

# Reflections on the Identity and State of Social Consciousness of Belarusians

Yury Vashkevich\*

## Abstract

*The main subject of this article is the self-concept of the Belarusians as an ethnic community, especially in the assessments of the forerunners of the Belarusian nationalist movement and Belarusian nationalists of the 1990s. In this context, the study pointed out a tendency to change the attitude of some circles of the current Belarusian elites and their changeable evaluations of situations of civil society in their country as well as Belarusianness in the conditions of state sovereignty. The paper also discusses the reasons of the failure of the nationalist movement and factors impacting on the Belarusian inclinations and attitudes. The most distinctive features of the present-day Belarusian identity were also distinguished. Referring to sociological studies and opinions of experts, the author sought to distinguish values that determine feelings and attitudes prevailing in the contemporary Belarusian society. He emphasized that the transformation is taking place in its peculiar way, in the state of diversification impeding consolidation, and practically without a uniting or integrating national factor needed for the development of mechanisms of democratic society and international integration.*

**Key words:** Belarusians, community, identity, nation, power, state

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\* Belarussian Collegium; j.koliber@hotmail.ru

During the 13th East European Summer School in 2003 organized by the University of Warsaw and dedicated to the history and contemporaneity the inaugural lecture of the Lithuanian president Valdas Adamkus read: 'Lithuania, 1991–2003: From the Soviet Union to the European Union. Why Did It Succeed?' While the former chair of the Supreme Council of Belarus Stanislav Shushkevich titled his lecture: 'Belarus, 1991–2003: Why Did it Fail?' Both the titles sound very symbolically.

On the rising tide of reawakening of the 90s of the past century, the Belarusian national activists was making bold actions of rebuilding their nation from the remaining ruins of the past Soviet Empire. The processes of state-building in the neighbouring Baltic countries usually served as a model for them, especially Estonia and Lithuania, in spite of the fact that Belarus was incomparably less prepared for independence in that time.

The elation over the unenviably looming liberation from the fetters of communist captivity and a quite real prospect for building own independent state was really uplifting, on the other hand, it conduced to an idealized perception of Belarusian reality. The then Belarusian activists considered ten years of state-building work as sufficient to make the national consciousness of Belarusians adopt a distinctively national form. It was generally expressed that the collapse of the unitary Soviet Union would assuredly narrow the social and political resources of Russification conducted by Moscow officers and the local nomenklatura and would lay the ground for the 'global rebirth of the nation' (Уліцёнак: 286, 299; Кохан: 33) Once, spiritual fathers of Belarusian patriotism also reasoned alike. Belarusians were thought to have retained their intrinsic character and be granted the indisputable right of nation to self-determination. They accepted an optimistic assumption that the national consciousness of Belarusians had been arousing fast enough to persuade all the prodigal sons to return to the bosom of the homeland and the revived Belarusian nation was demonstrating more and more will of national integrity with their own country (Доўнар-Запольскі 1994: 21; Смоліч 1993: 124; Власт 1991: 107).

A picture of benign, tolerant and composed Belarusian being nurtured by the forerunners of the Belarusian reawakening at the beginning of the 20th century and recreated by their continuators at the end of that century considerably affected the formed later idealized self-image of Belarusians as people endowed with sublime romantic moral principles. The hallmarks of Belarusians which occurred in the concepts of Belarusians historians and activists were coupled with a created by them myth of state and nation. Thence, real or imagined traits of the fellow countrymen were accentuated with the emphasis on their uniqueness. In their work, Belarusians appeared as a nation of gifted people priding themselves on their language, nationality,

history and homeland (Ласцоўскі 1991: 28–29). The character of Belarusians was presented as earnest, restrained and good willing and self-possessed. Their being thrifty and hardworking was also emphasised. A Belarusian is understanding and forgiving for the wrongdoer and revenge is completely alien to his/her nature. A sense of religious zealotry and chauvinism are unprecedented thereby he/she lives in harmony with neighbours of different nationality and denomination. Belarusians were considered to find violence repulsive and it ran in the nation (Смоліч: 134–136; ЦВІКЕВИЧ 1919: 27).

