

3. What can Belarus offer Europe?

Volha Abramava

In terms of resources, Belarus can enrich Europe's human potential, if its higher education quality does not slip. One music note makes the entire orchestra sound different. I do not think that Belarusian culture will sink into oblivion and will be razed to the ground. It is too authentic. It cannot dissolve whatever devastating impact integration processes and globalization may have on cultural matters. I believe that intellectuals will always remain the consciousness of the Belarusian nation and will defend Belarus' authenticity. The Belarusian authenticity should be promoted. At the same time, it should enrich the development of diverse Europe.

Speaking about human resources, Belarus can come up with new achievements in the coming 50 years, also in the scientific sphere. I believe that Belarus will put a stake on the development of science and education, on human capital and practical return (however, I feel pity for fundamental sciences). Belarus will focus on the development of high technologies – it has everything for this. However, a political will is needed to attract funds from everywhere possible to fund the efforts. We have every opportunity today but there is no understanding. For some reason, the government believes that we need the light industry. I personally do not understand why we need it. I am not talking about crafts and the production of some

secondary things that we have got accustomed to and cannot any longer do without. It is clear that the Belarusian light industry will not be able to compete with the Chinese one. It is doomed to failure because of many factors. Only some companies that have a good marketing policy, employ first-class managers and pursue personal interest instead of working for the state, can manage to remain afloat.

So, it is clear what we should develop. Belarus is a country with good human capital which should be exploited.

I would not like to reduce the question of what Belarusian could give to Europe to a down-to-earth issue. In general, acting together is better than acting alone. Integration into Europe is better than an economic autarchy to put it plainly.

Svyatlana Aleksiyeovich

This is a very difficult question.

I grew up in a Belarusian village. I wrote about old village women, I like the topic very much. Later in Paris, I met old Arab and African women. That was so exciting. I talked to an old Iranian lady in Sweden. Her philosophy was great!

The question is about internal family affairs, but the world is currently divided in a different way. The Muslim East can enrich Europe. Or, for instance, western intellectuals took a great interest in India and Indian culture. The interest remains quite strong. Or there is much interest in China. Cultural energy remains on vast territories and in old civilizations! Belarusian culture cannot even compete with the Polish one at present.

We can offer Europe our patriarchy and Chernobyl philosophy. This is something that can be of interest to the world, because the Chernobyl vision of the world is full of future fears. This is the only text that we can offer. We must realize that the world is cruel and be realistic.

Yauhen Babosau

Belarus can bring its traditional values: tolerance, respect for any religion, respect for any culture – that's what we have. We have no such conflicts like, say, in Armenia (Nagorny Karabakh), etc. This is this Belarusian tolerance and well-wishing that we can bring to Europe. And in this respect Belarus can add something new to the spiritual potential of Europeans. This is not the worst country in Europe, it is somewhere in the middle. It is probably not the main country either, although some in our country call it the center of the Slavic community. I don't believe in this but I know that such opinion exists. It is hard to be the center of the Slavic community. Russia claims to occupy this position, but why can't, say, Poland do this? One should prove this and this cannot be proved!

I think that Belarus is an ordinary European country that meets European standards as far as it concerns culture, education, science, religion and whatever else. In this context, the country can contribute something valuable, in particular its traditional values, to Europe. And this will be a normal contribution! And they will appreciate Belarus for this even more that they do now.

Of course, there is a certain dislike for us on some political grounds and this bars Belarus from closer integration with the European civilization. But it has nothing to do with culture or civilization; this is pure politics.

Anzhalika Borys

Europe's riches are diverse cultures, traditions and ideals. Belarus like any other nation can enrich Europe. The country should develop national culture, revive traditions and adopt national ideals that are not hostile toward the rest of the world.

Iryna Buhrova

I don't like this question. Belarus is not a woman who wants to get married! If I understand that I want someone to fall in love with me, than I think of what I should wear. I should first examine everyone and then try to look pretty for someone I like...

