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INTRODUCTION

In issuing the first collection of works of young political scientists who studied in the Political Science and European Studies programme of the EHU, the staff of the department, jointly with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, have realised a long-held dream of EHU's researchers of sharing new critical research that has been built up in the university's archives. Found in this collection is edited research of young specialists in the field of political sociology, political culture, and gender political studies with a focus on Belarus. Owing to cooperation with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the dream of political scientists working in EHU's Department of Social and Political Sciences and of those who died before their time – S. Pankovskii, S. Naumova, and V. Charnou – has been realised. We share the research of our department with pleasure and honour.

The objective of such cooperation is to popularise political-science research about Belarus and, at the same time, to de-marginalise EHU's political science and of independent Belarusian political science generally. Moreover, a particular academic approach has been established at EHU despite crises and challenges. A new circle of researchers and lecturers in political science has emerged who are able to remain critical, to comprehensively analyse the political and, most importantly, to teach political science without imposed ideologies while working in Vilnius.

Another important aspect is the focus of EHU's political science on Belarusian issues. The evidence of this includes articles offered in the collection dedicated to lesser-known and often marginal political topics in the Belarusian context.

We hope that this attempt at familiarising the reader with new works of Belarusian political thought and analysis will become a solid and long-term tradition. On this, the aspirations of the EHU and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung to bring research closer to practice and to assist in consolidation and democratisation of Belarus through a scientific, intellectual channel open to debate and reflection coincide.

The collection is intended generally for European and Belarusian politicians, activists, political scientists as well as those who are interested in alternative positions on Belarus.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND INTERNET PLATFORMS: HOW NEW COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES HELP BELARUSIAN CIVIC ACTIVISTS

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Summary: This article is based on research of political participation practices of Belarusian political and social activists who employed Internet platforms such as social networks or websites in their campaigns. With the proliferation of the Internet, more hopes for significant improvement of political participation opportunities were laid upon new tools of communication in countries like Belarus. Social networks and other Internet platforms attracted attention as tools that can promote public campaigns under the conditions of restricted freedoms and media sphere. The article draws on a qualitative case study of seven civic campaigns and groups that were active in 2011-2013 in Belarus. The data for the research was collected through interviews with leaders of those campaigns. The article suggests that those Belarusian Internet activists who actively employed Internet platforms were able to widen opportunities for the political engagement of citizens. Activists followed main trends that are used among digital political practitioners around the globe. However, some problematic features of the Belarusian political and media systems such as control and persecution of the political actors or Internet censorship did not allow activists to use the potential of Internet platforms to the fullest. Moreover, the list of domains of public policy that could be appealed by activists were restricted by unspoken rules.

Keywords: Belarus, political participation, nondemocratic regime, Internet, online activism, civil society.

INTRODUCTION

Politics, as well as many other facets of life, is strongly influenced by new technologies. Jose van Dijck and other researchers of social sciences even say that we now live in a society which can be defined as a "platform society" (van Dijck, Poell 2015). Online platforms such as Facebook or VK currently occupy almost as much space as other popular media. The platforms transform us, our civil institutions and how we interact with these institutions. Such transformations happen in different spheres from creating educational content to protecting our health and life.

As well as other facets of life, the Internet has its history. Van Dijck and Poell (van Dijck, Poell 2015: 2) divide it into two periods: before platforms and after. This article is based on research covering the period of 2011-2013 – the time when Belarus just began to transform into a platform society following the global trend. This transformation was also accompanied by expectations that such social media platforms as Facebook were able to introduce significant changes in political processes. Researchers and activists hoped that the platforms could bring a ray of light to the "dark kingdom" of political possibilities opening to common people and political activists in nondemocratic countries such as Belarus. During this initial period of establishment of the platform society, Belarusian political and civic activists dreamt if not about an Arab Spring in Belarus than at least about the possibility to disseminate their message and to be heard by the authorities. The wish to be heard concerned different issues and topics from students' rights to petrol prices. In my work, I attempted to examine some of those topics to understand whether online platforms in fact extended the possibilities for political participation in Belarus.

Thus, the object of the research is political participation of citizens using online platforms in nondemocratic countries with the case study of Belarus. Political participation is defined as "citizens' actions aimed to try to influence politics" (Anduiza et al. 2012: 5). I examined political participation within the broader concept of citizens' political engagement. The scope of the research covers practices of using online platforms by citizens who attempted to influence politics during the period of 2011-2013 when online platforms just began to turn into significant instruments for citizens' political engagement.

CYBER OPTIMISTS AGAINST CYBER PESSIMISTS: WHO HAS WON?

Debates over whether the Internet is able to provoke any little changes in nondemocratic countries have existed for a long time. The most interesting period of the debates was somewhere between the "Twitter Revolution" in Iran in 2009 (protests that were found to be influenced by Twitter only insignificantly (Morozov 2011)) and the Arab Spring, which peaked in 2011 (Tufekci 2011). Thus, the academic research is divided into two camps: cyber optimists and cyber pessimists. When cyber optimists searched for and found capacity of the new media to democratise different societies and political systems (Shirky 2010), cyber pessimists defended the idea of insignificant influence of social platforms on political protest and activism (Gladwell 2010; Morozov 2011).

Currently, the initial debates between cyber optimists and cyber pessimists are considered to be too simplified and general. The relationships among political institutions, actors, and online platforms are more sophisticated than thought prior to the Arab Spring (Fuchs 2014; Gunitsky 2015). As a result, the debates regarding citizens' political engagement are more concerned with the details of participation. At present, researchers are interested in the following issues: how new technologies

change political participation, whether they are able to make closed authoritarian systems more open; whether they unite or divide people; how new technologies change strategies and tactics of political activists; among others (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Gunitsky 2015).

However, the Arab Spring not only demonstrated the complexities of generalising influence of online practices on politics but also encouraged activists in other countries. In particular, the Occupy movement was encouraged by practices of Egyptian political activists occupying public places (Bennett and Segerberg 2013). During the economic crisis in many developed countries of the world, anti-establishment groups united by the overarching brand of the Occupy movement organised numerous protests in different cities of Europe and America. The movement enabled Bennett and Segerberg (Bennett, Segerberg: 2013) to examine characteristics of online activismmore attentively . As the researchers state, activism changed the nature of what we used to label "collective action" – joint actions such as protests or flash mobs organised by civic movements. Currently, movements which can arise on the Internet easily and spontaneously require no formal membership, do not impose a single ideology and, in general, get along easily with potential participants of the movements. At the same time, potential participants benefit more and more from exceptionally personalised social platforms. In addition to the increase of possibilities for spontaneous emergence of different protest formations, personalisation permits to discuss not "collective" but "connective action". Connective action is a simpler yet more chaotic method of political engagement because it doesn't require significant organisational effort as well as mandatory acceptance of the same version of reality by all participants.

This article foremost examines the possibilities of political participation in Belarus, which is why I will focus on this country further on.

DIGITAL DIVIDE, POLITICAL CONTEXT, AND BELARUSIAN MEDIA SYSTEM

It is usually more difficult to analyse the situation in Belarus because the majority of theories that intend to explain social processes and could be useful to analyse Belarus are currently being created and verified in more or less stable democracies. However, the categories which are often key to interesting theories are oftentimes not applicable to the Belarusian context. For example, researchers of democratic systems have paid significant attention to the possibilities of deliberative participation or discussions and negotiations. It was expected that extension of discussions on the Internet, dissemination of online petitions, and development of "e-government" would permit each citizen to have potential influence on decision-making. That is, the society would become more democratic (Carpini et al. 2004: 318; Halpern, Gibbs 2013: 1160). However, the research focused on deliberative participation has been based on the cases of Western democracies and have typically made theoretical assumptions that the state is interested in democratisation (Carpini et al. 2004). The same happens to theories about the new "platform society" and "digital participation"; that is, the majority of these have been created and tested in the West.

Comparative research can sometimes offer a solution. Upon studying 15 cases all over the world, Anduiza, Jensen, and Jorba (Anduiza et al. 2012) determined three contextual features that can influence digital participation practices in politics. These features or variables can be applicable

to my attempt to understand how the Internet influences Belarusian politics. These are the digital divide, political context, and the condition of the media system. I will further examine these variables theoretically as well as through using the Belarusian case study.

Currently, various phenomena can be considered the digital divide. In the period under examination, it was more expedient to consider the digital divide as a limitation of access to the Internet. In other words, researchers try to understand what happened in the societies and communities where a relatively small part of the population had access to the Internet. In 2013 just over half of the Belarusian population used the Internet (International Telecommunications Union (Geneva) 2014). It was similar to the level of many Latin American countries of the country and lagged significantly behind Central and Eastern European countries.

Anduiza, Jensen, and Jorba understand a range of factors as political context. For example, there are limitations and control on the Internet. In 2011-2013 Internet censorship in Belarus was widespread but not critical. Freedom House (2012) labelled the Belarusian authorities as "enemies of the Internet" among such countries as the Egypt under President Mubarak and China. However, China had greater control over the Internet than Belarus, saw more infringements on users' rights, and other limitations. At the same time, even China has numerous examples of the Internet being used for political participation by activists with different agendas (Yang 2011). Thus, less control over the Internet in Belarus allowed for the hope that Internet activism and digital participation practices would be disseminated further following the example of the nondemocratic countries discussed above.

Finally, the third component which influences the level of political participation is the state of the media environment. If the media system is not particularly independent from governmental regulation and relevant agencies, trust in traditional media channels such as newspapers or television can erode. For example, Egypt and Pakistan saw this kind of media environment prior to 2011 (Anduiza et al. 2012: 247). In such situations, trust in digital information channels can increase (Anduiza et al. 2012: 247). However, the Belarusian media system has been in a particularly deformed condition. According to the IISEPS, Belarusians' trust in government mass media did not exceed 39% in the past two years, and following the protests of the crisis summer of 2011 organised via social networks, it reached a all-time low of 25% (Независимый институт социально-экономических и политических исследований 2013). Trust in independent media was relatively low as well. In other words, the Belarusian media environment did not encourage dissemination of alternatives to government opinion on the one hand or preserve the potential for the appearance of new actors on the other. Further on I will examine how Belarusian online activists attempted to leverage this situation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To study the practices and strategies of those who attempted to influence the Belarusian political process using online platforms, I applied a qualitative approach to data collection and held nine interviews according to a semi-structured interview method. I interviewed seven civic activists who organised public civic campaigns on the Internet in 2011-2013 within which public policy demands were stated. In addition, I conducted two expert interviews with representatives of the online platforms that were often used for mobilisation, information dissemination, and analysis by numerous civic campaigns . In the interviews, I was most interested in the issues of limiting the citizens' access to the

Internet (digital divide); the political context: expected reaction of the political system, limitations of activists' activities in Belarus; the condition of the media environment; the structure of the campaign audience; and the degree of their trust in media. The overall results of the initiative/campaign activities were examined as well.

A sampling of complaints and their representatives was carried out in consultation with several experts in the field as well in order to examine the campaigns of the recent years most visible in the public sphere.

As a result, the following civic initiatives and campaigns were selected for analysis:

Table 1. Principle information examined concerning civic initiatives/campaigns

Name of civic initiative/ campaign	Main objectives of the campaign (studied within the research)	Main results
Visa Free Travel Campaign "Go Europe! Go Belarus!"	Attracting public attention to the issue of the visa regime; facilitation of visa procedures as a temporary measure	Visa issue is constantly in the public eye, however no significant institutional changes have been carried out by the Belarusian authorities
Campaign to amend the Game Husbandry and Hunting Rules of Public organization "APB-BirdLife Belarus"	Decision not to pass amendments to the Game Husbandry Rules prepared at the moment; to make other amendments to the Rules, such as rejection to define "harmful species", prohibition of seasonal hunting of other bird species	Ministry of Forestry prepared legislative amendments intended to satisfy most demands of the petition
Let's build BSUCA Centre Fairly and Transparently! Civic Campaign	Renewing construction of the sports centre of the Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts, ensuring transparent spending of funds for construction	Construction was renewed following a meeting of the university's management with the organiser of the signature collection and after her address to the Governmental Control Committee; GCC and the university made statements on the issue
Revolution on Social Networks group/Future Movement	Mobilising citizens, primarily youth, for protest action in a "new" format; liberation of the public sphere; accumulation of protest sentiment; demand for Lukashenka to resign was subsequently made	Organisation of most significant protest actions in 2011 and following the 2010 presidential election; indirect result has been that students, the most active participants, were granted the right to use public transport for free
Include Belarusian [language] in Self-Service Terminal Menu online petition	To include Belarusian language in the menus of Belarusbank's ATMs; to expand use of Belarusian in other fields in the future	Several meetings with bank management; app. 2 500 signatures collected
"We Demand to Launch the Negotiations with the EU on the Visa Facilitation Agreement!".	Exerting pressure on the presidential administration to renew negotiations between the EU and Belarus concerning visa regime facilitation	App. 10 000 electronic signatures collected
Stop Petrol Campaign (2011)	Lowering petrol prices	Petrol prices returned to pre-crisis level, however grew gradually later on

Sources: author's analysis of campaigns' websites and additional information messages.

All of the initiatives/campaigns examined were carried out without institutional political actors, though respondents were members of political organisations (in some cases informally).

The campaigns studied differed significantly as to the issues raised within them. However, interviews demonstrated that, similar to political actors in other countries of the world, the Belarusian groups and activists were attempting to exert pressure on authorities through civic campaigns using online platforms. At times this use combined with other factors allows citizens to influence political decisions. Thus, three of the seven campaigns examined achieved significant success.

ANALYSIS OF SEVEN CASES

As mentioned above, conditions for the spread of online activism and engagement of broader circles in the activities of different civic campaigns and interest groups in Belarus were established to a sufficient degree, but were far from ideal over the period analysed. On the one hand, technical conditions allowed for reaching a broad audience via the Internet. On the other hand, not all of the potential campaign and event participants were able to join connective action because they had no access to the Internet or had no knowledge of how to make use of the potential of online platforms. Almost all of the leaders of the campaigns studied noted this. Although representatives of some campaigns that targeted not only youth (e.g., "APB-BirdLife Belarus" and Stop Petrol) viewed working with audiences that had no access to the Internet as a natural part of the campaign. A majority of other activists had no time for similar actions.

It is indicative that access to what we call traditional media – newspapers, television, and similar information sources – seemed very important to Belarusian online activists. According to the research, a majority of activists saw Facebook, VK, and other platforms only as the first step in reaching a more "serious" level and having the possibility to sell their version of events to a newspaper, for example. It was desirable that newspapers were government sponsored, as the majority viewed state media as much more influential than non-government types. As one example, the activist who created the online petition Include Belarusian in the Self-Service Terminal Menu believed that "the number of signatures [of the petition] is not the most important thing". He explained that he "intended to get public attention, catch the interest of the mass media, people, and the general public" (5). It seems that "mass media" was raised with a range of meanings for a good reason. The possibility to integrate traditional media into one's Internet campaign could be significant for its success in Belarus. This conclusion is consistent with research results in other countries (Rojecki, Meraz: 2016).

However, it is not only non-government media that were considered relatively less important to Belarusian online activists. Traditional political actors such as opposition parties also did not play a visible role in the eyes of activists on the campaigns mentioned above. In fact, activists tried to distance themselves from opposition parties. "I don't want my petition to be associated with the opposition", the leader of the civic campaign "We Demand to Launch Negotiations with the EU on the Visa Facilitation Agreement!". explained. It is indicative also that three out of the seven activists asked did not identify themselves as active public-policy actors: "I never collected signatures, though I used to sign. I am so law-abiding in general. I only cross the street at a green light", (5) the author of the online petition Include Belarusian in the Self-Service Terminal Menu recollected.

The Belarusian online activists who were the focus of the research not only considered themselves law-abiding. They perceived state agencies as those that will consider their demands more carefully if the demands are laid on officials' tables in a certain form, preferably defined by law. Thus, the activists began to pay special attention to individual appeals by citizens. They "work well with administrative [sic] procedures in our country", a representative of Public organization "APB-BirdLife Belarus" said. When it was complicated to convert online signatures into signatures of individual appeals, activists expressed their regrets (Include Belarusian in the Self-Service Terminal Menu). However, such procedures do not always work well with other means of online mobilisation, as in the case with citizens' appeals to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiated by Visa Free Travel Campaign "Go Europe! Go Belarus!", which received no official reaction from the government.

