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THE MILITIA AND THE SPECIAL SERVICES IN THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICS OF HISTORY OF BELARUS

Abstract

The fundamental direction of politics of history in Belarus under the rule of Aleksandr Lukashenko has been to maintain and cultivate the memory of the Great Patriotic War and the Soviet period. Although the Republic of Belarus remains the most faithful heir to the Soviet inheritance, over time its politics of memory has begun to shift towards the establishment and consolidation of its own history of Belarusian statehood. The last several years have more actively revealed the authorities' new trend in the field of politics of history, which involves the creation of a heroic image for the secret service (NKVD, KGB) and the militia in the history of the Belarusian state. This tendency is characterised by a non-aggressive, but national-level, wide range of commemorative measures which are aimed at creating a myth of the KGB and the militia. Starting from the Great Patriotic War, which remains central to the Belarusian government's politics of history, new historical heroes have begun to emerge in the form of officers of the security services. The military and intelligence services are still linked to the figure of Felix Dzerzhinsky, and the cultivation of his memory in Belarus still predominates over the commemoration of other historical figures. A number of events (including those at state level) dedicated to the commemoration

of the 100th anniversary of the Belarusian militia and the KGB in 2017 gave a particular boost to these commemorative measures. In this article, the author will analyse the Belarusian authorities' current politics of history in this regard by introducing readers to a variety of commemorative practices (the unveiling of monuments, official speeches, films, historical reconstructions, etc.). Moreover, attention will be drawn to the current policy in Belarus and the place within it for the special services, as well as the lack of any consideration of the Soviet past (the Stalinist repressions, Kurapaty, the NKVD, access to archives), the international aspects of Belarus's current politics of memory (links to Russia), and the martyrological and sacral character of the memory of the KGB and militia.

Keywords: Republic of Belarus, politics of history, militia, KGB, Great Patriotic War, NKVD

“You, we – for the past of our special services, the Chekists – have nothing to be ashamed of. There is no reason.”

A. Lukashenko

Introduction

For the first time in the history of independent Belarus, a ceremonial parade for the institutions of internal security was held on March 4, 2018 in Minsk, in which the head of state also participated (*Торжественный марш 2017*). Towards the end of 2017, on 15 December, Belarus marked the 100th anniversary of the KGB's founding with an official speech in front of the officers of this service by the President of the Republic of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko. In his speech, which emphasised the role and importance of these structures in the history of the Belarusian state, Lukashenko admitted, however, that as well as being patriots, the Chekists worked without any expectation of social recognition (*Лукашенко: КГБ 2017*). These seemingly insignificant facts testify to a clear direction in the state's politics of history, and fit into the sequence of commemorative measures which the Belarusian authorities have actively been carrying out over the last several years.

This article attempts to analyse the place of the security services (the KGB [NKVD] and the militia) in the con-

temporary politics of history of Belarus. I will examine these bodies together, in the belief that they are closely related, as until 1954 the KGB (as the successor to the Cheka, the NKVD and the MGB) was formally one of the branches of the Interior Ministry. This paper will present various elements of the politics of memory regarding these state structures, as well as the attitudes of Belarusian society to the various ways in which the Chekists and militiamen have been commemorated. I will analyse the various elements comprising the state's propensity for commemoration (such as museums, monuments, street names, state holidays, testimonies by uniformed officers) which directly link to these or other aspects of politics of history. Most of the information has been taken from open sources, such as the official websites of the Interior Ministry and the KGB. I will also try to look at online journalism concerning the subject; and, by isolating the characteristic features of the state's politics of history towards the special services, to answer the question – what place do the security service institutions really occupy in the memory of the citizens of Belarus? This will not, therefore, be a text devoted to the history of those structures, but rather to the study of the Belarusian authorities' perception and understanding of the history of such controversial bodies as the militia and the KGB. Nor is it my task to analyse the memory of the victims (an issue which often emerges in research), but rather to focus on how the state commemorates the structures of these repressive bodies. This is probably the first attempt to describe the image of the special services in modern politics of history in Belarus. The lack of any previous publications on this topic permits me to describe this study as merely a preliminary contribution to the field.

The fundamental claim of this text is the thesis that, as it lacks a mass-level, well-considered and homogeneous vision of politics of history, the Government of Belarus, with the president at its head, is increasingly seeking support in the structures to which it has owed its position for nearly a quarter-century. One gets the impression that the politics of history which the state is conducting, as it explicitly raises the special services and the militia to a sacral status, is a certain kind of justification for the numerous examples of the impunity



displayed by the government and these very services. It is a truism to say that Belarus is the Soviet Union's most faithful heir in the post-Soviet space. It seems that the commemoration and sacralisation of the Great Patriotic War (hereafter, GPW) is beginning to intersect with and somehow generate a new trend in politics of history – the active commemoration of the state's security organs. Unlike the war, however, this symbol is not so popular and universal. There is no *consensus* on the Belarusian people's relationship to the KGB and the militia, which in turn has led the government to apply a specific commemorative tactic. This tactic could be called the creation of a symbolic "grid" of places commemorating the above-mentioned structures. At first glance, this is an almost invisible "web of memories" of the special services, consisting of holidays and celebrations, praise at the state level and an emphasis on the services' historical importance in the development of the Belarusian state and the maintenance of its security, which is such an important pillar in Lukashenko's rhetoric. A special place is occupied by the permanent acts of unveiling new monuments.

At the same time, if we look closely at all the commemorative practices connected with this matter, it is easy to perceive not only the artificiality of this "web", but also its controversy. One of the best examples of this is the unveiling of a monument to the tsarist policeman in the centre of Minsk in 2015, as we will see later in the article. Such a monument would have been unthinkable in Soviet times (as a symbol of the tsarist regime), but in today's Belarus it accurately reflects the government's logic of building up the memory of those structures which were most important for preserving continuity, in a manner transcending the Soviet period. In my view, this approach allows us to speak about the government's increasing orientation towards anchoring the memory of the permanent struggle against the "internal enemy" which the special services have been waging, regardless of the socio-political constitution of the state. During Lukashenko's rule the Belarusian people have repeatedly heard that Belarus was saved from its external enemies by the Soviet Army and the partisans, which was reflected in the cult of the GPW. The intangible yet well-known "achievements" of the militia and the KGB never enjoyed such a vast canon of memory to

match those of the Soviet Army. One might venture to say that we are dealing with an attempt to build just such a model at this time. These attempts are not aggressive, or being carried out on a mass scale, but they are undoubtedly rather intense and forceful.

