

= Alexander Lukashenko =

Alexander Grigoryevich Lukashenko (Belarusian : ?????? ? ??? ???? ? ?????? ?????? ? ??? , Alyaksandr Ryhoravich Lukashenka , Russian : ?????? ? ??? ???? ? ?????? ?????? ? ??? ; born 30 August 1954) is the President of Belarus , in office since 20 July 1994 . Before his career as a politician , Lukashenko worked as director of a state @-@ owned agricultural farm and spent time with the Soviet Border Troops and the Soviet Army . He was the only deputy to vote against the independence of Belarus from the Soviet Union .

Lukashenko opposed Western @-@ backed " shock therapy " during the post @-@ Soviet transition . He has retained Soviet @-@ era policies , such as continued state ownership of key industries , despite objections from Western governments . Observers also contend that Lukashenko presides over a regime steeped in Soviet nostalgia . Belarus has been labeled " Europe 's last dictatorship " by some Western journalists , on account of Lukashenko 's self @-@ described authoritarian style of government . Lukashenko and other Belarusian officials are also the subject of sanctions imposed by the European Union and the United States for alleged human rights violations off and on since 2006 .

= = Early life and career (1954 ? 94) = =

Lukashenko was born on 30 August 1954 , in the settlement of Kopys in the Vitebsk voblast of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic . His grandfather , Trokhym Lukashenko , had been born in the Sumy Oblast of Ukraine near Shostka (today village of Sobycheve) . Lukashenko grew up without a father in his childhood , leading him to be taunted by his schoolmates for having an unmarried mother .

Lukashenko graduated from the Mogilev Pedagogical Institute (now Mogilev State A. Kuleshov University) in 1975 and the Belarusian Agricultural Academy in 1985 . He served in the Border Guard (frontier troops) from 1975 to 1977 and in the Soviet Army from 1980 to 1982 . In addition , he led an All @-@ Union Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol) chapter in Mogilev from 1977 to 1978 . While in the Soviet Army , Lukashenko was an officer of the 120th Guards Motor Rifle Division , which was based in Minsk . After leaving the military , he became the deputy chairman of a collective farm in 1982 and in 1985 . He was promoted to the post of director of the Gorodets state farm and construction materials plant in the Shklov district .

In 1990 , Lukashenko was elected Deputy to the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus . He was the only deputy of the Belarusian parliament who voted against ratification of the December 1991 agreement that dissolved the Soviet Union and set up the Commonwealth of Independent States . Having acquired a reputation as an eloquent opponent of corruption , Lukashenko was elected in 1993 to serve as the chairman of the anti @-@ corruption committee of the Belarusian parliament . In late 1993 he accused 70 senior government officials , including the Supreme Soviet chairman Stanislav Shushkevich and prime minister Vyacheslav Kebich , of corruption including stealing state funds for personal purposes . While the charges were never fully proven against him , Shushkevich resigned his chairmanship due to the embarrassment of the series of events and losing a vote of no @-@ confidence .

A new Belarusian constitution enacted in early 1994 paved the way for the first--and to date , only--democratic presidential election on 23 June and 10 July . Six candidates stood in the first round , including Lukashenko , who campaigned as an independent on a populist platform of " defeat the mafia against the Conspiracy of New World Order and Zionism " . Shushkevich and Kebich also ran , with the latter regarded as the clear favorite . Lukashenko won 45 @. @ 1 % of the vote while Kebich received 17 @. @ 4 % , Zyanon Paznyak received 12 @. @ 9 % and Shushkevich , along with two other candidates , received less than 10 % of votes . Lukashenko won the second round of the election on 10 July with 80 @. @ 1 % of the vote . Shortly after his election , he addressed the State Duma of the Russian Federation in Moscow proposing a new Union of Slavic states , which would culminate in the creation of the Union State in 1999 .

