

European interview
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“The defeat of Russia in Ukraine will herald the defeat of the Lukashenko regime.”

What is the domestic political situation in Belarus? Has the government been weakened by its brutal and incessant repression? How is the population responding?

The government has been weakened by the protest movement of the Belarusian population. It has chosen the path of repression instead of meeting the demands of the people and holding fair elections. It has been weakened. The government now has a very small toolbox. Only repression remains.

Any easing in its stance will be a signal for people to launch further protests, even bigger than before. Because life has not improved.

When you are at war with your own people all the time, your position is a weak one. And the gains here for the so-called government are not visible.

To what extent are the struggle for the liberation and democratization of Belarus and the war in Ukraine against the Russian invasion linked?

Directly. Because Russia is Lukashenko's main sponsor. Only Putin's demonstration of support for Lukashenko saved him in 2020. Therefore, the defeat of Russia in Ukraine will herald the defeat of the Lukashenko regime. And if Russia is allowed to get away with it, so that it «can save face,» then these two regimes will continue to exist.

In this case, they will again gather strength and start another war.

Will Russian pressure on Lukashenko's government lead to Belarus going to war? Can it be said that Belarus has lost its sovereignty under Russian control?

Lukashenko has already dragged Belarus into the war. Moreover, without him, this war would never have happened. He has been the enabler and a material contributor to the aggression against Ukraine. This must be recognized by the international community so that Lukashenko cannot evade accountability.

Most disturbingly, he has traded our sovereignty and Belarusian national identity for Russia's aid to help him stay in power even after he lost legitimacy in the eyes of the Belarusian people.

Are the European Union and the international community doing enough to help restore democracy in your country? What more can they do and what do you expect from them?

Belarusians have received significant support from the EU and the world in their struggle for freedom. However, sometimes that support hasn't been quick or vigorous enough, while Lukashenko's regime has constantly received material help from Russia. Still, we applaud the consistency in the EU's implementation of the measures that have been adopted and its principled approach.

Now that Lukashenko has dragged Belarus into the war, he is complicit in the crimes committed against humanity in Belarus, enabling aggression, and in a way, he is an accomplice to the crimes being perpetrated in Ukraine. On top of that he has created a grave threat to the independence of Belarus since he has invited Russian troops into our territory. It's our duty and responsibility to defend Belarus's statehood but we need help from the international community.

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How do you see the future of your country between Russia and the EU? Can Belarus break away from Russia? How can it do so and how soon?

Russia saved Lukashenko from the protest movement which has allowed him to continue his repressive activities for a further two years. It has now become all too obvious that Belarus cannot be allowed to form a union with Russia - a hostile, irresponsible, bloodthirsty state, which is disrespectful of its neighbours' rights and their national identity. After 28 years of rule, Lukashenko has made our country dangerously vulnerable to the kinds of pressure exercised by Russia and this must be remedied immediately.

We need to build relations with those who respect and appreciate our sovereignty as well as our identity. We have already started doing this by establishing firm ties that are growing daily with the democratic community, and I am certain these achievements will help a free Belarus tremendously.

What can your country, known for its pacifism and the quality of its population, offer Europe?

I will turn the question around. The implications for a European Belarus that has been hijacked by a dictator, who is controlled by Putin are obvious for Europe as a whole. If Lukashenko were not in power there would not be hundreds of thousands of political refugees from Belarus in the EU, there would be no forced landings of Ryanair flights, there would be no orchestrated migration crisis on the EU border, there would be no war against Ukraine. Belarus has always belonged to the European family, even under Russian occupation. We need to restore our position and take an active role to complete and strengthen the European project.

What would the best guarantee of the independence and territorial integrity of a democratic Belarus be?

Internally, we need strong democratic institutions and cohesion between society and the state to ensure that the nation is looking in the same direction and working on the same goals. Externally, we will need

partnerships, alliances with our European neighbours. These should cover foreign affairs, national security, defense, economic and trade relations, social and legal issues and other areas.

The international community will also need to take a principled, clear-eyed stand to resist Russia's claims for a self-proclaimed sphere of influence over its neighbours - this is ludicrous and must stop.

How do you see the outcome of your struggle? Are you there to lead the democratic forces towards transition? Are you the builder of a new democratic Belarus?

We are already busy building a new democratic Belarus. Despite all of the challenges that we face and the adversity of repression and war, Belarusians are demanding a vision for a new Belarus – a new political model, solutions to our economic problems, external relations and others. This work will have to be finalized once free, fair elections under international observation can take place and Belarusians elect legitimate representatives. That would be the most desirable outcome of my work.

Many people, young people have been imprisoned for protesting peacefully most of the time. What can be done to help them? How many are left?

The answer to this question is complex. Some time ago an attempt was made to solve this issue separately from the problem of the existence of Lukashenko's regime. In exchange for the release of political prisoners, sanctions against the regime were lifted. However, the number of political prisoners has increased many times over. If you try, as some are now suggesting, to pay a ransom for these political prisoners, the regime will simply be convinced that this is a profitable business. The problem is that all of the country's inhabitants, all 9,000,000 Belarusians are being held hostage by the regime. And any bargaining with it for political prisoners will encourage it to arrest more and more individuals. Therefore, no matter how hard it is for us to live without our loved ones, we must understand that only the end of the regime will lead to the release of these people.

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How can the Nobel Peace Prize help you and the Belarusian people?

For Belarusians, this is a sign that their struggle is not going unnoticed, that they have some support somewhere. It increases the authority and legitimacy of the democratic forces of Belarus. This is an additional resource for strengthening the struggle within the country.

And on a political level, Belarus can remain the focus of attention, stay on the agenda, which is very important. And not only for Belarus, but for the whole world.

Because we see that now the world has become too small to allow dictatorial regimes to exist. The dictatorial regime is now a threat, not only to the nation where it exists - it threatens the security system at regional and even global level.

The award of the Nobel Prize shows that the world understands this and supports those who combat dictatorship – that people will not be left face to face with a terrorist regime.

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