In 1991, the leader of the Belarusian Popular Front Zianon Pazniak described his nation in the following words: ‘the Belorussian nation is essentially clear and unusually bright. To the best of my knowledge and belief, there is not another nation alike in this world...’ (Уліцёнак: 296). Then, Belarusian researchers and political commentators pointed out that Belarusians lack such traits as aggressiveness which had not been demonstrated ‘even towards their former enemies – invaders’. According to some of them, the Belarusian nation has not lost in captivity its’ best characteristics. On the contrary, the oppression of nation confirmed Belarusians in the awareness of self-containedness and own distinctions towards other nations. Whereas deficiencies and deformities in characteristics and attitudes were often justified in terms of external factors. From 17th to 19th century it was vindicated by the onward process of Polonization; as of the second half of the 19th century – by the policy of Russification; in the 20th century – the process of Sovietization was to blame (Дубянецкі 1994: 11).

At the beginning of the 90s, description and determination of the Belarusian mentality was conducted from a domestic perspective through their own effort. The above phenomenon can be conditioned by the fact that even the immediate neighbours’ perception of the Belarusians was indistinct as a result of indeterminate self-identity of the Belarusians and its vague external manifestation. Nonetheless, the self-esteem did not clarify too much from the aspect of objective analysis of the Belarusian character since as a rule, it usually amounted to a list of positive personality traits such as trustfulness, hospitality, various abilities, diligence (Дубянецкі 1992: 199) which are characteristic for describing of every nation.

The present day advocates of reforms and building of nation state have not allowed for a yet important circumstance. The Belarusian society was not homogenous and consolidated as the societies of the Baltic states on which the Belarusian nationalists modelled themselves. Thence, the transformations in Belarus occurred in a completely different way, virtually, without the contribution of strongly uniting and merging national factor. Belarus as a state and nation was very divergent with respect to

active political options the representatives of which found themselves in the state of permanent hostility literally bursting out and dividing the Belarusian society through confrontations of sections representing not only disparate views and interests (often diametrically opposed), but also different values.

Regarding the national identity, the Belarusian society divided into two uneven parts. Nationally aware Belarusians accounted for one fourth of the population who clearly declared their national status of the Belarusian nation which possesses own interests and a national state (data collected on the basis of analysis of results of voting and referenda). Indifferent people in terms of nationality comprised the remaining part of the population. They considered themselves Belarusians by descent and cultivated some of the local customs but they forget completely about their national roots and historic continuity. They were rather 'indigenous' Russian speakers who identified with the place of residence but not with the whole nation and state the possession of which was imperceptible in terms of value. Actually, a sort of two nations existed within one ethnic community. The Belarusians who cherished their language, culture and traditions of ancestors accounted for the minority of the population; and the quasi-Belarusian – a Russian speaking collection of people who lost their Belarusian character but retained a sense of belonging to a certain territory and with a fuzzy notion of own historical origins. According to the 2009 census, only 53 per cent of the population of the country considered Belarusian as their mother tongue and only 23 per cent of them used it in every day conversation. The results of survey carried out in that year by an independent entity – 'NOVAK' Laboratory of Axiometrical Research revealed more pessimistic results: only 38 per cent of the population consider Belarusian as their native language, while only 12 per cent speak Belarusian in everyday conversation (Сіліцкі 2011: 12).