Many more journalistic rather than academic texts have been published on various aspects of politics of history in Belarus, which is why the literature on this subject is not particularly rich (Lindner 2005; Saganovich 2014; Lastovskiy 2009; Łaniewski 2015, Bratochkin 2016a; Snapkovskiy 2015).

“Politics of history” – although sometimes Belarusian researchers doubt that a Belarusian counterpart of this exists (Skobla 2013; Burshtyn 2016) – is present in every country, differing only in the levels of its intensity, form and scale. There are many definitions and interpretations of “politics of history”, “policy towards the past” or “politics of memory” (Nijakowski 2008; Kosiewski 2008; Nowinowski, Pomorski and Stobiecki 2008; Korzeniewski 2008; Traba 2009). Recognising the above descriptions as synonymous, and not wishing to enter into a terminological polemic, for the purposes of this article I have accepted that politics of history is “the conscious support of the memory of specific events, processes and historical figures, with political intentions and for political purposes” (Bouvier and Schneider 2008, after Kącka 2015, p. 65). In other words, the practise of this kind of policy is based on an entire complex of actions and procedures undertaken by a political power, aimed at subjectively selected knowledge of the past, and serving the maintenance or codeterminacy of that political power. I agree with Paul Connerton, who has written that “it is certain that control of a society’s memory largely determines the hierarchy of power” (Connerton, 2012, p. 32).

Belarus is formally a sovereign state with a democratic system, which has been run by Aleksandr Lukashenko since 1994. It is not my intention to analyse the nature of the Belarusian regime, as a vast amount of literature on that subject has already been written (Medvedev 2010; Feduta 2005; Poczobut 2012; Czwołek 2013; Czachor 2016). As an enormous simplification, I accept that it is an authoritarian regime, which is why it seems that the president is the originator of and inspiration behind the general line of

politics of history in the country. Zdzisław Julian Winnicki, who has specifically studied the state ideology of the Republic of Belarus, has drawn attention to its huge role in constructing country's historical propaganda (Winnicki 2013). However, despite the theoretical (manuals, lectures at universities) and practical (ideological state apparatus) experiments Minsk has been implementing in this area for many years, no coherent ideology of the Republic of Belarus has yet been developed, something Lukashenko himself has admitted (*Лукашенко: Беларусь* 2019). Interestingly, in the basic textbook for teaching Belarusian state ideology, the role of politics of history is not mentioned directly. True, the authors are fully aware of the importance of the humanities, including history, in shaping state ideology. Nevertheless, the role and importance of the militia and the special services is omitted in the textbook (Knyazev and Reshetnikov 2004). It is thus hard to talk about state ideology as a fully-formed, comprehensive system shaping Belarusian politics of history towards the uniformed services. Rather, it is more a mosaic of attempts, a kind of multi-vector search for (as it seems) a quite unstable state ideology. However, this does not diminish the role of ideology in forming (or deforming?) the consciousness and attitudes of the Belarusian people. Furthermore, it is quite possible that this “web of memories” – which at first glance is invisible, and which has only begun to be clearly exposed in recent years – will soon become clearly articulated at the level of state ideology.

The German researcher Edgar Wolfrum acknowledges the politicians, journalists, intellectuals and scientists defined as elite opinion-makers as the creators of the state's politics of history. Of these he attributes the most important role to the political elites (Wolfrum 1999, p. 26, for 58; Kącka 2015, p. 67). As it is difficult to speak of a political elite in Belarus, where the whole of political life revolves around the president, I accept that it is he who is the leading creator of Belarusian policy towards the past, and is the unchanging political decision-maker in this matter. This becomes even more interesting when we recall that Lukashenko is a historian (and economist) by education. I do not wish to assess his knowledge and

proficiency in these fields; I merely wish to point out that Lukashenko doubtlessly has a concept of history which likely exceeds the average level of historical knowledge.

From my observations, it appears that the politics of history towards the militia and the KGB has only started to become active on a larger scale during the last few years. The president's primary objective throughout his rule has been to maintain and strengthen the memory of the GPW (slightly modernised since Soviet times) (Rudling 2008; Lastouski, Kazakevich and Balachkayce 2010; Lastouski 2013; Lastouski, Khandozhko and Sklokina 2013; Mironowicz 2015). Today, the government is trying to link the memory of the war with the memory of the special services, while also referring to the creation of the Soviet Union.

Probably the most well-known figure in Belarus, someone who occupies a central place in the commemoration of the special services, is actually a Pole, Felix Dzerzhinsky. The notorious head of the Cheka, the protoplasts of today's KGB, has several streets in the country's largest cities named in his honour. In addition, several villages named after Dzerzhinsky are located in the Gomel region. Here and there one can find busts of "Iron Felix", usually associated with buildings connected with the KGB, the militia (for example, his bust stands today in front of the militia building in Pinsk), or the border guards. The most symbolic manifestation of his memory is Dzerzhinskaya Gora; this mountain peak, 345 meters above sea level, is the highest in Belarus, and was called Holy Mountain until 1958. The summit is a popular tourist destination, and is located near a village of the same name, Dzerzhinsk (Kojdanów until 1932), in the Minsk oblast. Furthermore, the notorious Bolshevik's family estate of Dzerzhinovo (formerly Oziembłowo), opened in 1957 and renovated in 2004, can be found in the Stouptse district of the Minsk oblast. The estate has the status of a "historical and cultural monument of Belarus", and serves as a place of "pilgrimage" for officers from the Russian FSB and the Belarusian KGB. (As a curiosity, it is worth noting that in 2007 the property was awarded a diploma of distinction from the Russian FSB "for creating an exhibition of high artistic value devoted to life and the activities of F.E. Dzerzhinsky": *Premiya* 2006.)

