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**European Belarus versus State Ideology:  
Construction of the Nation  
in the Belarusian Political Discourses**

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## **European Belarus versus State Ideology: Construction of the Nation in the Belarusian Political Discourses**

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As P. Bourdieu noted, in the democracies with widespread media access political action became the means of public struggles for the power of definition of the ‘vision and division’ of a society<sup>1</sup>. Articulation of a political project, which implies certain organization of society and tends to mobilize public support, involves certain definition of the ideological position of the collective actor in the name of which the project is formulated<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the existence of a collective political actor depends on the ability of its representatives to launch and preserve hegemony of definition in the public discourse, a ‘nodal point’ that puts different problems of a given social reality in certain meaningful perspective<sup>3</sup>. As Ruth Wodak suggests, discursive struggles aiming at the establishment of such a ‘nodal point’ usually involve a re-definition of national identity and exploit powerful discursive configurations like liberalism or socialism<sup>4</sup>.

For the study of the struggles for the definition of the political identity of major “collective actor” of the Belarusian political sphere – “Belarusian nation” - the concept of ‘discursive strategies’ can be used<sup>5</sup>. This concept designates the strategic application of language that has political and ideological implications. These implications can be analysed by carrying up the representation of object and actors – Belarus and Belarusians, what features are fore-grounded or backgrounded, to what/whom and how certain they are referred and appointed. Studying the application of these discursive-strategic means in the political discourses, one can see how different political actors articulate their ideas that perpetuate, transform, or destroy the state of the Belarusian people’s political identity backed by a certain concept of the national idea.<sup>6</sup>

Programmes, articles and public presentations of Belarusian opposition politicians have been used as the basic material for the analysis of the political discourse of the alternative

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<sup>1</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Political Field, the Social Science Field, and the Journalistic Field*, in Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field, ed. by R. Benson and E. Neveu, Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, 2005, pp. 29–47.

<sup>2</sup> Laclau, Ernesto and Mouffe, Chantalle, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London: Verso, 2001/1985.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> Wodak, Ruth, *Fragmented Identities: Redefining and recontextualising national identity*, in *Politics as text and talk: Analytic approaches to political discourse. Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture*, ed. by P. Chilton and C. Schaffner, Amsterdam, Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 2002, pp. 143–170.

<sup>5</sup> Wodak, Ruth: *The discourse-historical approach*, in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. by R. Wodak and M. Meyer, London: Sage, 2001, pp. 63–94.

<sup>6</sup> Wodak, Ruth: *Fragmented Identities: Redefining and recontextualising national identity*, pp. 143–170.

Belarusianness, as well as publications of political analysts. Remarkably, the alternative Belarusianness does not exist as a single concept like the one made by the official ideology. One can speak of the alternative discourses of Belarusianness which breaks down into many images of potentially “different Belarus”. Some authors see alternative Belarusianness in Europe, others see it at the meeting point of civilizations, still others consider it a neutral and self-sufficient country. They are united by the renunciation of the Russian vector of the Belarusian idea cultivated by the authorities and a consequent denial of the national status of the existing Belarusian state. In practice, the two alternative concepts of Belarusianness not only do not contradict each other, but often unite in their strive against the pro-Russianness dominating official culture and politics. To realize the idea of Belarus as a “cultural bridge” between Russia and the West it, first, has to move from Russia towards Europe to reach neutrality. Thus, “Europe”, becomes a symbol of the Belarusian alternative anyway.

### **“Belarus is Europe”**

The articulation of the European idea of Belarusianness is based on a number of principles. First, it is a liberal democratic interpretation of the nation as such. It means that the “nation” as a phenomenon, including the Belarusian one, can be realized only under a definite state structure. A. Suzdaltsev writes in his article “The Belarusian national state”: “the present Republic of Belarus cannot be considered a national state of the Belarusian people... as only a state with a democratic state and political regimes can be called “national”<sup>7</sup>. S. Bagdankevich<sup>8</sup> gives a similar formulation of the national idea. He includes “the European political idea” into the content of Belarusianness. “We are convinced that the essence of the Belarusian national idea consists in the consolidation of complete sovereignty of the state and the right of our people to manage out own destiny, in the revival of its moral and spiritual formations, in the flourishing of national culture, in the formation of a prosperous civil society and a democratic rule-of-law state, with its ultimate aim to provide citizens with rights and liberties as well as a worthy level of life”<sup>9</sup>. The main hindrance in realization of this national idea is the incumbent authorities who tear Belarus away from the West and bring it to the East. “The Lukashenka’s socio-economic realities of Belarus are more pertaining to the Asiatic model production based on the predominant administration power and its

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<sup>7</sup> Suzdalcev A., Belorusskoe nacionalnoe gosudarstvo, Proekt “Nashe Mnienie”, 18 of April, 2005, <http://www.nmnby.org/pub/180405/nation.html> .

<sup>8</sup> The chief of Belarusian National Bank in 1991-1995, currently the Head of United Civic party.

<sup>9</sup> Bogdankievich S., Belasuskaya nacionalnaya idea, in Open society, Informacionno analiticheskij bulleten, 1999, N1(6); <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/1.99/2.html>

inseparability with property, on the economic and political dominion of bureaucracy”<sup>10</sup>. In this manner, the genuine European idea of Belarusianness is sublimed by the Asiatic formula of power. Like S. Bogdankevich, the majority of the political opposition authors proclaim liberal and democratic values as a basis of the national Belarussian development while opposing it to the current regime. The basic thesis of this approach is reduced to the idea that a nation cannot exist outside and without liberal democracy that is why Belarussians have to replace the political system of power in the country in order to start a new reference of point of its existence as a nation. Adherents of this approach work in the sphere of political declaration and build their argumentation on analogy with European countries, their major problem is installation of Belarus into this context.

A far more demonstrable and consistent seems another source of “European Belarusianness” that is built on the revival of the European past. In this context the Belarussian nation is considered a nation based on European democratic values, not due to the category of nation in general, but because such is the Belarussian tradition. One of the programme directions of the Belarussian People’s Front is “renewal of the Belarussian cultural tradition on the basis of European moral values”, while the Europeanness and the general civilizational perspective of Belarus is provided by the Belarussian historical memory<sup>11</sup>. The Belarussian political scientist V. Rovdo writes that “from the moment of emergence of statehood on Belarussian lands in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and till the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Belarus had referred to the Western or, rather, to European civilization”<sup>12</sup>. The Western format of the Belarussian national idea is verified by pages of Belarussian history, and practically all the features of the “western” civilizational scale can be applied to Belarus or, more precisely, to its past. As if leafing the pages of Belarussian history, V. Rovdo observes on them multiple signs of Europeanness. Here belong the impact of the “classical cultural legacy” which penetrated into the territory of Belarus both from the Byzantine Empire and the Roman Empire, and development of Catholicism and Calvinism, and the separation of the Church and secular power typical for Belarus up to the moment of its corporation by the Russian Empire. The idea of law supremacy, of everyone’s submission to the single law runs through the 1588 Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Remarkably, Rovdo writes, “some Articles of the Statute, for instance, death penalty for homicide of common people, presumption of innocence,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Pragrama Gramadskaga ab’adnania BNF «Adradzenie”, <http://pbnf.org>

<sup>12</sup> Rovdo V., Zapad est Zapad, Vostok est... ili Mogut li oshibatsia “krupniejschie politologi sovremennosti”? in Belorusy I Rynok, 26 July - 2 August 2004

limitation of serfdom, declaration of religious tolerance, exceeded the codes of law of the Western European states of the time”<sup>13</sup>. Medieval Belarus enjoyed developed social pluralism, and in this respect the country was not inferior to Western Europe. When concluding his historical review V. Rovdo writes, “on the balance of Belarusian history there are nine centuries of European history on the one hand, and two centuries of “Asianness” on the other hand”<sup>14</sup>, and that is why for Belarus the development of national self-consciousness means the revival of the very European tradition that underlie contemporary democracy on the West”<sup>15</sup>.

