

NACJONALIZMY W ŚWIECIE SPECIFIC NATIONALISMS

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WHAT FUTURE FOR BELARUS? AN ANALYSIS OF IDENTITY ISSUES

Any attempt to address the question of the future of Belarus requires that we analyse factors which determine the situation of Belarusian society today, as well as consider whether and how these factors might possibly change, thus affecting the position Belarus currently occupies on the socio-political map of Europe. My assumption is that it is Belarusians themselves who decide the situation in their country and its relations with the rest of the world. Thus, if they are subject to manipulation and become pawns in someone else's game, my approach as a sociologist is to look for the causes of such a situation mainly in their current state of awareness, the distinctive features of their community, their political culture, etc. These are the factors which account for a limited nature of Belarusian relations with the West, and their close proximity to the East. At the same time, the West shows far less interest in Belarus compared to Russia, which sees Belarusians as 'an extension' of the Russian ethnic community and its 'geographical' link with Europe.

Belarus is not a democratic state, but neither is it a state where power would come from the outside, or rely only on the use of force and repression. In every presidential election, millions of Belarusians cast their vote for Lukashenka and his position in opinion polls is adversely affected practically only at the times of eco-

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conomic hardship. As well as this, periods of Lukashenka's lower popularity do not involve a major or lasting increase in support for the opposition leaders. Although not entirely ungrounded, it is an oversimplification to put all the blame for such a situation on the mass media. It is not inconceivable that anti-government demonstrations gathering between one and two percent of the population of Minsk once every few years would be successful if the protesters were ten times as many. I do not find it fully convincing that, as Belarusian opposition activists have it, it is Lukashenka that is at the root of the problem, and that it would be enough to overthrow him to steer the country towards democracy, civil society and Europe. Lukashenka is not the reason of the current situation. Quite on the contrary, he is its result.

The example of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine shows that a lasting change has to be based on the social and political capital, as well as on the distinct substance of social identity. If today Belarus is a non-democratic archaic state, economically dependent on Russia and increasingly impoverished in comparison with its western and northern neighbours, it is a result of decisions made mainly in Minsk, not in Warsaw or London. Nor should Moscow take all the blame for the situation, since it simply makes the most of the opportunities created by Belarusian authorities themselves. The West can help Belarusians in their effort to modernize the country, but it cannot do the task for them. Similarly, Ukraine was not accepted as a NATO member because Ukrainian society did not support it. In order to effect a change, it is not enough simply to want it. It is also necessary to have a more or less clear vision of a different Belarus, to work out the means to achieve it, and to have the expertise needed to communicate this vision successfully to the majority of Belarusian society.

As I understand, my task is to answer the question whether Belarus will be, or indeed can be, a strong, independent and democratic state, a society of free and prosperous people. Leaving aside an approach which sees Belarusians as pawns in someone else's game, I will attempt to discuss social factors behind the emergence of Belarusian sovereignty, with special emphasis on aspects outlined above.

TO BE OR TO HAVE?

A modern state which, while aspiring to the position of an independent subject in international relations, at the same time it needs to adapt to constant change, modernizing through competition with others, it has to be characterized by at least one of the two features that, in the long run, condition its ability to change: a reasonably strong sense of community and a socially established tradition of an efficient state and its institutions. These two factors will be discussed in turn. A society that, at crucial historical moments, perceives the sphere of its community-making ideals as less important than bare necessities of life, is unlikely to be able to articulate and pursue values and objectives most often referred to as the national interest, or *raison d'État*. Potentially destructive nationalistic forces aside, over the last two centuries of European history it has been the concept of a national community that consolidated societies at historical turning points. Civil societies, promoting democracy and market economy, generally develop against an already existing national background, which provides a unifying effect of a shared system of values in certain spheres of social reality.

With the tradition of statehood almost non-existent (unless the questionable statehood of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic, BSSR, is considered), modern Belarusian society was shaped by the Soviet rather than national ideology. The attitude to the law and ownership is far from that of Western models of civil society; neither is there any bourgeois tradition or a significant modern middle class. 'To have' dominates over 'to be' not just when it comes to everyday reality, which would be quite understandable. It is not only sociologists who often quote the results of two surveys (2003 and 2006) conducted by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS). When asked: "What is more important: the improvement of the economic situation in Belarus or independence of the state?", more respondents chose the former over the latter.¹ Belarusians are different from Germans or the Dutch with their strong bourgeois ethos; they do not resemble the French or British with their tradition of state, nor are they like Poles or Hungarians attached to their strong sense of nationality. To be more precise, even if all these features are present, they are not strong enough to successfully protect Belarusians against taking an attitude of an object rather than an independent subject. If they want to make decisions about themselves and set themselves goals to achieve, they have to move beyond an individualist approach limited by the considerations of the here and now; to promote elites that will go beyond thinking in such categories and that will be able to foster attitudes of empowerment, thus successfully integrating the society. The question is: Have Belarusians developed such a mechanism of self-creation, and if so, to what degree?

Since the Soviets made it impossible for Belarusians to develop a strong sense of a national community, their class world of peasantry was not disintegrated by a national ideology that would have been able to compete with it. Rather, it was transferred to and, with some modifications, regenerated in a working class reality of Belarusian cities. In this way, modern Belarusianness, as far as it actually existed on a larger scale, turned into a largely Sovietised ethnicity, clearly rooted in its peasant origins. Peasant masses perceived their move to towns as social and class advancement. In Soviet cities they did not come into contact with an expansive national ideology that would have a unifying influence, cutting across class divisions. Thus, the phobias of their own social class remained intact, and their culture did not embrace a concept that they are also entitled to their share in political power. A division of the world into 'familiar' and 'strange' was transferred from feudalism to the reality of the Soviet system. Categorizing people into 'ours' (those directly connected or involved in everyday exchange of favours) and 'strangers' (those in the public sphere, which remained more or less dangerous, cold, conducive to 'artificial' or theatrical behaviour) stemmed directly from the perspective of a small rural community. Fostered by peasant mistrust and compounded by the ambivalence of being caught between the Eastern and Western cultural traditions, this dichotomy was a persistent feature of an omnipresent Soviet ambivalence of attitudes. A tendency to remain enclosed in near-primary groups was combined with a residue of a local, ethnic and familiar perspective. In the absence of distinctive national barriers, it made Belarusians accept the Soviet vision of Belarusianness limited to ethnography and folklore. It was a personal perspective that dominated the vision of the world. Consequently, ideologized, abstract visions formed by political and intellectual elites of the Soviet Union were met with mistrust, since they did not come from people of personal acquaintance. The real world was the world that was tangible, everyday, familiar and predictable. The prevalent

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¹ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2003, issue 4, p. 14; 2006, issue 3, p. 56.

attitude was to seize every opportunity and keep at a distance from the phoney world of Soviet cosmopolitan visions.

In Belarus, unlike in the Baltic States, the Soviet ideology was not superimposed on, but introduced instead of, national ideology. In the course of time it turned out to be a less productive approach than its national counterpart, which resulted in weaker levels of national self-identification in Belarusian society than is usual in Europe. In general, nowhere in the USSR did the Soviet ideology foster the development of stronger communities, since they could potentially challenge the principal position of Moscow in a centralized, despotic, and, at times, even totalitarian, state. Rather, the aim was to disintegrate communities, and create vertical axes of power which would make an individual face the authority directly. The representative function of mesostructures was an illusion or, at best, remained quite weak. Consequently, in the Belarusian context, the Soviet order superimposed on rural ethnic structures facilitated the survival of the local focus typical of peasant culture. Thus, an already established dichotomy of social perception continued among Belarusian masses: there was the public sphere (where the landlords became replaced with the authorities and the state) and the 'familiar' world of the immediate surroundings and social contacts (family, friends, an own village and, later on, the kolkhoz).

In this context, it becomes clear that any attempts to build a consolidated Belarusian national community in a short time would demand a fundamental deconstruction of modern Belarusian identity that has emerged over the last ninety years. This may explain why a transformation of this kind failed in the early 1990s. It required Belarusians to shift en masse from one ideological system of values to another: from a Soviet version of class system (constitutive to Belarusian identity) to its nationalist counterpart (which had been treated as hostile for decades), without taking into account that no social mechanism necessary for such a change was in place.² The above mentioned factors, especially the Soviet reality, did not foster values and attitudes which would encourage Belarusian society to initiate processes of change going beyond their everyday experience. The sphere of political and ideological declarations was treated as mere lip service, a theatrical show that rarely had anything to do with an individual code of conduct. It is for these reasons that the national interest is still regarded more as a term used in political speeches and "Basic Courses in the Ideology of Belarusian State" than a concept that carries a certain meaning and requires certain actions.

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² In the 19th and 20th century, Europe was an area of a massive spread of both nationalist and class ideology. The underlying factor was a process whereby local rural communities opened to the outside world and the peasant population moved to cities. Consequently, there was a need for a new system of values that would organize the emerging urban industrial world, characterized by the anonymity of cities and factories, as opposed to the familiarity of a village. A move from a settled existence of local structures to life in large communities of the modern world was, to use Stanislaw Ossowski's terminology, a move from a habitual to an ideological bond. The rise of both class and nationalist ideology was as an answer to a social demand. A mechanism of how they emerged and how a move from feudalism to modernity came about has already been extensively studied. However, it is one thing to move from a non-ideological ethnicity to an ideologically-bound national (or class) community, it is another to move from an already ideologically bound social pattern (Soviet) to a different one (such as nationalist). The problem is that even though the original ideological pattern may slow down social progress, it meets a need for social affiliation, which means it gives an adequate enough description of modern society. Once in place, it is difficult to be replaced with another ideological pattern of different contents.

EX ORIENTE LUX, EX OCCIDENTE LUXUS

Every state, society or nation belongs to a certain cultural tradition, which generally plays a role in shaping its cultural, sometimes political or, less often, economic or military orientation. In the same way as Poles, Lithuanians or Czechs are firmly oriented towards the West, Belarusians turn mainly to Russia, with which they share a bond of culture, the language of the majority of the population, family ties, a common history of the last two centuries and the tradition of the USSR, generally evaluated as positive. The problem, however, lies elsewhere. While a bond between Poland or the Czech Republic and the European Union is much more of a partnership that brings them considerable modernizing benefits, Russia has an established tradition of subordinating its weaker partners. At the same time, Russia is an economically backward country, looking to the West for a modernizing impulse. The Russian connection is not based on a prospect of long-term mutual benefits (short-term financial help only prevents Belarusian economy from developing), but rather it is anchored in the emotional and sentimental sphere. In the case of Lukashenka, these ties are strengthened by Moscow's acceptance of his non-democratic rule. Belarusian self-identification, based on a certain conglomerate of values, determines the possibilities of social change and thus influences the future of the country, especially in a long-term perspective. Needless to say, changes in the cultural code generally require a considerable amount of time.

