



Ambassador
of the Republic of Belarus

OSCE's parlamentariske Forsamling
OSCE alm. del - Bilag 44
Offentligt

Stockholm, 03 April 2007

Your Excellency,
Dear Mr Lorentzen,

Following our very interesting and, I hope, mutually thought-provoking telephone conversation and agreement achieved, let me send for your kind consideration some of my thoughts and arguments.

First of all, please consider once again the necessity of raising the topic on Belarus at the next OSCE PA session. There are at least three reasons which may say against this intention.

The first one is that the situation in Belarus is not the worst among all the OSCE member states. On the contrary: the situation in my country is much better than in quite a number of other members of the Organization. I will try to give you some arguments later on. More over, in the year 2000 Belarus put forward an official proposal to make a comparative analysis of fulfillment by all the OSCE member countries of their obligations at the Organization in the sphere of human rights. Our proposal was blocked by few countries with the usage of the principle of consensus. Belarus is still ready for such analysis. What does it prove? It proves that the situation in Belarus is not the worst. It proves that some countries are really afraid of such an analysis. It proves that Belarus faces an approach of double standards. May I kindly ask you not to make a report on the situation in Belarus but instead to support the proposal of Belarus and to call on during the next OSCE PA session to start such an analysis. The results of this analysis will give the real grounds for any reports on the situation in all the OSCE member countries. These results will also show us whether there are any real shortages in our countries, what these shortages are, as well as where and how to move forward to overcome them.

The second reason is that there are really very serious problems of violations of human rights in the OSCE area. Let me just numerate some of them. We are witnessing the ungrounded wars, the concentration camps where people are kept for years without any accusations, the kidnapping of people and their secret transportation to secret bases, the spread of terrorism. We are witnessing human and

drug trafficking, corruption, organized crime, poverty, hunger, absence of laws. These are the real problems which must be discussed and resolved.

Here we can also very clearly see the existence and the mass usage of the double standards' approach. I am sure you remember very well why the EU made its assessments on Belarus in 1997. The results of these assessments we can feel up to now. It happened that these days we are witnessing the same situation and the same developments in another country. But I doubt greatly, whether the same assessments will be made by the EU and the same policy will be introduced towards this country.

Dear Mr Lorentzen,

Let me give you some of the recent assessments of different aspects of the developments in Belarus, made by the respectful international organizations.

The International Monetary Fund in its country report, made in August 2006, says that Belarus preserves high speed in its economic growth along with the decrease of the inflation. It states that this is a result of a good governmental policy in the field of economic policy.

The statistical 2006 yearbook of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) states that Belarus among all the CIS countries at the results of the year 2004 had:

- the highest degree of the annual industrial growth (then follows Armenia and Kazakhstan),
- the second after Russia degree of industrial production per capita,
- the second after Ukraine degree of industrial production in the GDP.

According to the UNCTAD World Investment Report 2006:

- Belarus was put into the group of countries with the high potential for attraction of direct foreign investments (Belarus occupies 50th rank and goes ahead of all the other CIS countries but Russia),
- Belarus occupies 32nd rank in the world on the number of bilateral Agreements on investments protection.

According to the results of a joint survey made by the EBRD and the World Bank "The Description of Business and Entrepreneurship Climate", which covers 27 countries in transition of the Central and East Europe, the best results in struggling against corruption have been achieved by Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia and the Slovak Republic.

According to The Global Hunger Index, made jointly by the IFPRI and the DWHH in October 2006, Belarus has the lowest hunger index among the countries in transition and developing countries. This index lowered twice in Belarus starting from the year 1997. Belarus occupies in this index the first place, Ukraine – 4, Russia

– 13, Kazakhstan – 45, Kyrgyzstan – 48, Azerbaijan – 52, Georgia – 55, Tajikistan – 108. It is remarkable, that some of the EU-member states were included in this index. For example, Lithuania occupies the 9th place, Latvia – 11, the Slovak Republic – 15, Estonia – 19.

The UN AIDS Program gives high appreciation of the activities of Belarus to struggle against AIDS. According to the UN assessments, Belarus may become one of the first countries in the Eastern Europe which will stop the spread of AIDS and which will start the process of decrease of AIDS.