That's why it is mutual interest that is important for me. Mutual interest appears when a country lives a vibrant, full life, when it maintains many contacts. Because identity, and you can look it up in any good dictionary, is formed in interaction. That means that identification is constant interaction. I constantly look at myself and think whether my dress is appropriate for this or that environment. I can sport whatever coat I have in a forest but I can't do this in my office. I constantly identify myself with a certain environment, circumstances, the time of day, etc. There are periods when the person undergoes resocialization, crisis periods. And the same happens to society. Why do we say that the political pendulum swings from the left to the right and back in Europe? This is the process of identification and re-identification of sorts. Or people's misidentification and re-identification. And we see what processes are taking place in France, Germany as far as it concerns policies regarding emigrants, migration, ethnic minorities (which are becoming a majority actually).

What can Belarus give? I would put it this way: Belarus will be interesting when it starts interacting with other people. Then its absolutely incredible opportunities will be discovered. I believe that Belarus can above all show its flexible, very quiet nature, which contains very big discoveries. Belarus can interest others through its unusual ability to be a conformist and a pioneer alike. If you look at the map of the world and start studying the biographies of famous people, you'll see than many of them come from Belarus, irrespective of whether they are Jews, Poles, Russians or Belarusians...

Henadz Buraukin

Like any nation, Belarus can offer its unique mentality, its national character. It is interesting that some of the leading European nations with big cultural traditions are wary of globalization. This is a peculiarity and a big advantage of Europe. It respects national cultures and identity. The Belarusians, like any nation, have their unique strains and, mentality, their kindness and tolerance – the qualities that are not always good for our cruel world – that enrich the European race.

Belarus is interesting to Europe because it has been involved for quite a long time in its intellectual process. Take the Renaissance for instance, it was a great period in European history. Belarusians were involved and contributed to it. May be not so much as other nations, but they did make a significant contribution. Along with other nations, the Belarusians can claim to author the first constitution, the Lithuanian Statutes. Regretfully, the Belarusians at home have not yet realized the importance of that act, whereas other nations in Europe used the Statute to draft their democratic laws.

Nations like Belarus have not exhausted all of their resources and possess an intellectual potential for the future. Some nations had better historical and political opportunities to show and fulfill themselves. Belarus has not yet shown what its worth for historical reasons. I believe that an independent nation can better fulfill its potential. To my regret, Belarus was not an independent country for quite a long time. If national history gave Belarus at least some limited opportunities, it would produce Belarusian talents. Our nation has not yet given the world what it can. It is of big importance to Europe, often referred to as old Europe. It is true Europe is old, while Belarus is young. The young part of Europe can energize the old one.

Paradoxically, we feel guilty or weak because we lag behind, but we do not realize that we have an advantage because we can still give something. When others have exhausted their potential, Belarus will start taking advantage of its possibilities. Since it will be using its possibilities in this period of human evolution, it will have even better opportunities. This is

why I believe that Belarus is a very interesting, important and necessary country for the European civilization.

The Belarusians enjoyed many privileges in Great Duchy of Lithuania – Belarusian was practically the state language and many rulers had Belarusian origins – but it existed for a short period for the nation to fulfill its potential. Many opportunities were lost when the Belarusians found themselves in the Russian Empire or under the Polish rule. Both Polish and Russian authorities passed decrees banning the Belarusian language. When the language, one of the distinguishing features of the nation, is taken away from the people, it cannot succeed like other peoples that can freely use their languages. The Russians have never been oppressed as a nation. Every Russian bum dies or lives feeling himself a representative of the nation that has its language and history. Belarusian people, even prominent and talented ones, often lacked national self-esteem and knowledge of the national history and language. It was taken away from them.

The Great Duchy of Lithuania has not yet been studied seriously enough. It was a poly-ethnic state. The peoples that were once part of it now have their separate countries and national histories, but seek monopoly of the history of the Great Duchy of Lithuania. Their position can be understood from the human and state viewpoint. But since the Belarusians are not aggressive or extremely resolute people, our neighbors use it by stealing our common history bit by bit. For instance, our neighbor seeks to represent Konstanty (Kastus) Kalinowski as its national hero.