In such conditions, proponents of the national idea had no chance to obtain massive support or to achieve their political goals. Material and economic factors have been always affecting the Belarusians' attitude more than national and social factors which have remained historically determined characteristics of the Belarusian population: Prosperity has always been more important for Belarusians than freedom and independence. Social slogans referring to material conditions of life have always been more popular among Belarusians than national banners. Therefore, the first actions and movements of the epoch of forming of modern nation in the 20th as the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 and activities of the Belarusian Social Democratic Assembly in the 20s in the interwar Poland were conducted under the banner of quite mundane slogans. Most of the population of Belarus were not ready to carry the burden of the costs of national independence in the form of system transformation

and provisional decline in living standards on the contrary to Poles and populations of the Baltic states who could do that. Extrapolating own conception of the society to the Belarusian society, the activists of the Belarusian national reawakening and the moderately nationalist Belarusian Popular Front in particular (BFL) overestimated the level of social support for their initiatives which dwindled as the Soviet economy was fragmenting and the living standards of the population were decreasing.

The ideology of BFL rested on the assumption of the ethnicity of nation. The issue of language was more and more associated with the problems of sovereignty and national development of Belarus therefore the issue was bestowed a distinct political complexion. Nevertheless, this vision was divergent with the view of the world of the population inhabiting the real Belarus. Appropriate historical perception and self-image did not correlate with the ideas promoted by the nationalists. Indeed, the initial radicalism coupled with communism was popular for some time since the apathy of the Soviet system was obvious to everybody. As the economic situation deteriorated, the social consciousness tended more and more to adopt the conviction of consumerist superiority of socialism and its egalitarian merits. On the other hand, a distinctively defined anti-Russian attitude of BFL and its overt aspiration for common 'Belarusianisation' encountered a barrier of Russified consciousness of assimilated Belarusians who comprised the majority of the population. It was not taken into consideration that the absence of cultured and consolidated national elites along with the long-lasing and systematic Russification made own history and tradition of statehood from the period of The Grand Duchy of Lithuania connecting Belarus with the European heritage sink into oblivion and substitute the national outlook with the conceptions and phantoms produced by the Soviet ideology. A considerable fraction of the population simply was not able to imagine their Belarusian image out of the Soviet context. The retaining of continuity of the symbolic tie of the new hegemonic authoritarianism power with the legacy of the USSR sufficed to take turn after the communism.

As time passed and political events developed, the Belarusian elites became aware of lack of civil society and realized more markedly how poorly educated people of that collections are in terms of modern nation. One of the first who noticed that was the classic of the Belarusian literature – Wasil Bykau. 'The present population of Belarus is a rather manipulated electorate than a nation', the writer considered. 'For the time being, only an ethnical substratum exists and only after some time a nation can emerge from it.' He expressed pessimism about the possibilities of national reawakening noting that he said that the favourable opportunities at the beginning of the 90 were spoiled. Bykau explained the reason of it as lack of political will of

Belarusians and reluctance to survive as a separate nation (Дашук 2005: 3; В. Тапас 2007: 477). The opinion of the famous writer is endorsed by other national activists who admit that Belarusians has not become a nation in the sense of terminology heretofore, and the attempt of nation-building stuck halfway through the process. A system of social structures – independent of the government – has not been established yet. A process of forming of civil groups capable not only to articulate but protect their interests is still in the embryonic phase. All social initiatives are obstructed by the government which is obsolete in form and functions according to the Soviet formula (Хадька 2011: 4; Беларусь 2006: 134; Геннадий Грушевой 2012: 24; Борщевский 2008: 7). 'Belarusians have not realized yet their value as a nation, the people'. A Belarusian poet and social activist Hienadz Burakin says, 'They have not realized the necessity of existence of some ideas: the need of own nation – state, the need of own national life which encapsulate respect for the history, the mother tongue, the need of building of democratic institutions, etc.' (Беларусь 2006: 129–130). 'The national identity of Belarusians has not formed yet, as some Belarusian politicians, political scientists and sociologists consider. Currently, the process of forming is taking place whereas the project of the state-building and nation-creating have not been accomplished since the decision had not been made neither at the level of awareness of national interests, nor in terms of geopolitical decision. They also consider that the based on the principle of ethnicity Belarusian identity has no distinctive prospect and is rather of civil, social and political than ethnic character (Лукашук 2012: 5; Беларусь 2006: 128, 133, 138, 140; Алексиевич 2006: 23).