The pattern of Belarusian identity is more divergent than that of Poles. To simplify Belarusian reality for the sake of the present discussion, I believe it is possible to see it in dichotomic terms, thus distinguishing two major types of Belarusian collective identity that are central to this argument. The first of them, initially West Russian (*zapadnorusizm*, *западнорусизм*), then Soviet, and subsequently, after 1991, post-Soviet West Russian, has been shaped under a two hundred years' long influence of Russian culture. The other, nationalist, pro-Western and occidental identity has developed through contacts with the western neighbours. Although currently in a much weaker position than the first type, it has a much longer historical tradition. The two types of Belarusian collective identity are radically different, with the post-Soviet West Russian visibly dominating the scene.

Compared to its nationalist (occidental) counterpart, what is called here post-Soviet West Russian identity is much less distinct, seems to be vague, blurred, sometimes ambiguous; or at least this is what it looks like from the point of view of Belarus' western neighbour. To a varying degree, the overwhelming majority of Belarusian population see themselves as a member of 'the threefold Russian nation' (*триединный русский народ*), an Orthodox East Slavic community, and a part of a self-contained 'Russian world' (*русский мир*) common to Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians. This perspective goes back to a belief in the existence and regeneration of a paranational community including the 'three tribes of a single Russian nation.' Historically, the existence of a uniform East Slavic community was advocated by Russian historiography, which used such terms as 'the old-Russian nation' (*древнерусский народ*) or 'a single Russian nation' (*единый русский народ*). In the 19th century, there was a generally accepted approach including 'Belarusian' (*беларус*) in a category of 'Russian' (*русский*). This view persisted throughout the Soviet era and, although affected by the post-1991 developments, is still in evidence. "What is the difference between Belarusians and Russians?" a question asked several times over the last decade in ISEPS surveys carried out in Belarus, generally prompted over 40% of replies that saw no difference at all (and this was the most frequently se-

lected answer). An opinion poll conducted in August 2006 found that almost two thirds of those questioned expressed their opinion that Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians form three branches of a single nation.³ In March 2005, nearly 57% of respondents agreed with Vladimir Putin that Belarusians and Russians are one nation, and another 7% did not see such opinions as a cause for concern.⁴ Although Belarusians are not Russians, concepts which function in Russian culture have been, to a greater or lesser extent, absorbed by Belarus. Since Orthodox societies preserved a pre-Christian richness of folklore for much longer, local rural communities were relatively late to open to the outside world and did not feel the need to form any kind of ideological bonds, national ones included. On the other hand, Belarus has experienced succession of autocratic monarchies, followed by a totalitarian state, which was then replaced by an authoritarian system. In a society that did not have a notion of its subordinate status, and where a gap between the elites and the people was far greater than in Western Europe, a significant share of responsibilities was transferred to the ruling elites, with widespread social approval. In Belarusian reality, the result was subordination to the Moscow elites and their anti-national Soviet associates in Minsk. In the 19th century, having become a part of the Russian Orthodoxy and a part of the Russian state (whatever its later name), Belarusians as a Slavic people turned into a regional part of a greater pan-Russian community. These mechanisms enclosed a significant proportion of the population, especially in rural areas, within their locally bound perspective. As a result, Belarusian identity has become a matter of an entry in a passport, an awareness of the name and of the existence of borders around the territory of the Republic of Belarus (which, after 1991, remained the same as those of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic) and a distinct local colour of pan-Russian folklore. Such identity was very far from that of a well-developed, ideologically marked, distinct national community of a Western type.

According to a 1991 survey carried out by the All-Soviet Public Opinion Centre (Всесоюзный центр изучения общественного мнения) only 24% of ethnic Belarusians declared themselves as citizens of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic and an outstanding 69% as citizens of the USSR in the first place, which was a record-breaking result among all the nationalities that had their own Soviet republic under the USSR (e.g., the result for Estonia was 97% and 3%, respectively).⁵ In a referendum over the future of the USSR (17 March 1991), Belarusian support for their membership in the Soviet Union was as high as 83%.⁶ Just after the fall of the USSR (December 1991), 69% of respondents were in favour of Belarusian independence and supported its accession to the Community of Independent States (CIS); those against membership amounted to 10%. It was as soon as February 1992 that 52.6% expressed their negative opinion about the Belarusian break-up with the Soviet Union, while 30.7% accepted the move.⁷ All this data indicates a considerable fluctuation of Belarusian attitudes to the newly achieved independence.

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³ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2006, issue 3, p. 57-58.

⁴ А. Соснов. "Российско-белорусские отношения в зеркале общественного мнения". *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2006, issue 2, p. 114. <http://www.iiseps.org>. (04.04.2012). [A. Sosnov, Russian-Belarusian relations as reflected in the public opinion.]

⁵ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2006, issue 2, p. 68. <http://www.iiseps.org>. (04.04.2012).

⁶ E. Mironowicz, *Białoruś* [Belarus], Warsaw 2007, p. 293.

⁷ И. Бугрова, "Молодое белорусское государство и общество: альянс или мезальянс?", [in:] *Национальная идентичность Беларуси. Материалы семинара*. Под ред. Гельмута Курта, Минск 2003, p. 13. [I. Bugrova, New Belarusian state and society: alliance or misalliance?, in: Belarusian national identity. Conference papers, ed. H. Kurt, Minsk 2003.]

While in April 1992 as many as 45.5% of Belarusians favoured the rebirth of the USSR, the figure diminished to 24.6% in March 2012. Interestingly, among opponents of the current authorities the proportion of those who would embrace the Soviet Union was more than twice as high as among the supporters (29.8% and 12.2%, respectively). Those against a potential reconstruction of the USSR included both opponents of the authorities (57.8%) and their supporters (85.8%).⁸ A most likely explanation of this result is Lukashenka's anti-unionist stand taken at the moment. Also, the president's opponents include diverse groups such as Belarusian nationalists (against the Soviet Union) and a pro-Russian but anti-Lukashenka part of the population, which suffers from the Belarusian economic crisis, looks to the east in the hope of a better future, and regards the former union state with sentiment.

Strong historical, cultural and, importantly, linguistic connections between Belarusians and the Russian state and nation are apparent in sociological surveys. Interviewed about their opinion on Vladimir Putin's view that there is a need for real integration of Belarus and Russia (September 2011), Belarusians expressed their views as follows: supporters of unification ready to fight for it (6.7%) or accepting it but not prepared to fight (34.0%); opponents of the Russian Prime Minister's idea ready to fight against it (11.6%) and those rejecting it but not prepared to fight against it (38.2%).⁹ Potential pro-unification militants are mostly elderly people; those ready to rise against the idea include mainly the younger generation.¹⁰ However, if a union really were to be accomplished, only 2.4% of respondents (December 2011) would take up arms to defend Belarusian independence, and by far the most frequent attitude would be that of reconciliation to the fact.¹¹ If, in Lukashenka's words, the tanks were to arrive from "there" (that is from the West), the proportion of Belarusians ready to "die for Russia" was higher (25.9%) than the combined figures of those prepared to fight for or against integration (18.3% as above); 51.4% of respondents were against the idea.¹² Such results could be attributed to a tradition of the 'Great Patriotic War' (World War II). Also, while the struggle against the 'alien' West falls in line with Russian and Soviet tradition, taking up arms against Russia, the next of kin, certainly does not form a part of Belarusian experience (even though, historically, there were occasions when it did occur).

Regular surveys of Belarusian preferences regarding a hypothetical choice between integration with Russia and accession to the European Union reveal a pattern whereby until 2010 Russia was certainly a much favoured option. However, in the last two years, the EU did take the lead on some occasions. In March 2012, the result was again in favour of Russia (47.0%), not the EU (37.3%).¹³ The results of other opinion polls asking only about integration with Russia indicate that until 2007 Belarusians supported the idea but since then they have turned their back on it in most surveys.¹⁴ As regards the question of joining the EU, since mid-2000s the results have varied between for and against; prior to this, respondents quite frequently accepted the option.¹⁵ It is quite difficult to establish to what extent the respondents gave careful consideration to major differences between integration with Russia and accession to the EU in such spheres as: the degree of inde-

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⁸ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2012, issue 1, p. 28.

⁹ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2011, issue 3, p. 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹¹ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2011, issue 4, p. 35.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹³ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2012, issue 1, p. 21.

¹⁴ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2011, issue 4, p. 54.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

pendence, extent of liberties, economic prosperity, cultural and national identity; that is, generally speaking, in the degree of their agency.

With regard to an initiative involving the Eurasian Union (Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus), an opinion poll conducted in December 2011 showed that most Belarusians approached the idea with indifference (38.2%), followed by acceptance (33.2%); those against amounted to 13.6%.¹⁶ We have to be aware that in empirical sociological research what values respondents declare in a survey, and what attitude they adopt in real life, are two very different things. In fact, what sociologists analyze is people's awareness rather than the actual actions they take. Looking at all the data mentioned above and considering a wealth of publications on the subject of Belarusian society and its culture, some conclusions can be obvious to a Belarusian, but not necessarily so to a Western European. Generally speaking, although Belarusian mentality is still marked by a strong and persistent influence of the Soviet system, attachment to the former Soviet Union diminishes except among the older generation, where it still remains significant. On the other hand, strong relations between Belarus and Russia, and between their people and cultures, are still in place. To some extent, Belarusians share a Moscow perspective on the world and Russian attitudes to various aspects of social activity. When asked whether they consider Russia a foreign country (March 2010), Belarusians answered as follows: no (79.4%), yes (17.4%), no reply / I don't know (3.2%).¹⁷

Generally, Belarusians are still keen viewers of Russian TV channels and this is where they get their picture of the world. Consequently, their perspective on the West is largely, but not exclusively, a perspective of Moscow. In fact, they have never come into direct, large scale, intensive contact with the reality of a democratic civil society. Their awareness of market economy is rather patchy, information about the West limited, and visits there quite rare. On the other hand, some of the elites are strongly pro-European and stress the fact that Belarus is a part of European culture, even though it does not belong there in a political or institutional sense.¹⁸ As indicated by opinion polls concerning integration, pro-European attitudes among a large proportion of the population are certainly connected with the image of Europe as a place of desirable economic prosperity. Such a motivation is not shared by the elites and, to some extent, by the west of the country, where European values are stronger than in the eastern regions. Belarusian attitudes are changing, especially, what is only natural, among the younger generation. They take their own state for granted and accept some of the ideals of civil society. This, even if it remains in the sphere of declarations, stands in marked contrast to the Soviet realities. However, I think there is still no critical mass that would secure the future of Belarus as a state and as a nation. It is conceivable that a prolonged period of severe economic crisis, combined with adequate Russian pro-unionist policy, could result in a massive growth of support for integration with Russia, currently held in check by Lukashenka. Belarusians are either susceptible to official propaganda, or they may not be eager to openly declare their real opinions and intentions. Given the vagaries of official policy, they have also grown quite tired of the eighteen-year-long talk of integration. All this considered, it is not really possible to predict how far declarations made in opinion surveys would be reflected in the actual attitudes once integration was in fact to get underway.