= = President of Belarus = =

= = = First term (1994 ? 2001) = = =

In May 1995 , Belarus held a referendum on changing its national symbols ; the referendum also made the Russian language equal to Belarusian , and forged closer economic ties to Russia . Lukashenko was also given the ability to disband the Supreme Soviet by decree . In the summer of 1996 , deputies of the 199 @-@ member Belarusian parliament signed a petition to impeach Lukashenko on charges of violating the Constitution . Shortly after that , a referendum was held on 24 November 1996 in which four questions were offered by Lukashenko and three offered by a group of Parliament members . The questions ranged from social issues (changing independence day to 3 July , abolition of the death penalty) to the national constitution . As a result of the referendum , the constitution that was amended by Lukashenko was accepted and the one amended by the Supreme Soviet was voided . The new document dramatically increased Lukashenko 's power and transformed his presidency into a de facto legal dictatorship . His decrees now had the force of law , and he also acquired near @-@ total control over government spending . On 25 November , it was announced that 70 @.@ 5 % of voters , of an 84 % turnout , had approved the amended constitution . The US and the EU , however , refused to accept the legitimacy of the referendum .

After the referendum , Lukashenko convened a new parliamentary assembly from those members of the parliament who were loyal to him . After between ten and twelve deputies withdrew their signature from the impeachment petition , only about forty deputies of the old parliament were left and the Supreme Soviet was dismissed by Lukashenko . Nevertheless , international organizations and many Western countries do not recognize the current parliament given the way it was formed . At the start of 1998 , the Central Bank of Russia suspended trading in the Belarusian ruble , which led to a collapse in the value of the currency . Lukashenko responded by taking control of the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus , sacking the entire bank leadership and blaming the West for the free fall of the currency .

Lukashenko blamed foreign governments for conspiring against him and , in April 1998 , expelled ambassadors from the Drazdy complex near Minsk and moved them to another building . The Drazdy conflict caused an international outcry and resulted in a travel ban on Lukashenko from the EU and the US . Although the ambassadors eventually returned after the controversy died down , Lukashenko stepped up his rhetorical attacks against the West . He stated that Western governments were trying to undermine Belarus at all levels , even sports , during the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano , Japan .

Upon the outbreak of the Kosovo War in 1999 , Lukashenko suggested to Yugoslav President Slobodan Milo?evi? that Yugoslavia join the Union of Russia and Belarus .

= = = Second term (2001 ? 06) = = =

Belarus held another presidential election on 9 September 2001 . Under the original constitution , this election should have been held in 1999 , but the 1996 referendum extended Lukashenko 's term for an additional two years . Lukashenko faced Vladimir Goncharik and Sergei Gaidukevich in the election . During the campaign , Lukashenko promised to raise the standards of farming , social benefits and increase industrial output of Belarus . Lukashenko won in the first round with 75 @.@ 65 % of the vote . The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) said the process " failed to meet international standards " . Jane 's Intelligence Digest surmised that the price of Russian support for Lukashenko ahead of the 2001 presidential elections was the surrender of Minsk 's control over its section of the Yamal @-@ Europe gas pipeline . After the results were announced declaring Lukashenko the winner , Russia publicly welcomed Lukashenko 's re @-@ election ; the Russian President , Vladimir Putin , telephoned Lukashenko and offered a message of congratulations and support .

Following the 2003 invasion of Iraq , American intelligence agencies reported that aides of Saddam Hussein managed to acquire Belarusian passports while in Syria , but that it was unlikely that Belarus would offer a safe haven for Saddam and his two sons . This action , along with arms deals with Iraq and Iran , prompted Western governments to take a tougher stance against Lukashenko . The US was particularly angered by the arms sales , and American political leaders increasingly began to refer to Belarus as " Europe 's last dictatorship " . The EU was concerned for the security of its gas supplies from Russia , which are piped through Belarus , and took an active interest in Belarusian affairs . With the accession of Poland , Latvia and Lithuania , the EU 's border with Belarus has grown to more than 1000 kilometers .