For the decisive majority of the population of Belarus the problem of freedom and civil liberties did not exist, as it may have been alike in the whole USSR. Having lived for generations in captivity they did not have inkling of such values. The totalitarian character of the country was not perceived as a negative life hindering value. Therefore, for this population, the change of the system was deterioration of living standards which always takes place in the course of transformation.

The inhabitants of Belarus do not discern the improvement of their existence in achieving democracy, freedom and a market economy which they do not have inkling of, but in the rearrangement of power because the issue of authority has always been of absolute priority in the totalitarian societies. An ex-candidate in the Belarusian presidential election in 2010 – Uladzimir Niaklajeu contends that attempts were made to rally the people under the banners of human rights or democracy which are real values for people in the West but do not constitute any value for the population of Belarus. For the present and former generations, those values simply have not been accounted for on a daily basis. It impossible to compare living with human rights and

without them. In his opinion, the majority of citizens simply do not understand the way in which human rights civil liberties and democracy can affect their standards of living as they do not understand what are those values they do not find it necessary to strive for them (Некляев 2011: 6).

Some pessimistic assessments seem to be borne out by the results of sociological research. Mass protests in Minsk in 2006 were accepted by a mere 20 per cent of the respondents, while 45.9 per cent of them demonstrated a negative attitude toward the action. Roughly 60 per cent of the researched considered the situation in Belarus as developing appropriately (Класкоўскі 2006: 24). They perceived their participation in protest as meaningless and leading to undesirable confrontations with the authorities.

Surveys conducted at the beginning of 2007 indicated that almost half of the Belarusians took no heed of the possible loss of own identity and traditional culture (Ўюфэ 2007: 221). Surveys of the Belarusian Independent Institute of Social-Economic and Political Research (NISEPI) revealed that problems as infringement of human right, social divisions, risk of loss of national independence and international isolation have not attracted considerable attention for years. These values are not priorities for Belarusians and strongly yield their importance to fears and anxieties concerning the possible loss of the achieved living standards. However, over the course of time the national independence is becoming more and more important value for a bigger number of people. In 2004 when people were asked: 'What is more important – improvement of the Belarusian economy or independence?' roughly 74 per cent of them pointed to the economy while only 19.2 per cent opted for independence. In 2007, 59.4 per cent of respondents pointed to 'better economy' while 32.2 per cent preferred 'independence' (Новости 2007: 18). Surveys of several years do not indicate it to be a steady tendency and the majority of Belarusians live immersed in the world of everyday problems while the political issues including independence are on the sidelines of their interests and concerns. When asked: 'What problems are you concerned about the most?' The following answers were given: the lack of possibility of making provision to children for the future – 45.5 per cent; the shortage of currencies at exchange bureaus – 38.6 per cent; the price of fuel – 28.7 per cent; the risk of job loss – 27.1 per cent; the possible change of situation in the country – 14.6 per cent; the level of corruption – 13.4 per cent; the possible loss of the Belarusian independence – 12.2 per cent (ibidem: 5). An absolute priority of concerns for themselves and their relatives is linked consecutively with a desire of transferring of all care over the people to the government which results in citizens' alienation from the civil life in consequence. Belarusians markedly lack understanding of civil solidarity which is indispensable

for common collective actions. According to the chairman of the non-governmental organisation – the Association of Entrepreneurs – *Perspektyva* Anatol Shumchanka, the lack of national identity and authentic patriotism as well as the people's attention focused only on the issues of everyday living and deliberate moving aside from the politics brought the country to the verge of collapse. 'People simply do not care who pays their wages – it might be Alyksandr Lukashenka or it might be Medvedev with Putin', Shumchanka concluded (Шумченко 2010: 3).