In addition to appeals and petitions, Belarusian online activists paid attention to discussions social network sites such as VK or Facebook as well as to messaging to journalists and supporters. "The means which are associated with administrative procedures in our country are most efficient because our country has lots of administrative procedures. That is why appeals that follow administrative procedures can be more influential. And the petition is not an official submission, it is just pressure on an individual", one online activist asserted. It is significant that activists tried to print appeals, including those sent electronically, and delivered them to the institution for which they were intended. That is they did not try to use the legal possibility to send civic appeals electronically (as such appeals had to be sent individually but activists did not, in fact, ask citizens to do so). The strategy could be related to the digital divide where a significant number of citizens had no access to the Internet. The activists considered lack of access or impossibility to use platforms as something natural. According to them, actions joined online were to eventually result in offline actions, something beyond the cyberspace. As a matter of fact, the Revolution on Social Networks group set a goal of offline mobilisation – collective action in real squares of real towns supported with collective action. However, the relative failure of the admittedly utopic goals of the group demonstrated an important feature of political engagement through the means of online platforms in Belarus – it is well nigh impposible to raise and promote every issue through this means.

The research demonstrates that the possibility of Belarusian online activists to influence public policy and to accomplish their purposes within it depends on the existing social and political circumstances to a significant degree and is more often than not not within the activists' sphere of influence. In other words, the Belarusian political system has a number of issues or domains in which the authorities could be influenced using social platforms. And it has those issues concerning which pressure on the authorities would be fruitless. It is possible to mention environmental issues, issues raised by small groups (e.g., students of a certain university) and related to financial benefits, consumers' rights issues, etc. Domains within which the regime legitimacy or some fundamental principles of the foreign and domestic policy could be questioned can be hardly influenced by interest groups with insignificant resources. Thus, this situation resembles the models of other nondemocratic political systems, e.g., the Chinese (Anduiza et al. 2012: 249; HagueHarrop 2008: 172).

However, certain differences from other nondemocratic systems can be noted as well. For example, the Belarusian authorities rarely apply censorship on the Internet as a means to pressure activists. However, activists were more often influenced not by censorship on the Internet but through physical means. Concerning censorship, the activists named the following:

• Attempts to influence online discussion with insults;

• Groundless accusations and dissemination of facts which discredited the activists (so-called "network trolls");

• Temporary limitation of access to certain websites and pages of social networks;

• Attempts to obtain (steal) access to web pages and sites.

In some cases (Revolution on Social Networks group, Stop Petrol Campaign), activists had to invest additional efforts and resources in order to avoid persecution on the Internet. However, in the majority of cases activists faced no limitations by the authorities that they would cite as extraordinary.

CONCLUSIONS

The research has demonstrated that, like in other countries of the world, Belarusian activists can successfully use online platforms in order to influence the authorities via civic campaigns. Online platforms such as electronic petitions, social media, and websites, can expand the potential for political engagement in nondemocratic countries and engage more participants in politics. Activists, even those with limited resources, can carry out large, high profile campaigns, unite people online, and realize their objectives to some degree.

It seems that Belarusian online activists, just like their colleagues from the U.S. to China, have been able to use the benefits of a platform society to spread and expand possibilities for collective actions on the Internet. The Revolution on Social Networks group as well as the Occupy movement were inspired by the Arab Spring and were able to unite citizens with different ideologies and personal agendas through collective action. Less radical groups, such as representatives of "APB-BirdLife Belarus", sought to communicate not only with Internet users but also with "offline" people while preserving the main focus of the campaign on the Internet. In addition, as in other countries, traditional media were considered an important part of the communication strategy of civic campaigns most often, in spite of the existing limitations of the media system. These examples demonstrate that Belarusian online activists operate in the context of global trends.

Belarusian activists who use online platforms, however, face similar barriers and challenges that are typical of nondemocratic regimes. These challenges have been related to the nature of the Belarusian political context that manifests itself in relatively strong control of the Internet and limitations on activities of political entities. Political persecution has entered the Internet in pursuit of activists. And the traditional media, most importantly government media, still preserve significant influence, which affects activists' opportunities to reach out to a more general public. In addition, censorship on the Internet and the digital divide complicate access to information for potential platform users.

Probably one of the most serious limitations of online activists' work in Belarus concerns the issues that can be raised within their campaigns. Civic campaigns related to environmental issues or issues of small, less protected segments of the population can be advocated for with relatively few challenges and can be covered by traditional state media and even resolved later on. However, it is more complicated with issues that concern the legitimacy of the government or foreign policy. Some activists (e.g., "Go Europe! Go Belarus!", or Revolution on Social Networks group) have attempted to raise similar issues, however have been unsuccessful. It seems that online activism aimed to resolve such issues has fewer chances of succeeding in the Belarusian political system.

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POLITICAL MYTHOGENESIS IN BELARUS IN 1994-2010: RULING ELITE'S DISCOURSE

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Summary: The process of the creation of political myths accompanies any political activity, regardless of whether the actor is committed to this or not. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, with the rapid expansion of channels of information (due to the emergence of television and radio broadcasting, followed by the Internet), the process of creating political myths has significantly accelerated, and the media have turned into a battlefield for different ideologies competing for popular support. The particularly essential process of political myth creation takes place in non-democratic countries where myths are often components of ideological struggle. Focusing on the process of the creation of political myths by the ruling elite of Belarus in 1994-2010, this research paper analyses particular features of the transformation of political myths over the course of this period. The main objectives of this thesis are to discuss theoretical approaches and concepts of political myth creation; to analyse public speeches of the ruling elite of Belarus; and to identify the content of political myths. The methods of content analysis, structured interviews, and secondary data analysis applied in this work allowed us to discover that Belarusian political myths adjust to changes in the political and socio-economic spheres (including in foreign policy) both quantitatively and qualitatively. The system of political myths in Belarus is eclectic and flexible; it combines modern elements with certain features of the Soviet model. Several myths are pervasive in the public discourse of the elite throughout the whole period of 1994-2010 ("enemies", "the father of the nation", "national languages", "the Great Patriotic War", "the Union of Russia and Belarus").These myths can be described as dominant, whereas other myths that appear and disappear under internal and external factors can be defined as contextual. The main public actor in political myth creation is the Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko, whose statements are characterized by specific semantic colouration.

The article may be useful to students and political science, sociology, and social psychology researchers.

Keywords: *political myth, mythogenesis, ruling elite, authorities' discourse, ideology.*

INTRODUCTION

Political mythogenesis is one of the inherent functions of political power and one of the main tools of politicians that allow them to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct social reality; promote the rulers' ideology; strengthen personal political power; and create a historical image. From the early 20th century when information dissemination centres extended, political mythogenesis developed extremely rapidly, and the mass media gradually turned into a place for struggle of different ideologies for people's consciousness. "If political myths were perceived quite matter-of-factly, as bogus, propaganda or a usual lie previously, in the recent several years, they are considered in a more sophisticated manner. They are believed to be the main components of creating collective identities in the countries, especially communist ones", writes Robert Walinski-Kiehl, a researcher of the English University of Portsmouth (Walinski-Kiehl 2004:43).

The word "myth" translated from Ancient Greek means a "story" or a "legend". For a long time the concept of myth had two best understood meanings – a sacralisation myth and a falsification myth. These meanings are still the popular understandings of the concept of myth in in everyday life. Starting from the 17th century, the concept of myth became a subject of research and the concepts of myth by R. Barthes, K. Mannheim, G. Le Bon, J. Ortega y Gasset, K. G. Jung became widely known. In the late 19th century we see research of the concept of myth beginning in the context of the political directly. A literature review demonstrates that the amount of theoretical information exceeds the amount of applied research carried out in political mythology by far. Belarus is characterised by a similar situation and, therefore, the concept of governmental ideology or political mythogenesis is of particular importance.

This article is an attempt to analyse the political mythogenesis carried out by the Belarusian ruling elite from 1994 to 2010 and to determine the main political myths and features of political mythogenesis in this country. It is worth, however, examining the theoretical concepts first.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE ANALYSIS OF "POLITICAL MYTH"

Christopher G. Flood and Ernst Cassirer's ideas are especially interesting among the classical concepts of political myth and mythogenesis.

Christopher G. Flood, an English researcher, (Флад 2004) defines the political myth by comparing with the sacral myth. The main difference between the sacral ("consecrated") myth from the political myth is that the latter is "ideologically marked". Thus, even within the same country, ideologies that confront each other can produce contradictory political myths about the same phenomena, processes, and historical epochs. Flood states three important ideas: first, that any text by a politician is mythological; second, the political myth is one form of expressing ideology and that "any ideologically marked narrative presented to the respective audience in the respective circumstances" can become a myth (however, mythologisation of political statements often happens on its own, without their authors' wish); and third, that there is nothing negative or extraordinary in mythogenesis. As an integral part of the political process, mythogenesis is an acceptable practice of political actors.

Ernst Cassirer, a German philosopher, (Кассирер 2000) examines creation of political myths in Germany up to World War I: difficult financial conditions; high inflation and unemployment; and the futility of using legal means for problem resolution. All of these created "the fertile soil from which

political myths could arise and derive strength". Cassirer holds to the widespread opinion about the "collective unconscious" in myths but believes that this holds only for myths that existed in the early 20th century and that in this period the process of political mythogenesis changed fundamentally. "New political myths did not appear spontaneously, they were not a phantom of wild fantasy. They were, in fact, artificial products created by skilful and wise 'craftsmen'. Our 20th century – the great epoch of technical civilisation – was supposed to create new techniques of myths because myths can be really created according to the same rules just like any other weaponry as machine guns or aircraft".

Like Barthes (Барт 1994), Cassirer focuses on linguistic transformations that occurred in parallel to creating new political myths. Dividing linguistic functions into the semantic (phenomenon description) and magical (intention to change the way things are), he states that since the early 20th century the magical function began to dominate the semantic. Familiar words acquire new meanings and give rise to certain emotions in individuals while spurring them on to certain actions. Political mythogenesis is always strengthened with rituals that strengthen the effect of the word. Totalitarian countries in which individuals' private lives are minimised are characterised by the highest number of uniform public rituals.

Current developments of the political myth should receive as much attention as classical concepts.

The researcher Robert Walinski-Kiehl (Walinski-Kiehl 2004) analyses political mythology in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). He defines political myths as "simplified historical narratives that communicate information about the origin, meaning, and political fate of regimes" (Walinski-Kiehl 2004:43). Upon the end of World War II the leadership of the GDR faced an ideological problem. The recently dominant Nazism was hostile to the communism that was to become the new ideology of the state. The only way to legitimise the newly established Marxist East German country and to provide it with revolutionary heritage was to mythologise the past. Communist ideologues focused on one historical event – the Peasants' War of 1525, which was interpreted as the first attempt of the German nation to transform the social structure. In spite of the fact that the peasants' revolt was unsuccessful, the establishment of the GDR as an independent country was presented by the government of the country as implementing the revolutionary ideals of the medieval peasants. Gradually, the GDR began to be imagined as the first socialist form on the German lands, as opposed to the West Germany, which was introduced as a hostile capitalist counterrevolutionary entity.

Interesting theses concerning mythogenesis during the period of Tsarism in Russia (in particular, the rule of the Romanov family) are provided by Mikhail Dolbilov, a professor of history at the University of Maryland, with reference to the research of Richard Wortman (Dolbilov 2001:773). The Romanovs (in particular Nicholas I and Alexander II) faced the need to combine "universalist principles of the multinational Petrine empire with new ideas of national uniqueness" (Dolbilov 2001:777). While the imperial mythology was initially based on the political and cultural ideals of the West, as time passed the public discourse of the authorities changed towards common cultural idioms (e.g., faith in God, subordination, renunciation, etc.). A striking example of political myth created by Nicholas I is the myth of power (one of the most popular types of myths according to Flood's classification): "A resolute leader strong in spirit appears almost from nowhere, miraculously appears at the most dramatic moment of mischief and undertakes boldly to eradicate disorder" (Dolbilov 2001:779). (Nicholas I began his rule with suppressing the Decembrist uprising.) Another myth was the archetypal basis

for Alexander II's rule – that of the emperor's parental affection to his subjects (the practical result of which was implementation of reforms and abolition of serfdom) and of the nationwide adoration of the ruler.

An entirely different method of creation and functioning of political myths is described by Canadian researchers Justin Massiea and Stephanie Roussel (Massiea, Roussel 2008:67) in joint research of the myths of Canada's foreign policy. When the majority of theoretical concepts result in the gradual rise of myths that are later realised in political practices, Massiea and Roussel infer mythmaking from practical political activities, in particular the country's foreign policy. Thus, non-aggressive foreign political activities, absence of initiative in provoking large global conflicts, active participation in peace-making mission – all of these resulted in the rise of the common belief of the Canadians that their "national character" is envisaged for peace-making. In spite of the fact that Canada participated in the two World Wars and in the Korean War (on the U.S. side), the current international policy of the country resulted in the creation of a positive peaceful image in international relations and in the beliefs of the country's citizens.

In further analysis, we will presume that the Belarusian political myths produced by the ruling elite of the country are based on the principal premises of government ideology forming and transforming them simultaneously. Accordingly, in our understanding of the political myth we will use the definition provided by Christopher Flood: "an ideologically marked narrative which purports to give a true account of a set of past, present, or predicted political events and which is accepted as valid in its essentials by a social group".

CONTENT OF BELARUSIAN POLITICAL MYTHS

Qualitative content analysis of public addresses of the Belarusian officials was conducted using materials from the three largest nationally distributed state newspapers: SB – Belarus Segodnia, Respublika, Zviazda, and websites of government institutions. Over the course of 16 years, these newspapers and websites saw the appearance of around 1,500 unique materials that can be studied relative to political myths. The author of the majority of public addresses and programme works is A. Lukashenka.

The number of materials with public addresses of other representatives of the ruling elite is much lower. It is dictated, first of all, by the features of power configuration in Belarus; secondly, by the closed nature of the government system; thirdly, because of the underdeveloped culture of officials' public addresses; fourthly, because of the historical period; fifthly, by individual characteristics of public figures. For example, when Ryhor Vasilievič was the President of the Constitutional Court, this institution produced much more public information available for our analysis than in the period of Piatro Miklaševič's – a much more closed person in relation to the press and audience.

The content analysis conducted allows for determining the following political myths over the priod of 1994-2010. (At the end of the article the myths are distributed according to the type and periods of greatest realisisation in the form of diagrams):

1. ENEMIES

Myth: Belarus faces numerous internal (political opposition) and external (liberal powers of the U.S. and Europe) enemies whose main objective is to remove the country from the unique

development path selected, to bring it to economic collapse, and/or to cause an ideological crisis.

Quotations as an example (here and later the quotations are given in the original language to reflect their vivid semantic connotations):

"Недавно Комитет госбезопасности, Служба безопасности разоблачили 72 организации — целую систему в нашей стране. Сотни миллионов долларов, мобильные телефоны, компьютеры, заготовленные протоколы фальсификации выборов. 19-го числа они выйдут с этими протоколами, которые сегодня уже заготовлены, объявят победителем кого-то из этих "отморозков" и скажут: "Фальсифицировала власть выборы" [12]. ("Recently, the State Security Committee, the Security Service exposed 72 organisations – an entire system in our country. Hundreds of millions of dollars, mobile telephones, computers, and statements of election falsification. On the 19th they will come out with statements already prepared before that day and announce one of these "bullies" as the winner and will say that the authorities have falsified the election".)

"Украина формирует лагеря: мы, мол, оттуда вам подкинем революционеров. Поляки работают в западной части, в том числе и через церковь католическую, но не очень–то получается" [18]. ("Ukraine is creating camps. We will bring you revolutionaries from there. The Poles are working in the western part, including via the Catholic church, but it is not really successful".)

