

# BELARUS — THE THIRD SECTOR PEOPLE CULTURE LANGUAGE

Warsaw — Minsk 2002

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East European Democratic Centre — IDEE

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This edition contains a CD-Rom with a database of the Belarusian non-governmental organisation, prepared by the Belarusian Association of Resource Centres (BARC), as well as electronic version of both the publications "Belarus — the Third Sector" (1998) and "Belarus — the Third Sector. People — Culture — Language" (2002).

Paweł Kazanecki

## INTRODUCTION

The present publication was prepared as a result of co-operation among several organisations. The Eastern European Democratic Centre — IDEE would primarily like to thank the journal "Arche," which prepared the Belarusian-language edition, the Association "Kulturny Kantakt," whose co-operation in the selection of authors was invaluable and to which we are also grateful for the culture-related material. We would also like to thank the Belarusian Association of Resource Centres (BARC), which prepared the interactive database of Belarusian non-governmental organisations included with this publication on CD.

We are pleased to present the new publication, which in some sense is the continuation of the book "Belarus: The Third Sector" published two years ago. As the previous publication generated significant interest both in Poland and abroad (the English-language edition), we decided to prepare a publication that updates the information concerning non-governmental organisations in Belarus, as well as illustrates the social processes occurring in this country in a way that raises many controversies and questions, i.e., the revival of national identity.

In presenting the social discourse that has engaged Belarus for years, we want to demonstrate the language and arguments that both sides of the conflict employ. We present the language of the regime's official propaganda, employing the old soviet rhetoric, which currently is based on neither a real system of values nor a real strategy. Censorship in historical literature and school textbooks is used for political purposes. Various types of cultural and artistic events are censored and closed. A recent event that upset the Belarusian scientific community was the decision of the Presidential Administration of the Republic of Belarus concerning the appointment of the Chairman of the Belarusian Academy of Science. Even during the Soviet era the state did not so clearly interfere in the affairs of the Academy. The appointment of the Chairman is also connected with a change in the structure of the Academy and the interference of the state administration in personnel decisions. For the Belarusian Academy of Science this will

mean a loss of contacts and its expulsion from organisations associating academies of science from various countries, as only those organisations can be members whose governing bodies are selected internally by academy members.

In wanting to show this discourse in a broader context we included articles illustrating the dispute concerning the official language, national and state symbols as well as the history of the cultural movement in Belarus. The struggle for recognising the position of the Belarusian language is not only a struggle within the cultural sphere of this country, but it is also a struggle against the administrative aim of soviet cultural unification and limiting cultural life to that approved by the state. A similar policy is conducted in regard to every manifestation of cultural diversity as well as in relation to national minorities and various religious faiths.

All articles illustrating socio-political problems are woven around the main axis of conflict between the two cultural-ideological attitudes held by the Belarusian elite: the post-soviet, with soviet symbols and a belief in the need for eternal ties between Belarus and Russia, and the second, with Belarusian national symbols, a belief in the tradition of Belarusian statehood, originating from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and seeing a need to build an independent and neutral Belarus, oriented toward Europe. This dispute between the two elites is a sign of the deep and long lasting process of transformation that has been occurring in Belarusian society following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The process of change occurring in the elites is only one of its manifestations.

A change of elites is occurring in all post-communist countries. In various countries this process is occurring more or less painfully. It is however unavoidable for the development of each of these countries. The elites, able to exert an impact on the further development of the state, are the guarantors of success of all reforms undertaken in Belarus. These elites are able to free the country from international isolation, which results not from external factors, but to a certain degree from the fear felt by the Belarusian elites of operating in a global context.

This deep social conflict is difficult to define from the perspective of political disputes in western democratic countries, discussions between left and right, held in parliaments and preceding according to established rules. However, in Belarus, basic principles of political discussion such as the state's *raison d'être* and its independence, model of government (totalitarianism or democracy) and the role of society in the structure of the state are violated, as not only the model of government, state budget or other practical decisions are raised in discussion, but also the very reason for the state's existence. It is difficult to conduct such a discussion based on rational and pragmatic arguments inherent in political discussions as employed in the West. The participants of this discussion seem to have forgotten what their ideological disputes have in common with the everyday reality in which Belarusian society exists. They seem to have forgotten in what way general values and principles translate into practical methods of solving the social and economic problems of the country. They do not treat society subjectively.

Political elections in the country are taking on dramatic overtones. Their significance does not involve only the selection of a party or leader, but also a civilised and moral decision, which is difficult to make. This is even more difficult for Belarusian society, as it is subject to disinformation by official propaganda. It has no satisfactory and clear information concerning its own situation and the situation of the country in which it lives. There is also insufficient information concerning the essence of the dispute that is occurring around it. Therefore, the role of media and civic education is key for changes in Belarus. Elections are not a mechanism for changing the political elite in the country as long as they are based on an undemocratic election law, ruling out the possibility of the opposition gaining power. While not bringing any fundamental political changes, the presidential election in 2001 raised many questions among Belarusian society itself and provided it with more information, bringing society closer to current domestic events. The election also made it apparent that the authorities are losing control over society and that it will be increasingly more difficult for the authorities to maintain this control, even through employing fear tactics. The election also showed the opposition that society has a differing view and that it is seeking solutions that the opposition is currently unable to provide. The opposition's initiation of a dialog of partnership with society may be the only way of acquiring influence on the fate of the country.