The Great Duchy of Lithuania period proves that the Belarusians are an old nation in a certain sense. The potential we failed to use in the Great Duchy of Lithuania was not lost forever. If the nation is alive, it will have an opportunity to develop and use its potential. It is like people who have not lived in their native country for a long time start speaking their mother tongue before death or during a hard time in their life. A nation may also have a period when unused potential manifests itself. I hope very much that the Belarusian nation will have an opportunity to use the potential it failed to use during the Great Duchy of Lithuania period, after the declaration

of the Belarusian National Republic and in the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. I hope the world will be surprised to see how much Belarus can give Europe, the humanity and the nation and its history in the first place. Let's hope the time will come sooner.

Ales Byalyatski

A lot! My visits to European countries helped dispel illusions that the Belarusians are underdeveloped in a way, that they lack something or are worse than other people. They are an absolutely normal Central European nation. As any people or nation, they have good and bad traits. They have enough qualities that make them competitive in Europe. Belarusians have found themselves a niche in sports, for instance in track and field events. Occasionally they show surprisingly excellent performance in other sports. Our girl¹⁰ won a 100-meter race at the Summer Olympics – fantastic, it never happened before.

Belarusians can succeed. They are very optimistic people, they have been optimistic for centuries. They are cheerful people, who never sit and complain doing nothing (there are such peoples). We are the people who will always find themselves a plot of land to work on. They will bring bricks there, build something, grow something and sell the harvest with a profit. I am absolutely convinced that Belarus can successfully compete with other European nations, make its contribution, push through its ideas, find niches and be reckoned with. It is beyond doubt that we will not die out, will not be exploited or used by someone to make a fortune.

I did not mean cultural contribution – culture is a more delicate matter. It is not an economy, a sport or something that can be created within five to 10 years. It requires a greater spiritual effort. In this sense, the Belarusians trail behind the rest of Europe. The nation is more competitive in other areas

¹⁰ Yulia Nestsyarenka (Belarusian: Юлія Несцяярэнка; born 1979) won the women's 100 meter sprint at the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, in 10.93 seconds, becoming the first white and first non-U.S. athlete to win this event since the American boycott of the games in 1980.

like the economy, sports, social security etc., while in culture it is a complete emptiness and wilderness. The nation has created wonderful things – folk music, which cannot be found elsewhere, prose, music, fine art works – all that has been ignored and underestimated. It has not been promoted and marketed the way it should. Anyone who wants to sell something must have a plan and think about packaging. The government would not do it. Some efforts have been taken by amateurs, but this is not enough. Money is required, a lot of money. With government funding such efforts would be much more productive. There are very good prospects for culture, but an enormous amount of work has yet to be done.

Pavel Daneika

It is a good question, but perhaps it is better to put it in a different way. How important are the Czechs or, say, the Bulgarians for Europe? What categories should we use? If we mean that the Bulgarians can give a piece of the Black Sea, while the Slovaks can present the Vysoké Tatry, then we can give forests!

If we are talking about cultural values and peculiarities of national characters, we have something to offer as well. If we see Europe as some 'synergy' that promotes diversity to have more opportunities for growth, then Belarus' contribution could be no smaller than that of any other Central European country that is already part of a united Europe.

Andrey Dynko

Belarus is an area of approximately 207,000 square kilometers, which is not very densely populated. It is also an inexhaustible source of clean fresh water: many Eastern European rivers flow from our country. Belarus is an important component in the security system of Eastern Europe: this is an area through which many supply lines run and more can be built.

There is no such sphere in which Belarus would not have its important contributions. Take, for example, art: we have a vibrant art life. Take

economy: Belarusian-made goods, from petroleum products and potassium chlorides to foodstuffs, farming produce and software made in Belarus' 'Silicon Valley' all can find brisk demand in Europe. Although the very question 'What can Belarus give Europe?' is not correct. And what if it could give nothing? Should we be surrounded with barbed wire then?