On December 22, 2004, a bust of Dzerzhinsky was unveiled at the Brest division of the Belarusian border guards' corps, which has been named after the founder of the Cheka since 1967. In 2006, a three-metre statue of the Polish revolutionary was unveiled at the Military Academy in the Belarusian capital. The then head of the State Border Committee of Belarus, Aleksandr Pavlovsky, said at that time that Dzerzhinsky had been "a decisive figure in history" (Lashkevich 2010). It is worth remembering that a bust of him from 1947 can also be seen opposite the KGB headquarters in Minsk. Meanwhile, on the occasion of the 95th anniversary of the KGB's founding, a monument entitled "Shield of the Fatherland", with the words "to the enlightened memory of the Chekists" inscribed on it, was solemnly unveiled at the Institute for National Security in the capital, with the participation of the head of the Belarusian KGB Valery Vakulchik and the director of the Russian FSB Aleksandr Bortnikov. Along the 3.5-metre blade can be seen reliefs of the character of "bloody Felix" himself, a Soviet soldier from the time of the GPW, and a contemporary KGB officer (*Odstonięto* 2012). Furthermore, in October 2015 a bust of Dzerzhinsky was erected in front of the KGB building in Baranovichy; it had been transferred from the former collective-farm village of Milovidovo (Revyako 2015). Busts of Dzerzhinsky are located in a number of cities, including outside school buildings. This fact sometimes causes outrage among Belarusians. For example, an official letter to the director of School No. 108 in Minsk was sent by an activist from the "For Freedom" movement, demanding the bust's removal (Bykouskaya 2015). However, the government's actions indicate a different trend. In December 2018, a renovated bust of Dzerzhinsky was officially unveiled in front of Secondary School No. 6 in Grodno. (By way of a digression, it may be noted that signs of opposition towards the monument have also appeared. The author of this sketch recalls that on two occasions in the early 2000s offensive slogans in red paint were daubed on the bust of Dzerzhinsky in front of Secondary School No. 25 in Grodno). The ceremony was attended not only by representatives of the city authorities, but also by veterans of the GPW and heads of the KGB in Grodno oblast, who partially financed

the project. It should also be added that students from the fifth grade were also ceremonially admitted into the ranks of the Belarusian Republican Pioneers' Organisation during the ceremony (*В гимназии* 2018). (The Belarusian Republican Pioneers' Organisation was created in 1990, although the real increase in its importance can be dated to 1997; at that time there was a reorganisation and change in the concept of this structure, which is envisaged as a continuation of the V.I. Lenin All-Union Pioneers' Organisation of the Soviet period). Although the figure of Dzerzhinsky has little to connect him with Belarus apart from the place of birth, this does not hold back the cult of the Pole who chose Bolshevism and died in Moscow. Apart



Bust of Felix Dzerzhinsky, Felix Dzerzhinsky Square, Komsomolskaya Street in Minsk (Zair I. Azgur, Viktor M. Volchek, 1947). Minsk, Belarus. 2018. © Aliaksandr Laneuski

from Dzerzhinsky, it is difficult to discern other characters upon whose memory the government could build a narrative commemorating the security services. For this reason, its other commemorative practices are of a more generic character, lacking the personalised element.

The enormous importance of the Soviet inheritance can be seen in various spheres and levels in modern Belarus, so we will only examine those items that relate to the theme of this article. One of the major unresolved issues of Belarusian socio-political reality is the rethinking of the Soviet past. First of all, it should be noted that Belarus has never had a policy of de-communisation, such as has taken place several times in Poland, or more recently in Ukraine. True, in the early 1990s the authorities of the newly independent Republic of Belarus undertook certain measures to “de-Sovietise” public spaces; for example, the process of replacing Soviet-era street names. However, the Belarusian people did not experience either the “*leninopad*” (the mass removal and demolition of statues of Lenin and other senior Soviet leaders) or the liquidation of the old “red” state holidays. This process was halted after Lukashenko came to power, and any further changes in this field can, in my opinion, be considered as purely cosmetic. It is extremely important to note that Belarus is probably the only post-Soviet state which did not witness any reform of the KGB. Importantly, after establishment of independence this structure retained not only its old name, but also its traditions and personnel (Eduard Shirkovsky, who had held the office in the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, remained its head). Although nominally a security organ of a sovereign state, the Belarusian KGB and the military high command long remained (and perhaps still are) under the Kremlin’s influence at the personnel-logistics and ideological levels. Not only the origin, study and work experience, but also the commercial interests of its higher officials were often linked with Russia (Mackevich 2008). The influence of Moscow, including the Russian special services, undoubtedly constitutes an obstacle to carrying out any potential changes in Belarusian society. Researchers often consider the question of politics of history in both its internal and external aspects (*Co to jest* 2006; Wójcik 2016).

In my opinion, the commemoration of the special services and the failure to condemn Stalinist repression at the state level can be seen as a desire to further build warm relations with Russia, in which the role of the FSB is widely known.

Another obstacle to rethinking and re-evaluating the issue of the ambiguous period which was the Soviet era is the problem of archives. First of all, after 1991 historians have had problems gaining access to the archives of the Belarusian KGB (unlike Ukraine, which released all such materials in 2016). In Belarus, selective access to such documents has only been granted to historians close to the government (Vabishchevich and Kovalenya 2012; Adamushko 2012; Adamushko, Balandin and Dyukov 2017). Widespread access to these materials would undoubtedly shed much light on the history of the security bodies, and would help to better assess their role in the history of Belarus. Currently such measures are not convenient for the authorities, and one should not expect any major changes in the coming years.

The issue of the archives is linked to one of the most important problems for the Belarusian people's collective memory: the memory of the victims of Stalinist repression, and, most symbolic in this respect, the Belarusian memorial site – the sacred wilderness of Kurapaty. According to various data, between tens and several hundreds of thousands of people are buried there. The struggle for the recovery of the truth about Kurapaty and the fight to honour the memory of all those buried there, which was initiated in 1988 by Zianon Pazniak and Yauhen Shmyhaliou (Paz'nyak and Shmygaleu 1988), continues today. On the website dedicated to the site, the year 2017 was named the Year of Remembrance for the Victims of Soviet Repression (*Зварот Вяртаньня Памяці* 2017). The website also contains materials which form the basis of a project entitled *The Black Book of Stalinism. Belarus: crimes, terror, repression*. The enterprise is being coordinated by Ihar Kuzniatsou, a Belarusian historian who has investigated issues of repression for many years. In his opinion, Belarus remains the only European country where the memory of the victims of Stalinism has not been honoured at the state level. Almost all the other post-Soviet countries (except Turkmenistan) have condemned Stalinist repression in different ways (from state museums

to historical publications). A work entitled *Memorial sites for victims of Communism in Belarus* (Kaminski 2011), published in Germany by the Ettersberg Foundation has become an important book for Belarus.

