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**Migration of the Intellectual Elite from Belarus:
Socio-Political Causes and Consequences**

Keywords: intellectual migration, Belarus, political crisis, scientists, higher education

Słowa kluczowe: migracja intelektualna, Białoruś, kryzys polityczny, naukowcy, szkolnictwo wyższe

Abstract

The subject of the research is the problem of mass migration of the intellectual elite from Belarus. The analysis of the current situation in Belarus shows that a special role in the migration of Belarusian scientists and academic teachers is not played by economic factors, but to a greater extent, by political and social factors. Migration has taken the form of flight from Belarus, which is leading to a huge crisis in Belarusian science, education and society in general. The largest number of Belarusian scientific migrants is in Poland, where programs of assistance to Belarusian scientists and favourable conditions for moving have been created. Highly qualified specialists, leaving to work in other countries, bring significant benefits to the host country, at the same time causing irrepara-

ble damage to the country they leave. For host countries, the migration of the intellectual elite serves as a tool to increase the country's competitiveness in the world market.

Streszczenie

Migracja elity intelektualnej z Białorusi: przyczyny i konsekwencje społeczno-polityczne

Przedmiotem badań jest problem masowej migracji elity intelektualnej z Białorusi. Analiza obecnej sytuacji na Białorusi pokazuje, że szczególną rolę w migracji białoruskich naukowców i nauczycieli odgrywają nie czynniki ekonomiczne, ale w większym stopniu czynniki polityczne i społeczne. Migracja przybrała formę ucieczki z Białorusi, co prowadzi do ogromnego kryzysu w białoruskiej nauce, edukacji i ogólnie w społeczeństwie. Najwięcej białoruskich migrantów naukowych znajduje się w Polsce, gdzie stworzono programy pomocy białoruskim naukowcom i dogodne warunki do przeprowadzki. Wysoko wykwalifikowani specjaliści, wyjeżdżający do pracy do innych krajów, przynoszą znaczne korzyści krajowi przyjmującemu, jednocześnie przynosząc nieodwracalne ogromne szkody krajowi, który opuszczają. Dla krajów przyjmujących migracja elity intelektualnej służy jako narzędzie do zwiększenia konkurencyjności kraju na rynku światowym.

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I. Introduction

Intellectual migration is a process of loss of human capital by the state as a result of the departure of valuable highly professional personnel from it and is a serious problem on a global scale. First of all, this concerns countries with an unstable economic system and an authoritarian political regime.

Certain changes are taking place in contemporary international intellectual migration. Currently, the "brain drain" is gradually being replaced by "brain circulation", i.e. going abroad and then returning to the country. "Brain circulation" contributes to the expansion of international knowledge exchange; the creation of an international labour market, international research and scientific and technical clusters; and the increase in the investment in human capital. However, these global trends do not apply to Belarus, because the Be-

larusian intellectual elite, as a rule, leaves forever, not intending to and not being able to return home.

The authoritarian regime of Belarus, the lack of democratic freedoms and the constant threat of arrests or dismissals, as well as the lagging behind the developed countries of the world in socio-economic development, the low level of quality of life, the minimum level of prestige of science and other factors contribute to the strengthening of the migration processes of the Belarusian intellectual elite. This process went especially intensively after the events of 2020 and took on the character of flight from the country. The process of migration of the Belarusian intellectual elite has acquired such a scale that it threatens the existence of entire areas of knowledge in Belarus, as well as sectors of the economy, and causes a number of irreparable negative socio-economic consequences for the Belarusian society as a whole.

The purpose of the article is to analyse the causes, problems and trends of mass migration of the Belarusian intellectual elite both in terms of negative impact for Belarus and in terms of benefits for the host countries. The algorithm for achieving this goal includes solving a number of research tasks: to characterize the area of study of the problem of “brain drain” as the most negative side of migration; to identify the main reasons for the migration of Belarusian highly professional personnel at different stages of the life of the Belarusian society; to identify the structural features of the “brain drain” from the country; and to analyse the consequences of migration both for Belarus and for the host countries. The study was based mainly on the method of logic-situational analysis.