During a televised address to the nation on 7 September 2004 , Lukashenko announced plans for a referendum to eliminate presidential term limits . This was held on 17 October 2004 , the same day as parliamentary elections , and , according to official results , was approved by 79 @. @ 42 % of voters . Previously , Lukashenko had been limited to two terms and thus would have been constitutionally required to step down after the presidential elections in 2006 . Opposition groups , the OSCE , the European Union , and the US State Department stated that the vote fell short of international standards . An example of the failure , cited by the OSCE , was the pre @-@ marking of ballots . Belarus grew economically under Lukashenko , but much of this growth was due to Russian crude oil which was imported at below @-@ market prices , refined , and sold to other European countries at a profit .

= = = 2006 presidential election = = =

After Lukashenko confirmed he was running for re @-@ election in 2005 , opposition groups began to seek a single candidate . On 16 October 2005 , on the Day of Solidarity With Belarus , the political groups Zubr and Third Way Belarus encouraged all opposition parties to rally behind one candidate to oppose Lukashenko in the 2006 election . Their chosen candidate was Alexander Milinkevich . Lukashenko reacted by saying that anyone going to opposition protests would have their necks wrung " as one might a duck " . On 19 March 2006 , exit polls showed Lukashenko winning a third term in a landslide , amid opposition reports of vote @-@ rigging and fear of violence . The EcooM organisation gave Lukashenko 84 @. @ 2 % of the vote and Milinkevich just 2 % , while the Belarusian Republican Youth Union gave Lukashenko 84 @. @ 2 % and Milinkevich 3 @. @ 1 % . The Gallup Organisation noted that EcooM and the Belarusian Republican Youth Union are government @-@ controlled and both released their exit poll results before noon on election day even though voting stations did not close until 8 pm .

Belarusian authorities vowed to prevent any large @-@ scale demonstrations following the election (such as those that marked the Orange Revolution in Ukraine) . Despite their efforts , the opposition had the largest number of demonstrators in years , with nightly protests in Minsk continuing for a number days after the election . The largest protest occurred on election night ; reporters for the Associated Press estimated that approximately 10 @, @ 000 people turned out . Election observers from the Russia @-@ led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) differed on the Belarusian election . The OSCE declared on 20 March 2006 that the " presidential election failed to meet OSCE commitments for democratic elections . " Lukashenko " permitted State authority to be used in a manner which did not allow citizens to freely and fairly express their will at the ballot box ... a pattern of intimidation and the suppression of independent voices ... was evident throughout the campaign . " The heads of all 25 EU countries declared that the election was " fundamentally flawed " . In contrast , the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs declared , " Long before the elections , the OSCE 's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights had declared that they [the elections] would be illegitimate and it was pretty biased in its commentaries on their progress and results , thus playing an instigating role . " Lukashenko later stated that he had rigged the election results , but against himself , in order to obtain a majority more typical of European countries . Although he had won 93 @. @ 5 % of the vote , he said , he had directed the government to announce a result of 86 % .

Some Russian nationalists , such as Dmitry Rogozin and the Movement Against Illegal Immigration , stated that they would like to see Lukashenko become President of Russia in 2008 . Lukashenko responded that he would not run for the Russian presidency , but that if his health was still good , he might run for reelection in 2011 .

= = = Third term (2006 ? 11) = = =

In September 2008 , parliamentary elections were held . Lukashenko had allowed some opposition candidates to stand , though in the official results , opposition members failed to get a seat out of the available 110 . OSCE observers described the vote as " flawed " , including " several cases of deliberate falsification of results " . Opposition members and supporters demonstrated in protest . According to the Nizhny Novgorod @-@ based CIS election observation mission , the findings of which are often dismissed by the West , the elections in Belarus conformed to international standards . Lukashenko later commented that the opposition in Belarus was financed by foreign countries and was not needed .

In April 2009 , he held talks with Pope Benedict XVI in the Vatican , Lukashenko 's first visit to Western Europe after a travel ban on him a decade earlier .