Many reputable members of Belarusian elite share this orientation of the Belarusian national idea. Intellectual and politician Yu. Khadyka writes, “I think in today’s Belarus there is no real choice. In the conditions of a tense intercivilizational conflict, we have just one way – to the West, to Europe, that of where our legitimate place has been since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The two latest centuries, the hardest for Belarusian independence, have only tempered the basic features of the national character... In other words, Belarusians are Europeans by their mentality. We have to hurry up in order to really join European civilization”<sup>16</sup>. Writer V. Arlov calls Belarus “an outpost of the Enlightenment era”, which was as irrelevant to Russia as the Reformation and the Counterreformation. As he put it, Belarus in all times has found itself “in the sphere of European history and European cultural values”<sup>17</sup>. Political activist A. Antsipenka also writes that Belarusianness connected the country with old Europe as long ago as in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL’s) time. In this manner, the way to Europe today is just a way back home. In his opinion Belarus is “a miniature model of Europe”<sup>18</sup>. In this context the accentuation of Europeanness means that Belarusians are a nation among many others, whose formation has undergone all the stages of “nation-building” in Europe. Writer and philosopher V. Akudovich says that Belarusians have always been within the same ideologeme of the Nation as all the other peoples. The phenomenon of “homo national” displaced “homo religious” as a result of radical modernization process, and this change is a universal cultural, even civilizational factor. “That is why it is strange to hear about “old” and “young” nations, namely in the historical respect, we, let

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Khadyka Yu., Eurapejskiya kankstyy belaruskaga mentalitetuin, (in Belarusian) in Filamaty 4(7), 2003; <http://kamunikat.net.iig.pl/www/czasopisy/filamaty/07/04.htm>

<sup>17</sup> Arlou U., U palone histarychnych mifau, in Golas Radzimy 15 of June, 1995, pp. 3, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Antsipenka A., Eurapejskast’ I hryscianskaya idea belaruskasci, in Belarusika. Albaruthenica. Vol. 2. Minsk, 1992, p. 259.

us say, and Germans can be considered as siblings born at a year's interval"<sup>19</sup>. Remarkably, even "the most difficult issue" of Belarusian national consciousness – russification and the abandonment of the Belarusian language is viewed here in the context of the European analogy: "The state of the national language which may seem peculiar from the standpoint of standard nation-building models, is not unique on the universal background: all America speaks the language of former colonizers, in Ireland and Belgium the language of former occupants exists along with the vernaculars"<sup>20</sup>, says journalist and publicist Yu. Drakokhrust. History of Belarus, being European in its typological standards, naturally leads to its European present, i.e. to the European idea of Belarusianness. Akinchyts writes, "The Golden Age of Belarus, the 16<sup>th</sup> century show us the proper way to be taken in order for Belarus to occupy its honourable place among peoples"<sup>21</sup>. The project of Belarusianness is built on the foundation of European history, according to the principle: Belarusians are a nation just like Poles, Slovaks, Czech people. This synonymic series is opposed to the Russian – and, broader, to the pan-Slav – context of the official Belarusianness.

The retrospective formula of Belarusianness, as P. Sadouski writes, has all the ground to be European. The factological material of the Belarusian past provides wide possibilities for this. In his opinion, the founders of the Belarusian idea even insufficiently make use of the pages of their history in basing the national myths. (As an example he mentions the battle of Orsha (the victory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's troops in the battle of Orsha over Muscovy in 1514) or the participation of Belarusians in the battle of Grunwald (the battle between joint forces of the Polish Kingdom and Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Allies with Teutons). Sadouski himself, however, arrives at the conclusion on the basis of the historical legacy, not about the Europeanness of Belarusians, but about the fact that "according to a great deal of cultural and historical evidence Europe "was present" in Belarus in the era of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania"<sup>22</sup>. This presence of Europe in Belarusian history can become a basis for a nation-forming myth, however, just efforts of the national cultural intelligentsia are not sufficient, even if it is grouped into political parties.

Indeed, a strong side of the European version of Belarusianness is its historical basis. The alternative vision of history is aimed at a purposeful re-orientation of Belarusianness to the West

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<sup>19</sup> Apytanne ARCHE, Z chago na vashu dumku pachynaecca nacyanalnaya historia Belarusi I chym yana skonchycca? In ARCHE № 2 (25) 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Akin'chyc S., Zalaty Vek Belarusi, <http://txt.knihi.com/bel/zalaty.html>

<sup>22</sup> Sadouski Petra, Nacyianalnaya identychnasc': patryiatychnaya I pazytyvisckaya interpretacii (z paraunan'em roznauzrostavykh etnasau), Filamaty, № 1(8), 2004; <http://kamunikat.net.iig.pl/www/czasopisy/filamaty/08/03.htm>

and the return of the Belarusian nation to Europe. But behind “the return”, so much spoken about by the adherents of the European Belarusianness there is, in fact, a practically complete re-formation of the Belarusian nation what had been formed in a different civilizational context. This leads to a strange precedent: “European Belarus” is represented by a convincing historical projection with nevertheless weak correlations with the political and cultural present. “History” essentially remains the major, if not the sole instrument of manifestation of this version of Belarusianness. However, during the first years of independence there were all the reasons for optimism: when adopted as a state idea, the concept of European Belarus got an institutional support. In early 1990s instead of the terms “Western Rus”, “west Russian Lands” in relation to the pre-revolutionary history of Belarusians it was officially recommended to use the notions “Belarus”, “the Belarusian people”<sup>23</sup>. At this time the official historiography legalized a new view on the origin of Belarusians, “the Belarusians were viewed no longer as a branch of the nationality of “ancient Rus”, but as a Slavicised mixture of Slavic and Baltic tribes”<sup>24</sup>. This change of policy in relation to the ethnogenesis of Belarusians had a symbolic meaning. As R. Lindner writes, “The road from the myth about the “purest” East-Slavic people to the myth “Slavicised Balts” was a road to the West”<sup>25</sup>.

In 1993, in the atmosphere of general enthusiasm about the Belarusian state independence, Prime-Minister V. Kebich spoke about the necessity to give shape the new self-consciousness of Belarusians: “It is not easy for us to shape our national self-awareness with national heritage we have received, not easy to re-convince our contemporaries and successors that we have a history of our statehood... That is why any efforts, state and public initiatives, to revive our national history are so necessary and valuable”.<sup>26</sup> All these events displayed the beginning of a new epoch in the state understanding of history and an actualization of the new idea of the Belarusianness. Many had the feeling that the new time was final and that “the ruinous for the historical education of Belarusians, the unnatural imperialistic, Russia-centered direction in teaching history will be

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<sup>23</sup> Bich, M., Ab nacyanalnaj koncepcii historyi i historychnaj adukacyi u Respublicy Belarus, in Gistorychny chasopis №1, 1993, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> Zaprudnik J., In Search of National Identity, in Contemporary Belarus. p.120.

