Lukashenko warns EU that Belarus won't stop migrant border surge

О. Лукашенко попереджає ЄС, що Білорусь не зупинить сплеск міграції

Білорусь не має наміру зупиняти зростаючу кількість мігрантів з Африки та Близького Сходу, які перетинають територію сусідньої Литви, заявив лідер країни Олександр Лукашенко. "Ми нікого не будемо стримувати. Зрештою, ми не їх кінцевий пункт призначення. Вони прямують до освіченої, теплої, затишної Європи », - сказав О. Лукашенко. Литва оголосила надзвичайний стан через міграційну кризу на кордоні з Білоруссю. Вільнюс неодноразово звинувачував О. Лукашенко у використанні мігрантів як зброї проти ЄС у помсту за санкції блоку та підтримку білоруської опозиції. О. Лукашенко назвав реакцію Литви "нитям" і сказав, що не дозволить ЄС відправляти людей, які не мають права на притулок, до Білорусі. "Вони хочуть перетворити Білорусь на фільтраційний табір: люди тікають на захід через горе, біду та війну, і вони хочуть, щоб ми взяли їх і утримували тут у "фільтраційних таборах". Цього не станеться».
https://www.politico.eu/article/belarusian-president-alexander-lukashenko-warns-eu-belarus-wont-stop-migrant-border-surge-lithuania/

Belarus has no intention of halting the growing number of undocumented migrants from Africa and the Middle East crossing into neighboring Lithuania, the country's leader Alexander Lukashenko said Tuesday.

"We will not hold anyone back. We are not their final destination after all. They are headed to enlightened, warm, cozy Europe," Lukashenko said, according to the official Belta news agency.

Lithuania on Friday declared a state of emergency due to the migration crisis on its border with Belarus. In recent weeks, Vilnius has repeatedly accused Lukashenko of using migrants as a weapon against the EU in retaliation for the bloc's sanctions and for its support of the Belarusian opposition.

Lukashenko called Lithuania's reaction "whining" and said he won't allow the EU to send people who don't qualify for asylum back to Belarus. "They want to turn Belarus into a filtration camp: people are fleeing westwards because of grief, misery and war, and they want us to take them and hold them in 'filtration camps' here. This will not happen."

Lukashenko's fiery response came on the same day that the country's top court sentenced opposition politician Viktor Babariko, who had planned to challenge Lukashenko in last year's presidential election, to 14 years in prison.

Lukashenko also railed against EU sanctions imposed on him and his allies.

Babariko, a former senior banker, 57, collected over 430,000 signatures in support of his presidential run, well over the 100,000 needed to get on the ballot. That posed a potential challenge to Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus since 1994. Babariko's candidacy was turned down by the election commission and he was arrested in June and charged with money laundering and bribery. Human rights watchdogs have declared Babariko a political prisoner.

The EU's External Action Service called the sentence "one of at least 125 unfair and arbitrary recent verdicts by Belarusian courts in politically motivated trials," and demanded Babariko's "immediate and unconditional release."

In his last statement to the court last week, Babariko denied the charges and said he has "no shame before the people."

According to a June opinion poll conducted by London-based Chatham House, Babariko is the most popular choice for president, with the backing of 25 percent of respondents, while Lukashenko was ranked second with 23 percent.

Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, the opposition leader who had to flee Belarus after running against Lukashenko last year, called the Babariko ruling an "insane sentence" for a man who was "one of the leaders who woke the country from a long sleep."

Her husband Sergei is on trial and also faces a long jail sentence. As of Tuesday morning, there were 534 political prisoners in Belarus, according to human rights groups.

Pavel Latushko, another opposition leader, who fled to Poland, called Babariko's hearing "a show trial."

"The dictator tries to pretend that he is in control of the situation, and that he is not afraid [of] anyone. But this is not so in many ways," Latushko said.

Angry authoritarian

On Tuesday, Lukashenko accused the EU of waging "war" against Belarus, responding to the latest sanctions imposed in late June.

"It is lawlessness and blackmailing on an international scale," he said. "Whatever it takes, we have to endure them."

Lukashenko instructed the nation's government and the central bank "to take a close look" at western companies doing business in Belarus. "If someone fails to understand us and has started a fight against the Belarusian state, you know how they should be dealt with," he told his cabinet.

Lukashenko also instructed the government to restrict EU-based transit through Belarus to Russia and China.

In May, Belarus banned the import of products made by Volkswagen subsidiary Skoda, as well as German manufacturer of motor oils Liqui Moly, and the German skincare multinational Beiersdorf, the maker of Nivea.

That's in reprisal for those companies refusing to sponsor this year's Ice Hockey World Championship in Belarus, which contributed to the International Ice Hockey Federation's decision to pull Minsk's hosting rights. Hockey is a personal sporting passion of the mustachioed leader.

On Tuesday morning, European Council President Charles Michel visited the Lithuania-Belarus border.

The previous evening, he tweeted that Brussels condemns "all attempts to instrumentalise illegal migration to exert pressure on EU member states. Lithuania can count on our full support and solidarity through the mobilisation of [the EU's border agency] Frontex and the dialogue with countries involved in return and readmission procedures."

Since early January, over 1,300 unauthorized migrants have entered Lithuania from Belarus — most from the Middle East and Africa. Last year, fewer than 100 were recorded.

Last week, Minsk said it would suspend an agreement with the EU on procedures to readmit people who illegally cross the border with the bloc.