The fight for Kurapaty is also a part of the political struggle being played out in the outskirts of the Belarusian capital. The conflict gained a new dimension in the spring and summer of 2018, when a new restaurant was opened just 50 metres from the memorial. In response to these actions a social initiative was created which, through petitions, information campaigns and 24-hour vigils has sought to get the restaurant moved (*Паездзем. Паядзім* 2018). It is significant that in February 2017 one of the leading government newspapers *СБ. Беларусь сегодня* organised a “round table” on the issue of the memorial; the meeting was attended by the deputy head of the KGB, Major-General Igor Sergeyenko, pro-government historians (with the exception of Kuzniatsou), and Pavel Yakubovich, editor-in-chief of the newspaper. There they agreed that a national “Memorial of Memory and Regret” which could unite the Belarusian people should be built at Kurapaty (*История должна* 2017). Nevertheless, the government has remained somewhat on the sidelines in this conflict, as they are unable either to explicitly deny Stalin’s crimes or afford to build a memory/memorial centre there. If the government had agreed to create such a memorial, it would have discredited all its other initiatives to commemorate the special services. Although this is a fight for the memory of the victims, it seems that its outcome could direct further actions of both the government and social commemorative initiatives with regard to the attitude towards the perpetrators of the repression – the police and the special services. One must also remember that, unlike its neighbours, Belarus has no institutions analogous to the Polish or Ukrainian Institutes of National Remembrance (IPN), or to Russia’s Memorial or Sakharov Centre, or indeed a range of other projects aimed at preserving the memory of the victims of past regimes’ political repressions. The establishment of such an institution has repeatedly been called for by the historian Ihar Marzalyuk, a member of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly

of the Republic of Belarus and the chairman of the House of Representatives' Committee on Education, Culture and Science (*Парламентарий Марзаяук 2017; Как построить 2018*). The creation of a Belarusian counterpart to the IPN is still only at the level of a formal request. The following question may also raise some doubts: would so-called independent historians be admitted to the group of creators and workers appointed to a Belarusian Institute of National Remembrance? Admittedly, smaller grassroots projects do exist; their role is of enormous importance, but they remain marginalised, and have neither the clout nor the resources to influence the Belarusian people at large (*Виртуальный музей 2014*).

The question of the repressions has been dealt with for years by historians who have no link to the government's official canon of politics of memory. Their creation of websites and organisation of conferences and discussion panels has been met not only with the incomprehension of the authorities, but also with actual prohibitions. One exception, however, was the conference – the first of its kind in 19 years – entitled “Mass repression in the USSR in historical study and collective memory” (*Масавыя рэпрэсіі 2018*). This event was held on 17–18 November 2017 in Minsk, and was organised by the Belarusian Oral History Archive, with support from the Polish Institute in Minsk, the Flying University, and the Institute of Slavic Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences.

Similar events include the forum “Bolshevik terror. The right to establish the truth”, which was held in Minsk in August 2017. This event was attended not only by professional historians, but also by human rights defenders, and social and political activists. This occasion was significant because, apart from discussing important topics such as archival law in Belarus or the issue of access to the archives of the KGB and the FSB, the conference's participants also adopted a resolution which demanded that the government should (among other things) grant access to the documents from the years 1917–1953 stored in Belarusian archives; transfer all investigative files from the period 1920–1970 to the state archives, with the possibility of open access to these archives; establish and name all the sites of mass murder in Belarus, and label and commemorate these places in an appropriate manner; offer a final rehabilitation

of hundreds of thousands of citizens who were swept up by the Terror; and recognize Stalinist repression as a crime, with punishment by law for any attempts to propagandise it (*Форум Большевистский террор* 2017). In their responses to the demands and resolutions, the Interior Ministry and KGB stated that they had no information about the places of mass repression, and their competence did not include lifting confidentiality from the documents from the period 1917–1953. Meanwhile, in their opinion, the rehabilitation which was demanded in the resolution had already been implemented correctly by the courts and the prosecutor's office in the years 1991–2001, according to the Resolution of the Republic of Belarus of June 6, 1991, No. 847-XII, 'On the order of rehabilitating the victims of political repression from the 1920s to the 1980s in the Republic of Belarus'. It is interesting that at the administrative-legal level, the ministries' records should have been transferred to the general archives after 30 years, but in 2006 and 2009 representatives of the Interior Ministry and the KGB signed an agreement with the Department for Archives and Office Management of the Justice Ministry of the Republic of Belarus, extending the archival period from 30 to 70 years (*МВД и КГБ* 2017).

Most of the government's activities in commemorating their own "heroes" are linked to specific dates and anniversaries. It should be emphasised that Belarus has its own public holidays which are already well-anchored in the minds of majority of its citizens. For most people, of particular importance are the national holidays connected to the GPW: 9 May, 22 June, 3 July. In addition to the general national holidays, both militiamen and Chekists have their own professional holidays. Every year, even back in the Soviet period, 20 December was celebrated as State Security Officers' Day, or just Chekists' Day (the date refers to the creation of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage). In turn, 4 March was Militia Day (introduced by the president in 1998), a date which is also anchored in Soviet tradition (the first divisions of the militia were appointed in Minsk on March 4, 1917). On the sidelines, we may add, that 26 July is Prosecution Employee's Day, referring to the creation of the State Prosecutor's Office as a department of the People's Commissariat of Justice in 1922.

One date which can be juxtaposed with the official dates commemorating the special services is 29 October, which is known as the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Political Repression in Belarus. This date should not be confused with the official date celebrated in Russia on 30 October as the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Political Repression; this was initiated by the Memorial association, and was celebrated for the first time on October 30, 1974 at the initiative of the dissident Kronid Lubarsky (1934–1996). On the night of October 30, 1937, more than 130 people, mostly from the intelligentsia, were executed in the basement of the Minsk NKVD. Since that day, starting from 2007, activists from opposition organisations and the relatives of those killed during the Stalinist repression have participated in symbolic acts of remembrance. One such took place in 2017 in front of the KGB building in Minsk, under the name “The chain of memory”; during the action, the participants stood on the steps of the KGB building, held up portraits of repressed cultural activists, and lit candles. The action was broken up by force and arrests were made (*В Мінске у КГБ* 2017). On the same day, the activists organised a day of remembrance entitled “The night of the shot poets” at Kurapaty. The name of every victim was recited, and around 60 activists read poems and lit candles at the site (*In memoriam* 2017).