<sup>25</sup> Lindner Rainer, Nacyianal'nyja i prydvornyja historyki "lukashenkauskaj" Belarusi. Peraasensavanie Gistoryi u postsaveckaj Belarusi, (in Belarusian), in Historychny almanakh vol. 4, 2001; [http://kamunikat.fontel.net/www/czasopisy/almanach/04/04zvonku\\_lindnier.htm](http://kamunikat.fontel.net/www/czasopisy/almanach/04/04zvonku_lindnier.htm) .

<sup>26</sup> Zviazda, 23 December 1993 quoted after Zaprudnik J., In Search of National Identity in Contemporary Belarus p.120.

displaced by a different one, which is useful to its people”<sup>27</sup>. This did not take place, as already since 1995 in the historiography of Belarus there started a campaign which R. Lindner called “denationalization of the Belarusian past”<sup>28</sup>. This campaign could be more exactly called a reversion to the idea of Belarusianness internalized in the Belarusian self-awareness in the Soviet time. Devoid of institutional support and further representation in the official cultural and public sphere the idea of European Belarus appeared to be supplanted to the margins of cultural and political life.

### **Belarusians as “a nation on the bridge”**

Another version of the alternative Belarusianness actively developed by the oppositional political discourse can be conventionally signified as “a nation on the bridge”. The central premise of this understanding of Belarusianness is lack of its belonging to either the West or the East. Only on this principle of non-alignment it is possible to build the national Belarusian state according to V. Leonov, the organizer of the social movement “For a new Belarus”<sup>29</sup>. In his public lecture titled “A new Belarus: how we are going to build the Belarusian state” Leonov denies the existence of Belarusian own political national history: “Belarus has never been and today is not a national state”<sup>30</sup>. However, this lack of canonical history of a Belarusian national state in by no means a disadvantage, on the contrary, “it is our major advantage... In the upshot, history of the Belarusian national state begins today”<sup>31</sup>. The idea of state building “from scratch” enables to freely think about the future national state. The historical experience of Belarusians’ being part of different state unions had become a kind of political norm, that is why the disintegration of the USSR offered a precedent of an unusual of Belarusians state independence. In his opinion, the project of a new union with Russia, as well as the idea of Belarus’ joining the European Union prevent a true national development, as they deprive Belarusians of a national initiative: in both cases someone else will solve their destiny. As an alternative he offers the idea of a national state of Belarus as a state “in itself”, and “for itself”. Leonov proposes the following image of the Belarusian future on the European analogy – “the role of Eastern Slavic Switzerland is our national

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<sup>27</sup> Hrytskevich V., *Gistorya I mify*, Mensk, Belfrans, 1998, <http://txt.knihi.com/historyja/mify.html>

<sup>28</sup> Lindner Rainer, *Nacyianal'nyja I prydvornyya historyki "lukashenkauskaj" Belarusi*, [http://kamunikat.fontel.net/www/czasopisy/almanach/04/04zvonku\\_lindnier.htm](http://kamunikat.fontel.net/www/czasopisy/almanach/04/04zvonku_lindnier.htm)

<sup>29</sup> The conception of the political and economic system transformation is presented at the webpage of „New Belarus” Movement: <http://www.newbelarus.info>

<sup>30</sup> Leonov Vasilij, *Novaya Belarus: kak my budem stroit Beloruskoye gosudarstvo?* <http://www.newbelarus.info/index.php/1.338...0.0.0.html>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.



role and mission. We should always be a little in front, should be in eternal search. We have such potential, if you like, this is where our national idea lies”<sup>32</sup>. In Leonov’s view, the image of Switzerland designates neutrality and keeping a distance in relation to both Russia and Europe, creation of a national Belarusian state designates non-alignment, which “will enable new Belarus to be independent in its relations with both the East and the West”<sup>33</sup>. This project became a foundation of the public movement “For a new Belarus” supported by a number of oppositional politicians and economists.

Similar ideas are presented in the book, whose title speaks for itself: “Belarus: neither Europe, nor Russia. Reflections of Belarusian elites” published by Arche in 2007<sup>34</sup>. About 30 representatives of both oppositional and official elites expressed their view concerning the status of country in the world’s geopolitical landscape, and the role of Europe and Russia in the national self-perception of Belarusians. Also opinion poll, conducted among the members of Belarusian elite by the IISEPS in December 2006, shows that the idea of joining the West or the East, indeed, is not supported by Belarusian elite, the elite sees the major national interest in state independence itself.

**Table 1.** *Distribution of responses to the question “What are, in your opinion, national interests of the Republic of Belarus? ””, per cent, (not more than 3 answers)*

Variants	All the answers	Employed in State sector	Employed in non state sector
Independence, Sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus	80	90	70
Democratization of society	50	37	63
Observance of human rights	42	47	37
Increased level of life of the population	37	50	23

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Belarus: neither Europe, nor Russia. Reflections of Belarusian elites, Arche, 2007.

Integration into Europe	27	23	30
Economic reforms	27	13	40
Development of the national culture	10	10	10
Improvement of the demographic situation	8	13	3
Unification with Russia	7	13	–

*Source: the opinion poll of leaders and experts (above 60 policy-makers, media leaders, scientists and businessmen, equally representing state-run and non-state run sector) conducted by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economical and Political Studies (IISEPS) sociologists<sup>35</sup>.*

At first glance, this contradicts the world practice: small political subjects, to which Belarus can be ascribed, traditionally experience lack of internal resources to develop and assert “one’s own way”. Their successful strategies of survival, as a rule, are boiled down to the selection of a proper ally. Nevertheless, the image of Belarus without its belonging either to the East or to the West is deeply implanted in the consciousness of Belarusian elite.

One of the explanations of this phenomenon can be found in the historical experience of Belarusians. The idea of Belarusian cultural territory as a neutral one, not belonging entirely either to the West or to the East, but at the same time connected with both was formulated as far back as early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The poet and thinker Ignat Abdziralovich wrote in 1921: “Belarus since the 10<sup>th</sup> century has actually been a battlefield of the two directions of European or, rather, Aryan culture – western and eastern”<sup>36</sup>. It means that neither side has a complete power of Belarus, Belarus is not characterized by either open resistance or complete submission. “Up till our time the Belarusian people does not support either the Eastern or the Western waves; and they freely roll over its head... Fluctuation between the West and the East and lack of genuine inclination to either side is the main attribute of the Belarusian people’s history”<sup>37</sup>. In Belarusianness we can find a “mild” combination of separate features of the two opposites. As Ignat Abdziralovich writes, the

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.iiseps.org>

<sup>36</sup> Abdziralovich Ignat, *Advechnym shliakham, Dasledziny Belaruskaga svetagliadu*. Minsk, 1993, <http://pawet.narod.ru/book/philosophy/1.html>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Belarusian national idea, is based on the rejection of the two extreme, “messianic” forms of either the eastern Byzantism or the Western individualism. The former contains the idea of absolute and unified power, unification of public life, collectivism and usurping ambitions. The latter comprises fragmentation of public life when neither level of authority has real power, which leads to endless search of a compromise, often unattainable, among parties possessing equal rights. As Abdzirlovich writes, in Belarus the better aspects of the two cultural and historical types are synthetically combined on the basis of original forms of public life and culture<sup>38</sup>.

The positive aspect of the Belarusian place “in between” two civilizations is reflected in the idea of Belarusianness as a harmonious conjunction of eastern and western values. In its turn, it made some authors formulate a special Belarusian civilizational mission in late 20 century. The philosopher V. Konan, the author of numerous works devoted to the Belarusian national idea, writes: “Probably the historic mission of Belarus is in overcoming of the one sided “eastern” and “western” poles”<sup>39</sup>, “the historic destination of Belarus is to build a cultural and geopolitical “bridge” between the East and the West, between the Russian Eurasia on the one hand and Western and Central Europe on the other hand”<sup>40</sup>. On the one hand, the dependent position of Belarus within the state formations in the Middle ages and modern history has become a reason for the weakness of the national tradition. But this weakness can be interpreted as “virtuous neutrality” which has caused Belarusians’ reluctance to take this or that side of the civilizational divide.