II. The Phenomenon of Intellectual Migration

Since the middle of the 20th century, intellectual migration has attracted increasing attention of researchers. Overall, literature on brain drain is quite rich, and the whole phenomenon is explained in close connection to the migration of individuals between continents and countries¹. There is no single meaningful definition of the phenomenon of intellectual migration in the scientific discourse. The phenomenon of intellectual migration is diverse. The

¹ F. Docquier, H. Rapoport, *Globalization Brain Drain, and Development*, “Journal of Economic Literature” 2012, no. 50 (3), pp. 681–730.

international migration of scientists and highly qualified specialists takes place in various forms, among which it is customary to single out:

The term “brain drain” is defined by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as “the migration of educated or professional personnel from one country, economic sector or region to another, usually in order to obtain better wages or living conditions”².

“Brain waste” – the departure of the intellectual elite from the donor country and work in the host country not in their specialty, often in unskilled jobs; in this case, both countries lose resources.

Mutual exchange of knowledge and experience between countries (brain exchange), when people migrate to a new place of effective application and use of their labor, taking into account their knowledge, profession and qualifications. This concept is viewed positively, since mutual enrichment occurs, and both countries receive resources³.

Initially, the reasons for the migration of highly qualified specialists were mainly explained by economic incentives, the prospects for successful creativity in a new social environment, gaining access to more modern equipment, the desire for a higher quality of life, a high level of personal security, a decent education for children, etc.⁴ However, in the modern world, the direction of the flow of highly professional specialists is mediated not only by quite obvious material, but also by other objective reasons. Among these reasons, factors of political stability and the existence of reliable guarantees of observance of individual rights are taken into account; furthermore, they attract relatively more attention from the intellectual elite than from ordinary labor migrants⁵. Owing to the spread of political science research, the study of intellectual migration is gradually becoming multidisciplinary.

² S. Mahroum, *Europe and challenge of the brain drain*, IPTS Report 1998 November, no. 29, pp. 27–29.

³ М. Митин, *Интеллектуальная миграция: сущность, последствия и пути решения*, https://journals.rudn.ru/political-science/article/view/8853/8304/ru_RU (20.10.2022).

⁴ M.R. Pistone, J.J. Hoeffner, *Stepping Out of the Brain Drain: Applying Catholic Social Teaching in a New Era of Migration*, Lanham, MD, 2007, p. 5: “It does not make good sense to direct foreign aid to developing countries and at the same time receive reverse foreign aid in the form of professional persons whose talents are badly needed in the same countries”.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 5: “Even though they have a right of emigrating, citizen are held to remember that they have the right and the duty... to contribute according to their ability to the true

As a rule, the activity of the “brain drain” processes increases in the conditions of social upheavals and political instability experienced by a country where specialists have received higher professional education, as well as academic degrees. This trend has been traced since the end of the 20th century, when every sixth immigrant in the world was a researcher, engineer or a doctor⁶.

III. Political and Economic Aspects of the Migration of Belarusian Scientists and Academic Teachers

The socio-political and economic crisis in Belarus, accompanied by radical changes in the field of social relations, has captured all the sectors of the society and all the social institutions without exception. Science, which forms the basis for the development of a modern society, was most affected by the negative impact of the authoritarian regime. The present policy of the current President of Belarus is aimed at maintaining the power structures and turning them into the elite of the society.

The lack of reliable statistics in the Republic of Belarus makes it difficult to conduct researches, the results of which may be important for politicians. The problem of migration of the intellectual elite from Belarus has existed for a long time⁷. Support for the development of science has never been one of the priorities of the Lukashenka regime, since educated people are seen as a threat to the stability of the current government. For more than 20 years, Belarus has been witnessing a crisis in the development of the humanities and social sciences, subject to pressure from the state ideology. The main reasons for the long-term crisis of science and education in Belarus can be

progress of their own community. Especially in underdeveloped areas where all resources must be put to urgent use, those men gravely endanger the public good, who, particularly possessing mental power or wealth, are enticed by greed and temptation to emigrate. They deprive their community of the material and spiritual aid it needs”.

⁶ *Миграция и «утечка мозгов»*. Доклад об экономике региона Европы и Центральной Азии, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/32481/211506RU.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>. (26.09.2022).

⁷ М.И. Артюхин, *Интеллектуальная миграция в Беларуси: состояние и тенденции развития*, Минск 2015, pp. 123–121.

summarized as follows: neglect at the state level of science and fundamental research; lack of demand for the results of scientific research in the society; absolute politicization of education; low level of financing of science from the state budget.

According to official figures, which should not be considered reliable and which include only those who left the country on the basis of official treaties and agreements, about 100 scientific researchers have left Belarus every year since the beginning of Lukashenka's presidency. According to the studies of the National Academy of Sciences, in 1996–2010, about 900 scientists and academic teachers left the country, that is, an average of 60–65 people per year, including 3–4 professors and 20–25 doctors, the rest are scientists without a degree⁸.

