

## Leading Belarus to the EU

REDE VON ALEXANDER MILINKIEWITSCH AUF DEM EVP-KONGRESS IN BONN

**Dear delegates, Dear guests, Dear like-minded friends,**

**Belarus faces a new stage of its development. New prospects for our nation were unveiled. Unique prospects. The independent society should define the directions of the movement and lead it.**

Our nation has achieved its statehood. We didn't allow the restoration of the USSR. Foundations of a competitive economy have been laid down. We didn't let the Soviet system to be reinstalled.

All this did not appear by itself. Endeavors of thousands of people are behind it. Intelligence and sacrifice of all of you who gathered here in this hall is behind it as well.

We have got international solidarity with us. But what is more important, we have got support of our people. At the key moments of our history the Belarusian nation showed its will go out on the streets when the question of independence was at stake.

In 1991, later, in 1996, 1997 and 2006 thousands of people showed what they were standing for. Our nation understood that if there is a necessity, each go on the street altogether.

With people recovering from the fear, from total dependence on the authorities, with their learning more about lifestyle in other countries, with the internet reaching every house, the political behavior of citizens will change.

Every year Belarusians will demand more and more control over what the government does, more rights and freedoms, more re-

spect for themselves and their national identity. We will support our people in these demands. We should form the organizational structure of such movement. We need to do our best to enable our nation to say its final word. And it will.

Our nation needs a direction – which way do we propose to go? Our answer is simple: Belarus to Europe! Here in Europe, back in XVIII century, the idea about the equality of people before God and Law was formulated for the first time. Here, Orwell and Popper set the diagnosis for the totalitarianism which destroys human dignity. Here, John Paul II pronounced his words about the inadmissibility of religious and political extremism and oppression.

The Soviets cut connections of Belarusians with Europe. However, in recent years our destinies started to contact again with millions of connections.

Belarusians have started to compare themselves to Europeans again. After the Chernobyl disaster, over a million of children went to Europe to improve their health. They found warmth and friends there. We are very grateful to all those Europeans who have helped our children. 200,000 veterans of the war and those submitted to the forced labor were granted support from the "Mutual Understanding and Reconciliation" fund. Of course, this money is nothing in comparison to the sufferings during the war, but is very important as a sign and hand of friendship.

Our pensioners know already that it is possible to live differently. An average pension in Belarus is 150 USD at the moment, while

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in Poland it equals 500 Euros. Embellished statistics hide the real situation in the Belarusian economy. We know that many people are suffering. Salary of a nurse is 450,000 BRB; flax-mill worker – 300,000 BRB; teacher, basis of the society, – 500,000 BRB.

Over 600,000 persons work illegally abroad annually. About 200,000 of them work in the European Union. There is no official statistics on how many young citizens of our country are doing their studies abroad, as they cannot self-fulfill themselves in Belarus. There are thousands of them. It is a pity that the biggest part of them leaves the country with no plans to return. We are losing the potential of our nation.

Let us take a look at the results of sociological polls. Every third Belarusian supports the idea of Belarus joining the European Union. Only 3 percent support the idea of joining the Russian Federation. It means that Belarusians want live as a European nation.

Over centuries we have worked together with Ukrainians, Poles and Lithuanians, together we defended our freedoms, borders and economic interests. And now Poles and Lithuanians have gone forward, in the open space of united Europe with large opportunities. What about us? Why have these nations made their way and we stayed behind the time? This is the question the authorities have to answer.

I want to underline the inseparability of three elements. Without the right for free choice, without freedom at all levels we cannot take an equal place among European nations. At the same time, only integration of Belarus into the united Europe can provide a full-fledged economic development which we really want. Only integration into Europe can guarantee the security of our country.

A transition period might be needed. But in general, the European integration is not possible without freedom and democracy. There will be no prosperity and security without the European integration.

We cannot escape the EU, having it on three borders. We simply will be nearby the EU or within the EU. The reality is hard. Those who stay out to the east of the united Europe will be just an appendix to the EU, a petrol hose, roughly speaking. Those who join the EU will be inside of a modern car. Talking about the importance of integration with the EU in terms of protection, I mean both domestic legal order, and international guarantee of peaceful life.

The development of democracy does not mean a decrease in legality and unstable legal order. On the contrary, the justice in European countries is maintained on the highest level. Army, police and secret service officers in European countries earn much more than their Belarusian counterparts. And their feeling of security and quality of life are incomparable. In Belarus, the defense expenses, expenses for the activity of security bodies should be harmonized with European standards. This is one of the keys factors in democratic development.

Everyone will benefit from freedom, even for those who are afraid of and are fighting against it today. It's possible to earn for life without selling freedom! Does our guideline to Europe mean that we're proposing another version of self-isolation? Shall we undermine contacts with Russia, as our strategic partner? No! Belarus should be open for a wide international dialogue with any country in the world from any region. It is a natural right of a free sovereign democratic country.

Only a rich and economically developed Belarus can ensure its independence. That's the reason why we will support the steps of the current Belarusian government in bringing the economy closer to European standards. At the same time, we will struggle hard with regime for each, even smallest, part of freedom. There will be no sustainable development without freedom.

