

# The Wit and Wisdom of Alexander Lukashenko

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*Перл: gem, howler*

Back in the old days, my idea of linguistic fun was tuning in to an interview with former Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, whose earnest malapropisms were hilarious, charming and often apt. He coined the phrase that is Russia in a nutshell: Хотелось как можно лучше, получилось как всегда. (We hoped for the best, but got the usual.)

Another producer of перлы (gems, howlers) is Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko. He's Eastern Europe's "I did it my way" guy, usually good for a linguistic chuckle (and a human and civil rights frown), and a staunch Russian ally. Well, he used to be. Now — not so much.

The thing is, батъка (affectionate term meaning "father") Lukashenko isn't behind the whole

Ukraine-is-fascist-gotta-rescue-threatened-Russians story. In fact, at a news conference on Oct. 17 he said: Это же не гитлеровская Германия! (Come on, it's not Nazi Germany!) He's really not with the program: Я очень хорошо отношусь к украинскому народу. Не верьте, что украинцы фашисты. (I really like the Ukrainian people. I don't believe that Ukrainians are fascists.) Maybe there's a personal reason for this: Я больше украинец, чем белорус. (I'm more Ukrainian than Belarussian.)

His theories about the origins of the conflict also contradict Moscow's version. Янукович финансировал Правый сектор, чтобы скинуть Тимошенко. Но в итоге они его и прогнали из страны. (Yanukovich funded the Right Sector to get rid of Yuliya Tymoshenko. But as a result they chased him out of the country.) But he does agree with Russia that the Ukrainians are to blame — sort of: Украина сама дала повод в аннексии Крыма. Нужно было воевать за него, а не сдавать. (Ukraine gave a pretext for the annexation of Crimea. They should have fought for Crimea, not given up.)

But he doesn't buy into the whole Крым наш (Crimea is ours!) thing: Крым украинский и должен быть в составе Украины. (Crimea is Ukrainian and should be a part of Ukraine.)

Maybe that's because Belarus has a few of its own territorial issues: Смоленск и Брянск наши, но Беларуси они сейчас не нужны. (Smolensk and Bryansk belong to us, but right now Belarus doesn't need them.) Батя also has some notions of expansion: Калининград — это зона ответственности Беларуси. В СССР её хотели отдать Беларуси. Я это поддерживаю. (Kaliningrad is in Belarus' zone of responsibility. In the U.S.S.R. they wanted to give it to Belarus. I support this.)

Or maybe it's because Belarus doesn't want any more problems with the international community: Если мы признаём Осетию, то с нами будет то же, что и с Россией под санкциями только в квадрате. (If we recognize Ossetia, we'll have the same thing Russia has with those sanctions — only it'll be exponentially worse.) So back off: Не надо меня долбать по Крыму, как вы это делали по Абхазии. Не признаём мы! (Stop pushing me over Crimea like you did with Abkhazia. We won't recognize it!)

But батя is still an unrepentant dictator: Наша диктатура никому не мешает жить и развиваться. (Our dictatorship doesn't prevent anyone from living and developing.) And: Я своё государство за цивилизованным миром не поведу. (I will not lead my government into the civilized world.) In fact: Лучше быть диктатором, чем голубым. (Better to be a dictator than gay.)

Well, he warned us: Ради сохранения спокойствия в стране я готов пожертвовать собственным разумом. (In order to maintain peace in the country, I'm ready to sacrifice my own sanity.)

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