

nobody would throw a stone at me, saying: 'he is a thief who has come to power to make money; he has everything while we have nothing'. This will never happen. I won't cross this line, giving my enemies such an opportunity. I perfectly understand this.

If I knew that 80 percent or more Belarusians hated me, I'd collect my belongings, place them on a table and say: 'Thank you, brother-Belarusians'. I'll earn money for a living. I'm not keeping this post as you sometimes write in Russia — for the sake of power or money. No! I'm the first President of the country and I must leave the country in a state that will inspire those who come after me to work just as hard. I want to leave such a country for our Belarusians! Our people understand this.

On social accents

We know the focus of a socially oriented economy: pensions, allowances, kindergartens and so on... What do I wish? I'd love to do more! Do you understand me? More! However, this depends on the wealth of the country itself. If I had the resources, I'd primarily spend them on raising people's wellbeing.

If I could do more, it would be appreciated. However, it's a true challenge to strike a balance. If we support people too much, we could encourage them to live off of the state rather than being independent. In such cases, people start believing that I should do more for them. I repeat: rely on yourself. Anything Lukashenko must and can give would be a bonus. Let yourself be motivated accordingly.

On billions from the West and Eastern Partnership

Nobody has offered me \$9bn — although this money would have come in time. It was a hoax aiming to indicate that Belarusians are keeping Lukashenko at the moment but, if they threw him away, they'd receive \$9bn immediately... Nobody gives anything to anyone for no reason! Would the Americans print \$9bn especially for us? No! If they really give someone this money for a certain purpose, they'd ask for it back with interest — wanting \$12bn or more! I've met such charlatans in the past; they promise billions but provide nothing when the time comes.

When the *Eastern Partnership* was being set up, the EU's neighbours were invited to join, as was Belarus. Considering the offer, we stated that we wouldn't join it if the organisation was 'against' Russia. It



was then announced that money would be injected into roads and economic projects, which appealed to us — being a transit country. In fact, we sell 34 percent of our exports to Russia, with the EU taking 3-4 percent more — so we'd be silly to turn away from \$30bn of trade. Regardless of whether they are good or bad, we are to maintain dialogue as we are the neighbours. What did happen later? It was announced that our presidential and parliamentary elections were wrongly conducted and that Lukashenko is bad. Politics are at the heart of everything. Is this proper?

Let's remind ourselves of a recent event; a thousand diplomatic tricks took place there, including: 'You should understand that we might invite not Lukashenko but someone else'. This is a Poland, where 'great minds' are at work. They sleep and imagine the Belarusian-Polish border passes near Minsk. They cannot agree that the border is near Grodno. They repudiate Stalin for taking Western Belorussia lands from the Poles. How then can they invite Lukashenko to the *Eastern Partnership* in Poland? Parliamentary elections are currently underway there and nobody knows how the Polish people would perceive my arrival or what I'd say there.

They began dropping hints — using various channels — saying that they'd invite a minister if we'd agree. I then agreed, thinking that a minister would go. However, he said to me: 'How is this possible? It's

discrimination. If presidents are invited, then Belarus should be represented by the President'. Whether I go or not is another matter entirely. They didn't invite me so we sent an ambassador to Poland. It's normal practice. We lowered the level of the delegation's leadership and Poland then began to selectively invite our ambassador to events. He eventually refused to debase himself. Poland then tried to adopt a resolution against Belarus. I was later given an extract from it to read... learning so much new — both about myself and about Belarus! Moldova, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia refused to support it and the Georgians and Azerbaijanis were especially strongly against the resolution. Why are you humiliating Belarus? None of our *Eastern Partnership* partners who were invited signed that declaration. Of course, this was a coup, as the EU clearly never imagined that the former Soviet republics would band together to protect Belarus. This is the *Eastern Partnership* headed by Poland. This is the policy which Poland conducts regarding us.

However, we won't let ourselves be provoked by their policy. We know the real attitude of Poles to Belarusians. These are our neighbours, with whom we long shared a single state. We remember this, as they are a Slavonic nation. We don't wish to battle the Poles. Politicians come and go; one day, their time ends. Then, God will judge them...

On profits

Salaries should be such that people can live comfortably and support their children and family. However, salaries alone are not the key indicator. Your [Russian] salaries are higher than in Belarus. Let's compare; when our salaries were \$500 or higher in equivalent, some said that those in the West received \$2,000. I told them that salaries could be raised but people would then have to pay the prices charged in the West — and nobody agreed. How much does education cost there and how much should parents pay for a kindergarten? We see this in Baltic prices. There, no kindergartens remain, as parents cannot afford to send their children at such prices. We provide free meals for schoolchildren; think of how much that costs. We should also take into account the cost of utilities. On average, Russians pay 85 percent of the cost communal services while Belarusians pay just 20.7 percent. Add everything up and you'll then see that we give real help to the population. Do you know how much we pay for the first, second or third child to a family and how many mortgages have been allocated at privileged terms?

If our people want to move from a district centre, selling a two- or three-room flat, it can be hard for them to find a buyer. We've lifted this problem. Only Minsk faces a housing problem, as everyone wants to live here. We haven't built thoughtless-

ly in Minsk though. Life should be convenient for people but we mustn't let the capital become overpopulated. With this in mind, we've reduced construction in Minsk, while building satellite towns 30-40km away. It's not a huge distance, especially if we launch an electric train to connect them with the city.

Recently, one such train began operations; I travelled on it myself. People are using it with pleasure, as it takes them just twenty minutes to travel.

We're trying to spread our production forces countrywide, so that not everything is concentrated in Minsk. It will create a huge problem for Minsk and the state otherwise. Everyone will gather here, while the districts will be empty.

On whether there is a second crisis wave

The major problem will come when no sales markets remain for our produce. Other things do not really concern us. If a second wave of crisis arrives, we'll handle it somehow... jointly with Russia. It will be easier for both of us. We have things which we can offer you, while you have something that Belarus needs. Together, we'll be able to overcome a crisis. It will not be so painful. We can count on Russia, as it can count on us.

You know that we should not be afraid to employ government leverages in such situations. Some believe market conditions set everything right but this is just empty talk. Yes, the market will regulate itself, but profits will flow out of the country. You know what kind of businessmen we both have: they grab what they want and then do nothing. They will be the ones regulating the market.

Those in the European Union and the United States are clever enough: when the crisis struck, they began talking about state regulation and pointing to Belarus. I maintained state regulation, as needed. Where it is not necessary, we've stepped away, not interfering. However, leverage should be at hand. You should never forget this.