Many political and cultural activists of the alternative Belarus see the source of Belarus’ political potential in the Belarusian ambivalence and its cultural connection with the east and west alike. G. Pranevich writes about the intermediary mission of Belarus as the sole true capital – the symbolic capital of the Belarusian state. “...not only by our tractors, potash fertilizers, the intellectual and trained work-force can we attract and interest our Slavic and Baltic neighbours, all Europeans, but first of all by the prospect of building in the centre of Europe of a reliable and durable bridge from the West to the East and from the North to the South, by the unique national mentality, the talent to reconcile, unite and bring together individuals, peoples, cultures and religions”<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Konan U., Belarus na miazy tysiachagoddziau: shtrykhi da gistarychnaga, palitychnaga I dukhounaga partretu nacyi, (In Belarusian), in Acta Albaruthenica 2., Minsk “Belaruski knigazbor”, 2001, p. 163.

<sup>40</sup> Konan U., Belaruskaya idea I misia Belarusi, in Belaruskaya dumka, №4 1992, pp. 6-25.

<sup>41</sup> Genadz Pranevich, Mentalitet u sisteme kaardynat nacyanalnaga byc’cia, in Open Society Infarmacyjna-analitychny №2 (11), 2001, <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/2.01/3.html>.

Pavel Severinets, the leader of the youth political organization Malady front<sup>42</sup>, the author of several books about Belarus describes the mission of Belarus as “a nation on the bridge”: “The concept of Belarus as a gigantic strategic economic and geopolitical bridge between the West and Russia, Europe and Asia, the Baltic and the Black seas regions gives is a unique possibility for a genuine neutrality, a friendly openness to the West and the East, with formation of an axis of our own financial and technological, as well as cultural interests”<sup>43</sup>. His image of Belarus is an ambivalent image of country with a special mission in the East and in the West. “To enlighten and educate huge Russia, to stir up Eastern Europe, to give tolerance and inspiration to the West is on our consciousness”<sup>44</sup>. In the East, in relations with Russian or rather with the empires that had been built on the territory of the eastern neighbour the mission of Belarus is to facilitate disintegration of empires and to “purify” Russia. “Save Russia! – is the slogan worthy of powerful Belarusian strategy”<sup>45</sup>. According to Severinets, in favour of this special mission of Belarus testifies the fact that namely in Belarus there were realized many projects that had been ruinous for the imperial plans of great Russia: first congress of RSDLP (Russian Social Democratic Labor Party), the abdication Nikolai II, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Belovezha agreement in the dissolution of the USSR. All these events are somehow related to Belarus and all of them have had a destructive impact on Russia. Precisely they are a manifestation of the Belarusian mission in the east. This mission is stipulated by the “westernness” of Belarus. At the same time, the destiny of the western strategy of the post-communist revival in Belarus has also a specific development. This fate “is inscribed” in the Belarusian national idea. Its “easternness” prevents it. “Belarus, which is placed between Europe and Russia, is not to become a domestic, decent Central European country”<sup>46</sup>. The internal conflict of the Belarusian national idea is a result of such duality. That is why the Belarusian national idea, writes Severinets “is the idea of long-suffering, great country... which is always in pain and which will, most probably, never become a happy one”<sup>47</sup>.

The intermediate position on the civilization divide often becomes a fundamental truth for the Belarusian national idea. It is a cause of the specific Belarusian mentality, which as G.

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<sup>42</sup> In 1999-2003 гг. – deputy chief of BPF party, in 1997-2004 – the chief of “Young Front”. Sentenced for two years of correctional labour colony for the organization of street protest actions against falsification of referendum and presidential election results.

<sup>43</sup> Seviarynets, P., “Novaya Gistoryia”, Nasha Niva, December 2001.

[http://www.seviarynets.net/txt/novaja\\_historyja.htm](http://www.seviarynets.net/txt/novaja_historyja.htm)

<sup>44</sup> Seviarynets, P., Nacyianalnaya ideia. Fenamenalogia Belarusi, Minsk, 2005, <http://seviarynets.net/>

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Seviarynets, P., “Novaya Gistorya”.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Pranevich writes “is to a great extent determined by the universal natural geographical, geopolitical and civilizational-cultural intermediateness”<sup>48</sup>.

The intermediate position also determines the specific character of the Belarusian cultural tradition. As I. Bobkov writes, “Belarus of the latest two centuries has appeared and formed just in this dark space between-and-post cultural meeting place...”<sup>49</sup> This position and status in “between” characterizes a specific nature of the a transcultural Belarusian tradition which “comprises heterogeneous elements, its texts were written in different languages and belong to different types of civilization... occur in several traditions”<sup>50</sup>. In this kind of context a specific effort is required for the preservation or, to be more exact, for the designing of the integrity of culture, tradition and nation. One of the ways to achieve such integrity is to establish a distance in respect to those cultures and traditions in which transcultural nation appears to be involved. The distance can be either long or short; however, it should exist as a sign of a break between Belarusian and the foreign, or not Belarusian cultural experience. This distance, as regards the West and the East, becomes a peculiar reference of point in calculation of Belarusianness on the territory of the alternative political and cultural discourses.

As early as in 1921 Yanka Kupala<sup>51</sup> created a literary image of this original neutrality on “the border” in his play “Tuteyshya” (“The Locals”). This play is frequently perceived as an articulation of the Belarusian cultural identity formula. Self-determination of the Belarusian is carried out here by means of the de-identification procedure with the Russian and the Polish context that results in the localization of identity outside any cultural traditions, in the extremely reduced space of “here”.

Similar idea of “being from here, being local and true Belarusian” is reflected in the song called “I was born here” (word by S. Sokolov-Voush, sung by Dmitrii Voityushkevich) which became a sort of youth national hymn. This composition was mentioned more often than others in the youth Internet forum “The Hymn of Belarus”, devoted to the discussion of an alternative hymn of Belarus<sup>52</sup>. It namely through the belonging to “the place here” how the identification with Belarus appears for young Belarusian: “Short word “here” unites all us, “the locals”, and for

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<sup>48</sup> Genadz Pranevich, op. cit., <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/2.01/3.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Babkou I, Etyka pamezza, transkulturalizm jak Belaruskі dosved, in *Fragmenty* № 1-2, 1999 (Ethics of the Borderline: Transculturalism as a Belarusian experience), p.79.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>51</sup> Janka Kupala (1882-1942) was one of the members Belarusian national revival movement at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, who later became "classic" of national literature in already Soviet Belarus.

<sup>52</sup> <http://mensk.by/forum>

everyone it brings something own, kin”<sup>53</sup>. The song had become a beginning of the musical project with the same title - series of concerts, after which the disk of alternative patriotic songs was issued. In 2001 the concert named “I was born here” gave the start to the political company under the slogan “Make a choice” aimed at the oppositional mobilization of the Belarusian youth during the presidential election’s campaign.

The “Locals” By J. Kupala, as well as the song” “I was born here” show a peculiar fact: in the Belarusian context usual opposition between ‘the national’ and ‘the local’ levels of identity as competing sources in influencing people’s self-determination and feelings of belonging ceased to operate. Indeed, the phrase “I was born here” for Belarusian youth sounds as a declaration of the Belarusian identity, built on the basis of its attribution to the territory, despite the external cultural and political influences. It is through reducing the national Belarusian identity to the status of “local” Belarussianness can distance itself from the Russianness in the East and Polishness in the West in order to reify its existence in people’s mind.