= = = 2010 presidential election = = =

Lukashenko was one of ten candidates registered for the presidential election held in Belarus on 19 December 2010 . Though originally envisaged for 2011 , an earlier date was approved " to ensure the maximum participation of citizens in the electoral campaign and to set most convenient time for the voters " . The run @-@ up to the campaign was marked by a series of Russian media attacks on Lukashenko . The Central Election Committee said that all nine opposition figures were likely to get less than half the vote total that Lukashenko would get . Though opposition figures alleged intimidation and that " dirty tricks " were being played , the election was seen as comparatively open as a result of desire to improve relations with both Europe and the US .

On election day , two presidential candidates were seriously beaten by police in different opposition rallies . On the night of the election , opposition protesters chanting " Out ! , " " Long live Belarus ! " and other similar slogans attempted to storm the building of the government of Belarus , smashing windows and doors before riot police were able to push them back . The number of protesters was reported by major news media as being around or above 10 @,@ 000 people . At least seven of the opposition presidential candidates were arrested .

Several of the opposition candidates , along with their supporters and members of the media , were arrested . Many were sent to prison , often on charges of organizing a mass disturbance . Examples include Andrei Sannikov , Alexander Otroschenkov , Ales Michalevic , Mikola Statkevich , and Uladzimir Nyaklyayew . Sannikov 's wife , journalist Irina Khalip , was put under house arrest . Yaraslau Ramanchuk 's party leader , Anatoly Lebedko , was also arrested .

The CEC said that Lukashenko won 79 @.@ 65 % of the vote (he gained 5 @,@ 130 @,@ 557 votes) with 90 @.@ 65 % of the electorate voting . The OSCE categorized the elections as " flawed " while the CIS mission observers praised them as " free and transparent " . However , the OSCE also stated that some improvements were made in the run @-@ up to the election , including the candidates ' use of television debates and ability to deliver their messages unhindered . Several European foreign ministers issued a joint statement calling the election and its aftermath an " unfortunate step backwards in the development of democratic governance and respect for human rights in Belarus . "

Lukashenko 's inauguration ceremony of 22 January 2011 was boycotted by EU ambassadors , and only thirty @-@ two foreign diplomats attended . During this ceremony , Lukashenko defended the legitimacy of his re @-@ election and vowed that Belarus would never have its own version of the Orange Revolution or Georgia 's 2003 Rose Revolution . Effective 31 January 2011 , the EU renewed a travel ban , prohibiting Lukashenko and 156 of his associates from traveling to EU member countries , as a result of the crackdown on opposition supporters .

= = = 2015 presidential election = = =

= = = Domestic policy = = =

Lukashenko promotes himself as a " man of the people . " Due to his style of rule , he is often informally referred to as ?????? (bats 'ka , " daddy ") . He was elected chairman of the Belarusian Olympic Committee in 1997 . Lukashenko wanted to rebuild Belarus when he took office ; the economy was in freefall , due to declining industry and lack of demand for Belarusian goods . Lukashenko kept many industries under the control of the government , and privatization was slowed . In 2001 , he stated his intention to improve the social welfare of his citizens and to make Belarus " powerful and prosperous . "

The economy of Belarus has been in a state of flux since Lukashenko 's election in 1994 . His economic policies aimed to prevent issues that occurred in other former Soviet states , such as the establishment of oligarchic structures and mass unemployment . The unemployment rate for the country at the end of 2011 was at 0 @. @ 6 % of the population (of 6 @. @ 86 million eligible workers) , a decrease from 1995 , when unemployment was 2 @. @ 9 % with a working @- @ eligible population of 5 @. @ 24 million . The per @- @ capita Gross national income rose from US \$ 1 @, @ 423 in 1993 to US \$ 5 @, @ 830 at the end of 2011 . One major economic issue Lukashenko faced throughout his presidency was the value of the Belarusian ruble . For a time it was pegged to major foreign currencies , such as the euro , US dollar and the Russian ruble in order to maintain the stability of the Belarusian ruble . Yet , the currency has experienced free fall and also several rounds of devaluation . A major devaluation took place in 2011 after the government announced that average salaries would increase to US \$ 500 . The 2011 devaluation was the largest on record for the past twenty years according to the World Bank . Belarus also had to seek a bailout from international sources , and while it has received loans from China , receiving loans from the IMF and other agencies depend on how Belarus reforms its economy according to standards set by the IMF and other agencies .