If we look at the government’s actions in the field of politics of history with respect to the police and the KGB, we can say that a process of mythologising history is taking place. In other words, the government – with the use of a variety of tools – is creating political myths regarding the special services. The political myth, as Raoul Girardet understands it, is a form of arranging the political scene and different political actors at various places; it forms a whole and demonstrates a constant specificity. Myths often stimulate political action and serve as an explanation involving the “delivery of the keys necessary to understand the present. They form a kind of grid of concepts, along which the chaos of things and events is ordered” (Girardet 1986, after Kowalski 2002, pp. 24–25). At present, the myth “can be used to legitimise the government and the people occupying its offices, or to stand in defence of the social institutions which draw upon the essence of the myth” (Zdański 2012, p. 38).

They manifest themselves in the form of symbols and rituals, and “the most visible forms expressing these myths are the responses which create a mythical reality” (Zdański 2012, p. 39). As a result, the myth affects both individual and group activities; it stimulates a readiness to undertake political behaviour. It not only helps in choosing one’s own identity, but also in integrating or polarising society (Zdański 2012, p. 43). And if, in the memory of the GPW, one can find signs of consolidation among different generations and social groups, the matter of the special services and the police may actually provoke many reservations. Such reservations are becoming more and more relevant, if we look at the situation of the endless political repression in Belarus today. In trying to avoid criticism from the public and whitewash its own history, the government has resorted to the traditional “obsession with genesis”; that is, it is focusing on finding reference points for itself in history and tradition. Every government has a need for a “good origin” (Filipowicz 1988, p. 346); the Belarusian government, of which the police and special services are a fundamental pillar, is no exception. It is thus resorting to a range of tools which rely on the use of symbolic space in both the material dimension and the dimension of consciousness. It applies the mechanisms and strategies which utilise the human skills of remembering and forgetting, which Joanna Tokarska-Bakir (Tokarska-Bakir 2008, p. 29) has called historical manipulation. At the same time, the mythologisation and politicisation of history is taking place: more specifically, the creation of historical myths and their subordination to the current political narrative, which in turn is intended to produce a positive and inviolable image of the heroic history of the special services among the Belarusian people. In association with this, the government responds to the initiatives (conferences, monuments, etc.) relating to Stalin’s repression and the role therein of the special services with virtually total silence and omission.

Zdzisław Krasnodębski has written (Krasnodębski 2007) that myths allow a society to communicate with itself in the area of politics; when the citizens themselves choose and value the myths, they in turn include them in current debates and political discourses. In Poland, for example,

there is a negative myth about the ZOMO (*Zmotoryzowane Odwoły Milicji Obywatelskiej*, the Motorised Divisions of the Citizens' Militia, a riot police unit which was created in 1956 after the events known as the "Poznań Spring". They were mostly used to suppress protests and break up anti-government demonstrations). In Belarus, however, no similar structures exist on a mass scale in the public consciousness and social memory. The NKVD probably has the most negative connotation, although extensive research and sociological surveys (which unfortunately are currently absent) would be necessary to prove this assertion. However, there are several cases of positive perceptions of the NKVD.

The most notorious matter connected with the memory of the special services was the case of the former Interior Minister Igor Shunievich (who served in that office from January 2012 to June 2019, and previously worked in the KGB and the Minsk militia). In recent years he has appeared at large state ceremonies dressed in the made-to-order uniform of an NKVD officer, paid for out of his own pocket; he appeared in public for the first time in these clothes in May 2015, on the 70th anniversary of the victory in Great Patriotic War. His wife, meanwhile, dresses in the female outfit of the Soviet military every 9 May (Victory Day), and together, in a Willys MB car from 1947, they drive through the streets of Minsk in order to "pay tribute to all the officers of the internal security bodies" (*Порядок гарантирую* 2017).

Another manifestation of the formation of this network, or the special services' "web of memories", was the celebration of the anniversary of the GPW, which was launched in Brest in 2011. The annual event is named the International Festival of Reconstruction of the "22 June Brest Fortress". For us, the most interesting theme in this endeavour is the traditional march through the streets entitled "Tomorrow there was war" (the title refers to a famous film by Yuri Kara from 1987, based on a novel by Boris Vasiliev about the life of the younger generation on the eve of the outbreak of the GPW). During the march, portraits of Stalin are carried, and many people dress according to the fashions of that time, including officers and soldiers dressed in NKVD uniforms (*Belarus remembers* 2016; *Last peaceful* 2018). This re-enactment is intended to show how happy and peaceful the people of Brest were on

Barbershop "Chekist"
on Timiryazeva Street.
Minsk, Belarus. 2018.
© Aliaksandr Laneuski

the eve of the war. Moreover, everyone interested in having their picture taken in the NKVD uniform can do so for a fee on the territory of the Brest Fortress. We may add that it was there where a solemn meeting was held on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Belarusian militia's foundation (*Урачысты мітынг* 2017).

The latest mass-culture event which caught the attention of Belarusian society was the opening at the end of 2017 of a hairdressing salon in Minsk called "Chekist". In January 2018 two local opposition activists visited the salon, trying to convince the owners to change the name; they hung up a list bearing the names of 129 representatives of the Belarusian intelligentsia who were executed during the Stalinist purges. As a result, both of the activists received a fine of c. €300. The owners explained that this name is now history, and should



today be more closely associated with James Bond, and not with the perpetrators of Soviet terror (*Skazano aktywistów* 2018). The salon still operates under the same name in the Belarusian capital.

I think that the commemoration of the KGB and the militia is a form of political struggle. I will venture to say that the president is repaying his most faithful followers in this way, and letting society know how powerful and significant these structures are. All the above-mentioned facts testify to the government's acquiescence to the use of the "NKVD brand" as a symbol, in terms of history, business and culture. On the other hand, we are dealing with a certain trend wherein the younger generation of Belarusians are convinced that they have the right to use these "historic" symbols for commercial purposes. It is hard to predict, but it is possible that over time the image of the NKVD officer within Belarus may become the same as what the image of Che Guevara has become in the West, something which now can be found everywhere, from mugs and t-shirts to graffiti and tattoos. The government for its part wants the Belarusian people to become accustomed to the presence in the cities of elements commemorating the special services. It is thus worth looking at some of the monuments to the security services which have been constructed in recent years.