The most important element of the process of change in the elite is the coming of age of the young generation, which will build its own system of values, seeking those that it perceives as real. This generation must establish its own position in this dispute and find its place through contact with society, which the elites have completely lost. However, the young generation is frustrated and often chooses social isolation and indifference to what is occurring in the country. For young educated people, the possibilities of developing a professional carrier are limited.

Therefore, emigration is frequently chosen as a solution. Interest is also growing in radical paramilitary organisations of various ideological stripes. The increasing degree of fascism in street life is one of the most unsettling phenomena.

Between these two groups is society, which has taken an indifferent attitude toward the continuing conflict of these groups. Society has long ago forgotten what the dispute among the Belarusian political elites involved, as neither of the parties to the conflict treat society as a partner. Society is apathetic and ambivalent toward the abstract issues that occupy the intellectual, cultural and political elites of the country. It no longer believes in a better world. Furthermore, it does not believe in its own power and the influence it can exert on the situation. At present, Belarusian society only dreams of living in peace and not dying of hunger.

Neither of the parties to the ideological dispute is trusted by society. The party that wins this dispute will be the one that first understands that apart from this dispute is a society simply waiting for leaders who will not ignore it. This is the most difficult test, which at present neither of the parties to the conflict is able to pass. As long as society remains an object, changes in Belarus will not be possible.

Social organisations are key to solving this stalemate. The activists of these organisations are people in direct contact with the daily problems in society. They understand these problems well and are seeking solutions to them. Moreover, they are part of the elites that are participating in the aforementioned conflict. Therefore, social organisations are divided into those that unequivocally support the current undemocratic regime in Belarus (usually created by government officials themselves) and those that are trying to mobilise society. The mobilisation of society, breaking down its passivity and apathy, can give Belarusian society its identity and the courage to decide its own fate. Such a society will create the basis for building democracy in this country.

Other than presenting the ideological discussion among the Belarusian elites, we also present certain changes concerning the legal situation of non-governmental organisations in Belarus. One of the issues under discussion in the present work is the participation of non-governmental organisations in social processes in 2001, and primarily in mobilising society to participate in the presidential election. Descriptions of the activities of various organisations as well as their addresses, included with this publication on diskette, are mainly meant for those readers who would like to have a better understanding of the activities of non-governmental organisations in Belarus.

Primarily young authors have participated in the current project. This includes both researchers and activists in non-governmental organisations, for which the present publication also provides an opportunity to promote the results of their work. It is our hope that a community of young analysts will develop in the future, who will engage in on-going social research in Belarus.

Andrey Dynko

## A RESISTING CULTURE

Why is the Belarusian culture so little known in the world? Why does it remain so vague even in neighbouring countries? On hearing the words "Polish culture," an educated European will recall Chopin and Kieslowski; Grieg and Munch spring to mind when one hears "Norwegian culture." Muscovites might associate the words "Belarusian culture" with the Soviet-era folk-rock stars *Pesniary*; while a Berliner probably has no associations whatsoever, apart from Chernobyl and Lukashenko.

### The history of the partitions

The Belarusians had a traditional rural society when they started to become a modern nation in the very beginning of the 20th century, somewhat later than their neighbours.

National renaissance began along with the semi-modernisation introduced by the Russian colonial government. National self-identification was weak for the majority of Belarusians due to the absence of national schools, a national bourgeoisie, or a national church (the use of the Belarusian language was forbidden by the Tsarist government). The Uniate church came under oppression after the Belarusian territories were adjoined to Russia as a result of Poland's (*Rzecz Pospolita*) partition. Later, the Uniate church was banned, then forced into Orthodoxy in 1839. "Being indigenous" was substituted for identification with a national community. Cities were not Belarusian. A large part of the urban population consisted of Ashkenazi Jews who did not mix with the local inhabitants that much, while the upper classes appropriated Russian or Polish cultural tendencies. The conversion from Belarusian into the language of the ruling culture (Russian or Polish) was a condition for social promotion. That is why the gentry, officials, clergy, and Belarusian bourgeoisie declined any connection with rural "folk."

At the same time, the "intellectual enlighteners" identified the Belarusian nation with the peasantry, and saw the development of rural culture as the most promising strategy for national renaissance.

As a result, Soviet-type urbanisation presented a real challenge for the survival of Belarusian peasant culture, and made the very existence of the as yet unformed nation and its unripe nationalism doubtful. The Belarusian language and culture began to be forced out by Russian and the Russian culture.

Some of the more dynamic and aggressive neighbouring nations have even commandeered parts of the Belarusian cultural heritage. In the Georges Pompidou Centre, one can find works by two great Belarusian-born masters, Mark Chagall and Chaim Soutine. The inscription under a canvas by the former reads "Born in Vitebsk, Russia" while, similarly, the latter appears to have been "Born in Smilavichy, Lithuania." In fact, Belarus was also the birthplace of the linguist Elisar Ben-Yehuda, creator of Hebrew, Adam Mickiewicz, a classic writer of Polish literature, and the French poet Oskar Miłosz, people who never lost their spiritual bond with the country; and this list of famous people of Belarusian origin could go on and on.