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¹⁶ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁷ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2010, issue 2, p. 48.

¹⁸ Cf. *Беларусь: ни Европа, ни Россия. Мнения белорусских элит*, ред. В. Булгаков, Варшава 2006. [Belarus: Neither Europe, nor Russia. Views of Belarusian elites, ed. V. Bulkhakov, Warsaw 2006.]

The process of cultural and linguistic Russification of the country has continued over the last decade.¹⁹ The Russian media have a considerable social influence across the border. Although Belarus is not Russia, it is culturally much closer to its eastern neighbour than to Western Europe, which is especially noticeable in the fact that the Russian language is used by a considerable proportion of Belarusian people as their own. A similar proximity can also be observed in political culture. As for cultural differences, Belarusians are free from any imperial or nationalist bias, and Belarusian high culture is not as developed as Russian. Belarusians do not have a distinct sense of their own national identity and, unlike in Russia, their ethnicity is characterized by a strongly local focus. With a limited tradition of statehood, Belarusian political elites remain largely incompetent, and attitudes of political subjection to Russia are still lingering on. In a March 2009 survey question asking “Do you feel you are a European and belong to European culture and social tradition,” the proportion of answers was as follows: yes (37.1%), no (52.8%).²⁰ In other polls conducted in 2010-2011 (Table 1) Belarusians declared whether they considered themselves closer to Europeans or to Russians.²¹

Table 1. Dynamics of answers to the question: “Do you consider yourself a person that is closer to Russians or Europeans?” (%)

| Variants of answer | March 2010 | Dec 2010 | Dec 2011 |
|--------------------|------------|----------|----------|
| Russians | 74.5 | 69.9 | 68.0 |
| Europeans | 19.4 | 29.6 | 25.8 |
| No reply | 6.1 | 0.5 | 6.2 |

Table 2. Correlation between cultural identity and geopolitical perspective (%)

| Variants of answer | In favour of integration with the Russian Federation | In favour of accession to the European Union |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Closer to Russians | 90.6 | 40.4 |
| Closer to Europeans | 5.9 | 53.4 |

As indicated by data presented in Table 2 (December 2011),²² it turns out that 90% of those in favour of integration with Russia at the same time perceive themselves as closer to Russians than Europeans, which is hardly surprising. Interestingly, their proportion among the advocates of integration with the European Union is also quite high (about 40%). Other surveys show that some Belarusians are ready to integrate with both Russia and the EU, even at the same time.²³ Clearly, those considering themselves closer to Europeans (at least when defined in opposition to those closer to Russians) must be a more distinct group, more definite in their judgements. Among those opting for a Russian connection there is a clear overrepresentation of people of older age and lower education; on the other hand, their opponents include an overproportion

¹⁹ Cf. J. Smolicz, R. Radzik, “Belarusian as an Endangered Language: Can the Mother Tongue of an Independent State be Made to Die?,” *International Journal of Educational Development*, vol. 24, issue 5, 2004, p. 511-528.

²⁰ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2010, issue 2, p. 23.

²¹ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2011, issue 4, p. 55.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²³ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2010, issue 4, p. 91.

tionate ratio of younger and well-educated respondents. However, contrary to some assumptions, people from the western regions of the country do not show more support for European integration than their compatriots from the east. In fact, it is quite opposite. As indicated in a poll of March 2010, the group considering themselves closer to Europeans is mostly composed of westerners, younger generation, well-educated and living in large cities.²⁴ The obvious conclusion is that the group that perceives themselves as closer to Russians is more heterogeneous. If they express a strong pro-Russian sentiment and at the same time support the European option, it is quite likely that most of them consider the issue in an *ex oriente lux, ex occidente luxus* perspective; nevertheless, there are certainly some who embrace both a cultural bond with Russia and western economic and political liberalism. Considering the fact that those who see themselves as closer to Europeans are overrepresented in the western regions (and are overwhelmingly in favour of European integration), and, at the same time, the majority there is more inclined to support integration with Russia, unlike in the east of Belarus, the conclusion is that the remaining part of the western population is much more consistent in its pro-Russian attitudes than the east. Consequently, if the adopted factors are proximity to Russians and Europeans, a split of attitudes to integration is much more distinct among the westerners.

The influence of the Soviet rule over several generations of Belarusians can be seen in their answers to the question: "Do you consider yourself more of a modern European or a Soviet person?" In two subsequent opinion polls (March and April 2006), more respondents selected the Soviet option (52% and 46.1%) rather than the European one (36.0% and 41.3%).²⁵ Thus, in both surveys the majority of those who did not decline to answer the question declared themselves as Soviet people. Nevertheless, it is quite likely that self-identification in the Soviet categories, a concept already disappearing into the past, will be decreasing, which will not necessarily be the case with positive attitudes to Russia. A month later, representatives of Belarusian elites answered a modified question: "In your opinion, do most Belarusians consider themselves more of modern European or Soviet people?" The overwhelming majority of replies indicated the Soviet (87%) rather than the European (10%) option.²⁶ To some extent, such a view of Belarusian elites of their own society comes as a result of a gap between their perspectives. 65% of the elites consider themselves Europeans (the figure for the private sector is as high as 83%), as opposed to 22% subscribing to the Soviet identity.²⁷ Generally, as indicated by surveys, it is hardly surprising to observe that Belarusian elites are more pro-European and open to the world; they support market economy and the right to private ownership. The opinions of those employed in the private sector, a minority in Belarusian economy, are half-way between those of the elites and employees of the public sector.

The pro-eastern option was generally much more favoured, as indicated by the results of an all-Belarusian representative survey of April 2006 (Table 3).²⁸

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²⁴ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2010, issue 1, p. 32.

²⁵ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2006, issue 2, p. 36. Web.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69. Web.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 68. Web.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36-37. Web.

Table 3. Answers to the question: "In your opinion, what is the path of development for Belarus? What is the path of development for Russia?" (%)

| Variants of answer | for Belarus | for Russia |
|--|-------------|------------|
| Common path of European civilization | 17.3 | 29.5 |
| Return to the Soviet path of development | 25.5 | 19.2 |
| Own path of development | 56.8 | 51.2 |
| No reply | 0.4 | 0.1 |

The European perspective for Belarus was the least frequently selected answer. Although the return to the Soviet system was a more popular option, the figure was considerably lower than the proportion of respondents perceiving themselves as Soviet people. This could be an indication that at least some Belarusians are able to make a distinction between their own personal experience (marked with a residue of the Soviet system in various aspects of social life) and a vision of the future for their country, however vague was the temporal dimension of the question. Opting for its own path of progress, a majority of those asked saw Belarus somewhere between Europe and Russia. Most likely, this view came as a result of the isolation of the country on the international scene (in the context of considerable social support that Lukashenka had at the time) and an isolationist Soviet mentality. It is also possible that respondents found it difficult to give their answer to a question that was formulated in this way. Such a majority view might go back to the idea of an Orthodox East Slavic community, a civilization of its own, which could be supported by the fact that most of those asked saw Russian future also along its own independent path. Interestingly, Belarusians saw Russia as more advanced on its way towards Europe and as less inclined to go back to the old Soviet ways. This is probably because Russia is perceived as an equal partner of the West, a state that is more prosperous, more open to the world and more liberal in economic and political sense; consequently, as a country that, at least in some ways, resembles the West, or Europe, more than is the case with their homeland. Some western trends (e.g., in music or filmmaking) find their way to Belarus through Russia and the Russian language, which makes them more familiar and thus more easily acceptable.

Belarusian potential to open to the world, especially the western world, is assessed by other sociological surveys from a few years ago. As Jerzy Waszkiewicz writes:

"Even though they are fully aware of its civilizational and economic advantage, most Belarusians still treat the West with suspicion. For example, in 2006, as many as 70% of the rural population, 67% of small-town inhabitants, 52% of those living in medium-sized towns and 29% of the population of Minsk, the capital, believed that Belarus is in a hostile environment. Their suspicion and mutual mistrust are not so much a vestige of the Soviet system as its constitutive element, which has engraved itself on the social memory."²⁹

It should also be noted that for the last few centuries Russians have formed their identity in persistent relation and, to a considerable degree, in opposition to the West (while the West has never defined itself in opposition to Russia). This vision of the West and,

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²⁹ J. Waszkiewicz, "Co to jest sowieckość?", *Studia Białorusinistyczne*, vol. 2, 2008, p. 81 [What is Sovietism?, in: Belarusian Studies]; the author quotes a sociological survey carried out by the Research Centre of the Institute of Privatisation and Management: Ракова Е., "Растроение сознания. Социально-экономические ценности белорусского населения", *Белорусы и рынок*, nr 43, 07.11.2006, p. 23 [E. Rakova, Multiple consciousness. Socio-economical values of Belarusian people, in: Belarusians and the market.].

to some extent, the Russian feeling of alienation, have found their way into Belarusian culture in the course of the last two centuries. These processes were reinforced by the isolation of the Soviet Union from the outside world, the consequences of which are visible to this day. As indicated by a December 2011 poll, about 80% of Belarusians had not visited any EU country in the period of the previous five years.³⁰ At the same time, there was a positive correlation between travelling to the West, feeling close to Europeans and positive attitudes towards European integration. According to the authors of the report, this could be explained by a higher social capital among those of pro-European orientation (male, well-educated, young and middle-aged, urban background). EU supporters are also more liberal in their attitude to the state.³¹ It is an interesting question to observe Belarusian attitudes to the idea of homeland, which is a concept involving distinct collective identity, over the last two centuries. With all their fundamental differences, the Soviet period bore a certain resemblance to a three-level make-up of identity in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. A gentleman from Zaosie in Nowogródek region (such as Adam Mickiewicz) had his own little local homeland, his bond to which was of a habitual nature. Higher up, there was a second level: the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, with a habitual, but also ideological bond referring particularly to the history and the political tradition of separate statehood. At the highest level there was the great homeland of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth perceived in supra-ethnic terms as a sovereign power and a guarantor of political liberties. Likewise, in Belarus under the Soviet Union there was a strong sense of local identity, a little homeland, which continued into the post-Soviet era. Above it, there was the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic with its capital, Minsk. The third level was the great homeland of the Soviet Union, a geographically vast empire and a great military power that, in a sense, stood in the hierarchy where the former Commonwealth used to be. Over generations, the idea of a community formed by 'the three-fold Russian nation' was superimposed on this multi-level structure.