Many events were held on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the militia in Belarus, including the official unveiling of several monuments. In the town of Glubokoye, a plaque dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Belarusian militia was unveiled, even though the town had been part of Poland until 1939 (Siuchyk 2008). In contrast, a monument dedicated to the anniversary was unveiled in the centre of Gomel which represents a lieutenant of the Soviet militia from the 1950s. Interestingly, his uniform and medals carry insignia for injury and courage during the war (*Скульптурную композицию* 2017). This monument was unveiled on the eve of the Day of Remembrance of Veterans of Internal Affairs' Institutes and the Internal Troops of the Belarusian Internal Ministry. On this day local celebrations are usually held all over the country, during which prizes are awarded and flowers are laid at the foot of the monuments. In the capital, flowers are usually laid at the monument to



Monument to the employees of the Ministry of the Interior and soldiers of the Internal Troops of Belarus killed on duty. Park at the junction of Krasnaya and Kommunisticheskaya streets (Aliaksandr Dranec, V. Antonovich, B. Kostin, 2003). Minsk, Belarus. 2018.
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“Ohrana”. Monument on Levanevskogo Street, at the seat of the regional board of the security department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus in Brest (Vyacheslav Pishchuk, 2014). Brest, Belarus. 2018.
© Sviatlana Minkova

officers of the Interior Ministry who died while performing their official duties. This 6-metre monument was unveiled in 2003, near the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Belarus. The same idea was behind the unveiling of a monument on November 9, 2018 (on the eve of the Day of Remembrance of Veterans of Internal Affairs’ Institutes and the Internal Troops of the Belarusian Internal Ministry) in front of the Department of Internal Affairs of the Minsk Regional Executive Committee. It is made of granite slabs, on which are inscribed the names of 192 fallen officers and the image of a kneeling officer who is embracing a girl holding flowers (*Б УБД* 2018). In recent years similar monuments have also appeared in other regional centres: in Grodno (2004) and Homel (2012). In Grodno, in addition to the monument, a “memory wall” was erected, with the names of 141 officers (Harevich 2016). In Mogilev similar events have been held at an unveiled in 1980 memorial dedicated to the battalion of the militia captain Konstantin Vladimirov, who in 1941 defended the outskirts of the city at the village of Gayi (Mendeleva 2019; see also Hlystova 2016). In turn, on March 1, 2017, the avenue in memory



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of Captain Vladimirov's fighters was solemnly opened as a memorial; and in this city in December 2015, the head of the KGB V. Vakulchik personally unveiled a monument dedicated to three generations of Chekists in the Mogilev region: the Cheka, the NKVD and the KGB. In his official speech he declared that the monument was not only a part of memory, but it also "reveals the mentality of the Belarusian nation and the direction of state policy, focusing on the preservation of historical memory" (*Фота дня* 2015). It is hard to say whether this is coincidental, but in Mogilev itself there has been a blurring of the lines between past and present. On September 25, 2017, a monument was unveiled dedicated to the OMON (*Отряд Милиции Особого Назначения*, Special-Purpose Militia Divisions) (Shlykau 2017). This is a memorial to the body which has constantly displayed the greatest brutality during Lukashenko's rule in the dispersal of demonstrations, assaulting activists and arresting journalists.

It is hard to calculate how many smaller statues and plaques commemorating the militia there are in Belarus, although it seems that there are quite a lot. For example, on the territory of the famous historical-cultural site called the "Stalin Line" (which commemorates the fortification line along the pre-1939 Soviet-Polish border), there are commemorative elements which may also be of interest to us. In 2007, GPW veterans and officers from the Interior Ministry opened there the "Avenue of Military Glory". This was part of a campaign commemorating the 90th anniversary of the foundation of the Belarusian militia. In 2012, a monument was unveiled in Brest to the officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Brest region who had gone missing while performing their official duties (Kuharchik 2012). Another monument dedicated to the officers of the Security Department of the Ministry of Interior was unveiled in Brest in 2014; it had the form of an owl sitting on a bulldog's kennel, and was intended to symbolise vigilance and reliability. The controversial monument was unveiled in a promenade in Sovietskaya Street in the city centre, which caused dissatisfaction among the residents; after a month it was removed, and was unveiled again on May 31, 2017 in front of the Interior Ministry branch on Levonevsky Street (Moshchik 2017).

It is interesting that both historical figures, which do not suit the government's historical narrative, but also distinguished Belarusians and neutral dates from the history of Belarus have not been granted such commemorative monuments. The historian and journalist Siarhei Ablameika has criticised the government for ignoring the 950th anniversary of the Belarusian capital, writing about how the 100th anniversary of the Belarusian militia took precedence over that event for the government. He added that no-one remembers or celebrates this date today (the city's official day is celebrated at the beginning of September), and that there is no monument commemorating this event (a project from the 1970s was never completed). Here the author points out that if we want to seek the roots of the Belarusian militia, we should reach further back than 1917; he suggests that we should consider the appointment of the Police Commission of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania during the *Sejm* of Grodno at the end of 1793 as an appropriate point in history. In addition, the writer reminds us that the city's 900th anniversary was celebrated on a grand scale in the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic: an academic history of Minsk was published, a Museum of the History of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic was opened, the 900th Anniversary Park was founded, the *Вечерний Минск* newspaper was created, photo albums and stamps were issued, and so on. In other words, a whole series of events took place at that time in connection with the celebration of the militia's 100th anniversary (Ablameyka 2017).

It is hard not to admit that the Belarusian historian is right; the anniversaries of the militia and the KGB were commemorated by a whole range of events, including the publication of several books. In 2006 the KGB published a book about its history, a lineage which according to the authors stretches back for 1000 years (Dementey 2006), and in 2010 a book was also published about the history of the KGB in the Brest region (Suvorov 2014). In February 2017 there was a presentation of a book about the 100th anniversary of the militia (Shunevich 2016). In addition, a special gift for post offices was prepared, as was an anniversary seal, envelopes and stamps in an edition of 15,000 (Marchenko 2017). An anniversary medal entitled "100 years of Belarus's militia" (*Юбилейная медаль* 2016) was struck; and billboards were

put up in cities referring to the tradition and ties between the generations, displaying texts such as “We are proud of history, we respect the bond of generations”. As already mentioned, the anniversary was also commemorated by a special concert which the president attended.