#### **National Ideology of Belarusian state as a Political Articulation of the Official Belarussianness**

On the territory of alternative discourses the Republic of Belarus is declared to be an anti-Belarusian and anti-national formation. Nevertheless, many authors who observe the developments in the country “from the outside” note that the process of intense institutionalization and reification of the Belarusian nationhood has taken place during the whole period of independence in the country. There is a national idea behind this process: “in no area Belarus has moved so far during its years of independence as in the mobilization on the ground of national idea”<sup>54</sup>, writes the Belarusian political scientist S. Nikolyuk. On the one hand, one can speak about the development of the national self-awareness due to the very fact of establishing of a sovereign national statehood. As the participant of the round-table debate “Democracy and nationalism as alpha and omega of a political process” L. Zlotnikov noted, “Formation of the Belarusian nation is taking place now, before our eyes, on the territory we have acquired after the disintegration of the USSR. It takes place, first of all, because the people who now live within the boundaries of modern Belarusian state begin to form mutual interests whose realization can be beneficial to all of them, irrespective of their ethnic identity or language they speak. The very fact of the independent Belarusian state

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<sup>53</sup> News from the site „I was born here”: <http://smotritel.com/site/?artid=165&id=385>

<sup>54</sup> Nikoliuk S., Vozvrashchenie bludnoj docheri. Poisk nacionalnoj identichnosti ovladevaet umami sootchestvennikov, in Belorysu i rynek, May 24 – 31, 2004.

existence makes us more and more Belarusians from year to year”<sup>55</sup>. On the other hand, many authors admit that this is also the result of the policy conducted by the authorities. As Russian journalist F. Lukianov points to the particular role of the Belarusian president in “nationalization” of Belarusians, who, in his opinion “has made for the consciousness of the independent Belarusian national probably more than any Popular Front or the most convinced nationalists could do”<sup>56</sup>.

Certainly, the format of the Belarusian national idea, offered by the official discourse, essentially differs from the Belorussianness conceptualized by alternative discourses. It is based “not on the idea of national revival by which the leaders of the national democratic movements of 1980-1990s were guided, but on the idea of national exclusiveness of Belarus as a model of a state-society, its unique character which is devoid of any outside influence”<sup>57</sup>.

Some authors recognize the existence of the official national project of the Belarusian authorities, but with a reservation, behind it there is a simple aspiration to preserve its own status and power. Jan Zaprudnik writes, that “nationalization” of the Belarusian political life by the authorities is related to the desire “to resort to the national awareness of the population as a sort of barrier against absorption of national sovereignty by Russia, which would unavoidably reduce the status and the role of Belarusian bureaucrats including that of Lukashenka”<sup>58</sup>. Russian political scientist A. Mitrofanova also believes that Belarusian official nationalism has a forced character. “Relations with the West are deteriorated, and the integration with Russia is held back. It contributes to the creation of the besieged fortress consciousness. But the Belarusian nation, as well as the Soviet people, is built on an ideological basis”<sup>59</sup>. However, the result is the same, even if the true purpose for strengthening the national feeling of Belarusians by official methods is to make the position of the current regime more secure. Belarusians become stronger as carrier of the Belarusian national idea, and the phrase “our country” which used to mean “the Soviet Union” before 1991, now means “Belarus”<sup>60</sup>.

Program documents and statements of President of Belarus in which he sets forth the basic provisions of the state ideology, as well as monographs and manuals on ideology were used as

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<sup>55</sup> Materialy kruglolo stola na temu “Demokratia i nacionalizm kak alfa i omega politicheskogo processa”, in Open society, Infarmacyjna analitychny buleten, 2001, N2 (11) <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/2.01/5.html>

<sup>56</sup> Lukianov F., Belorussia kotoruyu my ne ponimaem, in Neprikosnovennyj zapas №47, 2006; <http://www.nz-online.ru/index.phtml?aid=80011754>

<sup>57</sup> Lukianov F., op.cit. <http://www.nz-online.ru/index.phtml?aid=80011754>

<sup>58</sup> Jan Zaprudnik, Belarus. In Search of national identity between 1986 and 2000 in Contemporary Belarus, p. 122.

<sup>59</sup> Mitrofanova A., Hrustalnyj sosyud ideologii, ili Belorusskij proekt, Neprikosnovennyj zapas N 47, Moskva. <http://www.nz-online.ru/index.phtml?aid=80011760>

<sup>60</sup> Jan Zaprudnik, op.cit., p. 118.

sources for getting a concise image of “the official Belarusianness”. In all these texts there is a reference to the Belarussian way of development, Belarussian tradition and characteristics of the Belarussian mentality. All these are part of the foundation of the official concept of the Belarussian nation.

The ideology of the state itself started to be developed as early as in 1990s. There appeared a scientific development of the topic<sup>61</sup>. At the same time the triad of the basic values of this ideology was formulated. It included “strong presidential power”, “socially-oriented economy”, and Christian (or, to be more exact, Orthodox) values”. In the public space “the ideology of the Belarussian state” appeared in 2003, when it became not only theoretical, but also a practical issue.

On March 27, 2003 President of Belarus spoke at the seminar “On measures to improve the ideological work” for senior ideological management, where he stated his vision of a “new” state ideology. The ideology saved the main theoretical theses, apart from several relatively new ideas (such as a messianic role of Belarus as a spiritual leader in the East Slavic civilization). An additional stress was made only on the applied character of the ideology. It should work “to educate a citizen”. It was reported about the necessity to teach ideology to students, to popularize its values by means of the state run mass media. The course “Ideology of the Belarussian statehood” was included in the university curricula in 2003.

Characterizing the format of the Belarussian state ideology V. Bobrovich writes, that “in traditional sense it is not a political ideology. According to its content, it is much closer to such concepts as “ideology of statehood” or “state idea”<sup>62</sup>. Indeed, constant appeal to the Belarussian people, its traditions and national developments makes conceptual boundaries between the national ideology, the state ideology and the ideology of state blurred. For example, the newspaper “Sovetskaya Belorussia”, a mouthpiece of the state, in its publications uses such concepts as “ideology of statehood” and “national ideology” as synonyms<sup>63</sup>. It is stated on its pages, that the state ideology is way out of the crisis of the national identity in which the Belarussians has found themselves after the disintegration of the Soviet Union<sup>64</sup>. The ideology of the Belarussian state is

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<sup>61</sup> Ermolitchki M.A., Sapelkin E.P., Sluka E.G., Tur A.N., Yurkeich A.T., Model ustoichivogo razvitiya Respubliki Belarus: ideologia, sistema upravleniya, mechanism realizacii v soyuze s Rossiej. Minsk, Technoprint, 1999; Ideologia belorusskoi gosudarstvennosti : problemy teorii i praktiki. Materialy nauchnoi konferencii 12 November 1998. Minsk, ISPI, 1998.

<sup>62</sup> Bobrovich V., Gosudarstvennaya ideologia *pro et contra*. Filamaty, Bulletin gramadskaga abjadnannia “Tavarystva amatarau vedau (filamatau) № 3(6) 2003, p. 58-59.

<sup>63</sup> Mirovozzrencheskaia sostavlyaiuschaya , Sovetskaya Belorussia №179 (21845), 25 September 2003, "My" – kto eto? Sovetskaya Belorussia №86 (21996), 12 May 2004.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.