Experts question whether in case of risk of loss of independence the absolute majority of Belarusian would fight to save it. They are rather prone to protect their social postulate than to fight for abstract and incomprehensible sovereignty which is the issue of lesser importance. It can be predicted in all likelihood that in the near future, Belarusians will not accept the idea of nation as proposed by its staunchest advocates and activists of the Belarusian Popular Front. The majority of the population is convinced, although they do not voice their beliefs, that Belarus is the western extension of Russia and the traditional attitude of Belarusians toward their eastern neighbour is not based on national feelings and cold calculations which stems from the Belarusian *raison d'état* but on common ideological values and vicarious sentiments.

The above-mentioned opinions are not unequivocally negative which may reflect some disappointment resulting from the experience of building of independent state. They also contain a lot of unbiased assessment. Most of all, they are voiced by Belarusian themselves – representatives of elites – concerned about the vicissitudes of their fatherland. Those reflections were made from the perspective of 15–20 years of existence of the independent Belarusian state, hence they were based on the experience of over ten years of functioning of the independent public and state of Belarus. In addition, they are forcibly confirmed by fairly old and already voiced arguments of researchers and international observers (see in particular: Radzik 1997: 9–72; Radzik 2005: 149–171; Radzik 2008: 330–364) general meaning of which can be grasped succinctly: one of the primary causes of the social crisis in Belarus was indistinct national identity of its population. The collapse of the USSR, and the acquisition of independence by the Republic of Belarus were not furthered adequately by the loyalty of citizens of the just established country. This way of thinking is largely applied to explain the lack of sense of community and cooperative actions which are indispensable in the process of the social transformation. Difficulties of own national identity and indistinct image of the population of the country hinder both international integration of the country and forming of the local mechanisms of democratic society.



Cultural activities of the forerunners of the Belarusian cultural revival at the end of 19th and political events of the 20th century provided impetus for the consolidation of Belarusians as an ethnic community, however a modern nation has not emerged yet. The process of accomplishment of the Belarusian nationhood has not been completed to the present day. Only a new interim variant of identity can be spoken of as formed in the time of independence and embodying some of the old and new values which were acquired in conditions of independent state. Nevertheless, the ongoing process does not gather momentum and is not linked with ethnicity. Therefore, the present Belarusian identity is national in principle. It has been forming to the extent of larger social group and mainly as a regional identity the features of which are attachments to a certain territory and national status. In the self-image of Belarusians the most frequently appearing feature is the reference to own country expressed as local bond but rather out of the civil context. In this way, we can talk about the continued tradition of invoking the territorial principle of this community. Whereas the reflections on own identity pertaining to the origin of Belarusian and speaking in the mother tongue are of peripheral significance (Waszczyńska 2005: 185).

Nowadays, only one fourth of the population speaks in the vernacular fluently. Moreover, the dichotomy of ethnic identity proliferates, in other words the number of people considering themselves both Belarusians and Russian increases<sup>1</sup>. According to the sociological surveys from 2008, 46.6 per cent of Belarusians accepted their national consciousness to different extents: 'I am a Russian' (Науменко 2012: 135–136, 153). The data cited in this publication are based on: the ethno and psychological researches conducted in 2004 and 2008; canvasses carried out by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus (NANB) in 2000, 2002, 2006, 2007 and 2008.

It is no wonder that only 5.8 per cent of Belarusians consider themselves Europeans to the maximum extent, while 42 per cent are not aware of their European affiliation. More than half of the population still consider themselves the Soviet people to a greater or lesser degree (ibidem: 118, 200). It is a particularly disconcerting fact for the Belarusian people that the components of identity such as national consciousness, culture, citizenship are the most appropriate for Belarusians with primary and secondary education, while they are not common among people with

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<sup>1</sup> Data acquired as a result of nationwide survey conducted by a private Belarusian independent service specialized in sociological research – NOVAK Laboratory in 2011, <http://svaboda.org/content/article/24594434.html> (accessed on 27 May 2012).

higher education (*ibidem*: 105). It may implicitly attest to the ongoing formation of the national elites which always consist of the most open minded classes of the society.