Independent Belarus has a precisely defined political and cultural border in the west. By contrast, its eastern limits are not so strict in both senses: the frontier is easy to cross, sometimes even hard to notice at all, and the cultural border is rather vague. Lukashenka treats Belarusian sovereignty in terms of his control over the territory of the country, but he does not promote the idea of its separate cultural identity in relation to the Russian state or people. On the contrary, he stresses cultural similarities with the eastern neighbour, thereby repeating the example of Kiev Rus, a medieval conglomerate divided by the borders between local princes rather than by any distinctions between the cultures of their people.³² As a result, Belarusians today see themselves as different from the West, but not so much from Russia. However, full empowerment requires more symmetry in mutual relations. Interestingly, when Belarusians spend a longer time in Warsaw, their Belarusian self-identification usually grows stronger in confrontation with Polishness, whereas in Moscow it often becomes dissolved in a pan-Russian identity. The reason for such a pattern lies not only in cultural and linguistic similarities and differences, but also in the Polish social context. More 'pro-national' itself, it is more conducive to intensification of self-awareness in relation to Western culture.

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³⁰ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2011, issue 4, p. 56.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57-58.

³² In Kiev Rus and its later political forms existing outside the Commonwealth, the ruler's authority over his territory dominated over other potentially community-making loyalties (this process strengthened under the influence of Tartar invasions).

What is more, Belarus has long perceived itself as a cultural province in relation to Moscow and Petersburg, both under the USSR and now. However, in the 19th century (especially in the first half, when the local educational system had not yet been destroyed by the Russian administration), prominent artists of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania certainly had no reason to feel inferior to Warsaw or Cracow circles. Rather, they were their most valued partners. People such as Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Moniuszko, Fredro and others were among those who built the high culture of the former Commonwealth, and initiated new intellectual movements of their period. Has a similar thing ever happened in the Russian or Soviet context, or (taking into consideration the common language) in the last two decades of independent Belarus? Over the last two hundred years, have Russian-speaking Belarusians ever set a new intellectual trend in Moscow or Petersburg? Have they been prominent figures of Russian culture? Considering the future of Belarus, we cannot overlook the main factors that both determine the degree of empowerment of Belarusian society and culturally condition the emergence of certain types of political attitudes. Such changes, if they happen, require a lot of time. As indicated by IISEPS research, the pro-European option has time on its side: generations raised under the Soviet system depart, in younger generations the level of education improves, people move from rural areas to urban centres. However, as sociologists know, such a simple extrapolation of current trends does not necessarily have to become a reality. Young people become more conservative with age, and higher education could be subject to ideologization, thus fostering conformist attitudes. Over the last two decades, Belarusian society has changed relatively little when compared to Poland. Obviously, there must be some objective barriers preventing social transformation and, to repeat it once more, Lukashenka is more of their product than a source.

THE STATE, HISTORICAL AWARENESS, GOVERNMENT

In 1991, Belarusians were granted freedom; they had not fought for it, nor had they even dreamt about it. All this is bound to be reflected in their attitudes to their own independent state. Surveys concerning possibilities of Belarusian integration with Russia provide an interesting insight into their opinions about various aspects of their national sovereignty. A poll carried out in May and June 1996 reveals some of the Belarusian peculiarities (Table 4).³³

Table 4. Public opinion on Belarusian independence and unification with Russia (%)

| | Yes | No | No reply |
|--|------|------|----------|
| Would you like Belarus to be an independent state? | 64.6 | 34.4 | 1.0 |
| Would you like Belarus and Russia to unite as one state? | 62.5 | 32.0 | 5.5 |

It would appear that two thirds of Belarusians supported both independent Belarus and a Belarus that would be united with Russia at the same time, which can be explained by a peculiar connection with Russians and Russia. As shown in this IISEPS survey, Bela-

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³³ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 1996, issue 1, p. 11.

rusians hoped for some economic benefits of such a union, but (most likely influenced by the context of the Chechen war) an overwhelming majority rejected an idea of united military forces. They would have liked to keep their own state administration: the president (formerly the first secretary of the Belarusian Communist Party), government and parliament. Thus, their vision of a union with Russia resembled, at least to some extent, the arrangements under the USSR, when Belarus had formally been a member of the United Nations and an officially recognized subject of international law; as such, it had some prerogatives of an independent state and was at the same time a member of the Soviet Union, a state it shared with the Russians. Clearly, to Belarusians, their sovereignty was more a matter of their independence from the West rather than from Russia.

Some of the 1996 research was repeated in 2002.³⁴ It turned out that the overall pattern of support for various spheres of integration was similar, but not identical. Most importantly, the proportion of those accepting integration in particular areas was considerably lower: positive replies to all of the eight specific questions were below 50%. As six years before, Belarusians found it easiest to accept the lack of borders between Belarus and Russia, with common currency and legal system in the second and third place. Such preferences went back to the arrangements under the USSR, and the apparent assumption was that a uniform legal system would not undermine the country's independence. Other results could indicate an increased tendency to maintain Belarus' sovereignty, among them: a sharp fall in support for the idea of a common external border, a very low and (with the exception of the president's office) falling acceptance of the abolition of Belarusian state institutions deriving from the Soviet times (president, government, parliament), and a lack of approval for a united army (again, perhaps because of the Chechen war). Generally, the two polls indicated a falling proportion of those who would be ready to abandon the instruments of Belarusian sovereignty. At the same time, there was a clear tendency to favour positive economic prospects of a closer integration with Russia, even in such areas where they could limit the country's independence. In comparison to Poland, it could be said that Belarusians treat their state more instrumentally, whereas Poles see it more as a value in its own right. The next decade certainly saw a consolidation of an awareness of own statehood and a spreading positive perception of independence, especially among younger generations that do not have a recollection of the Soviet Union. Still, unlike Western societies, Belarusians have grown used to their independence rather than developed a conscious sense of their own statehood perceived in terms of customs, values and loyalties (not to mention a strong emotional attachment to state symbols) that have evolved over the centuries. Asked whether they personally won or lost on Belarusian independence, the respondents answered as follows (December 2008): "I won" – 39.9%, "I lost" – 19.4%. The highest proportion of those asked (40.7%) had no personal opinion on the issue,³⁵ which is astonishing for someone who comes from a nation that fought for its freedom for generations. By contrast, Belarusians treat their state as a nationwide welfare institution in the first place.

Belarusian attitudes to sovereignty are connected with their limited historical awareness. On the eve of their independence, Belarusian historical memory included mainly the Soviet period, with special attention given to the so-called Great Patriotic War (WW II). Their conviction that the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic was the first truly Belarusian state was a part of their Soviet legacy. It is only in the last two decades that

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³⁴ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2002, issue 2, p. 27.

³⁵ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2010, issue 2, p. 23.

such a perspective has slowly begun to change, with the tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and, to a lesser extent, the Duchy of Polotsk also included in the picture.³⁶ Consequently, in 2012, when Belarusians were asked about the most important events of the 20th century that they could be most proud of, their choices were: “the victory in the Great Patriotic War” (79.8%) and “achieving independence in 1991” (35.9%). The proportion of answers was very similar both among the supporters of the current authorities and their opponents. Other answers included (in order of preference): reconstruction and industrialization of the country after the war, establishment of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (1918), election of Alexander Lukashenka to the office (1994), the Soviet revolution (1917).³⁷ A more deeply rooted Belarusian historical awareness is emerging only now. Its emotional value is still weak and it does not find widespread expression in the sphere of social and political attitudes. Moreover, Belarusian historical awareness is a matter of some general ideas rather than a set of generally accepted political customs and traditions that have evolved in the course of the historical development of the country. In other words, the attachment to the traditions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania observed among small nationalist elites does not find any reflection in the Belarusian political culture on the level of cultivation of historically established values, models or attitudes (for example the attitude to the law and civil liberties), which would derive from the legal and political system of a country that was once European. Similarly, the tradition of Magdeburg rights, which is sometimes given as an example link between Belarus and Europe, is not at all reflected in a more active attitude of urban population to local self-government. Everyday practice of social life is burdened with a very much more alive legacy of the Belarusian Soviet Republic rather than inspired by the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Thus what Belarusians cultivate is the Russian-speaking Soviet tradition, not a national Belarusian one.

In a 1996 survey, Belarusians were asked which historical figure was closest to their image of an ideal politician. The answers were as follows (those above 10% only, here and below): Piotr Masherov (45.2% – the leader of the Belarusian Communist Party, 1965–1980), Peter I (34.2%), L. Brezhnev (20.0%), M. Thatcher (19.5%), V. Lenin (18.7%), Y. Andropov (12.9%), P. Stolypin (11.1%), J. Stalin (10.8%).³⁸ In 2008, when also present-day leaders were included, the results were: V. Putin (31.2%), A. Lukashenka (25.2%), P. Masherov (23.5%), Peter I (18.5%), K. Kalinowski (13.6%), Catherine II (12.5%), M. Thatcher (10.1%).³⁹ Thus, Catherine II was ranked between Konstany Kalinowski and Margaret Thatcher. The poll was repeated in June 2010: A. Lukashenka (39.8%), V. Putin (36.9%), D. Medvedev (25.9%), A. Merkel (12.8%), B. Obama (12.0%).⁴⁰ To quote some other results, in 2008, Prince Vitovt was just behind the top seven, and in 2010 Fidel Castro came as number six. These rankings are an indication that Belarusian historical awareness and present-day political perspective is immersed in the Russian and Soviet cultural sphere and its tradition of authoritarian rule, with the additional inclusion of personalities as strong as Thatcher, or figures of a completely different kind, as Kalinowski, and recently Obama and Merkel. Top three invariably included Russians and Belarusians. Changes

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³⁶ Cf. А. Ластовский. “Специфика исторической памяти в Беларуси: между советским прошлым и национальной перспективой”, *Вестник общественного мнения*, 2009, no 4. [A. Lastovski, Aspects of Belarusian historical awareness: between the Soviet past and the nationalist prospects, in: Public Opinion Herald.]