“called to strengthen the socio-political consolidation of the society, to become a national force able to stronger unite citizens of the country to an integrated Belarusian people”<sup>65</sup>.

The concept “national” is widely used in the official Belarusian discourse, but actually it is used in two axiological opposite meanings. On the one hand, imposing signs of the “national” are brought into public space, this word occurs in the names of different public institutions: the National Library, the National Academy of Sciences, the First National is the name of Belarusian TV channel, there is the National television and radio broadcasting company, national security and cultural national legacy are constantly present in the media. In 2004 the main avenue in Minsk was reamed by President of Belarus into the Independence Avenue. All these are meant to confirm and emphasize the national status and sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus.

At the same time President speaks about the “open nationalism of Belarusian opposition”<sup>66</sup> as something alien to the Belarusian people. “Nationalism is absolutely unacceptable for our people. That is because internally we are the most internationally-minded people”<sup>67</sup> we see in the program text “Belarus as a military and moral outpost” placed on the site of President of Belarus. These statements, however, are combined in the official rhetoric with claims of the national idea as an essential aspect of the state life, because its “internalization” is a guarantee for a successful development of the country. The same text declares: “The national idea should be based on people’s awareness of the statehood and primacy of national interests. And such awareness is developed throughout the whole life of individual. Since birth, through a kindergarten, school, university everyone should understand such concepts as the Motherland, patriotism, the people, history, culture not just logically, and to absorb them in the soul. Without it it’s impossible to preserve the state and to build a good life”<sup>68</sup>. A similar passage could be perfectly found in the text of oppositional Belarusian nationalists, as well as an appeal “So let the flame of freedom and independence of the Fatherland never go out of our hearts”<sup>69</sup> found in the same text on the site of Belarusian President. However the official context sets its own parameters in the understanding of the national idea. There is “good” and “bad” nationalism traced in the official rhetoric of

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<sup>65</sup> Kniازهv S.N., Reshetnikov, S.V., Adulo T. I. and others, *Osnovy Ideologii Beloruskogo gosudarstva*, Uchebnoie posobie dla Vuzov, Minsk, 2004, p. 225.

<sup>66</sup> Lukashenka A.G., Press conference for the group of Russian journalists  
<http://www.news.by/333/2005-11-23/7927/>

<sup>67</sup> S.D. Laptенok, Belarus – nравstvennyj forpost, Webpage of Belarusian President,  
<http://www.president.gov.by/press14033.html#doc>

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

Belarusian authorities. Without “good” nationalism it is impossible to build and preserve the state (Valery Mikheyev names patriotism “a spiritual core of the Belarusian people”<sup>70</sup>). Behind the “bad” one there is political opposition, which is influenced and supported by the West (the fact that allows declare it as an external and therefore alien to the Belarusian nation. When Belarusian president declares: “This opposition is a pro-Western nationalism opposition”<sup>71</sup>, it sounds as a verdict: it is not Belarusian, as it is made and paid by West.

The official Belarusian national idea is based on a few fundamental guidelines. It is a stress on its own tradition and history; it is a positive philosophy of the Soviet experience on the whole and a recognition of the necessity to reproduce its components in independent Belarus; it is an appeal to the Slavic unity, with reliance on Russian culture as a counter balance to the western values; a reference to the peculiar mentality and special qualities of Belarusian people (such as collectivism) which form a basis for Belarus - Europe opposition. The idea of social equality, which according to the official ideology is a part of truly Belarusian idea and is a “backbone” of socialism, plays also important role in the counter-position to the Western civilization and capitalism. This idea is rooted in the symbolic matrix of Belarusianness, which “had been cast” as early as pre-October epoch of the Belarusian nationalism. The official discourse makes use of the fact that the Belarusians had never existed as a formed nation within capitalist formation. Thus, if the lack of capitalist social structure in postsoviet period was seen by M. Hroch as a cause and aspiration for Eastern European nationalists to transform society into a capitalist system with a capitalist class<sup>72</sup>, for the official Belarusian ideology it becomes the motivation to oppose such transformations.

Stating its Belarusianness, the official ideology widely uses the metaphor of “kinship”: “The ideology of the state should be built on its own foundation. Being in his senses a Frenchman will not want to adopt the American way of life, a German - the Russian one and so on. Each nation grows and develops on its native ideological ground. We will do the same”<sup>73</sup>. “The natives” is aggressively opposed to the “foreign-western”, it is in this rigid opposition that the independence of Belarusian state is maintained in the official discourse. A moral reasoning as regards its own country is also introduced. It is an appeal to “the country as a family”, which

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<sup>70</sup> Mikheyev V.M., *Ideologiya: razmyshlenia i vyvody*, Minsk, ODO:“Tonpik” 2004, p. 219.

<sup>71</sup> Lukashenka A.G., Press conference for the group of Russian journalists, <http://www.news.by/333/2005-11-23/7927/>

<sup>72</sup> Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, p. 90.

<sup>73</sup> Lukashenka A.G., *Doklad na seminaru rukovodiaschich rabotnikov po ideologicheskoy rabote*, <http://www.president.gov.by/press10957.html>.

makes it possible to differentiate its native and foreign values in the most understandable and emotional way. In his report on ideology President says: “It is senseless to copy someone’s values and aims on the basis of the fact, that this or that country is strong and rich at present. In fact, we do not abandon our parents, though they are not millionaires”<sup>74</sup>.

The thesis about “its own” experience, culture, and the bases of the statehood requires a more solid support and reasoning - it is provided by a “tradition”. “One should be careful with such borrowings as ideals, values and aims. Our own traditions, ideas and values, aims and purposes, make the “backbone” of our people. They are not made up, but gained through suffering of our people; they are result of the natural adaptation of society to the natural and social environment...”<sup>75</sup> An appeal to “the natural way” of “our own values” formation in the discourse of the official Belarusianness is necessary for strengthening the effect of alienation from any alternative ways of its definition. Thus, according to the president, the ideology of liberalism is deeply alien to the mentality of Belarussian people. As a counter balance to the western “individualism” he says, we shall be guided by “collectivism” and “mutual aid”, social trust and respectful relations between the state and the people.

The source of these ideological principles, in the view of E. Babosov, the author of the textbook “The Bases of the ideology of the Belarussian state”, is the mental bases of the Belarussian people such as patriotism, collectivism, kindness, and also self-esteem and personal independence<sup>76</sup>. The author also pays attention to the combination of patience and forbearance, on the one hand, and intolerance to any oppression, that is “to violent influence of the strong and rich on the weaker and poor” in the national mentality<sup>77</sup>. In the official ideology the “peoplehood” and “collectivism” appear as an integral feature of Belarusianness. “Collectivism is, so to say, something national, something that is in Belarussians’ blood, and it is something that should be kept and strengthened”<sup>78</sup>. It is the collectivist mentality that is viewed as one of the main reasons for the failure of the liberal reforms in Belarus. The western strategies of liberal reforms “did not correspond to the collectivist mentality on the post-Soviet space, moral principles and traditions,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Babosov E.M., *Osnovy ideologii sovremennogo gosudarstva*, Minsk, Amalfeya, 2004, pp. 213-219.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. pp. 220-221.

<sup>78</sup> Shinkarev V., Varganova L., *Ideologia gosudarstvennosti i obshchestvennogo razvitiia Respubliki Belarus*, Minsk, Redakcionno Izdatelskij centr Akademii upravlenia pri Prezidentie RB, 2004, p. 218.

constant search for the good and justice”<sup>79</sup>, writes A. Kazlovich. Western values are alien to “Belarusians - people of community, who do not accept absolutization of private property”<sup>80</sup>.