The future of the Belarusian economy is in a breakthrough to the EU market. It is logical that ministries have been queued up for European investments, and the National Bank is ready to follow recommendations of the

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International Monetary Fund obediently, which was an anathema just yesterday. The crisis has pushed the government towards Europe, but not towards democracy. Belarus has not made a major step towards Europe – changes in the political system.

Uladzimir Makiej has recently said during the Belarusian-German forum: “confident steps should be made slowly”. It could appear that our ancestors formulated the basics of Belarusian conservatism in the same way: “keep the old order, refuse novelties” (formula used in 17-18th century). But there is a nuance. This formula “keep the old order, refuse novelties” was related to the preservation of old freedoms and rights. It was invoked when there was a threat of a tyranny.

We should decisively put an end to the remnants of the Soviet times. We need a will for change in order to make it possible for Belarus to join the EU, to become a technologically and socially advanced country. My supporters! People who sharing the same views! We have such a will.

It is our great achievement that we have created a Belarusian Pro-Independence Block, since the independence is an absolute value for us. The Movement for Freedom will be a motor for changes and a platform for dialogue with the society. The Popular Front has brought a great tradition of political struggle and the Belarusian renaissance. The Christian Democracy seeks to protect universal human and family values. The Young Front has endured the most severe repressions. We have their firmness as an asset.

The Right Alliance gives us strength of spirit. The Young Belarus and Young Democrats mobilize us with their names already. The Movement of Solidarity “Together” will contribute to self-organization of those who what to defend their rights.

It is not all. Others will join us as soon as they see our principles. We’re waiting for you. We are under must be together!

Now about the relations between Belarus and the European Union. When we see in what there is our national interest, we should steadily defend it. Here’s an example from the recent history. Ten years ago the majority of people were supporting the restoration of the USSR. The majority was wrong. They stood for creating a union state with Russia that would be devastating the future of Belarusian economy and disastrous for the Belarusian identity. We openly opposed it. We did not allow the restoration of the USSR. Ten years have passed. Who won’t agree with us today? Everyone agrees. So let’s not be frightened and stand for decisions strategically important for our nation.

The isolationist policy didn’t work out. The regime can be isolated, but when the isolation lasts considerably long the people becomes isolated as well. We are strongly against it. Any increase of contacts with Europe is valuable in the long-run prospective. Isolation itself doesn’t give any choice to the regime and pushes it towards total dependence vis-à-vis Russia.

Our goal is to achieve irreversible changes not only in the economic policy of Belarus, but also in the nature of the state institutions functioning. These criteria we defend while assessing the position of our European partners in their dialogue with the official Minsk.

Now about the elections. We can win any fair elections. Any kind of elections. But in order to guarantee the right to fair elections we have to fight. We should consistently use every possibility to talk to people. We should try to achieve changes in people’s consciousness. That’s why I’m against boycotts. Under the authoritarian regime the passive abstention raises the chances for the elections to be recognized as legitimate. Understanding all current problems concerning elections, real competences of local councillors, I’m totally convinced that local elections shouldn’t be ignored. Combined with severe local problems of different regions, our elections’ slogans will remain: “Independence! Democracy! Europeanism!”

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We have been defending everyone who suffered in the struggle. We have organized education for the repressed students. We helped the victims. We organized concerts of forbidden musicians. "Belsat" and new radios began their work. Where the authorities shut down newspapers, we opened web-pages. We assisted as we could in every attempt of people to self-organize. We didn't have big amounts of money for that. But we had solidarity with us.

I personally have been trying not to miss a single trial. I visited more than 80 Belarusian towns and cities. All this gives me a right to be a leader of independent society and I'll be one regardless elections.

Everything we did before, we'll be doing until we are victorious. Participation in the presidential campaign is not an end in itself for me and for all of us. If a real candidate appears, a person who is able to persuade in his or her sincerity and program the whole country, to unite existing democratic forces around him or her, meaning regional democratic activists first of all, and not only the activists from the capital city, we and I will support this candidate and work with him or her in any capacity needed.

If we go for the elections, we'll go to win. It was extremely hard in 2006, but we were nevertheless working for the victory. We overcame the fear back then. There will be no such fear as it was on the eve of our Square. It will be easier in 2011. The regime became weaker. The erosion has undermined it. Those who were building the regime earlier have understood now that it's time to change the system.

We didn't allow the breakdown and disorganization of the opposition, when leaders were quitting right after the elections or moving abroad. I myself was here with you. I have walked the whole way together with you. I was at the Square with you in 2006. I've been imprisoned with you in Akreščina prison. But let us not praise a person. Let's praise our society. Our civil society.

If the nation entrusts to the independent society to lead Belarus to the European Union, it will entrust it to Milinkievič as well.

I'm able to lead and bring Belarus to the European Union. I will be preparing for the elections. We, the Belarusian Pro-Independence Block, will be ready for it. A clear alternative to the current authoritarian policy should be offered. It is an independent, democratic, European Belarus. European in its everyday reality. A Belarus for which we are ready to fight. A Belarus which we want to leave to our children.

We will correct the tragedy of national history when Belarus was pulled out from the European context. Belarus will become a prosperous European country.

I'm looking in your eyes and see that it will be so. Belarus to Europe! Long live Belarus!