2. NATION'S FATHER

Myth: the country's president plays the father role concerning citizens. The primary task of the president is to protect his "children" against enemies, to work for their wellbeing and realisation of their desires, and to help citizens – "children" who are not always able to select the best course of action – to make the right choice. Anna Brzozowska, a Polish researcher, (Brzozowska 2003:11) notes that this myth (the "Father" in her terminology) is interpreted as true by the "pro-presidential" part of the society as well as by the democratic community. However, where the former consider themselves a "kind but weak child" who needs security and protection against negative external influences, the latter – "democrats" – separate themselves from the "child" nation who misbehaves and requires serious control.

Quotation as an example:

"На моих плечах они [ансамбль "Песняры"] только во время перемен и выстояли" [13]. ("On my shoulders, they [Piesniary band] managed to preserve their existence through times of change".)

3. PAN-SLAVISM

Myth: Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine make up a united East Slavic civilisation, united by a common history, single Russian language, and by the Orthodox faith. Attaining wellbeing and the highest level of development is possible for Belarus only within the East Slavic civilisation.

Quotation as an example:

"Окунувшись в атмосферу фестиваля, отчетливо понимаешь: славянское единство есть. Люди всем сердцем хотят жить в одной семье – мирно, дружно и благополучно. […] Именно в этом истина. Осознание глубины наших корней, непоколебимости идеалов единения дает силы продолжать движение вперед, добиваться того, чтобы стремления наших народов восторжествовали, несмотря ни на какие преграды. […] Мы просто тогда спасали самое дорогое, что было впитано нами с молоком матери, – славянское братство" [9]. ("Diving into the atmosphere of the festival, you understand clearly that Slavic unity exists. People wish with their hearts to live in a single family – peacefully, on friendly terms, and in prosperity. […] This is the truth.

Understanding the depth of our roots, strength of our unity and ideals gives us the strength to move forward, to attain the triumph of our peoples' intents in spite of any barriers. […] We just rescued the dearest which we learnt at our mothers' knees –Slavic brotherhood".)

4. USSR DISSOLUTION

Myth: The Bielavieža Treaty resulted in the greatest catastrophe of the 20th century – the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This event resulted in a number of negative consequences for Belarus, including deep economic crisis, improvement of nationalists' positions, sharp weakening of the executive, and disruption of government ideology.

Quotation as an example:

"Что касается политического аспекта, я должен абсолютно ясно сказать, что после распада СССР у нас практически не было развитых государственных институтов, того, что лежит в основе любого государства. У нас не было нормально функционирующего правительства, не было самостоятельной и независимой внешней политики, собственной денежной системы, не было своей экономической политики" [14]. ("Concerning the political aspect, I should state clearly that upon the dissolution of the USSR we had no developed state institutions that form the basis of any government. We had no normal functioning government, no independent and sovereign foreign policy, our own monetary system, or economic policy".)

5. BELARUSIAN PATH

Myth: Upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Belarus managed to follow a unique path for the country's socio-political and economic development. Located between the Western and the Eastern civilisations, Belarus became the link between them. The basis of the "Belarusian path" is characterized by stability and wellbeing of the country, strict moral principles, and national traditions. An important characteristic of the unique Belarusian path is the messianism. That is, that in the 20th century Belarus was called on to save Europe from the Nazism and now Belarus is saving European countries from trafficking in drugs, influx of illegal immigrants, and human trafficking.

Quotation as an example:

"Социальное государство должно видеть и преодолевать недостатки рынка: эгоизм, индивидуальную замкнутость, снижение планки духовных ценностей" [7]. ("A social state should see and overcome the drawbacks of the market: egoism, individual insularity, and the lowering of the bar of spiritual values".)

6. BELARUSIAN STATEHOOD (TWOFOLD MYTH)

Myth 1: The origin of Belarusian statehood includes the Principality of Polacak, the Principality of Turaŭ, and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Throughout these periods the Belarusian ethnos and language emerged. They are the "Golden Age" of Belarus – a time of blossoming for the state and culture.

Quotation as an example:

"Мы говорим, что мы независимое государство. Мы его создали! Мы заняли свое место в международных отношениях. И это не сегодня началось. Нам не надо присваивать это достижение. Это было. К этому шли давно. Вы знаете еще со времен Киевской Руси, полоцких, туровских земель, Великого княжества Литовского. Каждое время по крупицам, по кирпичику складывало то, что сегодня есть" [16] ("We say that we are an independent state. We created it! And it did not begin today. We do not need to appropriate this achievement. We have moved towards it for a long time. You know this from the times of the Kievan Rus, Polacak, Turaŭ lands, and

the Great Duchy of Lithuania. Each time we have built by fragments, by bricks to achieve what we have today".)

Myth 2: The origin of Belarusian statehood is the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. The forms of statehood existing in the Belarusian lands were previously lacking. The Belarusian people were not represented as a separate ethnos but were considered to be part of the Balts or Poles. The Great October Revolution as well as the Great Patriotic War became key stages in the formation of the Belarusian nation.

Quotation as an example:

"Благодаря победе Великого Октября свершилась мечта многих поколений белору-сов – мы обрели независимое государство, открытое для друзей" [19]. ("Owing to the victory of the Great October, the dream of numerous generations of Belarusians has come true – we have achieved an independent country open to friends".)

7. GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR

Myth: the Belarusian people (jointly with the Russian and Ukrainian peoples) played a dominant role in the fight against Nazism. The memory of the popular heroism forms the basis of Belarusian state ideology. Belarus should react strongly to any attempts to form alternate interpretations of the events of the Great Patriotic War (in particular, of the partisan and underground movements) that can shatter the national idea.

Quotation as an example:

"Поэтому в основе идеологии у нас тоже лежит Великая Отечественная война и подвиг. Мы так это трактуем. Одно из достоинств нашего народа, советского народа, в том числе белорусского, — то, что мы спасли цивилизацию от уничтожения. Коричневая чума и нацизм — это полный крах цивилизации. Это величайшее наше достояние, которое у нас пытаются в последнее время отнять" [20]. ("That is why the basis of the ideology is the Great Patriotic War and heroism. We interpret it like this. One of the advantages of our people, the Soviet people, including the Belarusian people, is that we saved civilisation from annihilation. The Brown Plague and Nazism is the complete destruction of the civilisation. This is our greatest achievement that is attempting to be taken away from us recently".)

8. ORTHODOX CHURCH

Myth: the Orthodox denomination is the historical foundation of the Belarusian faith and the basis of Slavic unity. The Orthodox Church should be the government's ally. It should influence the forming of government ideology and be a channel for its dissemination among the faithful.

Quotation as an example:

"Мы никогда не отделяли себя от Церкви, ведь государство и Церковь решают одну и ту же задачу.[…] Мы всегда опирались на идеи Церкви, выработанные тысячелетиями, по сути, выбрали ее главным идеологом белорусской государственности, и мы в этом не ошиблись" [11]. ("We have never separated ourselves from the Church seeing as the government and the Church are working on the same problem. […] We have always relied on the Church's ideas developed over millennia, we have actually selected it to be the main ideologue of Belarusian statehood, and we have made no mistake in this".)

9. NATIONAL LANGUAGES

Myth: In Belarus, Belarusian and Russian are equal, which is why Russian should have the status of a "national" language. Belarusians have participated in the development of contemporary

Russian throughout its history, thus they should not abandon it. There is a difference between Russian (used in Belarus and Ukraine now) and the Russian spread in the faraway regions of the Russian Federation. In addition, Russian in Belarus is the language of culture and everyday relations while Belarusian is the language of the elderly in villages. It is rarely used and underdeveloped.

Quotation as an example:

"У нас наших два родных языка — русский и белорусский. Если вы считаете, что русский язык — это язык россиян, я с вами никогда не соглашусь. Мы немало прожили вместе с вами — от империи до Советского Союза. Мы вложили душу в этот язык" [22]. ("We have our two mother tongues: Belarusian and Russian. If you believe that Russian is the language of Russians, I would never agree with you. We have lived with you for a long time – from the Empire until the Soviet Union. We have put our heart into this language".)

10. UNION OF BELARUS AND RUSSIA

Myth: the Union State is a prototype of the future of a restored USSR. Starting from partial transfer of government functions to the supranational level, as a result of the integration process, the Union State should become a strong entity with a single currency and one Constitution. As of now, the integration process has slowed down because there is no agreement concerning the status of separate countries in this union.

Quotation as an example:

"Если бы мы видели, что российское государство хочет построить с Беларусью Союзное государство на принципах равноправия, то сегодня можно было бы в этом направлении работать более активно и смело. Но посмотрим правде в глаза. Что нам предлагают? Стать Н–ской губернией Российской Федерации" [15]. ("If we saw that the Russian state wished to build a Union State with Belarus on principles of equality, today it would be possible to work more actively and boldly. But let's face the truth. What is it that we are offered? To become province N of the Russian Federation".)

11. EXECUTIVE

Myth: the principal branch of government in Belarus is the executive. For a transitional country, it is unacceptable to have the so-called principle of balance of power because it will result in political instability and anarchy. A vivid confirmation of this fact is the operation of the Supreme Council in 1994-1996.

Quotation as an example:

"Только конституционная реформа создаст у нас нормальную рабочую обстановку, при которой можно будет спокойно жить и решать проблемы. Если мы не внесём изменения в конституцию, то политические авантюристы будут постоянно держать народ и страну в напряжении, ожидая удобного момента для захвата власти" [17]. ("A constitutional reform will only create a normal working situation for us where it would be possible to live and resolve issues easily. If we do not amend the constitution, the political "adventurers" will keep the people and the country under pressure waiting for a convenient moment to seize power".)

12. NATIONAL SYMBOLS

Myth: Belarusian national symbols are the red-green flag with a white ornamental design and the national emblem is based on the emblem of the BSSR, which were approved by referendum in 1995. The symbols which had official status in 1991-1995 and which are currently used by the democratically oriented part of the society – the white-red-white flag and the Pahonia coat of arms –

are hostile to the Belarusian state. The white-red-white flag (Pahonia to a lesser degree) was disgraced during World War II because it was acknowledged by German occupiers. It follows then that the social groups using these symbols support the Nazis and are enemies of the Belarusian people.

Quotation as an example:

"Под гербом "Погоня" и бело-красно-белым флагом прислужники фашистских оккупантов из специального батальона "Дальвитц" и штурмовой бригады "Белорутения" расстреливали и вешали борцов за освобождение Беларуси" [8]. ("Under the Pahonia coat of arms and the white-red-white flag, acolytes of the Nazi occupants from the special battalion Dalwitz and the assault brigade Weissruthenien shot and hanged the fighters Belarusian liberation".)

13. SOVEREIGNTY

Myth: upon the break up of the USSR, Belarus became sovereign unexpectedly which is now of great value to the Belarusian people.

Quotation as an example:

"Суверенитет и независимость не продаются ни за какой природный газ, ни за какую нефть. Это слишком дорогая вещь, чтобы ею торговать. […] Суверенитет и независимость – это святое, так же как постулаты, которые проповедует Христианство" [10]. ("Sovereignty and independence are not for sale in exchange for any natural gas, any oil. It is an extremely expensive thing to trade it. […] Sovereignty and independence are sacrosanct, just like the postulates of Christianity".)

14. CHERNOBYL

Myth: Belarus fell victim to incompetent actions of the political leaders of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to liquidate the catastrophe of the Chernobyl nuclear plant in 1986. But the results of the Chernobyl tragedy are significantly exaggerated by political opponents and non-government mass media. The Belarusian government has managed to liquidate the majority of negative consequences.

Quotation as an example:

"Не секрет, что прорабатывается вопрос о возможном строительстве в Беларуси собственной атомной электростанции.[…] Понятно, что для белорусского народа, пострадавшего от чернобыльской трагедии, эта тема связана с психологическими волнениями. […] В условиях отсутствия своих энергоресурсов и, как следствие, обременительной зависимости от других стран вопрос о создании собственной ядерной энергетики становится одной из гарантий национальной безопасности страны и обеспечения ее энергией. И не надо, еще раз подчеркиваю, на этом вопросе набивать себе политический капитал" [21]. ("It is not a secret that the possible construction of a nuclear power plant is being considered in Belarus. […] It is clear that for the Belarusian people that has suffered from the Chernobyl tragedy this issue is related to psychological pressure. […] With no energy resources and, as a result, burdensome dependence on other countries, the issue of creating national nuclear power engineering becomes one of the guarantees of the country's national security and energy supply. And there is no need, and I stress, to procure political capital using this issue".)

DISTINCTIVENESS AND FEATURES OF POLITICAL MYTHOGENESIS

Ales Lahviniec, a political scientist, notes that the Belarusian public discourse has its own style

that combines Soviet bureaucratese with current trends. The main features of the style are populism, eclecticism (one public statement can include opposite theses) as well as stagnation (educated in the Soviet traditions, the majority of the officials forming the public discourse are unable to create new concepts). In Lahviniec's opinion, it is impossible to determine the single mechanism of transformation of the politician's public statement into a political myth. Firstly, myths can be created artificially by active propaganda in the mass media and other channels of information dissemination. Secondly, denial of meaning of some statements with no sufficient counterarguments provokes anchoring of these theses as true ones in the individual's consciousness. Thirdly, certain statements become myths irrationally when they resonate with deep emotions of individuals. In the case of Belarus, such deep emotions are fear, understanding of the need to submit to the authorities, and the feeling of comfort.

Alieh Manajeŭ, a Belarusian sociologist, states a similar thesis concerning the eclecticism of Belarusian public discourse (but in a different meaning – as a combination of different components of other completed systems in the Belarusian incomplete model) and singles out another important characteristic of the discourse – its fluidity and instability (e.g., the components of the structural and cultural and mental level dominating in the 1990s are being shifted to the back). The largest number of components (in different spheres – law, economics, concepts of justice, strength, etc.), have been borrowed by the Belarusian model from the Soviet system. But a mass consciousness of Belarusian society is taking place gradually (foremost in the area of economic assumptions).

The content of the myths as well as their rise or disappearance from the political discourse have been determined by a real political process to a significant degree. For example, in 1994-1995 the attention was centred on the myths of national symbols and national languages, which can be explained by the preparing of a national referendum on change of the national symbols and providing Russian with official status. It is interesting that the myths discussed are mostly present not in the public speeches by Lukashenka (just like in later historical periods) but in the public discussions of the opposing parliamentary factions.

Since 2004, there has seen development of the myth of the father of the nation with the peak of popularisation of the personified myth happening in 2005-2006. It is obvious that the reason for the dynamics is the referendum of 2004, through which Aliaksandr Lukashenka obtained the right to run for a third term in the presidential election of 2006.

In 2007, the myth of Chernobyl appeared unexpectedly. It explained the need to build a new nuclear power plant to guarantee the country's security. Upon studying public reaction (and due to the lack of a mass negative reaction), the political decision to build the NPP was made, and the myth disappeared quickly from the public discourse of the ruling elite.

To sum up our short analysis we would like to provide several conclusions: firstly, the political myths determined (enemies, father of the nation, pan-Slavism, the dissolution of the USSR, the Belarusian path, Belarusian statehood, Great Patriotic War, Orthodox Church, national languages, Union of Belarus and Russia, executive, national symbols, sovereignty, and Chernobyl) correspond to the principal international characteristics of political mythology. That is, the common myth of the "Golden Age" of the country is revealed in the myth of Belarusian statehood we described.

Secondly, political myths are conditional. They adapt to transformations in the political and socio-economic fields and to changes in a country's foreign economic policy qualitatively and quantitatively. A part of the myths is present in the public discourse of the authorities throughout the whole of 1994-2010 (enemies, father of the nation, national languages, Great Patriotic War, Union

of Belarus and Russia). Such myths can be considered dominant while other myths appearing and disappearing under the influence of internal and external factors could be considered contextual. The concepts of the country, state, and people are in the centre of attention of the prevalent majority of the public discourse myths, while a personalised myth is focused on one person (e.g., father of the nation).

Thirdly, the main public actor of the political mythogenesis is the Belarusian president, Aliaksandr Lukashenka. Other actors are auxiliary. Lukashenka's statements in the focus of our analysis are characterised by particular semantic connotations unlike those of auxiliary actors, who are unable to deliver such curious addresses due to their status (e.g., diplomats working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) or because of their individual personalities.