The idea of Slav unity also makes a reliable foundation of the Belarusian ideology, and in its description the official discourse frequently uses “organic” metaphors. While nationalists aim at “cutting off the Belarusian branch from the common spiritual Slav tree”<sup>81</sup>, the Belarusian authorities see their mission in preservation of this “tree”. In this context, when the “Belarusianness” is placed on the territory of Slav civilization, ideas of the union with other states “inside” this civilization do not contradict, but develop an idea of independence of Belarus.

Geopolitically pre-determined idea of Belarusian tradition is represented in the assessments of the Belarusian past. Those periods of history, when Belarusians together with the Polish people or Lithuanians were members of the same state formations, are declared to be alien to the Belarusian tradition which is more linked to the periods of history related to czarist or Soviet Russia. Considering such ideological directives, as Belarusian author A. Feduta notices, it is not surprising that in the official textbooks on history “all fighters with the czarist oppression, including the national hero of Belarus Kastus Kalinovski<sup>82</sup> are presented as a “Poles”, and their activities are looked upon as a result of the influence of Catholicism, but the notorious count Michael Muravyov<sup>83</sup> who lives in the people’s memory as the “hanger”, was posthumously characterized as a “talented administrator”<sup>84</sup>. Also the decision, made by the president on the withdrawal of the award named after Kastus Kalinovski from the list of state awards of the Belarus, follows the same road of the ideological shaping of the official Belarusianness, which relies on commonness with Russian and separateness from Europe in the past.

Though, all history of Belarusians is a subject of a certain politically determined interpretation within the official historical narration, the basic source of the Belarusian tradition is considered to be the Soviet epoch. As Belarusian ideologist say, “we were a part of the great, large

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<sup>79</sup> Unutrypalitychnae zycce I miznarodnyia adnosiny, in Belarus na miazhy tysiachagoddziau, Minsk, Belarusiakaya encyklopedyia, 2000, p.276.

<sup>80</sup> Lukashenka A.G., Doklad na seminarie rukovodiaschich rabotnikov po ideologicheskoy rabote <http://www.president.gov.by/press10957.html>

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> The leader of the rebellion of 1863-1864 against Czarist Russia’s rule on the Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian lands, who is also recognized as a Polish and Lithuanian national hero.

<sup>83</sup> During the Polish-Lithuanian January Uprising of 1863, Muravyov was appointed Governor General of Northwestern Krai (now Belarus, Lithuania). He promptly subdued the rebellion, burning or resettling whole Belarusian, Polish and Lithuanian villages to Siberia. About 9000 people were resettled, 127 hanged. Konstanty Kalinowski was also executed on his orders.

<sup>84</sup> Feduta, A., Kollektivnyj politinformator i agitator. Izbranye Mesta iz uchebnikov po gosudarstvennoj ideologii Respubliki Belarus, in Neprikosnovennj zapas № 47, 2006, <http://www.nz-online.ru/index.phtml?aid=80011758> .

state, and all ideology was within that state... That ideology was in fact our Belarusian ideology too”<sup>85</sup>. This formulation, in spite of the obvious conflict of meaning between the notions of “Soviet” and “Belarusian”, is in its own way a sensible one. As the Belarusian political scientist V. Chernov writes, “Sovietness” was for Belarusians an organic form of expression of their ethno-marginality, moreover, a way of their identification with the “the Great Country of Soviets”... One can say that due to such identification an original, Soviet-Belarusian “nationalism” was stimulated, - a truly Soviet Belarusian felt, that he or she was the “most Soviet of the Soviet”<sup>86</sup>. In this sense, Belarusian nation is a creation of Sovietness: “today’s Belarus has grown up not out of the emigrant ideas of nationalist, but out of the truly brotherly family of Soviet Republic, due to the common efforts of all the peoples, and, first of all, of the Russian one”, writes A. Rubinov in his article published by “Sovetskaya Belorussia”<sup>87</sup>.

In the official interpretation all Belarusian tradition is focused on Soviet time, and Belarusian history is focused on the Second World War. S. D. Lapyonok, the author of the texts places on the site of the president, writes that “in those difficult years Belarusians struggled not only for the common victory, but also for the sovereignty of their country”<sup>88</sup>. It isn’t clear which country stands behind the concept “their country”, however, this ambiguity does not contradict identity construction merging Belarussianness with Sovietness. The people’s memory focused on the Great Patriotic War undergoes a similar reduction. “The state policy is based on its commitment to the historical memory of people - the Victory in the Great Patriotic War. The introduction of the course “the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people” in the curricula of the educational institutions has been a reflection of this commitment”<sup>89</sup>.

The set of the basic guidelines of the Belarusian ideology looks discrepant. Victor Chernov describes it as “an eclectic set of separate elements of Marxism and Keynesianism, the market and the feudal socialism, liberalism and conservatism, Pan-Slavism and nationalism, atheism and Orthodoxy”<sup>90</sup>. However, as another Belarusian author Janov Polesky notices, the Belarusian

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Chernov Viktor, Nischeta ideologii ili ideologia nischety, in Filamaty, Bulletin gramadskaga ab’adnania “tavarystva amataraubedau (filamatau)” №3(6) 2003, p. 47.

<sup>87</sup> Rubinov A., Esche raz ob ideologii in Sovetskaya Belorussia №140 (22550), 28 July 2006;

<sup>88</sup> Lapteneok S. D., op. cit.

<sup>89</sup> Istoriko-kulturnyi potencial Belarusi, text at the Belarusian President webpage:

<http://www.president.gov.by/press10640.html#doc>

<sup>90</sup> Chernov Viktor, Nischeta ideologii ili ideologia nischety... , p. 30.

ideology is “a project which has failed in its theoretical part, but which has been a successful in the practice”<sup>91</sup>.

The practice of state ideology like Belarusian one means its successful internalization by people. The opinion poll conducted by the IISEPS in 2006 manifested that 52 percent of Belarusians consider themselves “Soviet people”<sup>92</sup>. This striking number speaks in favour of the fact that the reason for the stable character of the Belarusian regime should be searched for not so much in its internal administrative resources, in the mechanisms of suppression the non-conformists with the aid of special services, as in the peculiar, and paradoxical for many, correlation of the Belarusian model of self-identification and the national realization with the concept of *Belarusianness* offered by the official discourse. Another study<sup>93</sup> of patterns of Belarusian’s self-perception show that prevailing majority of Belarusians support integration with Russia on the grounds that Russians and Belarusians are historically one people, they are spiritually close, and have similar languages, cultures, and traditions.

At the same time, Roy Alison, Stephen Wight, Margo Light give the results of the national representative polls conducted during 2004 and 2005, according to which “Belarusians practically in everything manifest greater “Europeanness” than Russians and Ukrainians.... Belarusians more frequently consider themselves “European” and refer to “Europeanness” as a variant of their self-identification”<sup>94</sup>. These polls also show that more Belarusians can define the European Union, and know where the headquarters of the EU are located as compared to Russians and Ukrainians.

**Table 2.** *Belarusians, Russians, Ukrainians and “Europe”, 2004–2005 гг.*

	Belarus	Russia	Ukraine
Feel themselves considerably/completely Europeans	34	25	26
Seldom /never feel themselves Europeans	54	68	62
Consider themselves Europeans	16	8	10
Support joining the European Union	59	56	54

<sup>91</sup> Yanov Poleeskij, 17 Thesis, in *Nashe Mnenie Proekt*, 14 March, 2005

<http://www.nmnby.org/pub/140305/seven.html>

<sup>92</sup> <http://www.iiseps.org/4-06-2.html>

<sup>93</sup> Unpublished survey April-May 1999 in Russian and Belarus, conducted by the Moscow-based Center for Sociological Research (Foundation for National and International Security. A Belarusian sample of 837) quoted after Clelia Rontoyanni, *Belarus and the East*, in *Postcommunist Belarus*, ed. by S. White, E. Korosteleva and J. Löwenhardt, Rawman & Littlefield Publisher, 2005, p.134.