In all likelihood, the consequences of the incurring challenge may end in a certain fraction of the population opting for the Russian model of modernisation which seems quite logical and rational with the present type of the national identity. This may be even more probable in the condition of geopolitical decisions being made by the general public when the primary values are superseded by expedient objectives and provisional interests.

The peculiarity of the Belarusian model of economic system also stems to a greater extent from the political and mental residuals. Belarus is the only post-communist European country which withdrew from the accomplishment of economic reforms launched at the beginning of the 90s. The withdrawal succeeded the moment of emerging and development of the institutions of private ownership<sup>2</sup>. The reforms were not abandoned completely, some elements were perpetuated while the whole quasi-Soviet system remained. Even formally privatized enterprises are controlled by the government in real terms, whereas the institution of private ownership in the traditional sense of the word does not exist.

Within the bidding political system in Belarus, the liberal economy does not conform to the interests of the Belarusian governing group but it may imperil them since it undermines the foundations of the monopolistic power. Therefore, the Belarusian economy resembles the Soviet system in terms of the structure which may be exemplified by limited capacity of free market, subsidizing of unprofitable enterprises, partial national regulation of prices and planning of production in the form of 'forecast rates' which are the poor substitutes for 5 year plans of the communist epoch. The implementation of the market system is not anticipated in the immediate future. This results from the cardinal policy document of the country – the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Republic of Belarus for the period to 2020 which assumes that the Belarusian model of 'socially oriented economy' is supposed to be the 'economy of effective government interventions' in its' final form<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Anyway, it is worth to emphasise that the conception of the transformation took place in an idiosyncratic man-ner. In 1991, privatization and forming of the market was initiated mostly on the basis of collective forms of ownership. An attempt to force economy development by means of merging principles of socialism and free market resulted in unbelievable corruption. Real fortunes were made by dint of pricing gaps in domestic and foreign trade. Public property passed without any control into its' administrators' hands.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.iseu.by/m/12\\_100229\\_1\\_67490.pdf](http://www.iseu.by/m/12_100229_1_67490.pdf) (accessed on 8 May 2014).

The gradual restoration of command system in the economics of Belarus after 1994 did not result from the lack of ideas for an effective economy. Narrow collective interests and the people's mentality hindered the process.

At the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Belarusian elites had no impact on the national policy. The whole of power was skilfully taken over or even persevered by the communist nomenklatura. A handful of reformers were admitted to power but their proposals were not taken into consideration due to the collision of interests of the authority. This formation was raised in the condition of permanent conflict between the East and the West hitherto kept in captivity of the past epoch departed ideas full of references to the purported incessant class war, the rich exploiting the poor, and common material equality<sup>4</sup>. By the way, the wealth and income differences among Belarusian are relatively slight. In 2013 the average income of the richest 10 per cent of the population was about 5.9 times that of the poorest 10 per cent (whereas in Russian the index was 16.4 times, in Armenia – 15.9 times, Moldova – 15.2 times) (*Разница* 2014: 10).

The Belarusian officials make a distinctive division between the ideas of 'government' and 'citizens' in their statements. Such utterances as: 'Not only in the interest of the authority but of the people as well' are not deemed as unreasonable. In other words, the group in power does not treat the civic community as a social partner. All independent social initiative is reputed to be sinister in the eyes of power, while the representatives of the opposition are deemed as 'the fifth column'. People of dissimilar views are ranked to an adverse group. Symptoms of pluralism, self-government and self-reliance are construed as infringement of centralism associated solely with law and order<sup>5</sup>. The logic of such reasoning leads definitely to the conclusion and belief that any dissent from the stringent centralism results in chaos and disorder. Such reasoning is being encapsulated in a simple formula: the more centralism and top-down commanding, the more order. As numerous surveys

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<sup>4</sup> A former prime minister of Belarus recollected his appointment to the post: 'In all likelihood, Lukashenka's inclination for the past system prevailed over the decision. I had worked for four years in the economic department of the Central Committee... While discussing government routine he often asked me: 'What the Central Committee would do?' It goes without saying that I was appointed as minister merely by virtue of my experience in the Central Committee.