Structure of Political Mythogenesis in 1994-2010

General myth; 5
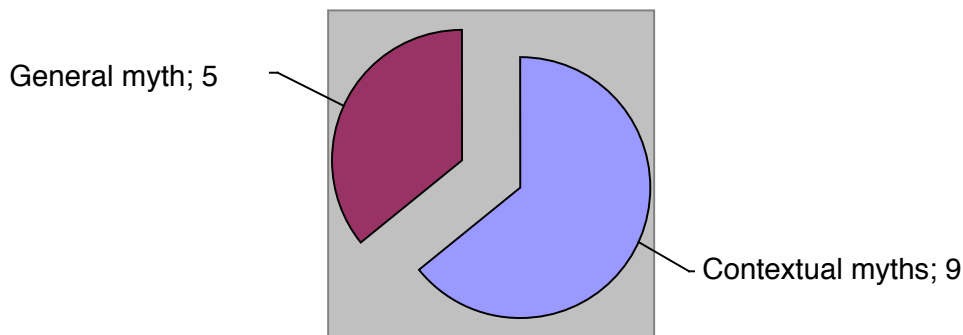
Contextual myths; 9

General myths: Enemies, Father's Nation, National Languages, Great Patriotic War, Union of Belarus and Russia.

Contextual myths: Pan-Slavism, Executive, Chernobyl, USSR Dissolution, Belarusian Statehood, National Symbols, Orthodox Church, Sovereignty, Belarusian Path.

Distribution of contextual myth
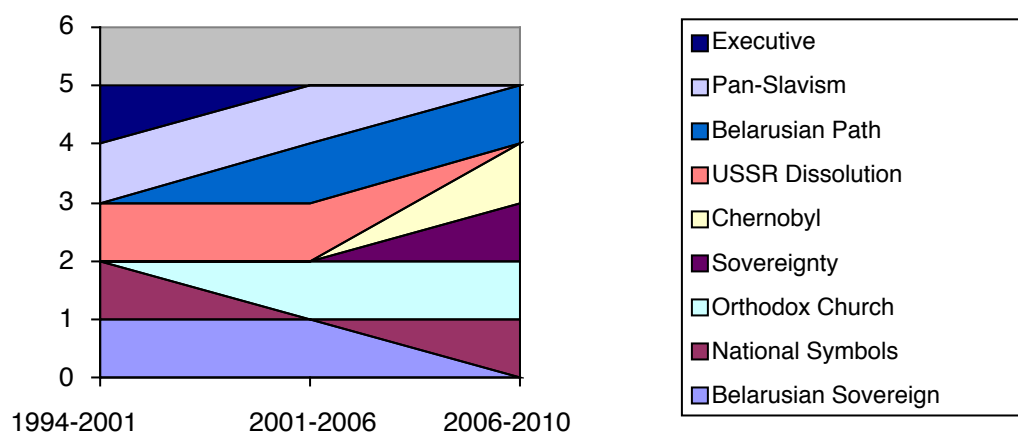
Fourthly, a feature of the Belarusian political mythogenesis is a low level of ancestors' reincarnation (observed solely in the myth of the Great Patriotic War). Even such historical figures such as Lenin or Stalin often assessed positively by the representatives of the ruling elite remain beyond the Belarusian mythogenesis, including the myth of the break up of the Soviet Union. This feature characterises only government discourse. Political opponents of the authorities use the reincarnation mechanism actively to produce their own myths (e.g., the figures of Kalinoŭski or Vituška).

Lastly, in spite of the fact that political myths are means of constructing and transforming reality, it is not worth overestimating their possibilities: the current political myths are produced by the "mass man" and for the "mass man" (as defined by J. Ortega y Gasset and A. Manajeŭ) while the active minority is often the main actor on changes.

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POLITICAL HOLIDAYS AS TOOLS OF NATION AND STATE REPRESENTATION IN BELARUS, 1996 – 2014

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Summary: Political holidays are important instruments of creation and consolidation of representations about nation and state. Using holidays, political elites "invent" traditions, reconstruct the past, and thus create particular visions of nation and state. In Belarus, the conflict between official and opposition discourses became the main feature characterizing the formation of these representations and of the historical narratives upon which they are based. This prevents the creation of a shared national memory space. At the same time, official representations maintained with the help of important institutional and material resources, have been gradually forcing the opposition historical narrative out of public space and national memory.

This research focuses on the example of two political holidays: official Independence Day and unofficial – opposition – Freedom Day. It analyses the strategies of the Belarusian nation and state representation through political holidays and the efficiency of these strategies. Using the examples of the official and unofficial political holidays, the main objectives of this study are to show how the competitive visions of the Belarusian nation developed between 1994 and 2014; to compare the representations of nation and state as they are reflected in two political holidays, Independence Day and Freedom Day; and to determine whether these holidays are effectively contributing to consolidate particular representations of nation and state.

This study uses such research methods as theoretical analysis of the concept of nation, discourse and content analysis of the media publications, written questionnaires, and oral interviews. It concludes with the fact that existing political holidays contribute to the blurring vision of nation and state and their identification either with or against the established political regime. From the mid-1990s the process of nation building in Belarus has been largely defined by the conflict between state institutions and political opposition that led to two competing narratives of the past. The image of the nation "born" in the Great Patriotic War stands in opposition to the one of the National Renaissance in the same way as the official holiday Independence Day is opposed by the unofficial Freedom Day. Memory conflict as well as the holidays' growing focus on political struggle and their weakening connection with the past makes the holidays ineffective in mobilizing and consolidating Belarusians on the basis of the common representations of nation and state. Moreover, the blurred vision of nation and state contribute to the maintaining of the existing non-democratic regime in Belarus as a political order "by default", further marginalization of the political opposition, and to the displacement of historical memory that became forbidden.

Keywords: *political holidays, nation, tradition, historical memory, collective representations, discourse.*

INTRODUCTION: FEATURES OF CREATING REPRESENTATIONS ABOUT THE BELARUSIAN NATION AND STATE

The necessity to reconsider history arises critically in political communities that undergo transformation and have begun establishing sovereign nation states. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Belarus faced the same necessity. The formation of the government of the Belarusian nation was established in a situation of political division in society. How did sets of images of the Belarusian nation and state shape the context of two competing mainstream discourses? On which interpretations of the past are they based and how do they interpret history to create an image of a remembering nation? What instruments do political elites use and what result do they hope for by trying to anchor the sets of representations in a public space?

To answer the questions above we analysed sets of representations of the Belarusian nation and state by comparing two holidays – Independence Day and Freedom Day. Independence Day of the Republic of Belarus is an official holiday related to the Belarusian statehood in which the collective representations of the nation and state communicated by the ruling political elite are revealed to the fullest extent possible. Freedom Day is an unofficial political holiday celebrated by the Belarusian opposition and dedicated to the creation of the Belarusian People's Republic in 1918. It represents an alternative (opposition) opinion of the image of the nation and state.

Through our research we draw primarily from the "modernist approach" in defining nations. Within this approach, nations are considered to be "socio-historical constructs formed as a result of long-term efforts by states to melt the diverse population of a certain territory into a relatively homogenous socio-cultural community (Малахов 2004)." In our opinion, this approach is the most appropriate when considering how new states formed as a result of the collapse of large states, such as the USSR needing to reconsider national ideas and borders of the nation. The understanding of the nation draws from the concept of B. Anderson's "imagined community" (Андерсен 2001) and E. Hobsbawm's "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm 1983). Political holidays are considered to be instruments of "the nation's image" which create certain representations of the nation and state using historical memory (Хальбвакс 2007; Хальбвакс 2005: 2) as a link between the nation's past and present. Memory (Нора 2009) and tradition intertwine in political holidays creating different images of the nation. Figuratively, it is possible to identify two sets of representations of the nation: the nation "born" in the Great Patriotic War (Goujon 2010) and the primordial Belarusian sovereign nation.

Political holidays as invented traditions replace the rituals and representations which exist already, thus one of the tasks is to gain the effect of social integration from the ritual, i.e. to ensure involvement of masses. However, as S. Lukes (Lukes 1975) insists, numerous researchers pay too much attention to the integrative function of political holidays and rituals leaving collective representations and feelings of their participants without consideration.

Official political holidays and rituals which work for the benefit of a certain group consistently and systematically are intended to anchor the current tradition and representations of the nation by including them in all aspects of life through symbols, slogans, urban space, time, and the loci of memory.

Alternative unofficial holidays have no high integrative, uniting potential, are unable to ensure existence of the dominant tradition by creating collective representations of the nation. Being criticised by the ruling elite, alternative representations are forced out of cultural memory gradually (Ассман 2004), they become the property of a separate group of people. An undemocratic regime allows for

using the coercion and force machinery against oppositional groups, for inciting fear in the other part of the nation, and, as a result, alternative collective representations and historical memory (Ластовский 2010) appear suppressed or banned to a certain degree. The official representations of the past and the relevant representations of the nation, state, political order, although consolidating insignificantly, are perceived as the only ones possible and are accepted by the majority.

The representations of the Belarusian nation were created in several stages related to the establishment of a sovereign state and new political institutions. The following periods can be tentatively distinguished:

1991-1994 – Transformation of the political regime, transition from establishment of communism in the USSR to establishment of a democratic sovereign legal nation state took place. Formation of the Belarusian ethnic nation, the policy of Belarusisation. During that period, the past and its connections to the present were reconsidered; the historical urban landscape changed (names of streets, monuments, museums) – F. Skaryna Avenue, Independence Square, etc. appeared; symbols and slogans changed, a new national identity was being created. A certain alliance of the authorities and memory arose as a result. At the same time, political holidays became part and parcel of the efforts aimed at legitimising the current authorities, reconsidering, and anchoring new images of history in the common perception, creating a feeling of the nation's unity, connecting the past and present. The country's Belarusisation project, restoration of the historical memory suppressed by the Soviet version of history, emerged to prominence and new political holidays appeared in the public holiday calendar: the 27th of July, Independence Day of the Republic of Belarus related to the State Sovereignty Declaration, and the 25th of March – the Freedom Day – related to the declaration of the Belarusian People's Republic in 1918.

1994-1996 – A period of transition and a gradual curtailing of the Belarusisation policy is connected to the election of the first president of the Republic of Belarus. Significant amendments related to the legislative and the executive powers were made to the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus as well as the presidential powers were extended; state symbols of the Republic of Belarus were changed (the Soviet symbols were reintroduced), the anthem was changed later on, Independence Day was shifted to the 3rd of July, and celebration of Freedom Day was abolished.

1996-2014 – A. R. Lukashenka's rule, institution and gradual consolidation of the authoritarian political regime, creating a set of images of the nation based on the positive interpretation of the Soviet past and the cult of victory in the Great Patriotic War.

Our research allowed us to determine several tendencies of creating and anchoring collective images about the nation and state in the political holiday – Independence Day and Freedom Day. We compared sets of images by discourse and content analysis of publications of Respublika, Sovetskaya Belorussiya periodicals in July 1996-2014, Naša Niva, Narodnaja Volia periodicals in March 1996-2014. Within a sociological study, students of the 10th and 11th grades, teachers, and some members of teachers' families participated in a written opinion poll on the basis of a secondary school in the city of Minsk. 43 persons aged 15 to 58 took part in the poll. The poll was completed with oral interviews of 18 respondents aged 20 to 50. The respondents were asked to answer questions concerning the two holidays – Independence Day and Freedom Day. The interviews allowed for connecting collective representations of political holidays with the respondents' immediate participation or non-participation in holidays as well as to study individual opinions on Independence Day and Freedom Day.

During the 23 years of the independent Republic of Belarus, the Soviet past and memory of the war contributed to the legitimisation of authoritarian power across the country. In fact, during that period, the public sphere saw the creation of the image of the president securing the memory of the Belarusian nation's heroism in struggle against the Nazism as well as of important values connected to the Soviet era in the public discourse.

Formation of the tradition of honouring the Belarusian nation as the nation which defended its independence during the Great Patriotic War was for the first time officially established in a speech by A. R. Lukashenka dedicated to the Independence Day, on July 27. In his speech *We Will Not Bow Our Heads to Challenges and Difficulties Because We Are Belarusians*, A. R. Lukashenka stressed: "Belarus' way to national independence was hard and challenging, the Belarusian people marched to this bright future for centuries fighting for freedom and independence with lethal force (Лазарь 1996: 193)." The Independence Day was shifted from the 27th of July to the 3rd of July in 1997 and changed the meaning of the holiday radically, from sovereign independence to Minsk's (Belarus') liberation from German Nazi occupants. The official historical memory of the Belarusian nation and state was based on the events of 1941-1945, i.e. on the period of the Great Patriotic War, and the fallen generation became the national symbol. At the same time, it was clarified that the nation's and state's sovereignty had been rooted in the October revolution: "No matter what they say about the October revolution […] it is the origin of the contemporary Belarusian statehood (Лукашенко. 1997: 140)," A. R. Lukashenka stated in his speech. An image of a brave patriotic nation defending justice together with the brotherly Russian people was being created.

The historical connection of the nation to the Great Duchy of Lithuania, Francysk Skaryna and the Belarusian People's Republic is not denied but presented as less important to the Belarusian nation than the October revolution of 1917 and the Great Patriotic War (World War II).

The national rebirth is connected to the events of March 25, 1918 when the Belarusian People's Republic was proclaimed. The main historical meaning of the act was the creation of the Belarusian state independent from Russia. The white-red-white flag and the Pahonia coat of arms became symbols of that state.

In the three years of the official status of Freedom Day (1993-1996), the attempt to establish a stable tradition of commemoration which updates the memory of the Belarusian People's Republic as the origin of the Belarusian statehood and independence was unsuccessful. The ideas of the Belarusian independence from the Soviet past of the nation were perceived and supported by a part of the Belarusian society but a lasting connection between sets of representations of the Belarusian nation and the pre-Soviet past was not established. The organisers of the Freedom Day had very limited channels for distributing historical information and limited possibilities to connect the past with the present throughout the last twenty years. The memory of the BPR as the foundation of independence was suppressed upon cancelling the Belarusisation policy.

It should be noted that the political conditions in the Republic of Belarus influenced the format of commemoration of the Freedom Day to a certain degree. In the first years, the idea of independence was used by the leaders of the opposition movement to counteract the ruling regime and integration with Russia. The opposition press created the image of an enemy represented by the state and the authoritarian political regime, the idea of an independent Belarus as a European country which could

exist on the basis of the BPR's experience emerged. Thus, the author of one of articles dedicated to the BPR made the following conclusion: "Belarus was stepping into the path of a European country, into the path of civilised development. We do not have even now what was proclaimed at that time […] No wonder that they will not celebrate 25 March" (Петрусевич 1996: 45). In spite of the fact that articles dedicated to the historical memory of the BPR and its leaders appeared in the opposition press, the Freedom Day organisers directed all of their efforts to the protest nature of the actions, which did not help to anchor collective images on the basis of the common historic memory.

Thus, through the commemoration of Independence Day, the official discourse created (or renewed) the following traditions aimed to anchor sets of representations of the Belarusian nation: stately addresses dedicated to Independence Day, military parades, parades of athletes and youth, parades of achievements of the domestic industry, unveiling of monuments and memorials related to the Great Patriotic War and independence symbols, honouring the memory of the heroes fallen in the Great Patriotic War, family traditions, concert and entertainment programmes, mass celebrations, and fireworks. The conflict with the authorities and limited possibilities do not permit the opposition to use the historical urban landscape during Freedom Day. The commemoration format is a protest event, a procession meeting, addresses by the opposition movement leaders criticising the ruling regime and urging to fight it, and participant arrest. The absence of a single view of national rebirth does not help to attract new followers and disseminate alternative representations.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SETS OF IMAGES ACCORDING TO MASS MEDIA

The comparative analysis of sets of images was done according to the following criteria: number of event participants, use of urban landscape (Ластовский 2009) and temporal characteristics; analysis of symbols and slogans preserved on photos; language means used to describe the nation and the state in leaders' speeches and in newspaper articles. Mechanisms and forgetting and recollecting the past (Assman 2008: 97-108; Assman 2008: 109-118) as components of created images of the Belarusian nation within the official and opposition discourses of the Belarusian nation and state were analysed as well.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

As mentioned above, Independence Day is the official holiday and all Belarusians participate by default. During the initial decade of the national independence, Freedom Day was commemorated by many people. Up to 10,000 people participated in commemoration in the capital, as a rule.