### The imprints of totalitarianism and reasons behind Russification

For the Belarusian culture, the 20<sup>th</sup> century ran red with all the blood it shed. The country was always under either German or Russian oppression. Since the Jews constituted a large part of Belarusian intellectuals, the Holocaust was especially devastating for the intelligentsia. After World War II, the forced emigration of thousands of Belarusian Catholics, ethnic Poles, and Belarusians to Poland was a real drama. Stalin's unprecedented repression struck its most destructive blow by aiming to extirpate every centre of cultural opposition (during the 1930s, 450 of the 550 Belarusian writers were subjected to repression, which few of them survived).

Soviet totalitarianism had a very profound impact. Since the early thirties, the regime demanded that cultural figures obediently participate in state policy under threat of imprisonment or prohibition of their work. This was not mere censorship or ideological control, as was the case in countries of the so-called "Socialist camp." The Soviet regime in Belarus set itself the task of completely annihilating the previous cultural tradition, with all its forms and content, in order to replace it entirely with culture of new, socialist content.

That new type of culture was required in order to provide unswerving propaganda for the new order and thus ensure its stability. Another imposed requirement was that it should base itself on the reference culture of Russia in order to bond this peripheral ethnic land with the mother country. Works in the Belarusian language were welcomed only for less esteemed art forms, while more prestigious ones such as the cinema or opera were almost exclusively in Russian. Scientific research into humanitarian disciplines was allowed in Belarusian, but all technical, exact and natural sciences were forced to use Russian. There was also an implicit veto on translation from world languages into Belarusian. The outside world was only supposed to reach Belarusian minds through Russian mediation.

Belarusian culture was reserved for the backward countryside and peasantry, or for cultural rituals and a touch of "local colour," whereas the urban population and all the leading, attractive fields of life had to serve the Russian culture. This policy was eventually intended to lead to the complete assimilation of Belarusians, as urbanisation advanced across the country. In turn, the high rate of urbanisation was brought about by the unequal living standards and opportunities for social realisation which existed between the city and rural areas.

According to the official doctrine, Russification (in the form of Sovietisation) was considered to be progressive. However, the Soviet authorities' plans implied it should be pursued gradually and without force in order to avoid protests and dissatisfaction. The Soviet ideological and scientific doctrines presumed the Belarusian language and culture would vanish, giving way to their Russian counterparts. *"The sooner we start speaking Russian, the sooner we will build communism,"* claimed Soviet leader Nikita Krushchev during an inspection visit to Minsk. This put psychological pressure onto Belarusian-speakers, making increasing numbers of people accept and adopt Russian cultural codes. Belarusian cultural and artistic figures who

were forced to live in cities while trying to keep doing justice to the countryside were doomed to perish in an eternal cultural ghetto, surrounded by a Russian-speaking urban environment. Instead of growing richer, the Belarusian language was being steadily Russified.

On the other hand, the Soviet system also eliminated the need to study Belarus and its culture anywhere outside the USSR. There was no demand for Belarusian studies because they were covered by Sovietology (as were Ukrainian or Lithuanian, for example). As a result, by the time the Soviet Union broke up, the Belarusian language was virtually unknown outside the Slavonic world, and nobody was interested in Belarusian culture. The West saw Belarus through Russia's eyes (as is the case with Chechnya or Ukraine), having adopted without criticism the traditional imperialistic concepts created by Russian historians and cultural theorists. After encountering the magical world of Western culture in the early nineties, Belarusian culture also faced a lack of understanding and feedback. The discovery became a frustrating experience.



Viktor Piatrou during his performance in frames of the exhibition "Kingdom of Belarus," Podkova Lesna.

Photo: Archive of Modern History

As paradoxical as it may sound to a foreign ear, the lowly status of the Belarusian language and culture has always been a direct result of the stigma attached to Belarusians who speak Belarusian in the formally independent Republic of Belarus. The official propaganda of Alaksandar Lukashenka's Sovietising regime follows the old pattern of presenting Belarusian-language culture (feared for its independence and irreconcilability) as being the culture of a limited group of political semi-dissidents (*"either agents of the West, or horrible nationalists"*), writers (*"ungifted graphomaniacs"*), and backward, uncivilised villages with no future. This is exactly what makes many Belarusian intellectuals (Belarusian- and Russian-speakers alike) insist on the need for positive discrimination against Russian-language culture, and for affirmative action in favour of the Belarusian-language and cultural minority, if the political situation should ever change. In their opinion,

it is only through such action that further discrimination against Belarusian-speakers could be stopped, and permanent foundations for a Belarusian state system could be laid. Those intellectuals consider that supporting Belarusian culture would be more than the mere repayment of a historical debt and a restoration of historical justice: it would make a sizeable contribution towards cementing the country's national identity and civil society.

### Undiscovered treasures

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the crystallisation of Belarusian cultural identity. However, wars and assimilation processes turned this country of four or five cultures (Belarusian, Russian, Polish, Jewish, and Ukrainian to the south) into a bicultural country, namely Belarusian and Russian. In fact one could say it became one Soviet culture, which the official ideology termed "*national in form, socialist in content*."

The burden of this Soviethood was much heavier for Belarusian culture to bear than Russian. A lot of what was allowed in the metropolis was considered to be ideological crime on the ethnic periphery. Creative Belarusians were under threat of being charged with "bourgeois" or "nationalist" deviation (the latter being a mortal sin), which hobbled their creativity and often rendered their artistic achievements anachronistic. Belarusian artists' chances of creating something modern and competitive were reduced because the centre was constantly creaming off the best creative talents. All competitive works that appeared, usually in opposition to official ideology, were stifled and kept away from the public. When something became impossible to hide from the domestic audience, it was then banned from being displayed abroad, since all foreign contacts had to be made through Moscow.