<sup>5</sup> Creation of internal enemies was essential for the dictatorship. Firstly, in Belarus this role was played by the nationalist oriented opposition. Subsequently, national minorities were subjected to persecution which is borne out by the liquidation of the Union of Poles in Belarus in 2005 and recognition of local Poles as 'the fifth column of the West' what might have been made with the involvement of Russian advisers who had felt the bitterness of failure year before – on the Ukrainian Orange Revolution when they had failed to intimidate the people by means of the Polish minority.

say, the majority of Belarusians are aware of the defectiveness and questionable legitimacy of the regime, however, they are reconciled to its existence because they are afraid of the situation getting worse. They also do not see any possibility of making changes and cannot point to any power capable of making such changes. (Дубнов 2012: 255). People often do not retain in memory information on possible alternatives to the present government and as a general rule, they confidently appraise the prevailing interpretation of events presented by the national mass media which influence them to a greater or lesser extent.

It is necessary to take account of the fact that Belarusians have been striving to live out in conditions affected by the maladministration of the economy of the country which has been in the state of permanent danger. In this situation, the collective way of decision making enacted by collegial bodies does not deserve confidence of the people. Whereas the personified power is accepted as for the president with a vast mandate to making fast and commonly comprehensible decisions. While making a choice between 'good law' and 'good managers', people decidedly prefer the managers<sup>6</sup>.

Nowadays, the government in Belarus is occupied with everything, prevails everywhere and subjugates the private sector by impairing their efficiency. Since it endeavours to act as an entrepreneur its officials actually act as businessmen. The concentration of ownership and the ruling nomenklatura occurs in the quasi-commercial conditions and which result in the emergence of the new class which can be defined as 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie' In an apt comment of a well-known Belarusian columnist: 'The Republic of Belarus of Lukashenka functions as a financial-cum-industrial group' (Дынько 2006: 6). It is no accident that the apparatus of officers hinders the development of domestic business. The president of the Belarusian association of entrepreneurs contends that foreigners may have difficulties in comprehension of unsympathetic attitude of some of the officers towards the local businessmen: 'it can be simply explained,' he says, 'we are competitions for officials. An official in Belarus is one of a kind – a sort of businessman. He has a vested interest in undertaking certain projects out of which only those generating instant and tangible profits are chosen' (Шумченко 2011: 2).

Such policy is intrinsically nothing else but an updated element of traditional peasant world view oriented towards the merits of own local world in juxtaposition

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<sup>6</sup> In response to the question: What is more important for Belarus, good law or good managers? 64.2 per cent opted for the good managers, while 31.9 opted for the good law 3.9 per cent did not give the answer, 'Новости НИСЭПИ' 2014: 9.

with all other world; and bias in the favour of own 'unique' path with assimilated in the times of the USSR absolutes and bondless capacities of the government.

The origin of staunch traditionalism among ordinary people should be sought in the history of their country. The turbulent industrial and urban advancement of Belarus took place at the 50s and 60s of the past century. Belarusians' prosperity outpaced the affluence of the inhabitants of the other republics of the Soviet Unions. Sizeable transfers of the population from the countryside to the cities improved living standards of a substantial number of inhabitants of the republic which determined a positive attitude toward the effectual social system.

One of the severe hindrances obstructing the reforms intended to improve living standards is lack of sociological and psychological readiness of some fraction of the Belarusian population for functioning in market conditions. After more than twenty years of independence the Belarusian population can in no way define their position with regard to the future economic system. When asked a question formulated in a lingo comprehensible for Soviet-borne people: Which system is more acceptable for Belarus, capitalism or socialism? 38,8 per cent of the interviewees opted for 'capitalism' and 39,9 per cent for 'socialism' 21,8 gave no answer (Новости 2014: 5, 9).