In 2010–2020, the crisis in the economy, science and education began to grow in the country. The annual emigration was comparable to the number of highly qualified scientists in the whole region or in the entire field of any science. It should be taken into account the presence of gray intellectual migration, when highly qualified specialists went abroad for permanent residence without changing their Belarusian citizenship and not informing the relevant authorities of their country.

It can be said that intellectual migration from Belarus until 2020 was of a preventive nature, as an indicator of the gradual deterioration of not only the economic, but also the political situation in the country, and the strengthening of the authoritarianism of the political regime, the retreat from democratic freedoms.

After the 2020 presidential election and the protests and repression that followed, the migration of the intellectual elite has increased significantly. Migration from voluntary turned into flight from the country. The repression of the Lukashenka regime affected many scientists and academic teachers who were fired from their jobs for participating in demonstrations and their political views⁹. As a rule, those were the best scientists and academ-

⁸ Т.А. Антонова, *Научные кадры Республики Беларусь: социологический анализ*, Минск 2007, pp. 37–39.

⁹ *Репрессии ведут к «деградации академической сферы» в РБ*, <https://www.dw.com/ru/repressii-v-vuzah-vedut-k-degradacii-akademicheskoy-sfery-v-belarusi/a-60226744> (20.10.2022).

ic teachers, the elite of the Belarusian scientific community. Many had time to leave literally before their detentions and arrests, and now they have no opportunity to get to Belarus. According to the international law, they can safely be classified as refugees.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) gives the following definition of the term ‘refugee’: “A refugee (according to the 1951 convention) is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution on grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or unwilling to avail himself of the protection this country; or who, being stateless and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it”¹⁰.

The goal of any authoritarian regime is to achieve the intellectual degradation of the society as quickly as possible; to simplify it as much as possible; to archaize it; to glorify the cult of a “simple” person, following animal instincts, loving power, avoiding thinking about life and distrustful of all manifestations of the complexity of life (cultural, social, economic and intellectual). In other words, its goal is the simplification of the types of structures and interactions, archaization, unification, impoverishment, and, ultimately, the complete dullness of the society.

The consequence of such a policy of the state is the complete stagnation of scientific life and a catastrophic decline in the level of education in the country. The number of scientists in Belarus has decreased by 4–5 times. So, in 2016, the number of profesors in Belarus was 1337, and in 2021 there were 548, number of PhDs in 2016 was 8505, in 2021–2624¹¹.

There is a strict attitude towards the dissemination of information that people are leaving Belarus; there is a veil of the true scale and consequences of the outflow of personnel from the country. According to analysts, there is the largest brain drain from Belarus in the history of the country¹².

¹⁰ *Adapted from Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*, <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms> (15.09.2022).

¹¹ *Национальный статистический комитет Республики Беларусь*, <https://www.belstat.gov.by> (25.10.2022).

¹² *Хартія 97%*, <https://charter97.org/ru/news/2021/11/15/444209> (18.09.2022).

IV. The Consequences of Intellectual Elite Migration for Belarus and the Host Countries

The quantitative assessment of the benefits and losses associated with the migration of scientists is rather conditional, since the figures are based on the ratio of the costs of education, training and advanced training of a scientist or a specialist, lost profits due to the exclusion of the migrant scientists and specialists from the economic life of the country, as well as indirect losses. There is another aspect of this problem: the scientist takes with him the methodology, experience, knowledge and achievements of the institution or scientific team where he worked.

The emigration of highly qualified specialists from Belarus leads to the curtailment of fundamental researches and the cessation of the activities of many scientific structures. The process of leaving science by its most valuable personnel leads to the collapse of scientific schools, to a significant lag behind from the developed countries of Belarus in the field of scientific and technical activities, to degradation of the economy and, ultimately, to the moral and intellectual death of the nation. «The death or decline of the highest national schools is a national misfortune, since they undermine one of the basic cells of the existence of the nation.» (V. Vernadsky)¹³. In any nation, the number of people capable of making an innovative scientific breakthrough is very limited and does not exceed 3–5% of the population as a whole¹⁴. The intellectual elite of the society is formed over centuries and millennia, and it is a self-reproducing and very fragile system. As a result of Lukashenka's policy, this system in Belarus has been completely destroyed, and it takes more than a dozen years to recreate the genetic intellectual core of the nation.