Even the best achievements of Belarusian culture (such as the films of Viktor Turau, the novels of Vasil Bykau, essays by Ales Adamovich, ballets by Yauhen Hlebau, paintings by Mikhail Savitski or Izrail Basau, tapestries by Alaksandar Kishchanka, songs by *Pesniary*, or sculptures by Andrey Bembel) have either failed to become worldwide phenomena due to their relative lack of talent; simply remained unknown to the world due to the language barrier or other reasons mentioned above; or were presented abroad as being Soviet or just "Russian" works. The most blatant example of the latter is the Belarusian Opera singer Maria Gulegina. When she became a soloist at the Metropolitan Opera and La Scala, the Russian media and musical critics unanimously described her as a "Russian singer," although she had never lived or worked in Russia.

Though it has produced masterpieces of high and pure art, given rare insights into servility, or presented unique examples of martyrdom and tragedy, 20<sup>th</sup> century Belarusian culture has nevertheless remained a culture unknown to the world.

With a millennium of Christian tradition behind it, plus a rich heritage coming from both East and West, Belarusian culture grew from a tangle of Latin, Byzantine Greek, and Slavonic roots. Unfortunately, in the West it is often seen as something exotic, Oriental and ethnographic, while in Russia it is perceived as something

local, regional, or even as a "Polish intrigue." These differing concepts are in fact two sides to one colonial approach. In the meantime, the Belarusian culture is still in existence, shaping the national consciousness, and coping with its post-colonial complexes and the handicap that has built up over years of national dependence and communist deformation.

Gerder wrote "*a poet is the creator of a people; he gives them a world to observe, holds their souls in his hands*." His words ring doubly true when applied to the national development of peoples with a short state tradition. Writers, philologists and historians were the smiths of national identity for Belarusians, just as they were in all the Central and Eastern European nations that started to form quite late and had no national bourgeoisie in the early stages of their nations were taking shape (e.g. Ukraine, Slovakia, Macedonia, or Bosnia). In Belarus, where the national formation process is not yet complete, culture plays an altogether special, exclusive role.

### Divided nation, divided culture

The litmus tests to detect the historical and ideological divides in Belarusian culture today are, firstly, the (approving or critical) reactions to attempts made by Lukashenka's totalitarian state to control culture and, secondly, different attitudes towards affirmative action favouring Belarusian culture. Beyond these opposing world-views of various "pro-staters" and "independents," Belarusophiles and Belarusophobes, there is also a linguistic split between cultures based on the Belarusian and Russian languages.

The Belarusian-language, "non-Soviet" tradition declares itself to be the successor of dissident/emigrant culture and independent cultural centres. It mostly conforms to what is known as the "classic spelling" (or *Tarashkevitsa*), rejecting the changes made to literary norms during the Soviet period. This school's main objective is to accelerate the creation of a true nation.

The Belarusian-language "state-loyal" tradition is maintained under the aegis of "creative unions" founded in Stalin's time, and is controlled by a Ministry of Culture established under Khrushchev. It remains faithful to the "official spelling" (or *Narkomovka*), introduced during Stalin's rule. This tradition sees its function as being to serve state policy, whatever it might be.

The Russian-language imperialistic tradition is supported by Russian nationalist ideology. It does not consider the existence of the Belarusian people to be sufficient grounds for independent national state development, and therefore ignores Belarusian culture. To the followers of this tradition, Belarus is a historical error, whereas Russia can be found everywhere one hears the Russian language. Given the widespread expansion of the Russian culture, adepts of this tradition feel quite comfortable in Belarus.

The Russian-language, Belarusophile imperialistic tradition is the youngest of all. Its supporters are Belarusian in the political sense. They stand for the independence of Belarus and respect the same historical symbols and myths that Belarusian-speakers do, but in most situations opt for Russian language and culture. Unlike the rulers of the empire, they do not doubt the full value of the



Belarusian language, nor do they reject Belarusian culture, and even agree to participate in benefit actions to support it. They do not, however, believe in reviving the civil role of the Belarusian language and culture, considering them to be museum exhibits, and nothing more than symbolic figures. It goes without saying that this cultural model is very attractive to the newly-emerged Belarusian official and business elite, which is often of Russian origin. The vulnerability of this position lies in its ambiguity and inconsistency. The weakness of this "Creole" world-view is that a Creole culture is easily conquered and diluted by that of the mother state. A striking example of this is the band *Lyapis Trubetskoy* — outstanding proponents of a Creole culture.

The "independent Belarusian" and "Creole" cultural models are most popular among the young people who will be shaping the outlook of Belarusian culture tomorrow. Whether society is able to overcome its internal divide depends on mutual recognition from both sides. This mutual recognition and interest are on the increase thanks to joint resistance against the authoritarian regime that has taken hold of the country.

### Cultural resistance

Contemporary Belarusian culture is facing many challenges.

The challenge of "degovernmentalisation" and supporting independent initiatives also means working to fill the void created by Sovietisation. The only possible way to achieve cultural diversity is by means of painstaking daily work, ranging from translating world classics into Belarusian, to designing new teaching curricula for schools.