³⁷ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2012, issue 1, p. 18.

³⁸ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 1996, issue 1, p. 26. Web.

³⁹ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2008, issue 2, p. 10.

⁴⁰ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2010, issue 2, p. 84.

occurred in lower positions and, were this tendency to continue and grow in strength, it might be a sign of a slow opening of Belarusian historical and political perspective beyond the area of the former USSR. Even so, the results of the polls clearly suggest that it is not a coherent vision. The turn of the 1980s saw the emergence of a national vision of Belarusian history alongside the established Soviet version. These two visions are fundamentally incompatible, thus resulting in a peculiar mishmash of Belarusian historical awareness. Their co-existence is visible in literature and in popular culture (including the image culture) as well as in the public space of Belarusian cities, where statues of Lenin stand in front of Orthodox churches, and a bust of Dzierżyński overlooks Independence Avenue at the junction with Lenin Street. While Kościuszko and Kalinowski are on their way to the Belarusian pantheon of national heroes and Minsk boasts a statue of Mickiewicz, bronze figures of ruthless revolutionaries have not been knocked off their pedestals. I have personally visited Bierut Street, a name familiar to every Pole. Also, there is a widespread belief that Russia freed Belarus from the Tartars, even though the country, unlike its supposed saviour, had never been under their occupation. Belarusian museum guides often give visitors information contrary to basic historical facts. Immersed in this historical chaos and incompetence, President Lukashenka, a qualified history teacher himself, has publicly used the term "comrade" to refer to a 16th century political figure (Sapieha, the Chancellor and the Marshal of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania), thus showing his utter lack of knowledge of the history of his own country.

A somewhat similar confusion on the level of historical awareness is also a part of the Ukrainian experience. There, however, it is more a case of two regional identities with their pantheons of heroes. A clash between the two opposing visions of their history stirs a much more heated conflict. In Belarus, the situation in the last two decades could be likened to that of a sack which different political powers try to fill with their own heroes. These are often people who had fundamentally different approaches to Belarusian identity and represented conflicting political and ideological orientations, sometimes even fighting on opposite sides. The contents of the sack, whoever is put in or thrown out, depend on the current political situation. There is no coherent vision that would offer a link between the personalities involved, no socially preferred system of values. Consequently, in its popular textbook version, history does not teach, inspire, open new directions or provide a logical explanation of the past and present. Instead of providing a stimulus for activity, it stifles individual and social efforts. Thus history is reduced to a strategy of manipulation used to the advantage of those in power. All it offers is an incoherent world of myths, leaving Belarusian society impotent and helpless.

This situation is a result of the 20th century social developments. Following the Soviet revolution, Belarusian elites, a depository of historical awareness, fled the country or were exterminated. Ordinary people have always perceived history mostly in terms of their own personal experience without feeling the need to ideologise it, especially that a canon of Belarusian national identity did not have any chance of being spread under the Soviet Belarusian Republic. Consequently, Belarusian historical awareness has a familiar, local, fragmentary character. The pantheon of national heroes is a loose concept, both in terms of its composition and the level of emotional attachment. The world of political power, ideology and history came to Belarus from the outside as a result of the Soviet revolution, bringing its anti-nationalist class ideology. Given the overwhelmingly peasant background of Belarusians, it was, and still is, perceived as alien. Unlike Poland and Russia (where high culture had been the domain of landed gentry elites and its continuity

spanned generations), Belarussian society had never developed an attractive higher culture. Moreover, its marked regional differences and the overall pattern of self-definition in terms of small, most often primary, local groups (family, friends), meant that there was no mechanism that could create a modern ideologically-bound community, since there was no ideology that would be strong enough to integrate it. The class ideology was effective only for a short period (until its major slogan “rob what’s been robbed” was fully implemented), while national ideology was never allowed to develop under the Soviets. Thus, Belarussian historical awareness does not provide a stimulus for activity or modernization. On the contrary, it produces Soviet-type attitudes of withdrawal, submission and reluctance to change. As such, it arrests rather than facilitates the development of pro-independent, pro-modernisation, pro-democratic and pro-European attitudes. Clearly, a well developed historical awareness is necessary for the emergence of a strong sense of community. Without it, a society is but a loose conglomeration of people, and may easily fall prey to outside manipulation.

The same mechanisms shaped Belarussian attitude to public authority. In Europe, peasants came to see it as their own as a result of changes that were both democratic and nationalist (sometimes revolutionary, like in France), or, initially, just nationalist (as in Poland). In both types of the process, peasants were eventually given ownership of land. In Belarus, however, their land was soon confiscated and national ideology was declared subversive to the Soviet state. Thus, the position of Belarussian kolkhoz members vis a vis the authorities resembled the one they had been in for centuries, especially that for the whole decades they were not allowed to leave their villages without the permission of the local authorities, just like in feudalism. Their bondage to land turned into bondage to their kolkhoz or sovkhoz. All this affected attitudes to authority as such, both in rural and, with increased social mobility, in urban areas, where the system shared its essential features and the only difference was the standard of living. In this way, a peasant approach to authority which had developed under feudal serfdom came into contact with the Russian and Soviet tradition of despotic rule. As a result, authority remained an alien and often hostile concept.

This situation can only change as a result of long-term external or internal processes. With regard to the former, Belarussians, unlike the Baltic nations, Poles or Czechs, have not done anything to become a member of the European Union. As regards the latter, it will be the evolution of the Belarussian social structure that will have a decisive influence. It is quite unlikely that a large proportion of Belarussian peasants or industrial workers (both living in a non-ideological world of concern for everyday existence) will suddenly start to dream of democratic rule and take measures to make such a dream come true. Likewise in the case of office workers and public administration who are groups heavily dependent on the state. As for Belarussian nationally-oriented intelligentsia, Valantsin Akudovich, an intellectual, philosopher, poet and essayist of the middle generation, bitterly remarks in an interview: “Here in Belarus it so happened that we, intelligentsia, live only for ourselves. This is why we have become tiny little islands and the whole Belarussian sea around us is composed of an entirely different matter. Even worse, these little islands where intellectuals live are drifting apart.”⁴¹ If I were to consider long-term prospects for possible change, I would not associate them with a sudden rebellion triggered by a severe economic crisis, as the ultimate outcome of such developments is really hard to

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⁴¹ *Ograbiony naród. Rozmowy z intelektualistami białoruskimi*. Przeprowadzili M. Nocuń i A. Brzeziecki, Wrocław 2007, p. 165. [A robbed nation. Interviews with Belarussian intellectuals.]

predict. Rather, I would perhaps see some potential in the development of the Belarusian middle class. Currently it is still weak, and it could become to some extent subordinated to external forces as a result of Russian takeover of Belarusian economy. Also, at least its upper echelons are in fact a concessionaire subordinated to the authorities and derive profits from such an arrangement. On the other hand, some part of the middle class is already showing interest in gaining independence from the authorities, in cooperating with the more technologically advanced West, and even in the processes of democratization, which would guarantee their unconstrained development.

For Belarusians, democracy is not a dream system. Most of them were strongly critical of the early 1990s political disputes in the parliament (calling their deputies 'good-for-nothing') and accepted the fact that the chamber was practically stripped of its actual law-making prerogatives. At that time, democracy came to be associated with chaos (just like in Russia) and market economy meant poverty, unemployment and poor social welfare. Later on, there was a favourable change of attitude towards market economy, but not so much to democracy. Practically speaking, in periods of economic crisis Belarusians withdraw their massive support for undemocratic authorities, only to return to Lukashenka whenever the situation improves. Clearly, social concerns come before the political agenda. Autocratic rule is accepted if it is conducive to stability and, still better, to economic growth. Even relatively slow but steady improvement of the standard of living, social stability, regular paychecks and pensions, guarantee an overwhelming social support for any kind of political rule. It seems as if there were an unwritten contract between the authorities and the society: political support in exchange for a certain standard of living. A serious economic crisis would threaten the survival of this contract, but for the time being Belarusian protests remain mainly in the verbal sphere.

This is quite understandable considering the history of Belarus in the last century. Democratic traditions were wiped out by the Soviet Union and the Russian imperial tradition did not exactly fall within the canon of European democracy, either. As a result, for many generations, Belarusians did not encounter the reality of a democratic society; the democratic ideology was persecuted and there was no mechanism to spread its values. Deep inside, Belarusians are still marked by the trauma of Stalinist times, when their strategy of survival was based on unreserved submission to dictatorship. Drawing on their experience of the ordeals of the 20th century, they have learnt to seize every opportunity, to plan and act only within a short timescale, to mistrust others and to see the world in terms of their personal experience. Also, they tend to treat ideology as alien to their world and divorced from their everyday experience of the joy and hardship of physical survival, traditionally characterizing lower social classes. Consequently, ideology is perceived as an instrument of manipulation in the hands of others. As Belarusian culture has been deprived of any influence of the elites, there is no potential for widespread social movements motivated by 'higher' values or ideologies going beyond everyday existence. Such circumstances are not conducive to the emergence of attitudes involving active resistance, which remain limited to small circles. Peasant culture originated, especially in this part of Europe, in the reality of serfdom and slavery that continued for centuries. Therefore, unlike the culture of European gentry and middle class, it was not an important source of democratic ideas.

In a historical perspective going beyond the last twenty years, Belarusians show little inclination towards economically and, even less so, towards politically motivated social protests. Sociological patterns relating to Belarusian awareness of these issues are

discussed below. In December 2005, when asked whether they would support a ‘coloured revolution’ similar to those in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, the respondents answered: Yes (9.7%), No (82.4%),⁴² which would mean that Belarusians are not ready to get carried away by an imported spirit of freedom. As stated in the survey report, more young people would be ready to emigrate than take up arms.⁴³ Such findings would indicate a predominance of passive attitudes in relation to politics, a substitute strategy of escape or evasion. A long-established pattern of affirmative answers to another question was as follows: Asked “If in your city or district there are protests against a deteriorating economic situation, will you be ready to take part?”; Belarusians answered ‘Yes’: Dec 2007: 17.4%, Dec 2008: 18.6%, Dec 2011: 14.7%.⁴⁴ Considering that 2011 was a year of a dramatic economic crisis, the results indicate that Belarusians might be considering other solutions or strategies of adaptation to hard economic conditions than protests. Up to a point, a deteriorating situation could lead to increased feelings of helplessness or even apathy. However, I think Belarusians, compared to their western neighbours, have a high capacity for adaptation to existing circumstances, even when these are very difficult. They tend to accept things as they are and try to function by developing individual strategies of coping (such as finding a second job).