<sup>94</sup> Roy Alisan, Steven Wight, Margo Light, *Belarus between the East and The West*, in *ARCHE N10 2006* (published after *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*) <http://arche.bymedia.net/2006-10/alisan610.htm>

Can define The European Union	48	39	42
Know where the headquarters of the European Union is based	49	39	36
Believe that the country should join the NATO	22	29	22

Source: Roy Alison, Stephen Wight, Margo Light "Belarus between the West and the East"<sup>95</sup>.

Providing that "Europe" is one of the main signifiers of the alternative Belarusianness, one can say that in this capacity it also has a great impact on the Belarusians' self-awareness. However, this does not prevent Belarusians to remain Russian-minded to the utmost. As the IISEPS opinion polls manifest, during the last few years, even in the conditions of a persistently aggravating political and economic crisis in the relations with Russia, in case of a forced choice between the East and the West, the majority of Belarusians will decidedly prefer Russia.

**Table 3.** Dynamics of the responses to the question "Of you were to choose between unification with Russia and joining the European Union, what would be your choice?", %

Response variant	03'04	03'05	04'06	01'07
Unification with Russia	41.0	51.9	53.9	48.5
Joining the European Union	36.5	31.6	32.6	33.6
No definite response	22.5	16.5	13.5	17.9

Source: nation-wide representative opinion polls conducted by IISEPS in years 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007<sup>96</sup>.

This phenomenon of the considerable presence of "Europeanness" in Belarusians' self-image against the background of their no less impressive "Sovietness" and persistent pro-Russianness can be explained by the fact, that though number of "Europeans" among Belarusians indeed can be higher than those of Europe-minded Russians or Ukrainians, but still the other 54 percent of Belarusians "seldom" or "never" think about themselves in this way. They determine the stable orientation of the society "in general" to the East.

Several factors determine the ideological conflict between the two political concepts of the Belarusian national idea.

In the first years of Belarusian independence in 1990s, a paradoxical situation had taken shape. There appeared a national movement of Belarusian intelligentsia that appealed to the pre- and extra-Soviet experience of the Belarusian nation. However, the formation of the Belarusian nation in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was just at the initial stage of the national idea articulation in a small circle of national intelligentsia and did not attain stage of mass mobilization. Real

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> <http://www.iiseps.org/press6.html>

“nationalization” of the Belarusian people took place already in the period of Soviet power and with the help of its instruments. As Terry Martin writes, the result of the first period of Belarusian nation building within the Soviet state was “the remarkable success of Byelorussization”<sup>97</sup>. He also notes that Hroch’s model of three phases of national movement among stateless nations of Eastern Europe ignored the existing multiethnic state, automatically assuming it would oppose these developments. The national policy of the first decade of Soviet history revealed a different picture. “The Soviet state instead literally seized leadership over all the three phases: the articulation of national culture, the formation of national elites, and the propagation of mass national consciousness. It went still further and initiated even “phase D” measures typical of newly formed nation-states, establishing a new language of the state and a new governing elite”<sup>98</sup>. Descriptions of the nation building of that era practically fit the scheme of nation formation which was conducted by the state through the practices of standardization, with the help of the education system and other attributes of modernizing practices, albeit in the socialist mode.

Later on, Belarusian nation was affected by the various experiences within the Soviet Union: The Communist genocide of 1930s, participation in the common victory in the Second World War, the years of post-war reconstruction realized by joint efforts and resources of different Soviet Republics. D. Marples believes that the “golden age”, the key point in the legacy of the country with the major symbolical meaning of historical positivism in the perception of Belarusians’ majority is connected with the time of reconstruction after the Second World War. During the period of P. Masherau’s government (1965-1980) the Republic not only restored the losses, but occupied the leading place among other Soviet republics as to the level of its industrial development and to the standard of population’s living<sup>99</sup>.

In the first years of independence, the national intelligentsia faced an extremely difficult task – to conduct a complicated “surgical” operation of separation of the Belarusianness and Soviet ideology. This could mean a step-by-step de-identification of Belarusianness and Soviet mass consciousness with its simultaneous saturation with alternative content. As the experience of the Soviet Belarusian nation-building revealed, a success of this kind of work is most probable when the process of installation of the new content of the national idea into mass consciousness is carried out by means of numerous articulational and institutional practices supported by state.

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<sup>97</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalisms in the Soviet Union 1923-1939*, Cornell University Press, 2001, p. 261.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>99</sup> David R. Marples, *History and Politics in Post-Soviet Belarus*, in *Contemporary Belarus*, p. 24, 25.



However “the new nationalists” built the alternative project of Belarusianness on an open confrontation with the Sovietness and with the Soviet and later Belarusian independent state. Besides, their project of alternative Belarusianness they expanded mainly in the framework of historical ethno-culturalism. They acted as if prompted by A. Smith, like political archeologists rediscovering and reinterpreting the communal past in order to regenerate the community<sup>100</sup>. The new nationalists’ accent on revival implies an appeal to the restoration in its national rights of the nation that had existed in the pre-Soviet past. Though, as was said above, the Belarusian nation had not existed - as a community whose formation was complete - prior to the Soviet power.

The official project of the Belarusian nation initiated by the Belarusian authorities was built on the principle of succession with the Soviet period of history. In order to promote official Belarusianness, the authorities resort to the tools of social reification borrowed from the Soviet practice. Forming of the official “Belarusianness” is also implemented with the help of the education system, correction of history, the press and a large number of social rituals and national projects initiated by the state serve to its social reification. This difference in the strategies of actualization of the alternative and the official Belarusianness are been built on a different principles of identity formation. The alternative Belarusianness is represented by profound historical and political narratives supported by a number of cultural manifestations. These cultural manifestations provide an access of definite ideas to the public, i.e. to those who are expected to become carriers of articulated and represented ideas. Their status in the public space is reduced to a “counter-culture”. The official Belarusianness is reified by numerous social practices on the micro- and the macro levels of everyday life, in which the state is involved directly and indirectly.

In the specific conditions of a non-democratic regime, like in Belarus, representation of interests appears subordinate to the logic of open confrontation of two disconnect and, in a way, self-sufficient public spheres. Each of them functions on the basis of its own sources of information (state run and non-state run media), its own social organizations (state institutions, educational establishments, on the one hand and NGOs and different educational centers and institutions on the other hand). The major problem of the alternative Belarusianness is its opposition to the state. It means lack of access to the institutional resources of the state, which, as modernist nation theorists affirm and as the Soviet experience had demonstrated, has great nation-

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<sup>100</sup> Smith A., *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 181.

building resources as a tool of social reification of the nation at the micro- and macro-levels of social life.

From the theoretical perspective, this situation leads to a paradox: two opposite political discourses implement different political projects in the name of seemingly the same actor – the Belarusian nation. In practice, this leads to creation of two different actors with the same name. The competing ideas of “Belarusianness” provide their supporters and adherents with different formulas for building their Belarusian identity. But in the conditions of the non-democratic regime the fact that one of them is a “state-run” national idea and the other one is opposed to the state create unequal conditions in this struggle over identity, by definition.