One of the most important tasks is to overcome political nihilism, the allergy to politics which the art world developed as a reaction to compulsory Soviet ideology. There is an urgent need for cultural figures to regain their former involvement in social affairs.

The creation of a mass culture is high on today's agenda. It will be a decisive factor to promote self-healing of cultural mechanisms as such, allowing them to free themselves of state control, and will certainly help in strengthening the Belarusian state.

Another vital task is to develop Belarusian studios and promote Belarusian culture in the rest of the world. A more active dialogue with different cultures will help it respond to other challenges, and give it the self-assurance it lacks today.

Returning to the beginning of this article, that is to the question of who the new Belarusian culture is associated with, one has to say that today's Warsaw or Kyiv intelligentsia will perhaps think of the poet Slavimir Adamovich (the first political prisoner of Lukashenka's regime, who went through two KGB prisons on a charge of "calling for an attempt on the head of state's life" in his poetry); the performance artists Ales Pushkin

(another "political recidivist" banned from travelling abroad by the authorities) and Artur Klinau; or perhaps Lavon Volski, lead singer of the right-on rock band *NRM*. A philologist specialising in Belarusian will mention the fundamental *Belarusian Historical Review*, the "scintillating" literature and arts journal *Arche*, or the kitschy satirical newspaper *Navinki*<sup>1</sup>. All these projects are produced by young people born in the 1960s and 70s who are not stifled by the burden of the Soviet legacy. They are now creating a new "humane" and attractive look for Belarusian culture. Their work under pressure from the last dictatorship in Europe is fascinating for its courage, inventiveness, nonconformity, and world intellectual context, as well as its radical aversion to any manifestations of autarchy and chauvinism.

The names of Bykau and Nyaklyayev are now well-known even outside the restricted academic circles of Warsaw and Kyiv. The demonstrative emigration of Vasil Bykau, the patriarch of Belarusian literature, and Vladimir Neklyayev, head of the official Belarusian Writers' Union, were acts of protest against the oppression of freedom, and totalitarian manipulation of the mass consciousness in Lukashenka's Belarus. Now they are gone, Belarusian culture has begun to recover its intrinsic, fundamentally united attitude towards the key problems of today.

For Belarusian culture, in its fight for democracy and national independence at the turn of the millennium, the formation process is almost complete.



"Navinki," Ales Pushkin's performance

**Andrey Dynko**, born 1974. Master of arts, graduated from the Minsk Linguistic University. Editor-in-chief of the "Nasha Niva" newspaper, director of the "Arche" magazine.

<sup>1</sup> Literally meaning "novelties," this is also the name of a village near Minsk where Belarus' largest psychiatric hospital is situated. The name also resonates with *Naviny* ("News"), a serious newspaper which has been banned in the past.

Vaclav Areshka

## CULTURAL MOVEMENTS IN BELARUS. THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY



*Ales Pushkin during his action in front of the President's Palace,  
July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1999.  
Photo: IREX/ProMedia*

### 1. THE HISTORY OF CULTURAL MOVEMENTS BEFORE 1991

#### 19<sup>th</sup> century

For many Central European peoples that lost or did not accomplish their sovereignty as states, the road to liberation or renovation went through the cultural revival of the nation. Belarus is no exception here. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Belarusian ethnos, once dominant in the Great Duchy of Lithuania, lost most of its state identity. The top strata of society usually identified themselves as Poles or Russians (depending on whether they belonged to the Catholic or Orthodox Church) and used the corresponding languages. The lower strata, which preserved spoken Belarusian, either adhered to the same division or considered themselves *tuteyshiya* (indigenous), without defining their ethnic or historical origin. The written Belarusian language that had flourished during the Renaissance

was wearing out during late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries down to virtual extinction. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some Polish intelligentsia of Belarusian origin turned to the fact of existence of the Belarusians with their history and culture. They were romantically inspired by the folklore and the “roots,” as well as by the contemporary trend of being democratic and “of-the-people.” Of course, their search was also influenced by the occupation of the territories of Rzeczpospolita by Russia, Prussia, and Austria.

During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the phenomenon of “Belarusianness” somehow fascinated such writers as Adam Mickiewicz (born in Navahrudak, the heart of Belarus, in a Belarusian gentry family), Jan Chechot, Władzisław Syrokomla, Jan Barshchewski, and Vincent Dunin-Martsinkevich. Some of them collected and reworked Belarusian folklore and used the Belarusian language and themes in their work. Generally speaking, most of those initiatives did not cross the boundaries of so called *krayovasts* — regional patriotism within former Rzeczpospolita and the context of Polish cultural domination.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some ideas of a Belarusian state became to show through. Vincent Kanstant Kalinowski (1838–1964), one of the leaders of an uprising on the territory of the ex-GDL in 1863–64, expressed hope for uniting the Belarusian gentry and peasants in liberating a “democratic” Belarus. The uprising was harshly smashed causing poet Frantsishak Bahushevich (1840–1900) to voice the notion of restoring the Belarusian culture and — in the future — state. His words “Do not abandon our language, Belarusian, for not to die!” remain one of the key appeals to the Belarusian liberation and cultural movements hitherto.