Table 5. Dynamics of answers to the question: “Do you consider yourself to be in opposition to the present government?” (%)

| Variants of answer | April 2006 | May 2007 | June 2008 | Dec 2010 | June 2011 | Sept 2011 | Dec 2011 |
|---------------------------|------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Yes | 18.5 | 16.5 | 18.6 | 18.9 | 25.8 | 28.3 | 22.6 |
| No | 73.3 | 72.5 | 68.0 | 72.4 | 60.3 | 56.0 | 63.8 |
| No reply/ I don't know | 8.2 | 11.0 | 13.4 | 8.7 | 13.9 | 15.7 | 13.6 |

As indicated by the results presented in Table 5,⁴⁵ there is a positive correlation between perceiving oneself to be in opposition to the present government and the deteriorating economic situation. On the other hand, improvement in the economic situation makes this perception weaker. A comparison between these results and findings discussed above suggests that being in opposition does not mean being ready to take part in protest actions. It would seem that Belarusians have a rather high limit of patience and do not easily engage in protests. In some other countries, when social patience is already stretched to the absolute limit, it is easy to upset the balance, triggering a sudden outburst of protest resulting from a deep and lasting blockage of social pressure relief channels. Is this going to be the case in Belarus? So far, there is no indication to suggest so.

As can be seen from the twenty years of independent Belarus, a change of both social mentality and political culture is not a matter of a few years, but a long-term process. To most Belarusians, their leader should be good, fair, straight and honest. At the same time, he should not be radical and must not shed blood because nothing is worth it. While Russians have gone through a process of desacralization of authority over the last century, Belarusians still face the challenge of liberating themselves from a patriarchal vi-

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⁴² *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2010, issue 2, p. 18.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴⁴ *Новости НИСЭПИ* [IISEPS News], 2011, issue 4, p. 51.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

sion of authority perceived in a kolkhoz and sovkhos perspective. The view of the world held by Mikhal (a character from *Novaya zyamlya* [A New Land] by Yakub Kolas) certainly stirs emotions of keen readers of Belarusian literature, but does not really apply a hundred years later.

On the other hand, what is the view on authority from the top of the social ladder? In line with the Moscow tradition, Lukashenka has almost unlimited control over political and economic life, individual freedom and the mass media. Although the authority officially preaches, propagates and implements certain values, it does not in fact serve them. Power is a supreme value in itself and all other spheres of interests and loyalties (national, economic, cultural) are subordinate. The state is treated as an instrument of control and not as an instrument for securing community interests. In terms of leadership, if the personal centre of power were to be transferred to a different and more attractive subject, it would not be a problem to give up the current one.

As described above, post-Soviet West Russian type of Belarusian collective identity has a dominant position, so its values are encountered in the process of socialization, at schools, universities and in everyday life. Its underlying approach is that Belarusians and Russians are members of a broad pan-Russian Orthodox community which has its historically and culturally distinct regions. For the most part, however, it does not turn Belarusians into Russians, leaving a lot of areas of indeterminacy and allowing a multiplicity of possible connections. The 'Soviet' element in the name points not only to the sentiment for the former Soviet Union, but also, more importantly, to distinct vestiges of the Soviet approach, attitudes and mentality, often referred to as *homo sovieticus*. The prefix 'post-' indicates an evolution of the Soviet West Russian identity over the two decades of Belarusian independence. This evolution included the acceptance of the fall of the Soviet system and the emergence of an independent Belarusian state (however it was understood), advances in market economy, attempts to build a sense of Belarusian community independent from Russia (however unstable the process and however verbally opposed by the president), and some degree of opening to the outside world. Belarusian sociological studies, including those discussed here, reveal all these attitudes, but also indicate other approaches. In any presentation of this type of identity it is thus impossible to isolate only those answers which would confirm it. At the same time, it is difficult to find a mature Belarusian who would not have been exposed to some influence of the reality presented here in the process of their socialization. Some try to liberate themselves from it, others strive to reinforce it.

Another option I would distinguish here, neo-West Russian (*neo-zapadhorusizm*), could be treated as an extreme version of the post-Soviet West Russian collective identity or as an approach of its own. It is very clearly connected to a historical West Russian perspective, according to which Belarusians are in fact Russians that over the centuries have been exposed to the heavy influence of Polish culture and Roman Catholicism. Two illustrative examples of this view are presented below. In early 2009, Belarusian nationalists were outraged by a declaration made by Andrei Gerashchenko. It was not because his views were a novelty in Belarus, but because they were expressed by a head of a local district Department of Young People's Affairs in Vitebsk. In his interview for a Russian portal run by the Community of Independent States Institute, he said that Belarus was another Russian state (*ещё одно русское государство*) rather than a separate nation. Consequently, relations between Russia and Belarus should be treated in the same terms as those between the former East and West Germany, North and South Korea, Serbia and Montenegro, or Germany and Austria. As stated by Gerashchenko: "Those looking towards Europe

are of Polish, Uniate or Catholic background, they support 'independence' because they stand to gain from it. On every occasion they keep stressing they are not Russian but European, as opposed to 'Asiatic Russia.'" In his opinion, pro-Belarusian cultural policy is "nothing more than an attempt to divide one common Russian nation, to give Belarusians an idea that they are not Russians and their prospects for the future are connected with Europe and, to be more accurate, with Catholic Poland and not with Russia."⁴⁶

Similar ideas are put forward by Lev Krishtapovich, a well-known Belarusian ideologist, philosopher and scientist, in his work *Belarus and Russia: Historiosophical and Civilizational Unity*.⁴⁷ In a nutshell, his views can be summed up as follows: the West is the source of all evil in Belarusian history (Roman Catholicism, the Jesuits, colonisation, Magdeburg rights, Polish and Lithuanian feudal lords exploiting Belarusian people) while all good came from Russia (Orthodoxy, high culture, Russian forces protecting Belarusian artistic treasures by taking them away to Moscow, and the longed-for reunification with Russia following the fall of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). Discussing the 16th century developments, the author concludes that "There was no essential difference between one Russian (Muscovite) and another Russian (Belarusian)."⁴⁸ The question is how such a perspective can influence the future of Belarus. If it were to rapidly expand and consolidate, an unlikely scenario at the moment, it would strengthen the pro-Russian political option (perhaps to an extent including incorporation of the country in the Russian Federation) and weaken the pro-European approach, regardless of whoever would be in power.

The nationalist (occidental) type of Belarusian collective identity is the exact opposite of approaches presented above. It is definitely a minority option, mostly limited to the elites, although in practice people may smoothly switch between the two orientations. At the same time, most Belarusians give little conscious thought to where they would place themselves on a map of Belarusian identities drawn here. Potentially, the nationalist perspective could appeal to anything between a fifth and a quarter of the population. It is possible that, under favourable circumstances, this proportion could form a nation in the European (occidental) sense of the term without experiencing a major social disturbance. However, it has to be noted that such a process would amount to abrupt ideologisation of one part of Belarusian population in western national terms. This could cause a deep rift within Belarusian society, and lead directly to the strengthening of the opposite option.

While the post-Soviet West Russian collective identity, as briefly outlined above, is an integrationist perspective perceiving Belarusians as a part of a larger community, its nationalist (occidental) counterpart is a separatist approach treating them as distinct from all their neighbours. Linguistically, the elites of the former are Russian-speaking, those of the latter cultivate the Belarusian language. The nationalist option was formed under the influence of contacts with Western Europe and of the presence of Polish culture in Belarus. It goes back to the early 20th century, when a group of activists associated with the *Nasha Niva* periodical absorbed and promoted Western ways of thinking.

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⁴⁶ <http://nn.by/index.php?c=ar&i=34939>. (13.02.2009). A. Gerashchenko was introduced as a member of the pro-government Belarusian Writers' Association and the Chairman of the Vitebsk association "Russian Home" (an organization promoting a view that Belarusians are Russians).

⁴⁷ Л. Е. Криштапович. *Беларусь и Россия: историософское и цивилизационное единство*, Минск: Академия управления при Президенте Республики Беларусь 2006 [L. E. Krishtapovitsh, *Belarus and Russia: Historiosophical and Civilizational Unity*, Minsk: Academy of Public Administration]; cf. a review of this publication: Р. Радзік, "Беларуская апалогія 'трыадзінарускасці'", *Беларускі Гістарычны Агляд* vol. 16: 2009, issue 2, p. 540-560 [R. Radzik, Belarusian apology of the 'threefold Russian nation', in: *Belarusian Historical Review*].

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Although its current supporters and activists are often Orthodox, its occidental character still makes it difficult to spread in a predominantly Orthodox society. According to this approach, Belarusians are (or at least its followers would like them to be) a Belarusian-speaking community distinct from Russians and rooted in European culture (hence embracing the tradition of the Duchy of Polotsk, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth); their future lies in a democratic state. Such a vision, however, is not consistent with the cultural and political orientation of most Belarusian people. On the other hand, the West Russian collective identity, including the concepts of Little Russia and Great Russia, fits with the idea of an Orthodox East Slavic community. Consequently, it is only natural that both Russians and West Russians have rejected the occidental vision of the Belarusian nation which was destructive to the concept of pan-Russian community.