Some critics of Lukashenko , including the opposition group Zubr , use the term Lukashism to refer to the political and economic system Lukashenko has implemented in Belarus . The term is also used more broadly to refer to an authoritarian ideology based on a cult of his personality and nostalgia for Soviet times among certain groups in Belarus . The US Congress sought to aid the opposition groups by passing the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 to introduce sanctions against Lukashenko 's government and provide financial and other support to the opposition . Lukashenko supporters argue that his rule spared Belarus the turmoil that beset many other former Soviet countries . Lukashenko commented on the criticism of him by saying : " I 've been hearing these accusations for over 10 years and we have got used to it . We are not going to answer them . I want to come from the premise that the elections in Belarus are held for ourselves . I am sure that it is the Belarusian people who are the masters in our state . "

Since the November 1996 referendum , Lukashenko has effectively held all governing power in the nation . If the House of Representatives rejects his choice for prime minister twice , he has the right to dissolve it . His decrees have greater weight than ordinary legislation . He also has near @- @ absolute control over government spending ; parliament can only increase or decrease spending with his permission . However , the legislature is dominated by his supporters in any event , and there is no substantive opposition to presidential decisions . He also appoints eight members of the upper house , the Council of the Republic , as well as nearly all judges .

= = = Foreign policy = = =

Lukashenko 's relationship with the EU has been strained , in part by choice and in part by his policies towards domestic opponents . Lukashenko 's repression of opponents caused him to be called " Europe 's last dictator " and resulted in the EU imposing visa sanctions on him and a range

of Belarusian officials . At times , the EU has lifted sanctions as a way to encourage dialogue or gain concessions from Lukashenko . Since the EU adopted this policy of " change through engagement " , it has supported economic and political reforms to help integrate the Belarusian state .

Lukashenko 's relationship with Russia , once his powerful ally and vocal supporter , has significantly deteriorated . The run @-@ up to the 2010 Belarusian presidential election was marked by a series of Russian media attacks on Lukashenko . Throughout July state @-@ controlled channel NTV broadcast a multi @-@ part documentary entitled " The Godfather " highlighting the suspicious disappearance of a number of opposition leaders during the late 1990s . Lukashenko called the media attack " dirty propaganda " .

His policies have been praised by some other world leaders and are seen as a model for at least one country . In response to a question about Belarus 's domestic policies , President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela said " We see here a model social state like the one we are beginning to create . " Chairman of the Chinese Standing Committee of National People 's Congress Wu Bangguo noted that Belarus has been rapidly developing under Lukashenko . Lithuanian MPs have also praised the Belarusian economy and its contribution to the Lithuanian economy ; Stanislovas Gedraitis said that he was in awe of the Belarusian progress created mostly by the efforts of the national leader .

During the 2014 crisis in Ukraine , Alexander Lukashenko became a critic of Russian policy and interferences in Ukraine 's internal affairs . Lukashenko criticized the Donbass status referendums and the idea of federalization , and proclaimed support for the government in Kiev . During the 9 May celebration , Lukashenko spoke in Belarusian instead of Russian for the first time . Later he arranged a meeting between Ukraine 's president Petro Poroshenko and Russian president Vladimir Putin . The Polish newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza has written about Lukashenko 's transformation from " the last dictator in Europe to acceptable peacemaker " .

In 2015 , Lukashenko sought to improve trade relations between Belarus and Latin America .