#### 1900–10

Thus was taking shape the ideology of the Belarusian national renaissance. Politically, it had a prevalently left, socialist orientation — a majority of its participants were members of the Belarusian Socialist Hramada. It is worth noting that almost all of them were activists of Belarusian culture: writers, publicists, historians, who went down in history not as representatives of some “national current” within the Russian or Polish culture. Their role as politicians was much weaker than that in the building up of the modern Belarusian culture.

In 1906, the Belarusian Socialist Hramada founded “Nasha Niva” (Our Cornfield), a Belarusian-language newspaper published in Vilna (Vilnius). It became a centre for almost all Belarusian cultural circles. Future classics of Belarusian literature — Janka Kupala, Jakub Kolas, Maksim Bahdanovich, Maksim Haretski, and others — worked for it and with it. The nine years of its activity, which included the preparation of the Belarusian Museum, promoting Belarusian culture among the broadest public in the country and abroad, “Nasha Niva” made a radical influence onto the moulding of Belarusian ideology, putting together a body of national culture, development of the literary language

and humanitarian science. Thanks to it, in the course of a decade from the Russian revolution of 1905–07 to that of 1917, the Belarusian movement had grown from a bunch of enthusiasts into a geopolitical factor.

On March 25, 1918, the Belarusian Popular Republic (BPR) declared its independence, which it had to be fighting for during the next two years. Modern historians refer to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the “Nasha Niva time” or “Nasha Niva Renaissance”; the newspaper and its manner of activity as a cultural and educational centre became a model for all the generations to come.

#### 1920s–40s

The next decades of 1920s–1940s surely were the most tragic period in the history of Belarus: having lost the BPR initiative, the country found itself divided between the Bolshevik Russia and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rzeczpospolita, and later, during World War II, completely under the German occupation. After the war, the whole of Belarus ended up in the USSR. The term seized country, invented by Janka Kupala for Belarus, continued to hold true despite the existence of the fictitious Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR).

The Polish authorities of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rzeczpospolita did not take well to Belarusian separatism. Nonetheless, the Belarusian elites of Western Belarus managed to preserve themselves physically and bring up successors. In the 20s, the Soviet regime was pretty liberal toward the national culture in the BSSR built on the ruins of the BPR, which allowed a short period of flourishing of the Belarusian culture and science; it came to an end in the 30s with Stalin’s hard line for the creation of a single “Soviet nation.” Terror was the main instrument of that policy during more than two decades, and by 1941 it scythed almost all of the national elite, including the majority of writers, philologists, and historians. The rest of the nationally aware intelligentsia emigrated or was killed during World War II. After the war, it was the turn of the third generation whose sense of being Belarusian was brought up under the German occupation.

#### 1950s–1970s

The generation that joined grown-up life after Stalin’s terror in mid-50s had to start everything all over again. The terror had left such powerful imprints that the generation continuity was virtually lost: the Belarusian intelligentsia that came from the countryside or demobilised from the Soviet army and graduated in the 1950s knew almost nothing about those who had been building up “Belarusianness” in the first half of the century.

By the end of the 60s, that was modern literature calls the “cultural opposition” had formed. At first it was unorganised individual statements of teachers, scientists, or writers, mainly in favour of the defence of the Belarusian language. (For example, in 1957 Branislaw Rzhewski, teacher of the Homel Pedagogical Institute, was arrested and sentenced to seven years in prison for

a campaign of written appeals to the authorities of Soviet Belarus about the discrimination of the Belarusian language. Same year, young philologist Lyavon Bely was sentenced for 10 years of imprisonment for spreading his own verses dedicated to the defence of his mother tongue.) In late 50s artist Lyavon Barazna, the founder and ideologist of the cultural opposition in Soviet Belarus started his activity.

The Khrushchev thaw in 1956 was clearly a new wave of russification and cultural nihilism through - out the USSR. The party leader said in 1959 in a speech dedicated to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the BSSR: "The sooner we all speak Russian, the quicker we will build communism." The anti-Belarusian state language policy, Soviet propaganda, the presence of teachers and officials from other Soviet republics made the Belarusian language and "own" country - side cultural tradition seem "not prestigious," and the new city population strove to rid of them as soon as possible.

The total sovietisation of Belarusian society and cultural life was assisted by the USSR's central system of management, both in the administrative and cultural fields. Moscow, the empire centre, divided finance among the regional centres — capitals of the union republics. Every republic had to feel as a Moscow's province. Everything important was created in the centre; the province was left to react to orders, directives, and campaigns. As a result, the periphery was losing creative initiative while most active creators sought to move close to the centre.

A cult figure for the national-minded intelligentsia was Larysa Heniush, a prominent poetess who was in the centre of the non-Soviet Belarusian life in the 1930s-40s, and never accepted Soviet citizenship after her release from a detention camp in 1956 — until her death in 1983 in a small provincial town, Zelva. Her house turned into a peculiar pilgrimage destination where she was visited by practically all adepts of the Belarusian movement. Vilnius, where some more representatives of the pre-war Belarusian movement lived, and where Belarusian affairs were not under such vigilant supervision of special services as in the BSSR, also attracted the Belarusians.

In the 60s, a circle of like-minded people group around Barazna; they collect information about history and culture, discussed on subjects forbidden under the Soviet regime. One of Barazna's closest companions was Zyanon Paznyak, then a young student of theatre criticism, who would become the leader of political opposition in late 80s. In late 60s and early 70s, Minsk had several of such small, more or less connected, groups discussing national revival. One of them was "Na Paddashku" (On the Attic), another — the Academic Centre, a circle that started in the Belarusian Academy of Science and some higher educational establishments and was mainly made up of young scientists studying history, literature, and languages.