According to the report of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) “On the Situation in Belarus in the Sphere of Human Trafficking”, Belarus named as the “Locomotive” for strengthening the struggle against the human trafficking on the international arena.

Dear Mr Lorentzen,

These examples can be prolonged. But even these figures and assessments of the International Organizations prove that the situation in Belarus on the whole, including the sphere of human rights, is too far from the worst.

That is why I kindly ask you, Mr Lorentzen, to analyze once again the necessity, the aims, the utility and the consequences of any special report on the situation in Belarus at the summer 2007 OSCE PA Session in Kiev. Please, take into consideration, that Belarus is a full-fledged member of both OSCE and of its Parliamentary Assembly.

In this respect let me also share with you with some of my thoughts concerning the current relations between the European Union and Belarus. I am pleased to send for your possible consideration in the attached file the article “Belarus and the European Union: What ahead?” which was published in June 2006 by the Danish Organization “Young Europeans for Security” (www.yes-dk.dk). I am completely sure that the EU has no real policy towards Belarus. The policy of restrictions, which is being applied by the EU for 10 years, has no prospects and should be transformed into a policy of involvement. Visa restrictions are most funny and can show only the weakness of the EU approaches towards Belarus. I am especially surprised that some of Belarusian parliamentarians – your colleagues – were without any explanations included in the list of restrictions, including the Speaker of the Parliament. This can only show the neglect by the EU towards the wish of the Belarusian people.

Dear Mr Lorentzen,

Please, forgive me such a long letter and let me raise one of my final topics – the possible exclusion of Belarus from the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) of the European Union. I am sure you know that the final decision by the EU will be made in June 2007. Please, use your influence to persuade the respectful Danish

Authorities to analyze once again the grounds and the consequences of such a decision. Such a step by the EU, if it is made, will be in line with the current non-perspective policy of restrictions and will be oriented not against the Belarusian Authorities, but against ordinary Belarusian people.

Let me conclude this letter with my sincere appreciation, Mr Lorentzen, of your active involvement into the process of development of the relations between Belarus and the EU and to wish you all the success here.

Let me also reconfirm my willingness to meet you in Copenhagen at any time, convenient to you, and to discuss these and other topics of mutual interest, including Belarusian-Danish bilateral relations.

With the wishes of Merry Easter,
Yours sincerely,

Andrei Grinkevich
Ambassador of Belarus to Denmark, to Sweden and to Norway

Belarus and the European Union: What ahead?

It is with pleasure that I accept a proposal to share some views and ideas concerning the current state of Belarus-EU relations as well as their future perspectives.

At the very beginning I would like to point out the most significant issue, which is that, the Republic of Belarus traditionally has been attaching utmost importance to the development of the whole spectrum of relations with the European Union and its member states. Moreover, Belarus considers cooperation with the EU as mutually beneficial and with perspectives for both sides. And there do exist all necessary proofs for such an assertion.

First. Belarus and the EU became direct neighbours with a common border of 1 200 kilometers, since ten new members joined the European Union in May 2004. Belarus is interested in having this border as a uniting rather than a dividing line. Such neighbourhood, in my view, implies more significant components, and not only geographical proximity.

Second. Belarus today is one of the most economically and industrially developed countries in the post-Soviet area. The figures of social and economic development of Belarus prove that fact, and there is a solid trend of sustainable economic growth. For instance, the average pace of economic development of Belarus in 2005 amounted to 7 per cent. At the same time, the increase in salaries in the country during the last 12 months constituted 27 per cent. The very fact that Belarus is a leading trade partner for Russia also demonstrates the economic potential of my country. There has been a two and a half fold increase in the volume of foreign trade of Belarus within the period of last five years, and at the moment more than 40 per cent of our exports go to the EU market. One should bear in mind in this context that Belarus does not possess its own energy resources such as oil and natural gas.

Third. Belarus today is an important transit corridor between Europe and Russia. My country plays an important and serious role in energy transit from Russia to Europe, and thus it contributes to strengthening the EU energy security.

Fourth. Belarus today is an important and integral element for ensuring security on the whole European continent. The country's activities in combating illegal migration, trans-border crime, human and drugs trafficking, as well as countering terrorism are visible to everyone. The considerable contribution of Belarus to the positive resolution of the acute problem of the Soviet nuclear arms legacy makes Belarus a straight supplier of



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security for the European region.

