and possible training of extremist groups was mentioned. How can you comment on this statement?

- V. S. I categorically disagree with him. I repeat: we do not conceal the fact when we organize activities involving Belarusian opposition. For example, recently, there was a seminar under the auspices of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. If we see that the Belarusian opposition is deprived of the possibility to present their opinion publicly in their own country, that nongovernmental newspapers are closed and there are no independent TV channels like in Lithuania, then we think it our duty to give these people an opportunity for free statement of their views about the future of Belarus. However, everything is done in a legal way! We do not urge people to start riots or to come to the streets. It is even more improper to speak about some plans of intervention on our part. We have our own problems! The fact that we do not always find a common language at the political level with the official Minsk does not mean that they prepare some revolution for Belarus in Vilnius. We have no any thoughts about this!

OK, let us put aside revolutionary scenarios. Then, the issue of effective influence by Europe and its institutions on the Belarusian situation comes up. For example, the European Parliament adopts relevant resolutions. They include a lot of correct items; however, the ideas and proposals often are stuck at the level of executive authorities of the European Union. In the European Commission, for example, they say: we have no leverage or tools to implement these plans. Or else: the rules do not allow sending money for some programmes of democratization. How, in your opinion, can this declarative approach in the approach of Europe to the Belarusian issue be overcome?

- V. S. I agree that there is little benefit of declarations and resolutions. In the recent years, they have not brought any tangible benefits. The problem is that in Belarus the traditional scheme of the opposition coming to power through elections does not operate. Unfor-

unately, the election legislation is far from European standards. The same concerns the law on press. The opposition publications are closed, and, as a result, the press controlled by the authorities is dominant. Thus, the Belarusian opposition is unable, for objective reasons, to do what the opposition in any normal democratic country should do. Namely, to explain to its people how it sees the future of the country so as to win over the majority of the electorates and win the elections. Therefore, I think that we should help the Belarusian opposition in the future. We also should do, so to say, some of its work (not because the opposition is so incapable, but because its conditions are unbelievably severe). That is, we must have as broad as possible contacts with the rank and file Belarusian citizens, explaining them the advantages of a democratic way.

Thus, we need not only resolutions and seminars for the opposition leaders — we need contacts with ordinary Belarusian people. It should be done through activities of nongovernmental organizations, scientific cooperation, art performances, youth exchanges, etc. In general, to facilitate democratization of Belarus, we need a broad front — a front in a good and peaceful meaning of this word. We should remember that Belarus is our neighbour. And we should not run at breakneck speed to the West, thereby increasing the abyss between our countries. We need everyday and laborious work for the sake of changes in this country, by communicating with broad sectors of population, but not only with the political opposition.

Following the scandal with the Union of Poles in Belarus, analysts started to say that Warsaw got its fingers burnt trying to build some special, more advanced relations with Minsk based on the principles of good neighbourhood. Now they make a conclusion: you will not mitigate the Belarusian regime with a carrot. On the other hand, a whip will not scare it, too. How should Europe behave — in a stricter or softer manner — in its relations with Belarusian authorities?

- V. S. I would put it in this way: I would like to see Belarus a free and independent state, rather than some unit making part of Russia. I am afraid that, if we rely on the policy of a whip, we will push Belarus closer to its big eastern neighbour. Therefore, I support the idea of tolerance and cooperation with Belarus at different levels.

According to the «Welt», the Lithuanian President criticized Brussels for its inefficient policy towards Belarus and suggested elaborating a clearer line. What do you think the President meant?

- V. S. I have repeatedly communicated with the President Adamkus on the issues of foreign policy and I know that he sees very well that resolutions alone, or statements on behalf of the EU entities, are far from being enough. Statements usually are made to some events, for example, when they close one more newspaper or put into prison another politician. However, the united Europe does not have a system for everyday and consistent work on the Belarusian topics. We need to address the issues of Belarus not from time to time, but every day. We need to develop in every way contacts with its people. We should not call for revolutions, but convince, step by step, broad walks of Belarusian society in the advantages offered by democracy.

Questions were asked by Aleksandr Klaskovsky. 07.11.05.