

# Lukashenko Reaches Out to West

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MINSK — Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko has called for dialogue with the European Union and described the bloc as "an important partner."

"Yes, we [Belarus and the West] have different views on certain social issues," he said during a speech in parliament Tuesday. "But these differences should be overcome through dialogue and negotiations rather than sanctions and bans."

"In terms of economics, and politics as well, Belarus and the European Union are important partners to each other."

In a jab at Russia, Lukashenko also spoke against large-scale privatizations — one of the conditions of a financial bailout package provided by Russia last year.

"Those who hope to make hay on Belarussian privatization are wasting their time," he said.

Analysts had expected Russian firms to be the main buyers in future privatization deals, but Lukashenko said Belarus would now limit asset sales and insist on the protection of employees' rights at privatized companies.

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