In the opinion of the initiators of the cultural opposition, the preservation and development of the language, culture, national and historical awareness, and spreading them among the masses was to become the basis for democratic changes in society. Cultural oppo-

sition was what characterised the last three decades before the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

Artists, such as Yauhen Kulik, Ales Marachkin, and Mikola Kupava, portrayed in their drawings and paintings scenes from Belarusian history, staged underground exhibitions and ventured to bring the "forbidden" imagery to official ones as well as to book illustrations. They also collected folklore. Gradually, *samizdat* (underground publishing) was organised, particularly of banned Belarusian literary works of 1910s-40s.

It is worth noting that intelligentsia from the periphery also joined the cultural opposition. For example, Mikola Yarmalovich, a retired teacher in Maladzechna, in 1963-64 was putting out a hand-written opposition magazine called "Padsnezhnik" (Snowdrop), revived in 1975 under the name "Hutarki" (Conversations). In 1968 he distributed his book "Following the Traces of One Myth" that, for the first time after the war, attempted to formulate a national concept of Belarusian history. There were also some groups founded in Harodnya and Navapoiatsk.

Many lost their jobs, subjected themselves to party or civil baiting (e.g., the Academic Centre crushed in 1973-74.) Books were banned from publication and paintings from exhibitions. Lyavon Barazna, who was organising (together with Zyanon Paznyak) actions against the demolition of historical neighbourhoods in Minsk in 1972, suddenly died under circumstances still scarcely known.

The 1960s-70s were characterised by certain political indefiniteness and trying to avoid politics; activists were targeting nearest cultural tasks: education, the promotion of the language, national values, and history among as broad public as was possible.

### The 1980s – early 1990s

As a new generation joined the Belarusian cause, the cultural opposition took on a new face. In 1979, students of the Belarusian Theatre and Arts Institute and the Belarusian State University formed what they called the Belarusian Vocal and Drama Workshop. It was the first cultural opposition organisation of the new type. Founded as a creative association, it was formally oriented at certain openness and public forms of activity. Folklorist orientation, traditional though for the Belarusian cultural opposition, was called upon to divert the security organs; the association actually set the task of taking over the power in the country.

The Workshop's example proved fruitful, and by mid 80s various folklorist, local-studies, and historical clubs and circles united mainly young people in Minsk and other places in Belarus. Their gurus were usually older people — the so-called sixtiers; however, it was mainly the younger members who held the initiative. In 1984, after the Workshop (*Maystrownnya*) was stopped, and an underground group called "Nezalezhnasts" (independence) was founded. Succeeding to the Workshop in Minsk was "Talaka," founded in 1985, which declared itself as a "fellowship for the protection of historical monuments." In 1986, a sister "Talaka" group appeared in Homel, and "Pakhodnya" in Harodnya. Those



centres were the background of many today's leaders of the political and civic opposition in Belarus, for instance, Vintsuk Vyachorka, Viktar Ivashkevich, and Ales Bialatski.

Youth cultural associations showed a distinct tendency to consolidate. In 1987, the 1<sup>st</sup> Free Assembly of Belarusian Associations assembled to work out a policy aimed at the national cultural and democratic revival of Belarus.

The founding of the Belarusian Popular Front in 1988 was a general outcome of the cultural opposition activities in 1960s-80s. Most of its elder leaders — Zyanon Paznyak, Yuras Khadyka, Mikhas Tkachow, Yauhen Kulik, Vasil Bykau, etc. — were in one way or another associated with that wave. Younger activists came mostly from "Maystrownya," "Talaka," and other youth cultural associations. In 1990, the declaration of the sovereignty of Belarus was adopted, and next year the country's independence became political reality as a new state took place on the map of Europe — the Republic of Belarus. Its official language was Belarusian, and its flag and emblem inherit the Belarusian historical symbols.

However, the realisation of the goals of the cultural opposition and the migration of activity onto the political field unexpectedly crushed that movement and the generation of its founders. Once in the middle of a rough political game and power fight, the cultural romantics did not manage to endure their rules.

In the field of arts, the revivalists, adepts of the old concept of cultural opposition, also found themselves facing a dead end. Art as a school and art as a poster no longer fascinated society. The "Pahonya" art group founded in 1991 by a majority of masters from cultural opposition and a lot of young artists demonstrated aesthetic eclecticism in its very first, "victorious" exhibitions. Those exhibitions were open on March 25, timed to coincide with anniversaries of the declaration of the Belarusian Popular Republic. In 1995, during the Lukashenka period, the authorities began to hamper the "Pahonya" exhibitions, which started to turn from art events into political rallies.

## 2. THE SITUATION AFTER 1991

In late 70s — early 80s, along with a significant folklore movement, there started to develop that of the "*neformaly*" (informals), which gave rise to most of the political parties and politicised NGOs of the 1990s. During that decade, we believe, the following movements played the most essential roles.