In its present form, the nationalist option took shape in the romantic atmosphere of the early days of Belarusian independence. To some extent, it has been a view shared by nonconformists, or even outsiders. As such, it is hardly surprising that it does not attract large numbers of political activists. In the Belarusian context, it could not emerge in a reality other than Soviet, so its founding fathers and leaders were not fully able to mentally free themselves from its constraints. The Soviet legacy is a burden even today. It is quite clear that the nationalist circles still function in ways which have their roots in the pre-1991 period.⁴⁹

On the level of their elites, the two options are fundamentally opposed. Their views on the Belarusian nationality, constitutional system, politics, liberties and culture are entirely different. They cherish the memory of different historical events and different heroes. In the European Union, it would be unlikely to find a nation that would be so deeply split over its history, vision of the future or the distinct features of its community. It does not mean, however, that Belarusian social identity is split in half, causing a heated conflict. Given the fact that, as presented above, Belarusian identity on the level of social macrostructures (including the nation) is not strong, and Russification is linguistic rather than national,⁵⁰ Belarusians form their self-identification on the level of small communities. Most of them are not really interested in a conflict between different visions: they get on with their everyday life and the world of ideology and politics remains an alien realm until their own economic situation is severely affected. The dispute is limited mainly to the elites and, on the nationalist side, to small circles of opposition activists. Politically, Belarusian authorities identify the nationalist orientation with anti-government opposition and define it as a negative point of reference. This could change as a result of some political outbreak, but in order to gain significant social support the nationalist option would have to evolve in order to adapt to the mentality of the majority of Belarusians. It is really difficult to answer a question how to do it. In the current situation, the authorities use the nationalists as a bogeyman, which should motivate their leaders to draw their conclusions. Belarusian opposition is certainly not limited to the occidental nationalist option. In fact, it seems that Lukashenka is more

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⁴⁹ Since *Nasha Niva* nationalists were more occidental in their approach, my impression is that their present-day counterparts should perhaps be referred to as a post-Soviet nationalist option, at least with regard to some of its followers.

⁵⁰ The Russification of Belarusians after the Soviet Revolution was more of a Sovietisation through the Russian language. It did perceive Belarusians as part of the pan-Russian community, but it did not involve the Russification in terms of nationality. As such, it was rather superficial, it did not instill typically Russian feelings and values, which makes it easier for Belarusians than for Russians to accept western type values and attitudes.

afraid of a situation in which representatives of a strong pro-Eastern option would turn against him.

Since there is relatively little uniformity of Belarusian society on the level of collective identity, there is no distinctly shaped community that would structure its different aspects. It is possible, however, to distinguish different 'identity orientations' and approach them typologically. This could be done by bringing together features we consider important from a given point of view. A very interesting typology, based on IISEPS surveys, has been put forward by Oleg Manaev, a well-known empirical sociologist, and Yuri Drakokhrust. Analyzing extensive sociological sources, they construct "sociodemographic profiles" of Belarusians, defining their national identity in terms of opposing features:

"While sex constitutes a factor of relatively little importance, they are almost exact opposites if age is considered (in sociology such cases of direct and strong correlation between factors are referred to as 'mirror-image patterns'): the older generation has more attachment to their country as it is now and at the same time feels close to Russian culture (in a broad sense: as a way of life and as a social system). In the case of the younger generation, it is the other way around: it is considerably less attached to today's Belarus and feels close to European culture. Considering the level of education, the picture is similar but not as distinct. A group that would like to live or work in Belarus and is proud to belong to the Belarusian nation (who will be referred to here as 'proud Belarusians' or 'nationalists') is, in terms of social status, clearly dominated by old age pensioners and inhabitants of small towns and villages in the east of the country. Those whose answers displayed a contrastive pattern (who will be referred to here as 'disappointed Belarusians' or 'cosmopolitans') consisted mainly of private sector employees, students, housewives/unemployed and inhabitants of large cities in the western regions. As already mentioned, there is also a clear difference as far as the nationality is considered: while Belarusians show more inclination to 'nationalism', other nationalities tend to be more 'cosmopolitan'. Consequently, the profile of a typical 'nationalist' is as follows: an old age pensioner with a relatively lower level of education, living in a village in an eastern region of Belarus; a typical 'cosmopolitan' is a young, educated employee of the private sector living in a large city in the west of the country. (...)

There is hardly any difference of economic status between these groups, but their opinions on the economic situation of the country vary considerably. 'Nationalists' see it as relatively stable and have an optimistic view of the future, whereas 'cosmopolitans' consider that it has aggravated and is going to deteriorate even further. It is quite clear that the former group loyally supports the economic policy of the authorities and the latter is critical.

An even more contrastive difference becomes apparent in view of their political values. There is little doubt that in such a perspective 'nationalists' become 'loyalists' and 'cosmopolitans' turn into 'critics' of Belarusian authorities and their current policy. (...)

Equally contrastive are the differences relating to the geopolitical preferences of the two types: 'nationalists' show evident pro-Russian sympathies and 'cosmopolitans' are pro-European (their opinion on which society is the most fair is particularly interesting). It is an astonishing feature of Belarusian national identity that those who take the greatest pride in being Belarusian and want to live in the Belarusian Republic are the same people who consider themselves most closely related to Russians. Undoubtedly this confirms that close proximity to Russians is seen as a 'constitutive' feature of Belarusian national identity. Common history and common language (in this order of importance) are the two main factors that determine this closeness."⁵¹

It could be added that World War II is a crucial element of their common history and the language in question is of course Russian. With regard to cultural, linguistic or historical considerations, patriotism as manifested by pro-Russian (and, let us add, post-Soviet

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⁵¹ O. Manajew, J. Drakochrust. *Właściwości współczesnej tożsamości białoruskiej*. [in:] *Tożsamości Białorusinów*, ed. R. Radzik, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS 2012 (forthcoming); [Features of Belarusian identity today. In: Belarusian identities].

West Russian) 'nationalists' is not of a separatist nature. By contrast, nationally-oriented elites stress a distinct status of Belarusians in relation to Russians.

As Manaev and Drakokhrust point out,

"It is interesting to observe the different approaches of the two groups to information. It seems a paradox that 'nationalists' use the Internet far less frequently but are quite happy about their access to political news and its quality, while 'cosmopolitans' are regular Internet users but think their access to information on the current political situation in Belarus is absolutely inadequate. The explanation is simple: while the former group relies mostly on information provided by official sources (the state-owned mass media) and 'lives in the world of their discourse', the latter makes use mostly of alternative sources and 'lives in an entirely different world.'"⁵²

According to the two researchers,

"The attitude to Lukashenka has become 'the touchstone of identity' of Belarusian people. An embodiment of attitudes and values of a larger (and conservative) part of the Belarusian society, the president ignores or marginalizes the values of its smaller (but more dynamic) part and limits their prospects. Those who accept the president and his policy also identify themselves with the country. Whoever rejects him, does not accept the country in its present form."⁵³

The 'nationalist' orientation as described above could be included, I believe, in a broadly perceived Soviet West Russian option. In Soviet Belarus, patriotism stemmed from people's pride in being a part of a great empire. Although it had its distinct local colour, it did not have any anti-Moscow bias. Today, patriotism as perceived by 'nationalists' puts probably even more stress on its Belarusian elements, but it still unites Belarusians and Russians in their common distance to the West.⁵⁴ The 'cosmopolitan' perspective is not a nationalist option either. Rather, it results from the process of opening to Europe, a trend to be observed especially among young people and inhabitants of western regions (to a certain extent, there are some analogies with the developments among the younger generation in Poland). The former has never formed a distinct sense of Belarusian identity, the latter (with the exception of nationalist circles presented above) gives up the idea at the very start.

Followers of what has been called here the post-Soviet West Russian orientation see the nation (*народ*) in a different perspective than it is perceived in the European tradition. Their nationalist adversaries (nationalist without inverted commas, and so used in a different meaning than that applied by Manaev and Drakokhrust above) tend to see the Belarusian nation as they think it should be and not as it actually is, which does not mean that it exists in a vacuum: it is simply a minority option. Regarding the degree of consolidation of their national identity, Belarusians are a diverse society: from parts of the rural population that have practically no reflection on their national self-awareness,⁵⁵ to Minsk intellectuals, fully aware of their various collective identities.

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⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Not every patriotism needs to be based on a national background in the western sense of the nation.

⁵⁵ As V. Hushchava, a Belarusian scholar, argues: "On the basis of fieldwork data analysis, we can conclude that, for the majority of informants, nationality and homeland are categories imposed by the outside world. It is their denomination and their locality which form a basis of their identity. There are informants who have a clear sense of national identity, who refer to the national history, self-stereotype, consider the question of national interests, but they are a small minority whose sense of identity is shaped by outside influences, such as school and the mass media. The concept of 'homeland' is mainly connected with the neighbourhood one inhabits, with personal comfort and welfare, and not with a mental image of a community and the symbolic sphere. Most often, homeland is not perceived as a personal value which would demand cultivation." V. Hushchava, "Ojczyzna – państwo – Białoruś w świadomości mieszkańców Brasławszczyzny", *Stu-*

The fact that some groups in Belarusian society are opening to modern European influences does not mean their involvement in the nationalist ideas of the inter-war period. Today, Europe is a different place and Belarusian nationalists are (also for other reasons) in an entirely different situation than the 19th century 'national awakeners.' At the same time, it needs to be stressed that the obvious weakness of Belarusian identity stems from the fact that no strong national community with a corresponding sense of consolidated identity has ever existed in Belarus. In its essence, its manifestations and its consequences, it is thus markedly different from the processes of the weakening of the once strong sense of national identity which can be perceived in Western and Central Europe. Consequently, I think that a view which is sometimes advanced that Belarusians are ahead of Western societies on their way to become "modern" (postmodern?) is not valid.

PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE

In a short-term perspective, the political situation in Belarus could develop in a number of ways, with a varying degree of probability. In the long run, however, future developments will be greatly conditioned by identity factors and the ensuing level of Belarusian social capital. These elements had a considerable, though not always decisive, influence on whether some countries became members of the European Union, but also on divisions within the EU itself. It is not a coincidence that the most serious (even if economically not the most important) European crisis affected Greece, a country whose specific type of identity and low social capital situate it on the periphery of the Union. Although other South European countries (such as Italy, Spain and Portugal) have their fully developed European identities, they have clearly dysfunctional elements in their social capital (with reference to officially accepted regulations of the EU economic and political standards). Even if institutionalized, radical changes require an adequate cultural background in order to become consolidated. The problem of Belarusian society lies in the fact that it has not created mechanisms that would be conducive to the processes of modernization both on higher and lower levels of the social structure. On the level of macrostructures, they are limited by the existing forms of collective identity. As far as microstructures are concerned, a low level of public trust (a factor also to be observed in Poland) is combined with a lack of interest in the outside world (as more broadly presented above), resulting in a web of unofficial and informal connections which hampers social activity on the lower levels of social structure, such as local self-government. This problem can also be noticed on the level of mesostructures, where it stems from a weak position of the middle class and non-governmental organizations. There is hardly any network of social connections that is typical of a civil society and could enhance the formation of a modern capitalist society. In the case of Poland, especially in the pre-1989 period, there were strong social bonds on the level of macro- (national, religious) and microstructures (family, circle of friends, as among Belarusians), while the meso-level was weak or non-existent. Such a pattern came to be referred to as 'sociological vacuum' (a term introduced by Stefan Nowak in 1979).⁵⁶ In the Belarusian model of the post-Soviet system, society functions

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dia Bialorutenistyczne vol. 4, p. 133 (Summary); [Homeland, state, Belarus in the awareness of people of the Bratslav region, in: *Belarusian Studies*]. In Poland, Anna Engelking and Elżbieta Smulkowa wrote a number of works on the subject.