TEMPORAL CHARACTERISTICS

Dependence of commemorating Freedom Day on the authorities' permission did not contribute to stable temporal connections in the collective memory: during the first years, events were held on the closest weekend (to have more participants present), at least during the daytime and on working days events were limited by the short daylight period in the evening.

USE OF URBAN LANDSCAPE

The urban space occupies a significant place in creating historical connections with today (Казакевіч 2011). The Belarusian opposition has been limited in its possibilities to choose places for meetings and processions had to violate the legislation in force at times. As a result participants turned into infringers and failed in their struggle against the governmental bureaucracy, making the historical memory of the independent Belarusian nation into struggle for the urban space of the capital. They had to abandon meetings in the central squares and processions in the central avenue of the capital agreeing to the "outskirts" of the capital – the October cinema, Surhanaŭ Street, and the Peoples' Friendship park.

The ruling elite was able to change the urban space of the capital. The military parade took place in the central avenue of the capital until 2000 and later its location was changed to the Hero City of Minsk obelisk. Names of streets were changed gradually: Mašeraŭ Avenue was renamed Victors' Avenue (2005), Francysk Skaryna Avenue was renamed the Independence Avenue (2005), etc. On Independence Day, the authorities are able to use all of the central squares, parks, and avenues of the Belarusian cities and towns and of the capital as well as places in districts.

Symbols and slogans occupy a special place in political holidays. They are the starting points to actualise memories of historical events, places and time, and to connect the past to the present. The years of 1997-1998 saw a transition from the Independence Day of 27 July to 3 July in the official historical discourse, which is why the newspapers used neutral symbols of peace: the dove, children, and mother. Starting from 1999, new state symbols were introduced: the emblem and flag. The ruling political elite was able to create or to renew symbols and places of memory connected to Independence Day: the renovated Burial Mound of Glory, Stalin's Battle Line, the State Flag of the Republic of Belarus Square, and the Great Patriotic War Museum anchor the official collection representations of the nation.

Due to the political circumstances and use of the Freedom Day as a possibility to demonstrate protest, the opposition holiday has a different range of symbols: struggle and blood. The white-red-white flag and the Pahonia coat of arms become the official symbols of the opposition movement. As already mentioned above, the memory of the Great Patriotic War contributed to strengthening A. R. Lukashenka's regime. The more authoritarian the regime grew, the more brutally the opposition events were suppressed on Freedom Day, and the more often military hardware, soldiers, the president, and his son in the military uniform appeared as Independence Day symbols. Since 2006, when mass opposition protests against the results of the presidential election took place, the bell as a symbol of attention to life appeared in the symbol range of the opposition holiday more and more often, and an armed soldier against the background of an anti-aircraft mount appeared among the symbols of the official holiday. The slogans of Freedom Day began to include not only calls to fight for freedom, of faith in victory, but a split occurring in the opposition upon 2005 was aired when the opposition politicians began to accuse one another more and more often. Against the background of the opposition calls to struggle, the official slogans of the need to keep memory, of homeland beauty have no negative message, create an image of effortlessness, idleness and, owing to this, prevail in the mass consciousness: struggle requires efforts and sacrifice, and effortlessness and idleness do not burden.

LANGUAGE MEANS

Descriptive language means that become part and parcel of the cultural memory take a special place in creating and anchoring certain images of the past. Describing a free, independent legal democratic national state, both parties use similar terms. However, as a result, the meaning context becomes different: when, starting from 1996, the current authorities have built an independent sovereign state providing it with new descriptions: strong, prosperous, young, stable; have created an image of festive wellbeing in the country, of strong and efficient authorities, have described the nation as wise, long-suffering; while the opposition forces use these words in the context of antonyms of the current regime and as values it is necessary to struggle for. The official characteristics of the nation are aimed at creating a strong connection with the historical events of the Soviet past – images of the Belarusian nation living as a single family with the Russian nation. The alternative view in the conditions of struggle against the current regime results in understanding the Belarusian nation as a nation of "fighters" for freedom.

HISTORICAL MEMORY

Analysing historical facts that form the national memory of the past, it should be noted that the political holidays of Independence Day and Freedom Day not only use different historical periods but also substantiate their vision of the nation and the state by mutual criticism and by contrast of the two national projects suggested. At the same time, the both discourses have the components of forgetting and suppression. The official historical discourse sees the Great Patriotic War as struggle of the Belarusian people against the Nazism exclusively, which struggle has the form of a mass liberation movement, the image of the Soviet people fades in comparison with the image of the victorious Belarusians. Such historical facts as passing the Declaration of Independence of Belarus are suppressed and, the emphasis is shifted from 3 July as the day of Minsk's liberation from the German Nazi occupants to the day of Belarus' liberation during the Bagration campaign. Images of the nation and the state for Freedom Day embody the historical memory concerning the foundation of the Belarusian People's Republic. They are supported by the opposition social group actively but cannot extend beyond that because of limited communication. It should be noted that with concentration on certain ideas of the representations of the Belarusian nation the common vision of the history of the Belarusian nation disappears. The official discourse covers the period of the Great Patriotic War and the post-Soviet period, and the opposition one concentrates on the BPR's foundation. As a result of the struggle the importance of the complete history of Belarus and of the lessons which the Belarusian nation should learn are lost.

ANALYSIS OF EFFICIENCY OF POLITICAL ELITES' STRATEGIES WHILE CREATING CERTAIN IMAGES OF NATION AND STATE

We have analysed the efficiency of creating special images of the nation and state by polling and interviewing. The questionnaire was presented to school students and teachers and included the following questions:

1) In your opinion, which holidays are the most important holidays of the Belarusian state? 2) Do you know of unofficial political holidays? 3) If the answer is affirmative, please list the holidays (commemorative dates) you know. 4) In your opinion, which holidays carry political meaning meaning? (New Year's, Victory Day, Christmas, Dziady, Easter, the Chernobyl Way, Independence Day, Kupala, Freedom Day). 5) When is Independence Day celebrated in the Republic of Belarus? 6) What is remembered on Independence Day? 7) To which event is it dedicated? 8) How is Independence Day different from other holidays? 9) Which historic sites remind you of the holiday? 10) Did Belarus have other dates related to Independence Day? 11) When is Freedom Day celebrated in Belarus? 12) To which event is Freedom Day dedicated? 13) Do you know of cultural and historical monuments related to the events of 25 March? 14) With which places in the city (capital) do you associate the holiday?

The interview was divided into two parts about Independence Day and Freedom Day.

About Freedom Day: 1) For how many years have you already participated in the Freedom Day events? What does this day mean and how do you prepare for the day? 2) What do you feel on this day? 3) With what is this holiday associated for you? 4) In which year was Freedom Day especially memorable for you? Why? 5) Do you celebrate this day somehow else (except participating in the event)? 6) How is this holiday celebrated? 7) Have any celebration traditions evolved already? 8) Has there been an unsuccessful celebration of the Freedom Day? Why? 9) Has the holiday format changed in the recent years? 10) What are the holiday symbols? 11) If you could provide a definition, Freedom Day is .... 12) What can you say about the people who attend the holiday? 13) What unites you? 14) What would you change in the celebration next year? 15) Without what could you not imagine Freedom Day? 16) With which places in the city do you associate Freedom Day? 17) In your opinion, how is Freedom Day related to today? 18) If you had a chance to speak in public to the Belarusian nation as a whole on this day what would you say?

About Independence Day: 1) Do you attend festivities related to Independence Day? Which? 2) What do you feel on this day? 3) Which Independence Day has become the most memorable for you? Why? 4) Has the celebration of Independence Day changed in all of the years of the Belarusian state's independence? 5) Without what can you not imagine an Independence Day celebration? 6) Has there been an unsuccessful celebration of Independence Day? Why? 7) What can you say about the people coming to the celebration? 8) What arouses happiness and happy feelings in you on this day? 9) What influences you negatively on this day? 10) In your opinion, how is the Independence Day celebration related to today historically? 11) With which places in the city do you associate this day? 12) If you could provide a definition, Independence Day is ... 13) How is this day symbolic? 14) If you had a chance of speaking in public to the Belarusian nation as a whole on the day, what would you say? 15) How is Independence Day different from Victory Day to you? 16) What is the most important aspect of Independence Day, in your opinion?

Interviewing was carried out in complicated circumstances, under conditions when it is not customary to speak about politics in public institutions. During interviewing the following tendency was discovered: respondents who did not consider themselves to be opposition-minded tried to answer not how they thought but how, in their opinion, they are expected according to the official position. Nevertheless, the results enabled to examine some effective aspects of the strategies of the political elite, celebration organisers, and mass media aimed at anchoring certain images of the nation and state.

In the first place, it should be noted that the respondents did not know politics well, did not

understand differences of political trends and parties. They knew the Communist Party of Belarus and the Belarusian Popular Front best, which was sufficiently related to the existing sets of representations. Insignificant knowledge of politics resulted in the respondents not being able to differentiate the holidays with political meaning, with selection being made spontaneously while following their own preferences, Independence Day, therefore as an important holiday of the Belarusian state occupied second place after Victory Day among collective images. Thus, the Great Patriotic War discourse on which the regime is based suppressed collective representations of the nation as a sovereign independent people. At the same time, numerous respondents noted that, in their opinion, Independence Day should have been related to the independence of the Republic of Belarus upon the demise of the USSR basically, and not to the day of Minsk's liberation from the German Nazi occupants. Besides, the official discourse has suppressed the memory of 3 July as the day of Minsk's liberation from the German Nazi occupants gradually and the day has become the day of Belarus' liberation from the German Nazi occupants, which results in more blurred connections between Independence Day and liberation day. 84% of student respondents were unable to connect any historical event to Independence Day.

Secondly, it should be noted that 60% of respondents could not differentiate between official and unofficial political holidays and believed that a holiday could be established only through the official calendar of holidays. One third of respondents only defined Freedom Day as an unofficial political holiday. At the same time, 40% of respondents associated Freedom Day with adoption of the Third Charter and establishment of the Belarusian People's Republic. The representations of the events taking place on Freedom Day were blurred. Almost nobody knew the historical places in the city of Minsk related to the events of the early twentieth century, to the BPR's proclamation. The historical space of Freedom Day is connected to the October cinema, Bangalore Square, and police vans by a tenth of the respondents.

The interviewees could be divided into two groups: those who visited Freedom Day events (35%) and those who did not (65%). There were no people visiting the events of both holidays among respondents. The majority of respondents did not participate in the events related to Independence Day.

Respondents participating in Freedom Day events believed that Freedom Day is the Belarusian independence day, the holiday of the first proclamation of the independent sovereign Belarusian state, the day of freedom and pride for the people, and a very symbolic day; to them, it was a holiday on which it is possible to feel excitement, happiness, consolidation with generations of the centuries'-old history, pride for Belarusians as a nation, and pride for the country. At the same time, participants felt disappointment related to the event's organisation. They wished to see other organisers and more creative persons – not just politicians. They noted that the holiday required engagement of "non-partisan" persons because the majority of people participating in the events were people related to a certain political movement or party.

The respondents not visiting the events dedicated to Freedom Day but following them who agreed to answer the questions (27% of respondents) had the following representations shaped: it is a holiday of freedom, independence, sovereignty, and a possibility to look back. The day is commemorated by people who care – patriots and conscience of the nation who know and respect the history of their country. Such people are united by common views, the idea, faith, history of the Republic of Belarus and the fact that we are Belarusians.

Respondents mentioned the white-red-white flag and Pahonia coat of arms as the traditional

symbols of Freedom Day, and A. R. Lukashenka, his son Nikolai, flags, and open-air celebrations of Independence Day.

The importance of Independence Day was very blurred for respondents: it was not only the possibility to leave Minsk on a day off but also an additional day of vacation. For respondents who attempted to demonstrate their civic position, it was the day when people were to remember the country in which they lived, however, at the same time, respondents did not mention their personal opinions concerning the day.

Respondents who visited official events perceived the pompousness of the holiday negatively. The respondents noted that the holiday was not related to today and to the nation historically but existed owing to the will of one person only. The respondents were irritated by constant massaging of the topic of the Great Patriotic War because the Independence Day of the Republic of Belarus is not only liberation of the country from the German Nazi occupants. Respondents were tired of the "Soviet anachronisms" of the official events as well. Repondents noted that Independence Day was not any different from Victory Day.

It should be noted that those visiting Freedom Day events stated that they would not visit Independence Day events due to a number of reasons:

• 3 July is an important day to the city but not to the country as a whole because Minsk's liberation is not the liberation of the whole country. In the history of Belarus, Minsk had been liberated several times and the liberation in question was simply the last one.

• Liberation day is not such a major holiday as Independence Day should be. It should be a day when the nation obtained its sovereignty or independence related to the history of these concepts.

• The topic of the Great Patriotic War should not be related to the country's independence directly and it should not surpass all of the country's history.

The respondents who did not visit Freedom Day events explained that they did not see any sense in them. The group included those who did not wish to be apprehended and to be associated with opposition members or with those who disagreed with the political regime but who wished to have another possibility to demonstrate disagreement with the current policy of the authorities. There were those who called the organisers pseudo-politicians, i.e. those who existed at the expense of the regime and strived for personal benefits while they were not, in fact, interested in the nation.

CONCLUSION: FRAGMENTATION OF NATIONWIDE CULTURAL HISTORICAL MEMORY

The current holidays do not unite Belarusians around common images of the past and contribute to the division of Belarusian society into "us" and "them".

Symbols and images are often important but not always understood components of representations and influence recollection processes. Thus, the white-red-white flag and Pahonia coat of arms are connected not only to the historical moment of Belarus' independence but also to the political opposition movement against the current authorities. At the same time, increase of brutality of the political regime in Belarus was mirrored vividly by appearance of new symbols during celebration of Independence Day (which are not new for other holidays, e.g. Victory Day, at the same time). Appearance of military symbols during the holidays, symbols intended to embody a strong nation and

state but discordant with the image of the tolerant friendly and wise Belarusian nation, could be an example.

Prevalence of the official holiday from the point of view of its anchoring in time is in its obvious connection to a certain date of the calendar. From the point of view of the majority of responses of the respondents, the opposition holiday is connected to the date of 25 March but not to the historical past of Belarus (the fact of the BPR's establishment) itself. Freedom Day loses the connection of the present to the historical date gradually, which does not contribute to engaging new participants of the events.The urban landscape plays an important role in anchoring collective representations of the nation and state connecting history to the present, turning holidays into memorable historical places. Respondents establish associative relations between Independence Day and the memorial complexes dedicated to the Great Patriotic War, most notably Stalin's Battle Line, the Great Patriotic War Museum, and the Burial Mound of Glory.

The conflict between participants and organisers of Freedom Day with authorities determines the instability of connections between the place of celebration and the political holiday itself. Representations of connections of the procession, dedicated streets, Bangalore Square are anchored (the procession ends in arrests for numerous participants). At the same time, connection to the content of the holiday itself, to proclamation of the BPR's independence in 1918, to participants of those memorable events and memorable historical places of the capital is not observed. Besides, attention of the mass media has been directed to the number of people and scope of the events and not to the created collective images and their spatial and temporal limits.

The discourse analysis helped make clear that the current political holidays and rituals contribute to blurring of representations of the nation and state. The official holiday of the Independence Day does not intend to anchor collective representations of the nation and state directly related to statehood, independence, and sovereignty actually. The created discourse of a nation "born" in the Great Patriotic War does not unite the proponents of the governmental and opposition elites but exists at the expense of criticism of the opponent's discourse, not least of all at the same time. In addition, the official celebration of the Independence Day of 3 July blurs collective representations of the Great Patriotic War while representing the day of Minsk's liberation as the day of Belarus' liberation from the German Nazi occupants. In the opposition holidays, the accent is shifted from the national historical component to political events directly related to the protest against A. R. Lukashenka's regime. As a result, the nationwide cultural memory disintegrates, becomes the possession of generations, and each generation remembers only the history studied at an educational institution, although quite obscurely. For the political elites, historical memory as well as collective representations of the nation and state become secondary, while primary focus is on engaging participants in the events. As a result, the Belarusian nation does not have a single project for Belarusian identity and of the national image. In general, the tendencies are beneficial to the current political regime in Belarus, which is enabled by blurred collective representations of the history of the nation and state to constantly instrumentalise the past in order to discredit and marginalise alternative projects of the political future.

