

EU Shows Support for Belarusian Gov't Before Elections



Amid tense waiting for presidential elections in Belarus and possible Russian attempts to influence the situation, 20 October, the President Dalia Grybauskaitė of Lithuania visited Minsk. It was a good sign for Belarusian president Lukashenka. After talks, his Lithuanian counterpart made some meaningful [statements](#):

Lithuania is an EU member and next year it will preside in the OSCE. Using it, we want to help Belarus, be alongside it during the elections. We want to help it to be more open and recognized in Europe.

While Moscow is clearly continuing anti-Lukashenka information campaign and is allegedly trying to reign him in or even oust him altogether, such a visit from the EU and NATO country should be considered as a prudent support from European side. Due to particular nature of relations between Belarus and Russia the West cannot move too openly in supporting Minsk against Kremlin's pressure. Belarusian leader himself [admitted](#):

We are in unfavorable conditions now, and we should think about how we could ensure our independence.

In addition to general strategic support, Belarusian and Lithuanian leaders discussed more specific issues. Minsk has recently enhanced and intensified its regional diplomacy and this time it declared the intent to increase trade with Lithuanian up to one billion US dollars. What about democracy?

Ms. Grybauskaitė [told](#) of her hopes for Belarus becoming more open and defend human rights after elections.

Lithuania as well as the EU is hopefully looking to Belarus and new elections. Europe is willing to recognize the elections' openness, if you will demonstrate it.

She elaborated more on it,

For a decade Europe as if built a Chinese Wall between itself and Belarus, and it should not be there.

There was also one more important point. Lukashenka publicly emphasized that two countries can successfully cooperate in energy. Lithuania could provide transit route for Venezuelan oil bought by Belarus to balance the country's dependence on Russian resources. While Venezuela is interested in new markets for its oil, it uses Belarus as a pilot partner to explore Eastern European market. Anyway, Lithuania could gain a lot on transporting oil for Belarus, though Lithuanian route is not definite choice since Minsk is also considering such transit option as Ukraine (dangerous one now that pro-Russian party came to power), Estonia and Latvia.

Of course, Russia does not like Belarusian oil endeavor, since Moscow is considering the region its own backyard. Interestingly, Lukashenka in his quest for non-Russian oil could really make some difference in the region, in particular by implementing his second oil idea – in the Middle East. Minsk could bring first oil by tankers, yet it is quite feasible to merge Caspian oil stream and Middle Eastern and send them for Europe.

Bringing Middle Eastern oil into pipelines meant for Caspian one would be a historical moment for the whole Europe. Especially easy it would be for Iranian oil – there is some infrastructure in place already – but the US are strictly opposing any projects with Iranian involvement. There are nevertheless other sources of oil in that region as well –

like in North Iraq. This project could not be implemented by Belarusian or any other single government, but it requires creation of an international consortium. Belarus, however, could show the way by importing Middle Eastern oil. It is not easy for a landlocked nation to use tanker option, but the energy security issues can interest the neighboring countries. The Lithuanian president showed interest in regional energy cooperation.

It is, of course, the entire Baltic Sea region, where we can be useful for you [Belarus] regarding the sea access. Both Belarus and Lithuania are interested in energy independence, or at least in having choice regarding energy resources.

Furthermore, she added,

I am glad to find common language with the Belarusian president as for ensuring energy independence of both states. ... We are willing to openly cooperate. It does not contradict European interests. The EU is interested in energy independence and in maximal diversification of its [energy resources] shipments dependency.

Regardless of oil ambitions, it seems that after a series of Russian moves, the EU finally decided to react and actively engage in Belarus. If so, a Great Game in Eastern Europe is going to be really big one.

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