

## FUTURE OF BELARUS

Let us jump into the time machine and talk about 1985, 2025, 2045.

I begin with the past:

In 1985 I was little. I did not know much. I remember all the nasty stinks of my hometown.

I do not mean the figurative stink of authoritarianism.

It was a real thing. A mix of dirt, coal smoke and diesel exhaust.

In 1985 my mother asked me to be a little help for the family and stand in line. Poles spent many hours in queues.

There were shortages of bread, butter, meat. By 1985 I had never tasted real chocolate.

Government introduced special food stamps but it did not help.

I have one particular memory from that time.

I was 8. We had religion classes at the parishes back then. Some of us children went really hungry.

Our priest one day took a huge chunk of cheese and distributed pieces of it among the kids.

The wrapper said: MADE IN THE USA.

It was part of charity coming from the West.

It was my first lesson of subtle geopolitics. Sanction the government while assisting the society under authoritarian rule.

Let us fast forward to 2025.

Streets of Warsaw today smell of international cuisine, perfumeries. Shops are full of nice-smelling foodstuffs.

There is normal hustle and bustle of city life. The mood is rather upbeat.

Polish economy in 2025 will be \$915 billion. We grew by 13 times in comparison to 1985. Polish nominal GDP in was \$70 billion back then.

This transformation happened in in just some 1700 weeks!

The GDP of Belarus last year reached \$73 billion. Just like the Polish one 40 years ago. There is huge potential for more.

A country in the middle of Europe deserves better!

Owning Polish passport, you are allowed to visit 186 countries in the world. It was ranked as 9<sup>th</sup> most powerful passports

Our friends from Belarus can visit only 84 states.

How exactly did it happen may I ask?

Obviously economic and political transformation of the early 90s

Harsh, unpopular, sometimes dramatic reforms were implemented

Joining the EU – for sure

But we keep forgetting to appreciate our Western friends from before 1989

The US, Western Germany, UK - all were firm with the communist government of Poland in the 80s

But at the same time supported Polish society.

They did not leave us alone.

They sanctioned our government but they sent the figurative cheese for the kids.

This is what we try to do as Poles with our friends in Belarus.

There is no meaningful dialogue with the Belarusian government.

No meaningful change will come after sham elections in Belarus.

President Lukashenko transformed Belarus into a logistical hub for Russian troops.

He instrumentalized migrants to attack the EU's eastern border.

There is no place for dialogue here.

That is why we focus on helping the society.

Bielsat. Białoruski Dom. Kalinowski Scholarship. Radio Racja.

We also act at the European level. The European Endowment for Democracy is active.

Polish presidency of the EU will not lose Belarus out of sight.

I also welcome the efforts of the Community of Democracies.

In 2000 more than 100 nations adopted the Warsaw Declaration, a founding document of the Community of Democracies

This job is far from finished today.

Let us do a little bit of futurology. What will the year 2045 be like?

I believe that in 20 years from now, Lukashenko will be as distant memory for Belarus as our communist leaders are for Poland.

I easily imagine Belarus of 2045, free of Russian military entanglements

Aligned with the Euro-Atlantic community

Making part of the EU Single Market.

Europeans able to enjoy both sites of the oldest forest in Europe - Belovezhskaya Pushcha.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

Svetlana sometimes uses this beautiful Belarusian proverb:

***Загляне сонца і ў наша аконца.***

Sun will look into Belarusian window, too! And I hope it will happen soon.