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CIVIC AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM OF BELARUSIAN STUDENTS: CASE STUDY OF EHU STUDENTS

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Summary: The article is devoted to the analysis of influence of a university on the civil and political activities of Belarusian students, researching the case of students of the European Humanities University (EHU). EHU was chosen as the research focus is the role and importance of the university in the process of political socialisation of Belarusian students studying outside Belarus. The research question is does the university – one of the main agents of political socialisation – have any influence on the political activity of students and their civil and political attitudes through the educational process? The object of the current research is attitudes and activity (participation) of students of EHU that can be attributed to the sphere of political and civic participation during from 2012 to 2015.

The main theoretical approaches are provided by the research and academic works of G. Almond, S. Verba, G. Powell, T. Luckmann, etc., which are devoted to the study of concepts and structure of political socialisation, political activity, and political culture.

Using survey methods to study the influence of the university on political/civic attitudes, the following conclusion has been made. The university (EHU) influences political/civic attitudes and engagement of students via the educational process and professional activities of lecturers. But the university is not the main agent of political socialisation. According to the opinion of students, mass media and family have the biggest influence on students' political/civic activity. The extent of participation in non-academic activities of the university partially corresponds to the level of political/civic engagement of EHU students.

The results of this research could be useful for researchers on political socialisation and political/civic participation.

Keywords: *Belarusian students, higher education in Belarus, political/civic activism, political socialisation, socio-political orientation, university.*

INTRODUCTION

Analysis of political socialisation agents, political orientation, and political activism models is important in the context of a nondemocratic regime, in this case in the situation of Belarus. It is conditioned by the fact that the success and quality of transition to a democratic political regime is related to the respective political values, orientation, and forms of citizens' political activism directly. According to the works of leading theoreticians of political culture and socialisation studies, political culture includes political values and citizens' orientation towards the political system is adopted via political socialisation specifically. Political socialisation is an integral process of transfer and adoption of cognitive components of political culture. Certain types of political culture are created according to the relevant model of political activism. Thus, political activism is a complicated process related to political socialisation and political culture.

The area of study of political activity has been one of the most important agents of political socialization – the university. The university creates conditions for students to gain certain knowledge about civic and political spheres, the role of citizens' activism in it, etc. In particular, this research is dedicated to the role of the university (the case study of the EHU) in Belarusian students' selection of certain political activism models. EHU was selected for analysis because it claims to be the only Belarusian university that is not only an educational institution, but also one that operates according to democratic autonomy principles (Статут ЕГУ 2014:3) that involve the active position of the students and their participation in the processes inside the university. EHU should contribute to students' participation in civic, research activities as well as to shaping such values as respect and expertise, proactiveness, duty, and feelings of responsibility (Статут ЕГУ 2014:3). Thus, it could be believed that university studies can influence civic education and students' selection of a certain political-activism model.

Using the above as a theoretical and applied foundation, we have decided to assess students' political activism with the following parameters:
- Experience of political participation at the university and beyond;
- Interest in current socio-political processes in Belarus and globally;
- Interest in the governance processes at the university; and
- Participation in civic initiatives, political parties, and/or civil-society organisations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Civic and political activism of students in the first to third years of all of the high-residence BA programmes in 2011-2015 inclusive were the research target. Since information about socio-political activism of the EHU students can be provided only by students themselves, the questionnaire survey was the main method of data collection. The survey was primarily individual. Each group of students received a questionnaire to which students responded in writing.

The population was 340 students and the sample was 182 respondents with a confidence factor of 95%. The sample was in clusters with each cluster having a similar number of respondents. The clusters were divided by programme, type of residence, and year.

The first hypothesis was that the university (EHU) as a political socialisation agent influenced

political activism and activities via the educational process, manifesting itself in changes of:

- practices of their political participation at the university and beyond;

- degree of interest in the current socio-political processes in Belarus and in the world; and

- participation in various political and/or civic initiatives.

The second hypothesis is based on the opinion that the degree of student participation in the university's activities beyond the teaching and learning process could correspond to the degree of student activism in the socio-political sphere.

While both hypotheses include such concepts as "student activism" and "socio-political activism," which are quite vague to examine, it is important to determine the indicators which would allow for studying activism empirically.

The following were selected as empirical indicators of political and civic activism on the basis of research of socio-political activism by G. Almond and G. Powell:

• Participation (conventional and non-conventional) in political events in Belarus as well as abroad. As a rule, conventional participation is participation in elections as well as membership in political parties/movements. Non-conventional participation is participation in protests, meetings, etc.

• Participation in socio-political initiatives/associations. This allows for determining political identification.

• Determination of interest in socio-political processes.

The principal indicators of determining students' activism at the EHU were related to participation in student activities of the university beyond the teaching and learning process:

• Participation in activities organised by students.

• Participation in public activities and work of governance and self-governance bodies of the EHU.

Depending on the degree of student activism, three models of participation were formulated: active, traditional, and passive participation. The active model was characterised by maximum involvement in the university's activities as compared to the traditional and passive groups. Representatives of the traditional model were involved in the university's activities, but at an average level. The passive model is characterised by non-participation in the university's activities and insignificant involvement.

DETERMINATION OF THE DEGREE OF ACTIVISM OF EHU STUDENTS

According to the research conducted, the active model of participation was demonstrated by 28 students (15%). They were characterised by the most active participation in the work of the governance and self-governance bodies of the university.

The model of traditional participation was demonstrated by 93 students (51%), who participated

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[1] · *The following educational programmes participated in the research (2015) at EHU: Cultural Heritage and Tourism, International Law and EU Law, Visual Design and Media, Visual Culture and Creative Industry.*
The questionnaire survey was sent students of high-residence programmes in the 1st through 3rd years. 4th-year students were not included as they had their pre-graduation practice at the time the research was being conducted.

in public students' events less often as well as in university governance and self-governance. These students' activism was sporadic.

The passive model of participation was demonstrated by 61 students (34%). As compared to the two other groups, this group demonstrated the minimum degree of student activism, as expected.

ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-POLITICAL ACTIVISM OF EHU STUDENTS

PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL EVENTS

One of important criteria allowing for the assessment of the degree of students' political activism is their participation in political events in Belarus and abroad (elections, meetings, flash mobs, etc.) in the period of 2012-2015.

Non-conventional socio-political participation in these groups of students is distributed as follows (cf. Chart 1).

50% of students in the active model participated in socio-political events and thus participated in similar events more often than representatives of the other groups. 33% of students in the traditional participation model and 26% of students in the passive participation model demonstrated similar activism.
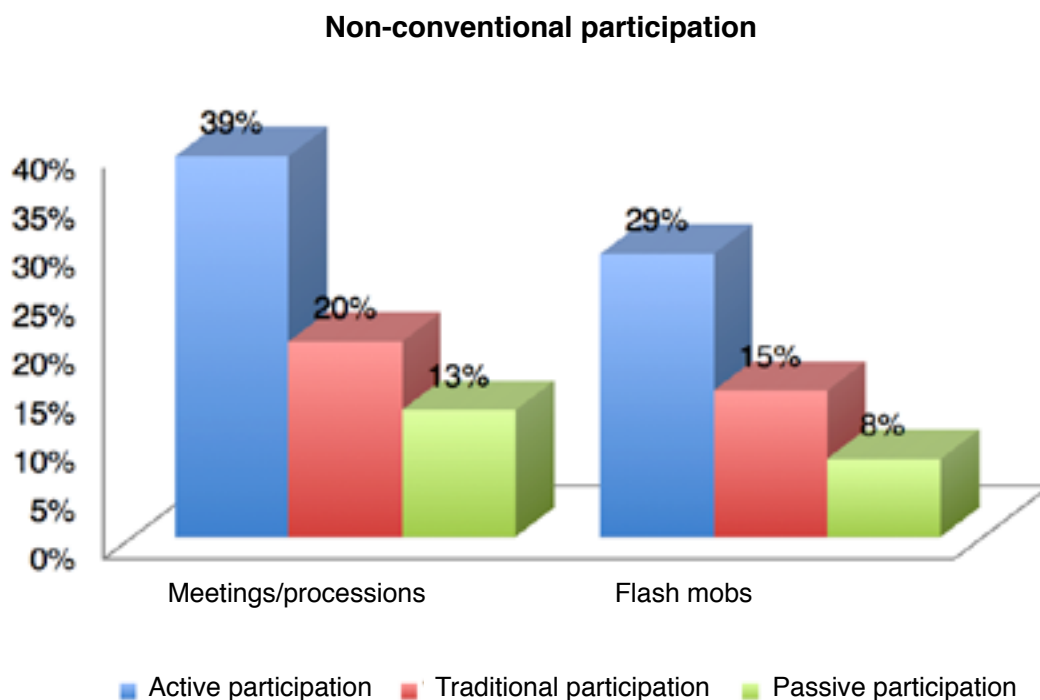
Non-conventional participation

■ Active participation   ■ Traditional participation   ■ Passive participation

Chart 1: Non-conventional socio-political participation of the three groups of students

For students in the active and traditional models, socio-political activism manifested itself in non-conventional participation more often. Also, students in the active participation model demonstrated such activism more often. Students who showed average activism and students with passive participation were the least active when compared to the two groups above. In addition, the three groups of students participated in meetings and/or processions more often than in flash mobs. Concerning conventional participation of students, it should be noted that students of the passive model spoke about their non-conventional activism more often (cf. Chart 2).
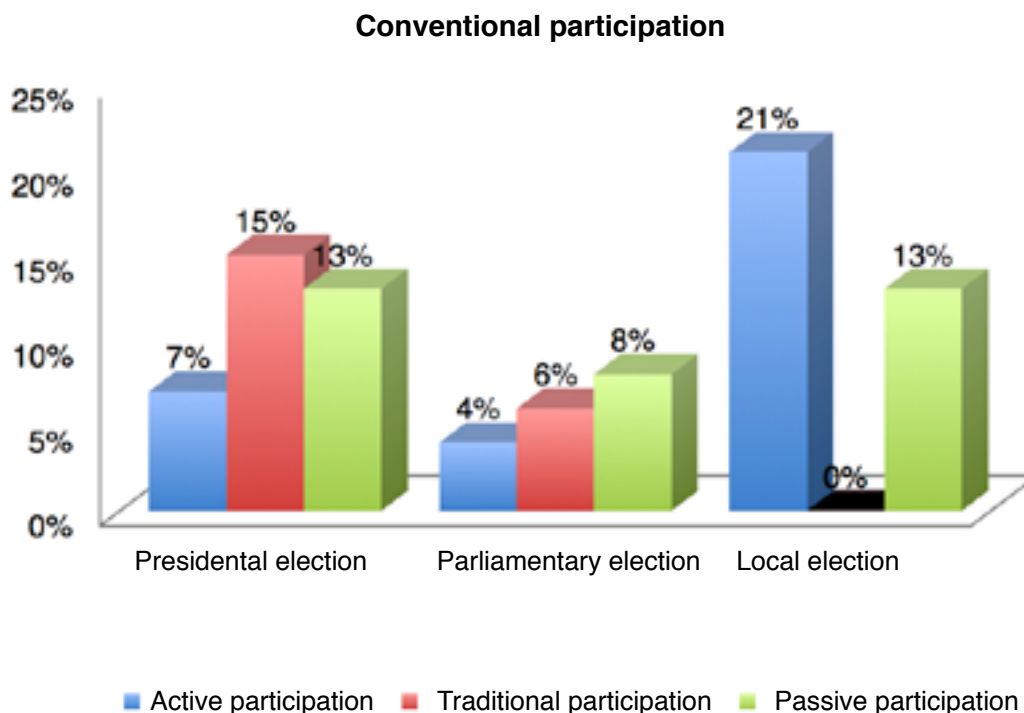
Conventional participation

■ Active participation ■ Traditional participation ■ Passive participation

Chart 2: Conventional political participation of the three groups of students

According to the data, students in the passive and traditional models participated in presidential elections more actively than students in the active model. However, "activists" participated in local elections more often while none of the respondents in the traditional model participated. It should also be noted that students in the traditional model participated in parliamentary elections more actively than the other two groups. 2% of students in each of the traditional and passive participation groups noted that they intended to participate in the 2015 presidential election.

Concerning the general distribution of responses among EHU students who took part in the survey, it should be noted that the degree of their participation in political events is characterised as low. Only 34% of students manifested political activism (cf. Diagram 1).
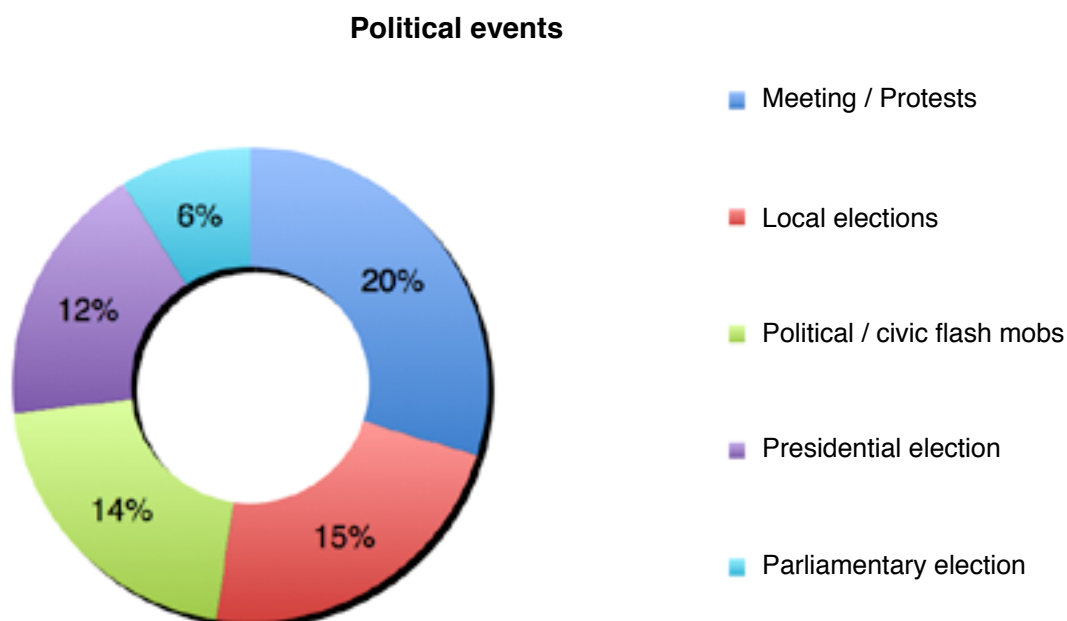
Political events

■ Meeting / Protests

■ Local elections

■ Political / civic flash mobs

■ Presidential election

■ Parliamentary election

Diagram 1: Participation of EHU students in political events

PARTICIPATION IN CIVIC INITIATIVES OR NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

Another important criterion that allows for determining the degree of socio-political activism is participation in non-governmental organisations and/or civic initiatives.

According to the data, 29% of students in the active model participated in non-governmental organisations. This value, while certainly not high, exceeds similar values of the groups of the traditional (6%) and passive (0%) participation models. Students participated in the following initiatives/organisations: UNESCO, European Belarus, Belarusian Helsinki Committee, and Language Anew. They also participated in local self-government, volunteering, and various NGO projects in Belarus and Lithuania. It is interesting to note that a majority of students who participated refused to say in which events specifically.

