

National Security Bureau

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The Summit for Democracy

President Andrzej Duda: I appeal to all of you for solidarity in this matter, I appeal for solidarity with Belarus. It is one of the most important challenges of the democratic world today.

Mr. President! Ladies and Gentlemen,
Heads of State and Government,
Co-Leaders of the democratic world,

allow me to share a personal reflection with you.

Thirty-one years ago, I voted in free elections for the first time, and for the first time in the history of Poland after World War II, my generation could democratically elect a president.

A year ago, as the second president in our history, I won re-election. It happened with a record turnout and after a very close competition with my opponent, Rafał Trzaskowski, the incumbent Mayor of Warsaw.

If I had stood in front of you just several months ago, I would have probably talked – as many of you have – about my country, about Poland, which had to shed blood for democracy time and again.

Furthermore, I would have probably talked about the priorities of our generation of world leaders and about a great task facing us. And that, in my opinion, consists in the overcoming of the polarization which is unfortunately increasingly evident in the post-pandemic world. On a scale we have not seen before and in almost all countries. My country is no exception in this regard.

I would have probably said that democracy must return to its roots: that debate must be debate again, not a call to censor opponents, that political struggle must not be tantamount to dehumanization of the opponent, because the opponent is simply a person who – for various reasons – has different views than we do.

In the meantime, however, something happened that changed my perspective on the democracy debate.

Four weeks after my re-election, when over 20 million of my Compatriots, Polish women and men, exercised their right to vote, our neighbors, Belarusian men and women, were once again, deprived of this right in the most brutal of ways.

And mind you: Belarus lies 180 kilometers from Warsaw. There runs a border of democracy, and maybe even more than that – there is a yawning gap between democracy and the lack of it.

In Belarus there is no discussion about the electoral system, polarization, minorities and ideologies. This is a luxury of us Westerners. There, the concern is how to get 900 people out of prison, those whose only fault was the desire to have free elections. And how to remove from power a dictator who has been ruling the country for 27 years and who, in breach of all civilized rules, rigged the vote and pacified the protests.

Why am I talking about Belarus? Because Poland, grateful to Providence for our freedom won in the 1980s, took on a commitment years ago: to be a support for democracy in Eastern Europe! It is a beautiful task, but it has its consequences. It has made us the target of the Kremlin propaganda, and more recently we have been paying the price in the form of a hybrid operation on our border provoked by the dictator Alexander Lukashenka.

I was asked for commitments, so I make a solemn declaration to our Belarusian brothers and I want it to be heard everywhere east of Poland:

POLAND SHALL CONTINUE TO BE a promoter of democracy, because I believe that my daughter, born in 1995, who has not lived a second in a dictatorship, and her Belarusian peer, who has never seen free elections, are two equal people with equal rights.

I DECLARE, as the President of the Republic of Poland, that Belarusian women and men, 180 thousand of whom have found work or shelter in Poland, will be treated by us as brothers and as most welcome guests.

I DECLARE that Poland is aware of the fact that supporting democracy has its price attached. It is paying this price today with our border guards, police and army guarding the eastern border of the European Union against a dictator's revenge, against tyranny and contempt for humanity.

I am saying this not only as the President of the Republic of Poland. I am saying these words as Andrzej Duda, who in 2025 will end his presidency and hand over power to his democratically elected male or female successor. And then he will proudly become an ordinary citizen again, simply a voter.

And I believe that Belarusian men and women will one day see the same democratic normality. The one, in which presidents change, but they remain – free citizens, free and independent voters.

I appeal to all of you for solidarity in this matter, I appeal for solidarity with Belarus. It is one of the most important challenges of the democratic world today.

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