Finally, Belarus today is the leader among post-Soviet states in terms of social rights and guarantees for its citizens. The level of average salaries and pensions in Belarus is one of the highest among these states. Belarus has managed to preserve and further develop its socially oriented educational and health system. Meanwhile the United Nations Organization has acknowledged the system of secondary education in Belarus to be one of the best in the world. Belarus occupies the leading positions among other CIS countries in terms of the level of GDP expenditures on education and of students' share in higher educational institutions per capita. There is no dramatic breakdown in the society; namely, we do not have those fabulously rich and miserably poor people. The majority of Belarusians belong to the middle class whereas all the citizens of the country enjoy equal rights.

In spite of all this, it is with my regret that I have to note, that the potential of Belarus-EU relations is by far not being fulfilled completely and properly. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the EU policy of restrictions, which has been carried out towards Belarus for at least nine years, can be considered as balanced, constructive and future-oriented. And this is not due to the fact that we do not like such a policy, but mainly because it has no perspectives. The very process of social, political and economic development in Belarus proves that the mentioned policy is initially doomed and has no future.

Frankly speaking, I think that persistence in pursuing that narrow-minded approach testifies that the European Union does not have any real policy towards Belarus. As an illustrative example of this fact one can mention the reaction of the EU on the results of recent Presidential elections in my country. The European Union ignored the will of the Belarusian people in a demonstrative manner and once again could not suggest any constructive alternative rather than imposing visa restrictions against a number of Belarusian officials.

Such an approach can hardly be considered a policy, and especially a policy of one of the largest and influential centers of political and economic power in the world. Such approaches, in my opinion, cannot only be named a policy, but they are deprived of any constructivism. On the contrary, they deprive us of mere possibility of contacts, dialogue between states and open discussion on all topics without exception, let alone any strive to understanding. Moreover, such EU actions fully contradict the spirit of Helsinki agreements of 1975 on the freedom of movement and contacts. This also creates an impression that our partners in the EU are afraid of contacts with their Belarusian colleagues in Europe. This road does lead nowhere.

The European Union should understand at last that a real policy towards Belarus must be elaborated, but not a virtual one. While formulating this policy the EU should rely on real facts, and not on prejudiced stereotypes and perceptions. Finally, in doing this, the EU should be guided by the same common standards.

So how, in my perception, can the future-oriented EU policy towards Belarus look like and what type of bilateral relations would correspond to a greater extent to the interests of both Belarus and the EU?

The answer to this question is obvious, that is only a policy of engagement of Belarus into a large-scale interaction on the whole range of issues of real importance for my country, and refusal from any restrictions could correspond to the above mentioned criteria. It goes without saying that the implementation of this policy requires another approach from the powerful European Union towards a medium sized European country, which is Belarus, rather than a routine one. Belarus is a country in transition and is overcoming a difficult stage of its development like many other post-Soviet states do. This requires both a creative approach as well as political courage and will.

Certainly, it does not mean that Belarus, in its turn, has no will to move forward to cooperate closely in plenty of spheres where the EU's interests lie. Certain changes in Belarus are already under way and further will take place. Belarus already moves ahead. However, it is important to be aware that Belarus will pursue its transition guided by its own interests that are based on its own requirements and needs. We do not do it for applause from the outside.

To give some examples of tangible and concrete steps of such an engagement I can mention the following: the establishment of full-fledged cooperation on issues of illegal migration, trans-border crime and countering terrorism, entering into force of the Interim Agreement on trade with the EU, ratification of the Agreement on partnership and cooperation between the EU and Belarus, constructive interaction at the WTO talks on fostering Belarus' joining this organization. This list of steps can be further widened.

I would like to emphasize that the development of truly equal and constructive bilateral relations in all spheres would correspond to the long-term objectives of both Belarus and the European Union. It is worthwhile to mention that Belarus is not asking for help as a petitioner but can itself suggest assistance to the EU on wide range of topics. At the same time, in terms of relations with the EU Belarus is ready to move ahead as far as the European Union itself is ready to proceed.

I am convinced that normalization of the EU-Belarus relationship is an important and long-term contribution to the creation of properly united Europe. It is also important to understand that the presence of an independent Belarus in the center of Europe corresponds to the geopolitical interests of the European Union itself.