DEMONSTRATION OF INTEREST IN CURRENT SOCIO-POLITICAL EVENTS IN BELARUS AND IN THE WORLD

In general, all the three groups demonstrated a high level of interest in information about socio-political events in the world and in Belarus. Thus, 68% of students in the active participation model were interested in information about socio-political events in our country and in the world. It is worth noting that 64% of students in the passive participation model stated their interest in political events. As compared to the previous groups, students of traditional participation manifested the least interest – 51%. However, interest in information on current events in Belarus and in the world was high in all three groups of students.

Summarising, it is important to note that the assumption that the degree of students activism can correlate with the socio-political, confirmed partially because students in the traditional and passive participation models did not correspond to their basic characteristics concerning participation in political events and interest in the socio-political domain and demonstrated higher participation than had been expected.

STUDENT CIVIC AND POLITICAL ORIENTATION

Within the questionnaire survey, students were asked to note the institutions which, in their opinion, influenced civic/political activism. The questionnaire provided an opportunity to mention several options of answers or to suggest one's own option. According to students' opinion, the following influenced their political and civic activism most: mass media (52%), family (50%), university (41%) as well as their inner circle – friends (35%) (cf. Diagram 2). The least influence on the socio-political activism of students is exerted by the church (7.1%) and school (6%). Distribution of students' answers concerning school seems interesting. In the first place, it is related to the fact that, theoretically, children begin their first familiarisation with socio-political values and principles of the political process outside the family institution precisely in school. However, according to the data, school influenced the civic and political activism of the Belarusian students the least.
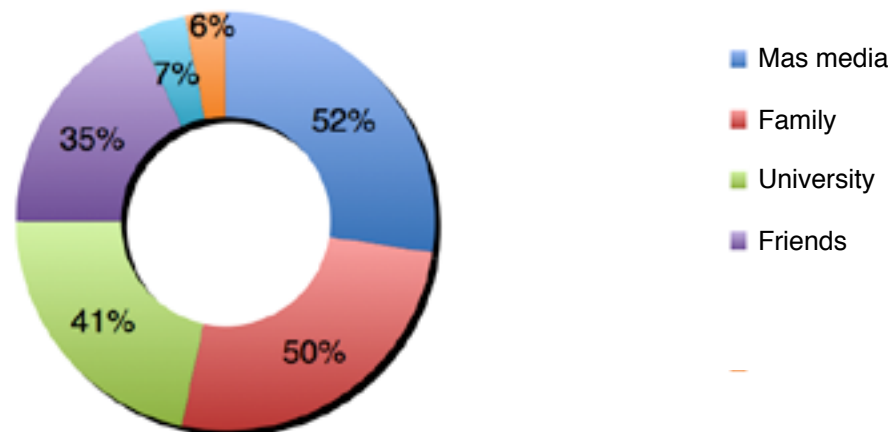
Political socialisation agents

Diagram 2: Student responses concerning political socialisation agents which influence their civic/political orientation

EHU'S INFLUENCE ON STUDENT CIVIC/POLITICAL ORIENTATION

In the framework of the research conducted it was important to determine the university's role in shaping socio-political activism and, in particular, the relevant orientation. Student responses to the question of whether EHU influenced their socio-political orientation was divided 50-50. From this distribution we can conclude that, in the opinion of the Belarusian students, the university (EHU) exerts an average influence on the civic and political orientation because the influence does not exceed 50%. In addition, students assessed with which components of curricular and extracurricular activities the university influenced their socio-political orientation. The most influence on their socio-political orientation, according to the data, is exerted by university-wide courses (49.5%), lecturers and their professional activities (48.9%) as well as courses within educational programmes (45.6%) (cf. Diagram 3).

STUDYING POLITICAL SOCIALISATION OF BELARUSIAN STUDENTS

Political socialisation is a complex and continuous process in which many agents participate, including the family, educational institutions, the inner circle, political parties, etc. Analysis of socio-political activism of the youth in the context of the socio-political sphere of Belarus is especially important. It is conditioned, in the first place, by the issues of political socialisation of the Belarusian youth consisting primarily of university students. At the same time, virtually no research of the issue is conducted. One of the few works in the direction was the sociological research carried out at M. Tank Belarusian State Teachers' Training University and Belarusian State University (BSU) in 2003 and 2006. During the research, the following problems of political socialisation of these two universities' students were found: 1) students demonstrated low trust in such governmental institutions as the National Assembly and Council of Minister and did not demonstrate interest in the operation of the local and national authorities (М. Канапацкі 2004: 34); 2) more than half of students did not know about the political sphere of Belarus. For example, the majority of BSU students surveyed failed to name a

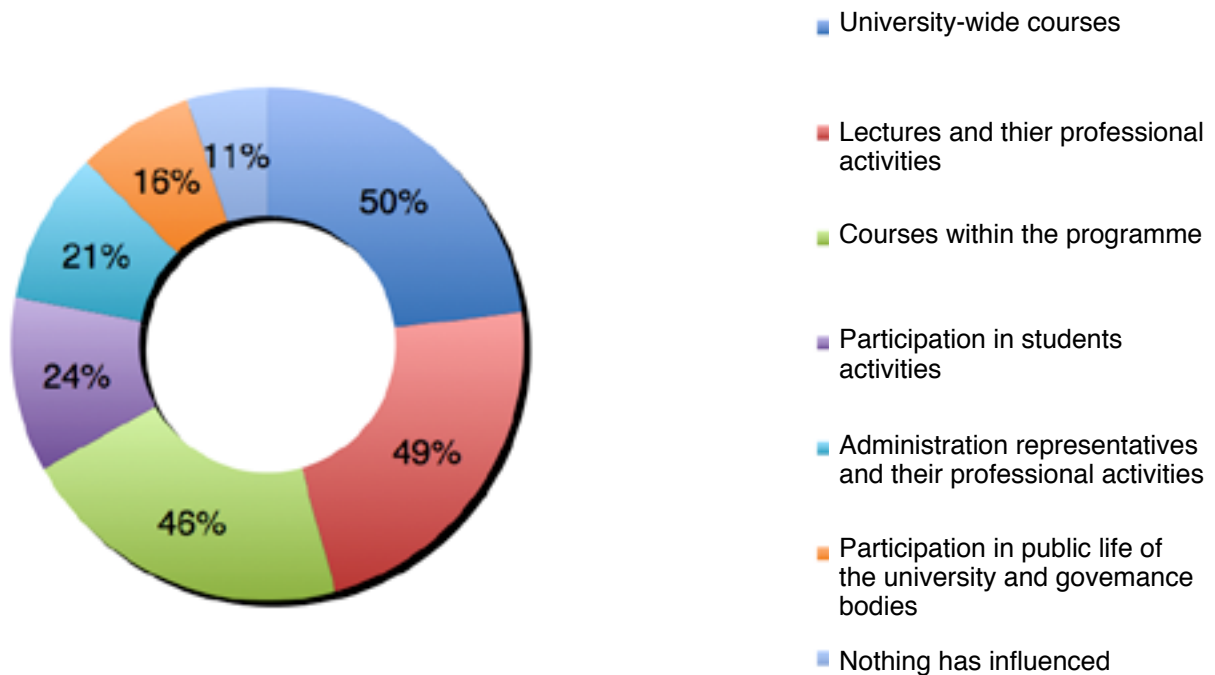**Components of influence on civic / political orientation**

- University-wide courses
- Lectures and thier professional activities
- Courses within the programme
- Participation in students activities
- Administration representatives and their professional activities
- Participation in public life of the university and govemance bodies
- Nothing has influenced

Diagram 3: Student assessment of academic and non-academic activities influencing their civic/political orientation

single political party (Н. Козыренко 2008: 205). The result of the lack of interest in the political sphere of Belarus and lack of trust in political institutions of power was uncertainty of political opinions of the Belarusian youth and absence of political orientation. Regarding political socialisation agents, it was noted that, to a significant degree, the reason for the low level of political activism among Belarusian students was "instability of the family institution and commercialisation of all levels of the educational system, which is turning into a service-oriented sphere and not the main form of translating culture to the coming generations" (Н. Козыренко 2008: 205).

Taking into consideration the above, it is possible to conclude that Belarusian students who study at Belarusian universities are mostly passive in relation to the socio-political sphere. It should be noted that in the research the important role of the higher educational institutions that could provide basic knowledge about the political system of Belarus, the activities and role of political parties, necessary orientation, etc., is not defined. It is obvious that the issue of studying the socio-political orientation of the students of the Belarusian higher educational institutions requires more attention.

Analysis of EHU as a political socialisation agent alternative to the government means seems important because its activities are oriented firstly towards Belarusian youth. on this research, it is possible to note that the university (EHU) is not the main political socialisation agent that influences students' socio-political activism. In the relevant ranking, it was named third after mass media and family. At the same time, the university was mentioned as more important than the inner circle, church, and school. EHU's influence on students' socio-political orientation is average but it exists, which was mentioned by 50% of the respondents. The influence is mostly exerted via the teaching and learning process that is manifested in the professional activities of the university's lecturers as well as in the courses of students' educational programmes.

CONCLUSION

One of important issues of EHU's influence on students' political activism is manifested in the providing of necessary knowledge about the political sphere. Thus, according to the opinion of the majority of students (60%), the university provides knowledge necessary to understand socio-political processes in Belarus and in the world.

Analysis of the influence of the university environment on students' socio-political activism was based on the assumption that the degree of student activism at the university could potentially coincide with the degree of socio-political activism. Given this, it is important to note that the degrees of student and socio-political activism were actually similar. Thus, in general, EHU students have an average degree of socio-political activism. It follows from the data obtained that, on the whole, political activism of EHU students is manifested by interest in information about the socio-political sphere (74%). Socio-political activism is manifested by participation in political events at an average level (34%). Such participation is mostly non-conventional and consists of participation in meetings and demonstrations (20%). The lowest activism is demonstrated in relation to such indices as participation in civic initiatives and/or non-governmental organisations (14%).

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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE LEVEL OF GENDER EQUALITY IN FRANCE, LITHUANIA AND BELARUS

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Summary: The object of the research is gender equality in the political, economic, and social life of France, Lithuania, and Belarus.

One of the goals of this study is to analyze the level of actual gender equality in the countries selected using gender-sensitive indicators. I sought to learn whether the actual situation is reflected by the view of the index dynamics or if some of the indicators do not correspond to the actual situation of gender equality in France and Lithuania.

The analysis used a combination of methods that, taken together, can be defined as an evaluation research. This methodology is often used in policy analysis where it is necessary to conduct a comparative assessment. After analyzing each indicator presented in the World Economic Forum (WEF) index, as well as unexplained dynamics within it, it becomes clear that the quantitative data from spheres researched by WEF is not enough to assess the actual level of gender equality in any country. To eliminate the gap a number of gender-sensitive indicators were introduced and gender equality policies of France, Lithuania, and Belarus were analyzed through these indicators.

The results showed that France is many steps ahead of Lithuania and Belarus in matters of gender equality, both in 2013 and today. This means that the gender equality index is not valid, and it does not reflect the reality. Belarus, although it has a number of similarities with the situation in Lithuania, still lags behind the latter on some issues. The most problematic areas are reproductive labour and issues involving prostitution.

The article may be useful both for researchers dealing with gender equality as well as participants in the process of political decision making. It may also be interesting for those who feel the need to introduce a gender perspective into all areas of social life.

Keywords: *gender equality, gender policy, government regulation, social transformation processes, discriminatory practices.*

A number of research centres publish a rating of countries based on the gender equality index annually. The World Economic Forum rating includes 136 countries. Belarus has not yet been ranked as to gender equality issues. However, does ranking allow us to comprehensively understand how close a country is to real gender equality?

The first figure of the rating indices demonstrating significant growth for France and decline for Lithuania, showing significant fluctuations, is based on the WEF rating for 2010-2014. Theoretically, such large changes can be the result of taking some efficient governmental measures regarding gender policy, but neither Lithuania, which fell by 16 places, nor France, which doubled its place on the list, paid attention to the gender policy in particular during the period under consideration nor was the legislation amended.

Detailed analysis of the indices rated as well as analysis of the gender policy itself will will determine whether it is possible to use the gender equality index to assess actual gender equality in a country under consideration and which sufficient indicators should be used for research.
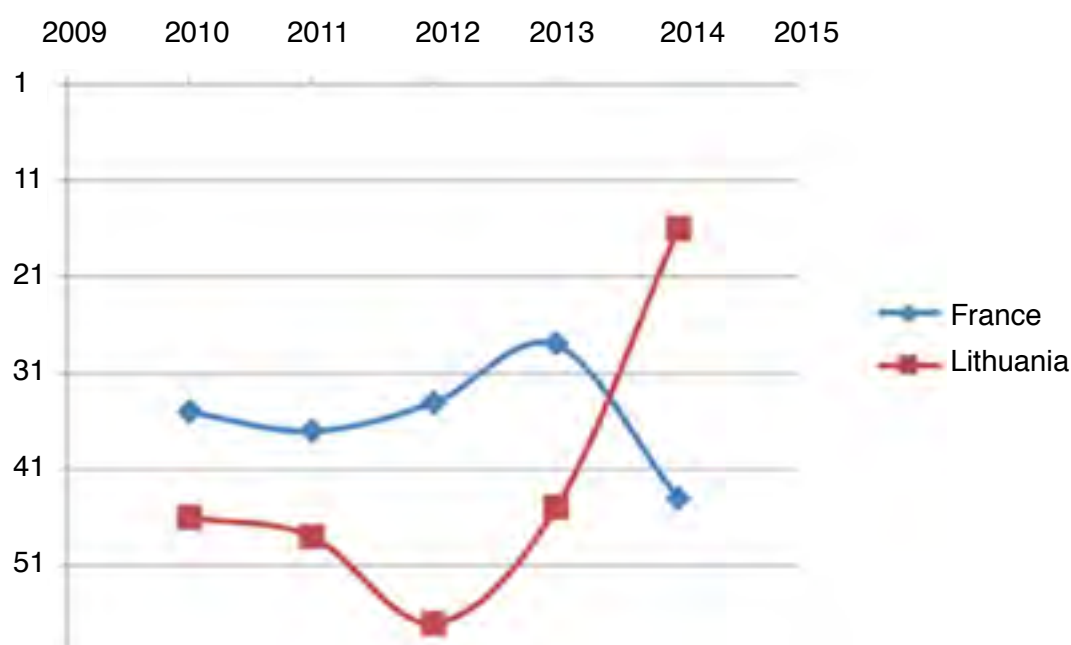

Figure 1. Comparative graph of the gender equality index (WEF)

It should be noted that in the index calculation the concept of "gender equality" is understood as the "gender binary model of the society". It would be a mistake to understand gender equality as equality of men and women only, however. In this context, quantifying the analysis of global issues, one has to divide the society into two homogeneous groups.

While calculating the gender equality index, four spheres of social life are examined and each of them is divided into several indicators. More detailed data concerning the indicators have been used to create a rating below.

The problem with the indicators used is that quantitative data are unable to cover and rank information important to assess the real gender equality in a given country. For example, the educational sphere studied with only quantitative measures is able to reflect the actual state of affairs only to a limited degree. Even when the overall tendency of women having tertiary education will be positive, significant discrimination in differentiation of educational spheres into men's and women's

Sphere	Indicator
Economic activity	Ratio of men's and women's employment
	Ratio of men's and women's remuneration for the same work
	Ratio of men's and women's wages
	Share of men and women among legislators, officials, and senior managers
Education	Ratio of men's and women's literacy
	Share of men and women with primary education
	Share of men and women with secondary education
	Share of men and women with tertiary education
Health and life expectancy	Ratio of men's and women's healthy life
	Ratio of men and women at birth
Political engagement	Share of men and women in politics
	Men's and women's share of ministerial offices
	Number of years of women governing the country (in the past 50 years)

Table 1. Indicators used for the gender equality index

could persist. In Belarus, for example, the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs has standards instead of contests for men and women with score norms for enrolment. Thus, in 2015, young males were to get 175 points and young females 336 to become students seeking degrees in legal science in the department of criminal procedure (Саламаціна, 2016). The issues of the teaching and learning process at higher educational institutions should be examined separately when women students face a number of discriminatory practices from undervaluation of their activities to sexual harassment.