Valery Fralou

What could we give to Europe? Well, we have no mineral resources... We could give them a sense of a bigger European family guided by common principles. I guess our serious asset is a very powerful human potential. Mutual access to markets also can be of certain interest for both us and them.

If we conducted a bit different policy, a more predictable one, they would be more calm.

Svyatlana Kalinkina

From geographic and historic viewpoints, Belarus is a crossroads. It is impossible to invent anything other than being a crossroads and a buffer zone between two great continents: almost Asian Russia and old Europe. That is why I believe that Belarus has no alternative in the geopolitical and cultural aspects. It is our major goal to remain such and preserve this status of our country.

Syarhey Kalyakin

It is abnormal that Europe has one unaffiliated country. If several countries stayed out for political reasons that could be understood. But it is strange that just one country, not a big or self-sufficient one, is not a member of the Council of Europe. It is a problem for Europe. Belarus' membership of all European organizations would help consolidate Europe

and achieve a progress in establishing a common mechanism to resolve various conflicts.

On the other hand, Belarus is interesting to Europe as a bridge, a transit corridor for economic cooperation with the Asian continent. The shortest route from Europe to Asia runs through Belarus and Russia. This is why the country is attractive from the economic viewpoint, but it should be predictable. It should fulfill its obligations to make Europe interested in the country economically, not only politically.

Belarus is one of the world's most educated nations with a high-skilled labor force. The country could find a very good niche in the European labor market.

United Europe is not a single whole. It consists of many nations, peoples and cultures. Belarus could contribute to diversity in Europe.

Kasya Kamotskaya

Like any other country. The countries that have joined the EU recently livened up Europe, in cultural and other senses. Belarus could also give some fresh blood. Europe was very boring, very old. It did not take interest in anything. Young blood is much needed.

Syarhey Kastsyen

The Belarusians can offer Europe their humanism, because Europe has more often than not drawn various nations in troubles, wars and bloodshed. Recall who attempted to invade our land in the past. Crusaders – various orders from Western Europe. Fascism emerged in Western Europe. Who supported Hitler? Who gave him a free hand to invade countries in the east? France, Italy and Britain. Who accuses the Belarusian government of being undemocratic today? Javier Solana who was born and grew up in the fascist country, Spain. Who is Barroso, president of the European Commission? He was born, grew up and learned fascism at mother's knees in Portugal. Who

promotes democracy today? Descendants of former fascists in Western Europe. Therefore, we have the right to say that Belarus is a European country and it will keep on imposing its Slavic values – humanism, internationalism and brotherhood – on the rest of Europe.

I would like to add one thing. Western Europe is dominated by Roman Catholic believers. Who blessed Hitler to begin a war against the Slavs? It was Pope Pius XII who blessed Hitler. Therefore, I insist that the Orthodox Church is the most humanistic faith. Our customs, traditions and culture have always promoted progress, humanism and a high Slavic civilization.

Vyachaslau Kebich

The question has political and economic connotations. From the political viewpoint, the EU wants Belarus to be a member of the EU. Although Russia considers itself a member of G8 and tries to maintain friendly ties with other countries, the EU and NATO policies are directed against Russia. Russia has always been in opposition to the EU and America. Belarus' membership would expand the EU and NATO to the Russian border.

From the economic point of view, Belarus would find it difficult to enter the EU because all of its markets have been divided already. Belarus has goods it can sell, but it would not benefit in the near term if it joined the EU. Belarus should gradually capture new markets through bilateral relations with EU member countries. It cannot join the EU automatically.

Zhanna Litsvina

Maybe it should not so much give something to Europe, but to take the historical place it lost two centuries before. It needs to restore historical justice in the first place.

It is not because of some threat from the East that Belarus needs to return to Europe. Our future depends on our language, cultural and national identification. Until we understand who we are and why we are here, until

we develop our own perception of interests, Belarusian interests, it will be difficult for us to say what we can offer Europe.