The media also play an important role in the Belarusian authorities’ politics of history. In January 2018, the state television channel Belarus 1 launched a series of documentary films entitled *The faces of the militia’s history* (*История милиции*). The eight 30-minute episodes and a “documentary about the documentary” were aired after the main evening news bulletin. The Chekists were more modestly celebrated on television, as there were only two parts of the c. 80-minute documentary *Guard and defend* dedicated to them (*100 летие КГБ* 2018). We may also mention that on the occasion of 95th anniversary of the Belarusian KGB in 2012, the ANT TV station ran a half-hour television documentary called *In the name of the Fatherland*.



In addition to the documentaries we should also mention the feature films glorifying the special services' activities during the war. Probably the most famous is the 2000 film *August '44*, directed by Mikhail Ptashuk. This Belarusian-Russian production was based on the novel *Moment of Truth* by Vladimir Bogomolov (1974), and relates the struggle of officers of the military counterintelligence unit SMERSH (from the Russian acronym for "death to spies"), a descendant of the Cheka, against German agents in Western Belarus in 1944. In autumn 2008, the head of the FSB's registry and archival resources, Lieutenant General Vasily Khristoforov, called it the most realistic film in Russia, which describes the life and work of counterintelligence in the most plausible manner. In turn, the actor Yevgeny Mironov received an even higher reward for his role as the SMERSH officer Alyokhin – the Russian FSB Award. In 2007 the Russian mini-series *SMERSH*, directed by Zinovi Royzman, was filmed in Grodno. This story tells of



Museum at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. Minsk, Belarus. 2018.
© Aliaksandr Laneuski

SMERSH's "heroic struggle" against the Polish Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*), who are portrayed as a gang of common bandits. The latest film with similar themes was a Belarusian production from 2016, *Footprints on the Water*, about the struggle of the Soviet security services with Polish "gangs" near Grodno in the years immediately after the end of GPW. The film was based on the novel *A stranger among his own kind* (2011) by Nikolai Ilinsky, a retired militia colonel. This "blockbuster" premiered on February 23, 2017, a date which is celebrated in Belarus as the Day of the Defenders of the Fatherland and of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus (the Day of the Soviet Army and Navy, in the Soviet period). This film was financed not only by the Belarusian Ministry of Culture, but also by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and was dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Belarusian militia. In my opinion, the films mentioned above fit well into the overall whitewashing of the special services' work. In all three films it is easy to see that the GPW still holds the central place of remembrance. Interestingly, all of these stories are set in Western Belarus, in the areas where the memory of those events contrasts most strongly with the state's narrative (Śleszyński 2013). All of them depict Polish people in a negative light. In any case, a detailed analysis of these and other Belarusian film productions deserves a separate article.

Another ceremony commemorating the anniversary was the unveiling of a memorial to the tsarist policeman on March 2, 2017 in front of the building of the Museum of the Interior Ministry in Minsk. The event was attended by Minister of Internal Affairs Shunievich, the Minister of Defence Andrey Ravkov [Andrey Raukou], the city's president [President of the City's Executive Committee] Andrey Shorec [Andrey Shorach], and even the Minister of Culture Boris Svetlov [Baris Svyatlou]. On 12 March, in protest against police brutality, an activist from the anarchist movement in Belarus threw a noose around the monument's neck. For this bold, albeit symbolic action, the activist received a fine and spent several days in jail (*Anarchist Kasinerau* 2017). In a comment on this event, the head of the capital's militia Aleksandr Barsukov called the monument a "holy place" (*Глава ГУВД* 2017). Over the next months, and in 2018 there were several



Monument to the tsarist-era police officer at Haradski Val Street, Minsk (Aliaksandr Dranec, 2017). Minsk, Belarus. 2018. © Aliaksandr Laneuski

similar actions targeting the monument; in July, political and LGBT activists set down a rainbow pot full of flowers in front of the monument, for which they were fined. In November, a man was arrested for throwing a scarf onto the monument to take a photo. A few days later, actresses from the Belarusian Free Theatre protested against the “status” of this monument by kissing and embracing it; they were immediately informed that under no circumstances was it permitted to touch the statue (*За поцёччину* 2018). In the same month, a teenager was caught in the act of slapping the figure; for this action he was forced to admit his guilt and make an apology to the militiamen in front of cameras, and the recording of the event was published on the Interior Ministry’s official website (*В Мінске милицыя* 2018). Meanwhile, in the words of Shunievich, the sculpture “embodies in itself the order and peace on the streets of the city, which is protected today by the Interior Ministry, and which is the showcase of our ministry and our state.” (*Скульптурная група* 2008). Such statements seem to clearly testify to the intentions of the politics of history-makers in Belarus, who have begun to link their rule over memory directly with their political rule. The response to this issue allows one to talk in terms of the basic absurdity of the Belarusian government’s politics of history towards the police and special services, which accepts the Soviet period (and particularly the period of the GPW) as its foundation. One does not need to be a professional historian to understand that the tsarist police in the early twentieth century belonged to a social group which suffered greatly as a result of the activities of a whole mass of revolutionary currents, including the Bolsheviks, the future creators of the USSR, and the Cheka. In a sense, the act of the Belarusian anarchist recalls the history of the statue erected in memory of the police officer Mathias Degan, who was murdered during a workers’ demonstration at the Haymarket in Chicago in May 1886. The monument changed its location several times, and – most importantly – in the years 1968–1970 it was repeatedly damaged and blown up by radical left-wing activists. For this reason, it received protection in the form of a 24-hour police patrol, which cost the city around \$70,000 annually. As a result of public protests, the monument was moved to the Police Academy in Chicago (Haymarket

Memorial Statue Website). It is difficult to compare the United States and Belarus, although the likelihood that there will be further actions targeting the monuments to the militia and the special services is quite real.

As mentioned, the monument to the tsarist officer appeared in front of the building of the Museum of the Belarusian Interior Ministry in Minsk, which was originally opened in 1986. For the purpose of the ceremony, the museum was renewed before the celebrations in 2017. Somewhat earlier, in August 2012, a Museum of the History of the Prosecutor's Office was opened in the building of the Minsk oblast prosecutor's office. Meanwhile, the Museum of the KGB in Minsk was opened to the general public on the 90th anniversary of the creation of this structure (2007). Currently on the KGB's website we can see a virtual panorama of the exhibition, but there is no information on the museum's operation. In 2006, a KGB museum was also opened in Brest. It can only be visited upon prior reservation, after submitting one's personal information and place of residence, and the registering of an audio and video recording at the duty officer's counter.