Thus, Lukashenka's policy and the mass migration of scientists and academic teachers from the country will lead to the following negative consequences for Belarus:

- sharp drop in the level of science and education;
- limited ability to innovate and implement advanced technologies;
- decrease in the efficiency of activity and development of enterprises;

¹³ В.И. Вернадский, *Перед грозой. Начало и вечность жизни*, Москва 1989, pp. 193–194.

¹⁴ *Интеллектуальный капитал и интеллектуальная миграция в условиях глобализации*, под ред. А.В. Должиковой, Москва 2017, p. 23.

- increase of technological gap from the developed countries;
- decrease in the intellectual potential of labour resources and structural changes in the labour market;
- loss of flexibility and competitiveness of the national economy;
- sharp decline in the country's economic growth.

The efforts of many countries are focused on preventing the outflow of specialists, thereby avoiding possible negative consequences for the economy, etc. To solve the problem, funding for science is being increased, and strategies for scientific and technological development and programs for the return of specialists within the framework of various projects are being implemented. Each of the methods affects intellectual migration from different angles: retention, return, as well as attracting specialists to the country¹⁵.

However, in general, the countries where the Belarusian intellectual elite comes to win a lot. The emigrants transfer the intellectual capital received in Belarus. These are often skills and knowledge that are different from traditional ones in the host country, which certainly enrich the science and education system in the receiving country. It should also be noted that Belarusian scientists, finding themselves in favourable conditions for work and development, take up work and research with great enthusiasm. Added to this is the guest effect and the feeling of gratitude, especially in the case of academic political refugees. This is expressed in a great willingness to work in the country that ensures personal security and all other freedoms and human rights.

“Science should be the most exalted embodiment of the motherland, for of all peoples, the first will always be the one that is ahead of others in the field of thought and mental activity” (L. Pasteur)¹⁶. In Poland, full-fledged social foundations for migration have been created, the main ones among which are conditions for employment and obtaining normal incomes, housing and other social benefits, as well as opportunities to meet social and ethnic needs. By their mentality, Belarusians are easily assimilated in other countries, and this is especially noticeable in Poland due to its historical and cultural proximity to Belarus. In addition, various programs for Belarusian scientists were

¹⁵ PAP, *MiR: nowe priorytety rządowej polityki migracyjnej* (komunikat). <https://pap-mediroom.pl/polityka-i-spoleczenstwo/miir-nowe-priorytety-rzadowej-polityki-migracyjnej-komunikat> (20.07.2022).

¹⁶ О.Е. Ершин, *Афоризмы. Золотой фонд мудрости*, Москва 2006, p. 1267.

developed and implemented (National Agency for Academic Exchange Program “In Solidarity with Belarus” 2020, 2021¹⁷; National Centre for Research and Development project competition¹⁸); almost every university in Poland hired Belarusian scientists and academic teachers who left because of the persecution of the regime. It can be said without exaggeration that a Belarusian scientific diaspora is being formed in Poland.

V. Conclusions

The purpose of the above reflections was an attempt to demonstrate the catastrophic consequences of an authoritarian regime, to show the results of the loss of the intellectual elite of society, to assess the “brain drain” in terms of the welfare of the state experiencing the consequences of this phenomenon and the benefits of the host country of highly intelligent migrants. This is the first review study which is fully focused on Belarus the brain drain phenomenon, reasons why it happens, and its R&D impact. The philosophy of the authoritarian regime of Belarus involves false propaganda of the well-being in the country and concealment of true figures and problems. The methodology of this article is based on the author’s own research and a minimal amount of statistical information, which significantly complicates the study of this topic.

The migration of Belarusian scientists and academic teachers has become enormous and looks more like an escape from the country. Despite the obvious catastrophic situation associated with the migration of the intellectual elite, the Belarusian authorities not only do not try to prevent it and stop this avalanche effect, but do everything possible to get rid of wise and educated people with a free spirit, leaving Belarusian science and education without talented personnel and without any development prospects.

For future research, we are building a research instrument to measure human capital flight or brain drain from Belarus. This article is a good starting point for us and other researchers to study the brain drain myth from Belarus from different angles and perspectives.

¹⁷ NAWA, <https://nawa.gov.pl/solidarni-z-bialorusia> (10.09.2022).

¹⁸ NCBR, <https://www.gov.pl/web/ncbr/solidarni-z-naukowcami-ii-tura-konkursu---nabor-uzupelniajacy> (10.09.2022).

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