The political aspect of the problem is much more complicated. The current authorities seek closer ties with Russia. During these 12 years Belarus was on the brink of incorporation. The authorities have forced integration ideas on the Belarusians. This effort has been supported by Vladimir Putin. The Russian president's statement that 'the Belarusians and Russians are one nation' came as a real insult. Remember, how many nations are there in Russia!

But on the other hand, the Belarusians have failed to formulate their strategy. The nation's fate is decided by European organizations, which initially declared a step-by-step approach (which did not work after the 2001 presidential election) and later put forward an even more dangerous idea to democratize Belarus through Russia. I do not think Europe has a strategy with regard to Belarus. Belarus should propose a strategy and implement it in cooperation with European institutions. The EU countries should make it clear that Europe needs Belarus only as an independent and sovereign state. This is the main issue at present that takes precedence over the legitimacy of authorities and presidential elections. Europe must stress all the time what it wants Belarus to be.

Anatol Lyabedzka

Belarus could give stability to the EU, its neighbors and Europe as a whole. The issue of European values is not only an internal matter of Belarus. Values are adopted inside the country, not imposed by someone else. But this is also a European issue. This is why opposition politicians insist that the EU should put it on its agenda. This is a question of stability and security in Europe. Belarus is the scene of a conflict between European values and a neo-authoritarian ideology called *Lukashism*. *Lukashism* is a commodity that sells briskly in the former Soviet republics. Asked to choose between Vladimir Putin and Alyaksandr Lukashenka, 80 percent of

Ekho Moskvy radio station listeners said they would vote for Lukashenka. The poll is indicative of how significant the issue is for Europe. Lukashenka is not only the Belarusian ruler; he is the leader of revanchist forces in the post-Soviet zone. Revanchism is a big problem and Belarus plays a key role in creating it. Poland, Lithuania and the whole Europe cannot be secure as long as the problem persists.

This is a matter of political and economic security because transport and energy supply routes run through Belarus. Stability is a long-term issue for Europe. In addition, in a certain period Belarus could act as a bridge linking the EU and Russia. The 'bridge' idea can be used effectively to obtain economic and other benefits for the country and its residents.

Vasil Lyavonau

We need not to bring anything from anywhere. We are at the center of Europe and we should arrange a decent life for our people in our country and end confrontation between the Belarusians and our neighbors.

We should learn to respect each other, to reach agreements, not to fight. In addition, we should not expect to live as a parasite on either the West or Russia. There will not be such opportunities or they will be only in the form of free cheese in a mouse trap. Our unique culture, our Belarusian style of life, our national traditions and national features such as industry and tolerance of others' opinion – all this is and will be our contribution to the European civilization.

Aleh Manayeu

I have two things to say in this regard. The first and most important one is that if we regard Europe as a system of values and a certain culture, one of the most developed in the modern world, then for Belarus as a nation, society and state, this would be a return to the European family. Imagine that we are members of a large family. We have a brother or a sister who left

somewhere and were absent for a long time, but they have now returned. Would the family benefit from this? Of course, it will. Everyone will be happy that they have rejoined the family and it has become stronger. A new labor force and potential will be added. From this point of view, Belarus' comeback to Europe would strengthen not only us but also Europe itself. That is why Europe has been enlarging in the last decade.

The other thing is more pragmatic. It is about the geographic aspect of Europe rather than its cultural one. The return of Belarus to Europe would give the big Europe an opportunity to more efficiently cooperate with Eurasia in the economic, political, military, information and other spheres, and open up new prospects. There can be many examples to show this. For instance, energy resources could be imported from not only Russia but also Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. Since Belarus is currently part of Europe geographically rather than culturally and politically, this creates certain problems for the entire region. Recent years have already seen crises such as Belarus' gas row with Russia in February 2004. In this context, the return of Belarus to Europe would help solve many of these problems, and not only the problems of transit via Belarus. Roughly speaking, the eastern border of the big Europe would be near Smolensk, not along the River Bug. And this, I repeat, would certainly strengthen Europe from a pragmatic viewpoint.