⁵⁶ S. Nowak, "System wartości społeczeństwa polskiego", *Studia Socjologiczne*, 1979, no 4 [Axiological system of Polish society, in: *Sociological Studies*].

on a principle of conflict between different interest groups (including pressure groups) operating, to a considerable extent, outside the legal system or modifying it to suit their needs. They are not interested in reforms modernizing the country since the resulting changes usually affect their interests. Major changes can be introduced mainly from above, like under Peter I, or through a rebellion. A similar problem was, to a lesser extent, a part of the Polish experience, especially under Communism.

Social processes currently taking place in Belarus lead in two directions. On the one hand, an intensifying cultural self-Russification of the country, especially visible in the linguistic sphere, is accompanied by a growing dependence on the eastern neighbour (in a number of areas). On the other, there is a consolidating awareness of separate statehood, especially among the younger generation, a greater openness of the young to the outside world, coupled with a growth of self-identification with a distinct Belarusian community, however it is understood and whatever the depth of this perception. Attributes of independence are still not an intrinsic, but a relative value, depending on the economic situation and relations with Russia. The acceptance of democratic values declared by some Belarusians remains in the sphere of lip service rather than real life choices and attitudes. The values of the "eastern option" are part of Belarusian psychological make-up irrespective of how consciously they are adopted. The European dimension and the corresponding western values exist mainly on the verbal level, they remain postulates and declarations rather than deeply internalised habits and customs. It is highly likely, however, that pro-European attitudes will become more widespread in Belarusian society in the future.

In recent decades, Western Europe has promoted local identities and regional traditions in the hope of fostering activity at lower levels of society. In the Belarusian context, however, local self-government structures are traditionally accustomed to receiving orders from above, thus a pattern of strong self-identification on the level of small, closed social groups and local communities, which do not have an ideological community-making bond with social structures on the macro level, is detrimental to social activity. Belarus is changing slowly and its people still do not seem to have become fully independent subjects.

Close ties between Belarus and Russia are not easily broken since they are accepted by both societies and treated, to a certain degree, as 'natural.' Russians perceived their 'loss' of Belarus and Ukraine as a historical disaster which ruined the 'unification of Russian lands' they had been striving to achieve for centuries. In their view Belarusians are not a separate nation. The Russian aim is to fully dominate Belarus in a number of aspects: military (already accomplished), cultural (quite advanced), economic (well under way) and political (in spite of their similar, but not identical, political culture, there are regular disagreements resulting from power struggle). The economic and political situation permitting, Moscow's long-term objective is to incorporate Belarus as another member of the Russian Federation.

As a result of nearly eighteen years of Lukashenka's rule, Russians hold most of the cards in the 'Belarusian game.' If the country is cut off from both European and Russian financial and economic support, it will practically go bankrupt. Russia is in control of its economic, thus also (to an extent) political situation and makes sure there is no uncontrolled explosion of social unrest. Furthermore, it slows down the process of economic and political modernization of Belarus, unless the reforms adjust its economic structure to Russian patterns, making it easier to manage in case of the ultimate takeover. It is in Moscow's interest to support such kind of rule that cannot be accepted by the West, so

that Minsk is left isolated from Europe and remains dependent on its eastern neighbour. A prosperous and democratic Belarus would be a Belarus independent from Russia and, most likely, far more pro-European than today. It is conceivable that Moscow supports or even instigates Minsk's anti-Polish gestures to stir up conflict between the two countries. Given its national interest, a sense of security included, Poland is the strongest European advocate of Belarus as a consolidated, fully independent, economically successful and preferably democratic state. The European Union, however, unlike Russia, does not show much interest in close relations with Minsk and finds it difficult to accept its undemocratic rule. For various reasons, European policy towards Belarus is marked by inconsistency. While close ties between Minsk and Moscow are likely to guarantee that the current leadership remains in power, the West usually sets some conditions which, if implemented, would end up its rule. The current political situation in Belarus is a direct result.

In a short-term perspective, we might assume that a sudden outburst of political turmoil could eventually result in a closer subordination to Russia rather than a lasting democratic and pro-European settlement. It seems worth considering what might cause a change of situation in this part of Europe in the long run. A sudden breakdown in Russian economy, which is based on export of energy sources, might produce twofold consequences. In order to deal with such a situation, Moscow might attempt to integrate Russian society, stir nationalist feeling, or even adopt measures to increase the subordination of Belarus. However, incorporating the neighbour would be rather unlikely because Belarusians would probably be less inclined to integrate with a crumbling economy than they are today, while Russians would be counting on western support in coping with the crisis (provided the West is not affected by the crisis as well). Thus, a severe crisis in Russia, which would require western assistance, would improve chances for a change of the Belarusian situation. On the other hand, an economic breakdown in the West would weaken Minsk's position in relations with Russia. For Moscow, an ideal situation to incorporate Belarus would arise with a combination of factors: the country has been completely dominated (especially economically), the Russian financial situation is sound (the move would cost a lot), pro-unification sentiments in Belarus have been successfully stirred (an orchestrated crisis setting the stage for a generous Russian offer to restore the standard of living), and an international situation is favourable to Russia (the West has become weaker and needs to secure Russian support in solving world conflicts).

In the last twenty years the West has too often adopted a short-sighted approach to Belarus and has timed its policy in terms of months and years rather than decades. Had the European Union opened its borders to Belarusians after 1991, as it did for Poles, Belarus might be a different country today. Any attempts to foster a lasting change in the attitude of Belarusian people to their political system and geopolitical situation will have to involve a change in their identity and cultural orientation, as well as an increase in their openness to the world in general and Europe in particular. It is therefore vital that the European Union should open its borders to make it possible for Belarusians to travel without restrictions and to find work (under certain conditions). Most importantly, such an opening should enable large numbers of young Belarusians to attend European schools and universities, to receive education in those places where European elites are formed. The questions we need to ask today are: if the opposition were to take over power in Belarus today, would its elites be able to run the state successfully? Does the opposition have professional managers who would understand the Soviet reality but would be educated

outside its constraints? Does it have visionary leaders who would be able to go beyond political squabbles and attract widespread social support for their ideas in times of crisis? Does it have a realistic, concrete programme, especially in the economic sphere? Does it have draft legislation and ideas for a new institutional shape of the country (including the constitution) that could receive social support? Not to mention billions of dollars of financial assistance to keep the country going. Today, Belarus finds itself at a turning point. Economically, it is heavily dependent on Russia. Politically, it is too weak to decide about itself. The example of 'coloured revolutions' shows that the extent to which they can change the reality of their countries depends on how much social support for such change they manage to muster.

Translated by PIOTR STYK

WHAT FUTURE FOR BELARUS? AN ANALYSIS OF IDENTITY ISSUES

Summary

The present article discusses various types of Belarusian collective identity and analyses their potential to make Belarus an empowered, fully independent, democratic and economically efficient society, nation and state with a stable position on the political map of Europe. The study is based mainly on sociological surveys collected by IISEPS, an independent Belarusian research institute. These data reveal weak points of Belarusian national identity (including a low level of historical awareness), a residue of the Soviet system of values and attitudes, as well as a considerable degree of Russification of the society. Although Belarusians have become used to having their own state (which, however, they treat mainly in terms of a nationwide welfare institution), they have retained a strong sense of local and regional identity. Social attitudes, both on an individual and community level, are clearly dominated by economic rather than ideological motivation. Eastern, pro-Russian orientation is far more widespread than pro-European attitudes, especially when more than only verbal support is involved. The text also points out symptoms of consolidating Belarusian collective identity, even if its post-Soviet/West Russian pattern still prevails over pro-European and pro-national orientation of the occidental type. Belarusian society is specific, which makes it difficult to analyze in terms of standard categories. The article demonstrates why identity issues limit the potential for any rapid significant political change in Belarusian society.

Keywords: Belarusians, national identity, political orientations, prospects for change

JAKA JEST PRZYSZŁOŚĆ BIAŁORUSI? ANALIZA KWESTII TOŻSAMOŚCIOWYCH

Streszczenie

Artykuł wskazuje na związki istniejące między różnymi orientacjami tożsamościowymi Białorusinów a możliwością ich trwałego zaistnienia na politycznej mapie Europy jako społeczeństwa, narodu i państwa w pełni upodmiotowionego, niepodległego, demokratycznego i sprawnego gospodarczo. W znacznym stopniu jest oparty na danych socjologicznych uzyskanych przez białoruski niezależny instytut badawczy NISEPI. Dane te obrazują słabości białoruskiej tożsamości narodowej (w tym

świadomości historycznej), wyraźne pozostałości sowieckiego systemu wartości i postaw oraz duży stopień russyfikacji społeczeństwa. Także odczuwalnie już zaistniała przywykłość do posiadania własnego państwa (traktowanego jednak przede wszystkim socjalnie) przy jednoczesnym trwaniu silnych lokalizmów i regionalizmów. W dalszym ciągu postawy promaterialne wyraźnie dominują nad proideowymi nie tylko na poziomie odniesień jednostkowych, ale i zbiorowych, a orientacja na Wschód (Rosję) zdecydowanie przeważa nad postawami proeuropejskimi, zwłaszcza jeśli wykraczają one poza werbalne formy ekspresji. W tekście przedstawione są także argumenty świadczące o wzmocnieniu się białoruskiej wspólnotowości, aczkolwiek orientacja postsowiecko-zapadnoruska wciąż przeważa nad proeuropejską orientacją narodową typu okcydentalnego. Społeczeństwo białoruskie wyróżnia się swą specyfiką, niełatwą do opisu w kategoriach, do których przywykliśmy. Artykuł pokazuje też samościowe ograniczenia możliwości zaistnienia istotnych, szybkich i głębokich zmian politycznych w społeczeństwie białoruskim.