= = Controversial statements = =

In 1995 , Lukashenko was accused of making a remark which has been construed to be in praise of Adolf Hitler : " The history of Germany is a copy of the history of Belarus . Germany was raised from ruins thanks to firm authority and not everything connected with that well @-@ known figure Hitler was bad . German order evolved over the centuries and attained its peak under Hitler . "

In October 2007 , Lukashenko was accused of making anti @-@ Semitic and anti @-@ Israel comments ; addressing the " miserable state of the city of Babruysk " on a live broadcast on state radio , he stated : " This is a Jewish city , and the Jews are not concerned for the place they live in . They have turned Babruysk into a pigsty . Look at Israel ? I was there and saw it myself ... I call on Jews who have money to come back to Babruysk . " Members of the US House of Representatives sent a letter to the Belarusian ambassador to the US , Mikhail Khvastov , addressing Lukashenko 's comments with a strong request to retract them , and the comments also caused a negative reaction from Israel . Consequently , Pavel Yakubovich , editor of Belarus Today , was sent to Israel , and in a meeting with the Israel Foreign Ministry said that Lukashenko 's comment was " a mistake that was said jokingly , and does not represent his positions regarding the Jewish people " and that he was " anything but anti @-@ Semitic , " and had been " insulted by the mere accusation . " The Belarusian Ambassador to Israel , Igor Leshchenya , stated that the president had a " kind attitude toward the Jewish people " , and Sergei Rychenko , the press secretary at the Belarusian Embassy in Tel Aviv , said parts of Lukashenko 's comments had been mistranslated .

On 4 March 2012 , two days after EU leaders (including openly gay German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle) had called for new measures to pressure Lukashenko over alleged human rights abuses in Belarus at a summit in Brussels , Lukashenko provoked diplomatic rebuke from Germany after commenting that it was " better to be a dictator than gay " in response to Westerwelle having referred to him as " Europe 's last dictator " during the meeting .

= = Personal life = =

== Family ==

Lukashenko married Galina Zhelnerovich , his high school sweetheart , in 1975 . Later that year his oldest son , Viktor , was born . Their second son , Dzmitry , was born in 1980 . Galina lives separately in the family 's house in the village near Shklov . Though they are still legally married , Galina Lukashenko has been estranged from her husband since shortly after he became president . His son Viktor is a ' national security aide ' ; according to one foreign tabloid newspaper Lukashenko has dismissed him in public as " a useless weakling who will soon become even weaker " .

Lukashenko fathered an illegitimate son , Nikolai , who was born in 2004 . Though never confirmed by the government , it is widely believed that the child 's mother is Irina Abelskaya ? the two had an affair when she was Lukashenko 's personal doctor . It has been reported by Western observers and media that Nikolai , nicknamed " Kolya " , is being groomed as Lukashenko 's successor . According to Belarusian state media , these speculations were dismissed by Lukashenko , who also denied that he would remain in office for a further thirty years ? the time Nikolai will become eligible to stand for election and succeed him .

== Hobbies ==

Lukashenko believes that the president should be a conservative person and avoid using modern electronic gadgets such as an iPad or iPhone . He used to play bayan and football , but abandoned both during his presidency . He is a keen skier and ice hockey forward , who played exhibition games alongside international hockey stars . His two elder sons also play hockey , sometimes alongside their father .

Lukashenko started training in cross @-@ country as a child , and in the 2000s still competed at the national level .

He has received an invitation to the 2016 Bandy World Championship and is considering going there .

== Orders and honors ==

Winner of the international premium of Andrey Pervozvanny " For Faith and Loyalty " (1995)
The Order of José Martí (Cuba , 2000)
Order of the Revolution (Libya , 2000)
Special prize of the International Olympic Committee " Gates of Olympus " (2000)
Order " For Services to the Fatherland " , 2nd Class (Russia , 2001)
Honorary citizen of Yerevan , Armenia (2001)
Order of St. Dmitry Donskoy , First Degree (2005)
Medal of the International Federation of Festival Organizations " For development of the world festival movement " (2005)
Order of St. Cyril (by the Belarusian Orthodox Church) (2006)
Honorary Diploma of the Eurasian Economic Community (2006)
Order of St. Vladimir , First Degree (2007)
Keys to the City of Caracas , Venezuela (2010)
Order of Distinguished Citizen (Caracas , Venezuela ; 2010)
Order of the Republic of Serbia (2013)
Order of Alexander Nevsky (2014)