Alyaksandr Milinkevich

It could offer its traditions, including its archaism, which is of great value. Our people have not been led astray by mineral resources, which often slow the evolution of nations. We are people who gained everything with hard labor. Belarus has a tragic history, one of the most tragic histories on the continent. In this sense, we are blessed with kindness, industriousness and the long-suffering tolerance, not indifference, but tolerance with regard to other cultures.

Anatol Mikhailau

For the time being, it can offer only bad experience in establishing a dialogue with the European culture. Let us hope that we and others will learn a good lesson from the bad experience.

Ales Mikhalevich

I believe that Belarus' attitudes to ecology, environmental protection and the survival of human beings in general are important to Europe, as well as to the entire civilized world. Belarus, which was affected worst by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, will definitely oppose the construction of nuclear plants and any other facilities that can kill humankind if exploding. The understanding that people are imperfect and that we should not play with things that can wipe out humankind is something what Belarus can bring to united Europe. In my opinion, it is the major unique thing that Belarus can bring. It is something that Europe does not have today.

Tatsyana Protska

Every country has talented people. If we lived in an environment created by European values, we could give Europe a lot. Look what kind of reception our opposition figures get in the West. It is not because, as *Belarusian Television* claims, they say bad things about Belarus. In fact they are outstanding people. They speak the same language as Europeans and have a broader understanding of challenges facing the European Union and the European community. European politicians realize that Europe needs Belarus.

This is why our artists enjoy warm reception in the West. Marachkin¹¹ is more popular in Germany than in Belarus.

If the question is about how much Europe needs Belarus, I would say that Europe needs every country because every country has its place and

distinctions. We do not give Europe a dollar or ten dollars. We give Europe something unique that no one else can give.

Europe is like a patchwork – every country has its place, color and is part of a unique needlework of European civilization. The patchwork can be marred by a country that looks like a black hole. Belarus is still a colored square of the European community. But anything may happen. Europe does not have a common ideology. A certain ideology guides Belarusians in official arts, literature and show business. If we try to impose our ideology on European countries, they would not accept either our ideology, or our Palina Smolavas¹² or others who ignore European standards and principles.

Andrey Sannikau

A huge human potential first of all. Despite all Lukashenka's efforts, we have well-educated, hard-working and gifted people...

Belarusians are now forced to emigrate. Lukashenka has showed that the Belarusian people is obedient, too obedient. This means that Europe will be joined not by a problem-stricken country but by a country that, first, can give much and, second, will observe laws. This is proved by our entire history: we abided by Soviet laws during the Soviet era and now abide by Lukashenka's laws, just like we abided by laws set by magnates and princes long ago. We are pretty obedient. And this means that we can promise that European laws will be observed on our territory.

Belarus can give much to Europe, and has already given. We may recount names well recognized in Europe. And not only Chagall. There are many eminent people coming from Belarus who have given much to Europe. This is the only Belgian Nobel prize winner Ilya Prigozhin, Barys Kit, whom Vasil

¹¹ Aliaksei Marachkin – a prominent Belarusian artist.

¹² Palina Smolava – a Belarusian singer often criticized for campaigning for President Alyaksandr Lukashenka before the March 2006 presidential election was voted last but one at Eurovision 2006.

Bykau called the first Belarusian among Belarusians in the world. And there are many such people.

Our art is well-known in Europe. Many artists today live and work successfully in Europe. And not only Barys Zaboraw, but also younger generations – Tsishyn, for instance, or, say, Lyavon Tarasevich, who is one of the best-known artists in the world. I know that many researchers (and very prominent ones) live there and lead the world's scientific community in their fields. This is an interesting study, it would be interesting to read if anyone did this (like Maldzis did once). To look what and where we are in Europe.

Some ethnic Belarusians have already joined Europe – through Lithuania, Latvia and Poland where they reside.