The interesting manifestations of memory associated with the special services also include the Museum of Prison Life in Grodno, which was opened in August 2015 in the building of a prison (which still operates today) in the city centre, next to the Basilica Cathedral of St. Francis Xavier. During different periods of its operation, the walls of Grodno prison held such well-known figures as Napoleon Orda (1807–1883, a Polish-Belarusian painter and composer), Feliks Dzerzhinsky himself, Wolf Messing (1899–1974, a famous Polish-Soviet Jewish mentalist and psychic), Sergei Pritytski (1913–1971, a Belarusian politician and communist activist, chairman of the BSSR's Supreme Council from 1968 to 1971), and Gustaw Herlig-Grudziński (1919–2000, a Polish writer, soldier and underground fighter, and prisoner in Soviet labour camps). All of these museums are labelled as “closed” or “not for everyone”. For example, the museum in Grodno may only be visited by organised groups upon prior reservation. Interestingly, Shunievich himself was also responsible for the initiative to open such places to the public (Поплавская, 2015). From the visitors' reports, we can conclude that the permanent display in the Grodno museum lacked any references to the

contemporary political prisoners who have been sent there during Lukashenko's rule. (It is worth noting that there are plans to open a KGB museum in Grodno in the near future.)



Conclusions

This text does not pretend to be a comprehensive discussion of the complex question which is politics of history in Belarus. This is only an attempt to sketch the trend which has been taking place in recent years at various levels of the politics of memory – a trend which gives material to reflect upon, but still requires further studies, including in terms of political science and sociology.

If we are to trust the UN's data from 2013, there are 1442 officers of the Interior Ministry for every 100,000 citizens of Belarus. This was denied by Shunievich in 2016, who said that the number of Belarusian militiamen varies around the figure of 39,000. It is interesting that the militia's official gazette *Ha страже* [*On the watch*] has a circulation of 56,000 copies, which allows us to call Shunievich's words into question (Spasyuk 2018). For Belarus, which is facing a demographic bust, this number is quite substantial (on January 1, 2016 the population of Belarus was estimated at 9,498,364). On the other hand, information on the precise number of the KGB's employees is kept secret for obvious reasons. One must take into account that the officers themselves, their families and friends, make up a large social group which demands not only socio-economic privileges, but also its own place in the urban symbolic space and in the state's historical narrative.

The top-down imposition by the government of these symbols onto society fits well into the concept of "politics of memory". It is a kind of spoken decree, ordering who should primarily be remembered. All of these top-down commemorative practices directed at the country's past, but which are focused around a particular social group (in this case, the police and the KGB), testify to the fear of losing the war of memory being waged against the likes of historians and social initiatives, namely those not connected with the government, and even standing in opposition to it. A number of writers (such as Vasyl Bykau), scientists

and other historical figures, whose commemoration would receive broad social consensus, have been displaced by the directive of the government, which is seeking to modify and renovate the memory of the war as it fades ever further into the past.

The GPW remains the central pillar on which the government builds the historical memory of the Belarusian people. The only changes made concern individual emphases. In addition to the myths of the Army and the partisans, the myth of the special services is currently being constructed, as in the eyes of the government they were no less significant as the Army, and were perhaps even more so, in terms of defence of the borders, peace and order in Belarus. The image of the state security institutions is uncompromising: they are shown as exclusively positive and heroic.

Despite the passage of many years Belarus, unlike its neighbours, remains under the influence of Moscow; it has not resolved the historical issues associated with the repression and the activities of the special services during the Soviet period. It is possible that the trends described in this article will be modified under the influence of possible changes in the Kremlin.

On June 11, 2019, Aleksandr Lukashenko appointed Yuri Karayev internal affairs minister. (Y. Karayev was born in North Ossetia, graduated from the Saratov Military Institute of the Interior Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Russian Federal Republic in 1987. In 1996, he graduated from the Frunze Military Academy in Moscow.) Will the new Belarus Interior Minister continue the policy of his predecessor? Time will tell. Nevertheless, it does not seem that the near future in Minsk will bring any radical changes that would allow for the opening of the special services' archives, any explanation of the events related to Kurapaty, the vetting proceedings or the liquidation of the KGB. Nor is it likely that academic conferences and public consultations will be officially organised which would allow a wider group of Belarus's citizens to express itself in terms of changes in street names or the construction of new monuments. The impunity of the militia and the KGB, the strong social position of these structures, and the privileges they receive from the government today are also reinforced

at the level of symbolic commemorative actions. Through the expansion of the “web of memories” around the militia and special services (notably by building aforementioned monuments), the government is introducing new elements into the urban landscape which are associated with the cult of violence and the fight against the “internal enemy”. It seems relevant that one important characteristic of most of the monuments is their martyrdom: in the government’s eyes, the KGB and militia officers are constantly fighting, suffering and dying in defence of the Belarusian state and society. In my opinion, this approach is deliberate and is being employed with the younger generations of Belarusians in mind, in order to gradually consolidate in their awareness the historical narrative of the uniformed services discussed herein. To a degree this fits in with the view of the Belarusian researcher Aleksei Bratochkin, who believes that the years 2003–2016 can be seen as a period characterised by a new ideological strategy of the government, “based on the regime’s own story, and not just in reference to Soviet history (creating its own »places of memory«)” (Bratochkin 2016b). The more these memorials (in the material sense) continue to appear in different parts of the country, the easier and more natural it will be for young people to get used to their presence, and hence to cultivate the memory of the “fighters on the invisible front”.

At the end, we must add that there is a current of opposition among the historians, journalists, social activists and opposition figures who are trying to hold discussions and resist the government by building a historical narrative which differs from the official canon. Nevertheless, we can certainly say that the Belarusian people’s attitude to the role of the militia and the KGB in history, and the politics of history of the authorities towards these structures, has not yet undergone the transformation and redefinition. It seems that to a great extent, the development of universal public opinion on this issue will depend on the scale and intensity of the commemorative practices which the government next chooses to undertake.

The case of Belarus clearly shows how much politics of history is associated with the “right” policy. Perhaps the resolution of the historical questions focused on

commemorating the victims of repression – not only during the Soviet period, but also related to the numerous abuses of power during the period of independent Belarus – will help to evoke a more real and complete image of these structures. This in turn will inspire public opinion to oppose the government's initiatives to expand the cult and the memory of the organs of repression.

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