When calculating the index, the sphere of health and life expectancy is represented by two indicators only: ratio of the length of men's and women's healthy life and ratio of sex at birth. Examination of the situation concerning women's health and life expectancy can significantly influence the increase of quality of life for women, but statistical data in only these two categories are obviously not enough for comprehensive research in the sphere. Thus, when calculating the index, the nature of medical institutions across which women come in their lives is not considered, meaning institutions that take care of the women's reproductive health. Thus, such an important issue as childbearing is not considered when calculating the index in spite of the fact that, in many countries, women's death in childbirth or childbirth at the very beginning of the child-bearing age (12-14 years) is a serious issue; this latter the result of early forced marriage often practiced in such countries as Afghanistan, India, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, among others.

The economic field is not related to issues of the "second shift," which deals with uncompensated household chores traditionally done by women. And one of the most important fields – political engagement – includes such an ambiguous indicator as the "number of years of women governing the country". This should reflect the women's role in governing the country but this indicator does not improve the actual situation for women in the country even with a high score. If the country does not have a presidential form of government the president has weak influence on the policy being implemented. Even when the form is presidential it does not mean that more attention will be paid to

gender policy issues than before. Thus, the fact that a woman is in presidential office is of symbolic meaning and is hardly able to influence patriarchal cultural orientation where women still have no access to high government positions. In Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaite has been in the presidential office for the second electoral term but no fundamental changes or strengthening of the gender policy has happened in this period. And women's presence at the parliament remains at the level of 28-32%. Thus, the indicators that are used to calculate the index are unable to reflect actual gender equality. A number of additional indicators should be used and qualitative characteristics should be introduced to have a complete picture in any country under consideration.

For in-depth analysis, gender sensitive indicators were selected such as marriage and marriage law, reproductive labour, childcare, and government regulation of prostitution.

MARRIAGE AND MARRIAGE LAW

The traditional patriarchal structure involves such division of roles in the family through which marriage contributes to men's career progress but charges women with additional duties. The duties are to keep the house and serve the man. This employment sector is called the "pink sector" of the economy and produces more than 30% of VAT on average. "Pink sector" work is not remunerated and hinders career progress due to significant limitation of time dedicated to professional development. Moreover, the division of industries into male and female, existence of the "glass ceiling", and different remuneration of labour based on sex should be considered.

All of these circumstances create a situation in which marriage of people of full legal age but who are not yet independent economically provokes situations of economic violence in marital relations. A multitude of household chores and childrearing completed in parallel with a professional occupation narrows the sphere of women's social relations. New social studies confirm the hypothesis of strong correlation of the marriage age and domestic economic and psychological violence to which women are largely susceptible. Researchers indicate that legislation protects married women's rights less.

All of the above, together with weak regulation of gender issues by the government, creates women's poverty. Secondary analysis of the research demonstrates that retired women belong to the most vulnerable category of population in Lithuania.

A particular and very important issue related to family legislation concerns issues of physical domestic violence. The legislation on the issue had been regulated quite well in France as well as in Lithuania prior to the period under examination.

Thus, in Lithuania any citizen may report an alleged case of domestic violence according to the domestic violence law and an investigation can be initiatied on the basis of witness testimony – not only through petition by the victim. The amendments protect married or cohabiting women more than previous legislation. Currently, investigation is carried out on cases initiated without participation of victims of domestic violence. It creates the real possibility to resolve issues, as the victims are often frightened. They suffer not only from physical but also from emotional and economic violence and may have Stockholm syndrome.

In Belarus, legislation related to domestic violence is weaker and the current law came into force only in 2014. Prior to passing the new law, the previous version passed in 2008 was in force but it

was very ineffective. With the amendments, the victim herself may press charges against her abuser, which, in my opinion, is a weakness considering the above arguments. The stronger part includes clauses that were added following consultations with the UNFPA. These include several prohibitive measures for the abuser:

- not to try to determine the location of the domestic violence victim;
- not to visit locations of the domestic violence victim;
- not to communicate with the victim, including by telephone or through the Internet.

Now it is virtually impossible to analyse the effectiveness of the legislative amendments while the data available (e.g., the number of domestic-violence petitions, the number of criminal cases instituted, etc.) do not reflect the reality. In the first place, it is connected to a significant difference between the number of domestic-violence occurrences and occurrences reported. A woman can fail to apply to the law-enforcement agencies due to a number of reasons. The main hindrance is the socio-cultural environment: patriarchal traditions make a portion of people believe that domestic violence is normal. Economic violence, mentioned above, is important as well because upon severing relations with the abuser the woman often loses a means of supporting herself.

However, the situation in Belarus differs due to the positive trend of the average marriage age. In the early 2000s, the age was 23 years and by 2014 the marriage age for women reached 25.3 years.

REPRODUCTIVE LABOUR AND PARENTAL LEAVE

Currently, being pregnant and childbearing are still not considered labour but rather as a woman's duty. Concerning the parental leave and childrearing, the primary obligations are laid on the woman again. In the European Union, this issue is governed by supranational bodies as well, thus in Lithuania as well as in France legislation is in force which engages men in childrearing and which intends to improve the conditions of parental leave for one of the parents.

For several years, a special type of insurance for parental leave has existed in France. If one of the parents decides to take parental leave for two years the government should pay 70% of the salary in the first year and 40% in the second one. If a parent takes parental leave for one year, the government should pay 100% of the salary. The parental leave insurance may not exceed the average salary of the parent in the previous four years. This insurance and the law to engage fathers in childrearing have created the situation of virtually equal distribution of parental leave between men and women.

In Lithuania, the parental leave distribution remains extremely unequal - 93% of women opposed to 7% of men in spite of the fact that in Lithuania the legislation similar to the French one is in force: 70% of salary is paid in the first year and 40% in the second year.

In Belarus, the situation with the parental leave is similar to Lithuania concerning the number of men and women on parental leave. 2014 statistics demonstrate a distribution of 2% to 98%, respectively. However, in Belarus one of the parents is paid a standard monetary benefit and the leave length is up to three years. While the average men's salary is higher than women's, reluctance to lose the main source of financial support contributes in part to such significant imbalance. In their turn, women on parental leave have virtually no income, which influences the phenomenon of economic

violence significantly. In 2014 the benefit for the first child was less than 210 USD (for the second child 20 USD more) while the average salary in the country was 595 USD the same year.

Another important issue is that 2% of men who take care of children in theory include grandfathers who go on the parental leave. In practice, it is not like this in almost all cases. That is, both parents continue working with the "second shift" of the woman carried out with childrearing, which deteriorates the woman's situation even further.

GOVERNMENT PARTICIPATION IN ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF PROSTITUTION

To address the issue of prostitution an efficient mechanism of government regulation is necessary, related specifically to the legal protection of women who engage in prostitution. It is obvious that the issue cannot be resolved by government regulation alone, but a high level of government responsibility for prostitution is an important step to address the issue.

As of now, a number of countries use the inefficient method of criminalisation of prostitution, which makes women even more vulnerable. Women who engage in prostitution are held liable for having to earn their living this way.

Another pattern of conventional addressing of the issue is prostitution decriminalisation. Decriminalisation without acknowledging prostitution as a form of gender violence and implementing methods of multilevel reaction of the government to women engaging in prostitution simplifies operation of the organisations that satisfy the demand for prostitution. A transitional pattern from decriminalisation to legalisation can be used as well.

Some European Union member states have legalised prostitution, whereas others have rejected legalisation due to the absence of regulation mechanisms for the industry and lack of possibilities for full-fledged protection of sex workers. Prostitution legalisation results in expansion of the sex industry, however it is virtually impossible to determine whether this process is voluntary. Thus, in the ten years of prostitution legalisation, the Dutch sex industry grew by 25%. Prostitution legalisation contributes to the expansion of related industries such pornography, strip clubs, phone sex, etc. Turning to this regulation method, the government uses a portion of its population as goods while pimps become businessmen. Prostitution legalisation excludes the possibility of achieving gender equality because of the perception that half of society are goods. Moreover, by declaring prostitution an "occupation" the government masks oppressed women's position in the country and does not attempt to create alternative ways for them to reach economic wellbeing.

The final form of governmental prostitution regulation is the governmental policy to criminalise the customer. This is the only pattern in which prostitution is considered to be a form of violence and which deals with the root cause – demand. Customer criminalisation legislation is currently in force in Iceland, Norway, and Sweden and has been in France since 2013.

Women engaged in prostitution have a number of special protective measures available and receive rehabilitation assistance. Customers' criminalisation includes fines and prison terms set forth for an attempt to use sex services. Such measures limit customer possibilities, reduce customer motivation, and make pimps' activities problem-plagued to the maximum.

As with the marriage issue the situation in Belarus is very similar to that in Lithuania: both countries regulate prostitution by criminalising it. Women who engage in prostitution are not protected

from physical and sexual violence which they face regularly and are held liable in the administrative process for their method of earning a living to which they had to turn.

	Criminalisation	Decriminalisation	Transition form	Legalisation	Customer criminalisation
France	-	-	-	+ (until 2013)	+ (currently)
Lithuania	+ -	+ -	-	-	-
Belarus	+	-	-	-	-

Table 2. Types of governmental prostitution regulation

Analysis of the indicators used to prepare the gender equality index has detected a number of serious drawbacks which call into question the results. To study gender equality, the research should not be limited only to quantitative data, otherwise the dynamics observed in the comparative analysis of France and Lithuania, which does not correspond to reality, becomes quite possible. Analysis of additional gender sensitive indicators demonstrates how many important issues are not covered and that the use of qualitative methods of research is absolutely necessary.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research have demonstrated that France was and is placed much higher than Belarus and Lithuania in regards to gender equality, in 2013 as well as today. It means that the additional gender sensitive indicators considered have confirmed the hypothesis of the index not being valid. Although Belarus has much in common with Lithuania it lags on a range of issues.

Unlike France and Lithuania, Belarus has no agency dedicated to issues that typically belong to gender policy. It creates a situation of minimum monitoring of the position of women by the government. Although the legislation is being amended gradually owing to such organisations as the UNFPA, Belarus still has a list of occupations from which women are banned, limitations for enrolling to study in "male" fields, persecution for women who engage in prostitution, the "second" and "third" shifts as well as numerous other complicated issues which should be analysed.

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EUROPEAN HUMANITIES UNIVERSITY, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCES

The European Humanities University is a non-governmental university in the field of liberal arts, established in Minsk in 1992. As a result of the repression of academic freedoms, the university was forced to terminate its activities in Minsk in 2004 and subsequently renewed its operations in Vilnius (Lithuania). EHU is the only Belarusian university operating in an environment of real academic freedom. Approximately 1,000 Belarusian students study humanities and social sciences in BA, MA, and PhD programmes at EHU.

Almost 3,000 individuals have graduated from EHU since its establishment in Minsk in 1992. Of these, two-thirds have graduated in the Vilnius period. According to a recent poll, 62.2% of graduates reside in Belarus permanently, having returned there upon completing their studies at EHU. 83.3% are employed full time and their employment is fully or partially related to their field of studies at the university. A majority of university graduates are employed in the private sector (64.6%) as well as in non-governmental organisations (17.4%) and Belarusian government institutions (10.1%).

The Department of Social and Political Sciences has been at EHU since 2011 when the Departments of Philosophy and Political Sciences were merged by the university administration. The Department is a successor to the French-Belarusian Faculty that existed during the Minsk period of EHU and offered political science studies. Upon relocation to Vilnius, Svetlana Naumova, Anatoliy Kruglashov, Andrei Kazakievich, and Victor Martinovich participated in the work of the department (in the field of political sciences), heading and managing political science programmes.

Currently, one BA and two MA programmes are offered by the department. At the BA level, we offer high- and low-residence programmes for World Politics and Economics (a successor to the Political Science and European Studies programme). It is an interdisciplinary programme that prepares specialists in the field of political and economic sciences. The programme was established by and is offered in cooperation with Vytautas Magnus University of Kaunas (Lithuania). It trains political scientists, economists, and professional analysts to be able to comprehensively interpret and analyse, compare and evaluate, theoretically describe and simulate economic and political processes in global and regional contexts. Graduates of the World Politics and Economics programme are awarded a BA degree in political science with an additional degree in economics. The programme process of studies is balanced among the political science and economics disciplines.

At the MA level, we offer a political science programme of Public Policy. The objective of the MA programme is to train specialists in the field of public governance, civil society management as well as professional activities at international and regional civic organisations. The programme was jointly created with the Faculty of Public Administration at Leiden University (Netherlands) and ROI, the Dutch Institute for Public Administration. Programme graduates are awarded an MA degree in political science.

In the field of philosophy and psychology research, the department offers a programme of Existential Psychology. EHU's programme of Existential Psychology offers a unique opportunity to gain in-depth specialised knowledge and practical skills required to work as an existential psychologist. Within the programme there is fruitful research cooperation among of Belarusian philosophers and psychologists with their Lithuanian colleagues associated with the Institute of Humanistic and Existential Psychology (Birštonas, Lithuania), the Centre of Existential Therapy (Vilnius), and the East

European Association for Existential Therapy (Lithuania). Graduates of the programme are awarded an MA degree in psychology.

In addition, the department offers a PhD programme in [Philosophy](#).

The period of studies in the high-residence BA programme is four years while the low-residence BA programme is a five-year programme. The period of studies for the MA programmes is a year and a half. The period of studies in the high-residence PhD programme is four years plus one year for non-residents.

The principal academic staff of the department includes associate professor Andrei Stsiapa-nau, PhD – department head; professor Tatiana Shchyttsova, academic head of the Existential Psychology programme; associate professor Victor Martinovich, PhD; lecturer Tatsiana Chulitskaya, PhD; professor emeritus Ryhor Miniankou, Candidate of Philosophical Sciences; associate professor Olga Breskaya, Candidate of Philosophical Sciences; Anatoli Mikhailov, PhD – member of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences; and lecturer Uladzislau Ivanou, PhD candidate. Visiting lecturers of the department include professor Vyachaslau Paznyak; professor Anatoliy Kruglashov; associate professor Aliaksandr Kavaliou, Candidate of Economic Sciences; and Ina Ramasheuskaya, MA – academic manager of SYMPA/BIPART.

More about activities and news of the EHU Department of Social and Political Sciences on the Internet:

http://www.ehu.lt/en/

https://www.facebook.com/socpolehu/

KONRAD-ADENAUER-STIFTUNG, BELARUS COUNTRY OFFICE

Freedom, justice and solidarity are the basic principles underlying the work of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). The KAS is a political foundation, closely associated with the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU).

In our European and international cooperation efforts we work for people to be able to live self-determined lives in freedom and dignity. We make a contribution underpinned by values to helping Germany meet its growing responsibilities throughout the world.

We encourage people to lend a hand in shaping the future along these lines. With more than 80 offices abroad and projects in over 100 countries, we make a unique contribution to the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and a social market economy. To foster peace and freedom we encourage a continuous dialog at the national and international levels as well as the exchange between cultures and religions.

Human beings in their distinctive dignity and with their rights and responsibilities are at the heart of our work. We are guided by the conviction that human beings are the starting point in the effort to bring about social justice and democratic freedom while promoting sustainable economic activity. By bringing people together who embrace their responsibilities in society, we develop active networks in the political and economic spheres as well as in society itself. The guidance we provide on the basis of our political know-how and knowledge helps to shape the globalization process along more socially equitable, ecologically sustainable and economically efficient lines.

We cooperate with governmental institutions, political parties, civil society organizations and handpicked elites, building strong partnerships along the way. In particular we seek to intensify political cooperation in the area of development cooperation at the national and international levels on the foundations of our objectives and values. Together with our partners we make a contribution to the creation of an international order that enables every country to develop in freedom and under its own responsibility. Currently Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung runs its Belarus office in Vilnius (Lithuania).

The main task of the KAS activities towards Belarus is the support of those forces that are working for the creation of a free, democratic and lawful Belarus that is going to have its place among the European Community of states. To this end the Stiftung is organizing educational events and consultations, dialogue and information programs in the neighboring countries, in Germany and in Brussels.

http://kas.de/belarus

http://www.facebook.com/kasbelarus

https://twitter.com/KAS_Belarus

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCf8Yo5qRs0DbhjmiPaQHjNQ

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