Stanislau Shushkevich

If we tear a small bit of something, the latter will never be the same. Belarus belongs to Europe and has always given something to it. I am lucky to have visited different continents. Belarus is a country where one can feel himself a European, and Belarusians are people who can feel themselves Europeans in Europe. There are no differences here!

What can it give? In terms of culture, it has already given by creating the European-level literature. It is no worse than the Ukrainian one, although it emerged some 50 years later. Our Bahdanovich¹³ and Kupala¹⁴ appeared 50 years later than Shevchenko. Belarusian art, architecture... We now have few monuments remaining – but they remain and are European-style palaces, Catholic and Orthodox (to a lesser degree) churches, estates. And peasant's cottages! For instance, when I was in Finland which we all regard as Europe some 10 years ago, I saw there the same primitive houses that are in Belarus.

¹³ Maksim Bahdanovič (Belarusian: Максім Багдановіч; 1891–1917) was a famous Belarusian poet, journalist and literature criticist.

¹⁴ Yanka Kupala (Polish: Janka Kupala, Belarusian: Янка Купала; 1882–1942) – penname of Ivan Łucevič (Іван Луцэвіч) was a famous Belarusian poet and writer. Kupala promoted the Belarusian language and attempted to shield it against russification.

They had simply not managed to reach the absolutely European level by that time, and we've got plenty of such houses in Belarus.

Uladzimir Ulakhovich

Itself. It can give Europe its civilization, identity and culture in a broad sense.

Alyaksandr Vaitovich

Belarus can offer Europe is cultural and spiritual uniqueness. This is an important contribution because diversity enriches a civilized culture.

Andrey Vardamatski

Not only we have European character and European values, but also Belarus could contribute a lot even in economic terms. Its transit geopolitical position determines what it could contribute.

Transit does not only imply roads and pipelines, but also industries and economy as a whole. It is a good place to have a concentration of manufacturing enterprises for servicing both Eurasian markets. Mentality and high skills make Belarusians more open to new technologies than other nations.

Vintsuk Vyachorka

Without reference to its history, taking the synchronic slice only, Belarus has already brought to Europe a problem associated with European borders and its right to democracy, national identity and independence.

Usevalad Yancheuski

I am very much skeptical about the EU project.

However, a skeptical attitude to the EU and many European values does not mean that we should turn our back on Europe. It is simply silly.

Anyway, many 'European values', such as tolerance, non-violence, respect for another person's opinion and dialog, are a valuable thing for the entire humankind. They are all very valuable! If they cease to exist under pressure from young aggressive civilizations, the humankind may slide back in its development.

What could Europe find interesting in Belarus?

Europe should be interested in everything because it is a heart of the world.

Belarus borders the European Union. Belarus, Russia and Ukraine have always been, and remain to be, an outpost on a route of drug traffickers, illegal migrants, criminal and extremist groups from Asia.

It just happened so. No one has ordered us to do that, but we have always been assuming the responsibility and fulfilling our duty in a decent way.

Political correctness is a nice thing but we should acknowledge that civilizations have tense relations and that the relations are about to grow into conflict. We have been, and remain to be, a sort of a barrier that prevents this stuff from getting into Europe.

Due to our authoritarian system that often comes under fire, we do not provide a perfect barrier, but we still provide some, which Europe underestimates for the very simple reason that we do that for free!

Let us recall the Chernobyl disaster. The lion share of relief expenditures has been, and remains to be, on our shoulders. For some reason, the international community thinks that it is Ukraine that has been affected most by Chernobyl. And it hurts to hear foreign media saying so. Ukraine was really affected, but we were hit worst. We were left alone with the disaster and had to tackle it by our own.

What are the results? Belarus makes good efforts to fight illegal migration, smuggling, trafficking in drugs, the movement of criminal and extremist groups. Belarus has really ensured a peaceful and tranquil life on its territory and does not foment conflicts. However, no one appreciates our efforts. No one thanks us for them. Countries are paid for such efforts, while we do not get a penny.

So, we really do much good to Europe. Europe also could do something good for us.