According to the research conducted by the Research Centre of the Institute for Privatization and Management (Minsk) and CASE – Center for Social and Economic Research (Warsaw), the number of advocates of government intervention in the economy is bigger than the number of supporters of its reformation. In general, Belarusians entirely reject common privatisation of the national enterprises and object to private ownership of land. They do not want a reform of banking system either. Over 40 per cent of them deem acquisition of Belarusian enterprises by foreigners to be unacceptable, which can be ascribed to poor level of economic literacy and consequences of exposure to the massive propaganda invested by the regime. According to the indications of the same research, the number of the graduated predominates in the group of market economy supporters. In contrast to the them, the group of paternalists comprise overwhelmingly of basically educated people. The factor of age is also relevant. Among the rejecting the reforms, pensioners prevail (Кудрыцкі 2008: 9, 10–11).

The pejorative perception of private ownership and commercial activities is determined by the enduring Soviet period in which social selflessness, constrained altruism and negative attitude toward actions of commercial nature are cherished, while private ownership of land was deemed as a sacrilege. It is also worth to mention that since the time of the Soviet Union, the people have been convicted that the authority can deprive everyone of everything in every time it wants, which additionally

dispossesses them of spurs to unassisted actions. They prefer the 'continuation of socialism' because they do not want to and cannot live in the conditions of market competition. They also do not notice the causative relation of the effectual political system, the model of economy and the living standards of the people, since the ability of individual thinking has not become a common phenomenon. Belarusian does not set great store by facts because he or she has not got a habit of their analysis and appraisal. In the tradition of Eastern Europe, words count more than their meaning which is not commonly deliberated over. Consequently, they shun watching reality substituting it with a world of make-believe. Therefore, it is hard to enlist Belarusians by means of a national political program or to convince them to specific ideas. On the other hand, their false hopes can be easily resuscitated and a new myth propagated.

The next relevant obstacle of the process of system transformation is low level of necessities of life of Belarusians. The research data testifies that about half of the respondents said that in case of occurrence of severe life problems involving strenuous efforts they opt for the decrease of own necessities such food supply, leisure, medical services; 15 per cent of the respondents prefer to do nothing i.e., passive observation of the eventual deterioration of their living standards. Another data indicates that almost half of the questioned would prefer to live on a lower standard of living but with regulated remuneration and not being put in danger of taking individual decisions rather than show initiative and be affluent. By contrast, almost 30 per cent of the interviewees did not give any answer which attests to lack of own mind about important life issue (Титоренко 2006: 71).

The mentality and system of values of the people moulded this way for decades succumb to changes with difficulty and need the alternation of generations. The results of such conditions are not much comforting. A young, well-educated and entrepreneurial fraction of the nation becomes hostages of the effectual system. The eventuality of introduction of system changes being made by the regime itself is close to the impossible. It reacts only to strong external actions. Nevertheless, it is worth to take into account that Belarus constitutes a mere little island in the ocean of surrounding emerging market economies. This development is of objective character thereby all barriers separating this 'grey economy' will disappear sooner or later. The profiles of the economies of the partner countries of Belarus will force the authority of the state to change the economic course toward implementation of market mechanisms. However it needs to be taken into account that blind imitation of reforms accomplished in Central and Eastern Europe can result in failure in case of Belarus. The intricacy of Belarus rests on its development demanding changes deeper than other countries with transitional economy – including the

post-Soviet states. Simultaneously, Belarus will be faced with, as other Central and Eastern Europe countries were earlier, the problem of choice of method of market economy development: The decision whether it will be a liberal western style or Byzantine- Muscovite style will to a greater extent determine not only political, but developmental future of the state as well. Thus far, a mock-up state has been created in Belarus in order to serve the authoritarian emperor and his surroundings' interests. Paradoxically, the dictatorship is the cardinal, if not the only one, link merging this quite ephemeral statehood bereft of the backbone of the state and traditions of independence.

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