### Upon the Attainment of Independence: 1991–94

Paradoxically, with time the "conservative" camp was also joined by some of the former oppositioners and revivalists, and in general, a lot of creative people and cultural functionaries. It was also due to the very heavy burden of Soviet mythology that had brought up several generations of Belarusian citizens. It was clearly illustrated by early 90s debate about renaming some streets and removing statues of communist leaders. In the argument about

whether to take away the "chief" Lenin monument in the country (the one in Lenin Square in Minsk), a majority of artists, art critics, architects, and ordinary capital dwellers spoke in favour of leaving the monument where it stood. The Minskians were rather frightened than inspired by the torn-away head of stone Dzerzhinskiy above the streets of Moscow after the defeat of the 1991 coup. The most frequent argument, among doubtful proofs of the Lenin's aesthetic values, was that "we have got used to him."

One of the first Belarusian cultural projects was the revival of the "Nasha Niva" newspaper in Vilnius in 1991. A group of young writers and journalists, once activists of "Maystrownya," "Talaka," and the "Tuteyshiya" literary group (headed by talented publicist Syarhey Dubavets), wanted not only to print a Belarusian-language newspaper in neighbouring Lithuania, but to found a model centre for the creation of modern post-Soviet Belarusian culture, development of the classical literary language, and forming a new Belarusian cultural elite. The tasks were set according to the scale of the original "Nasha Niva" in the 1900s. The place of publishing — Vilnius — was to point out to the tradition, as well as ensure independence from the uncertain Belarusian political situation. A circle of (mainly young) cultural figures most of whom had not been connected with the Soviet tradition and envisioned their task as conscious ridding the Belarusian culture of Soviet "holy cows." "Nasha Niva" enjoyed active co-operation of writers and journalists from the regions of Belarus, in the first place from Polatsk and Harodnya, rich in cultural opposition. As a whole, the newspaper really succeeded in establishing a type of cultural organisation that was new for Belarus: it was simultaneously creative and pragmatic, with pretty high aesthetic criteria and far-reaching goals. Within a few years "Nasha Niva," with its cultural journal content, became popular and authoritative among Belarusian intelligentsia. Gradually, it expanded its activity beyond that of a mere newspaper, publishing books, involving in scientific research, and staging exhibitions and concerts.

In the first half of the 1990s, several other stable centres of "non-governmentalism" emerged in the Belarusian culture, for instance, the Fellowship of Free Writers (1993) in Polatsk, which up to now remains one of the most active organisations outside Minsk. Cultural centres were founded in Harodnya, Mahyleu, Homel, and Vitsebsk; a movement of publishing and local research was growing.

### The Publishing Movement

A definitely important phenomenon of early 1990s was the beginning of what is known as the publishing movement. In the USSR, the printing of books and periodicals, and any copying of text was under strict control and monopoly of the state. Any attempts at *samizdat* (literally: "self-publishing") were harshly punished. Nonetheless, a chronic shortage of books wanted by the public inspired numerous private initiatives of underground printing in 1970s-80s political samizdat, persecuted with particular vigilance, was but a small current in that sea. The photo- and otherwise copied lot included works on

philosophy, psychology, and sociology that were not published in the USSR (e.g., those by Freud, Nietzsche, Kant, Schopenhauer, and other authors not accepted by the regime), as well as art and religious literature. The whole territory of the Soviet Union was covered by the contact network of science-fiction fans or those interested in oriental philosophy, who translated tens of texts from English or even Japanese and exchanged them, usually by post.

Meanwhile, Belarusian cultural opposition was looking for, making copies of, and spreading texts that were considered fundamental for the Belarusian liberation movement. Those were texts by Kanchewski, Lastowski, Stankevich, forbidden works by Janka Kupala, Larysa Heniush, and Western Belarusian press of 1920s–30s.

In early 1990s, a number of publishing companies were founded specifically to put out Belarusian books. At first those were mainly reprints of works dating back to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (a series of books like that was published via the Fellowship of the Belarusian Language). Among private Belarusian publishers founded at that time, it is worth mentioning “Batskawshchyna” (Fatherland), “Khata” (House,

cial exhibitions. The appearance of private galleries in early 1990s started a totally different period: the arts received access to permanent stage for uncontrolled contacts with the public and critics.

One of the most influential figures of the new wave was painter and performer Ales Pushkin, and active participant in the late-80s youth movement, who was many times detained by the police for involvement in “unauthorised rallies”: in 1989 he was put on probation for two years for organising a happening dedicated to the 71<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the BPR; in 1999 convicted for a happening that referred to the termination of Lukashenka’s legitimate presidency. A member of “Pahonya,” he managed to effectively combine the basic principles of the Belarusian cultural opposition with those of art avant-garde and the reality of contemporary social life. In 1993 Ales Pushkin founded a private art gallery “At Pushkin’s” in Vitebsk. It was an innovative gallery, not only because it was one of the first private ones in Belarus, but due to the fact that it turned into an active cultural centre that staged exhibitions, seminars, and actions. It was a centre of social activity with an expressed national democratic orientation. Soon it was closed.

Despite its short life, “At Pushkin’s” became the symbol of the Belarusian gallery movement.

In the first half of the 90s throughout Belarus there appeared tens of small independent galleries. The most famous, apart from “At Pushkin’s,” were “Shostaya Liniya” — The 6<sup>th</sup> Line — Minsk, “Vita Nova” — Minsk, “Kawcheg” — Minsk, “Zyalyony Dom” — Green House — Homel, “Alter Ego” — Minsk, “Salyaniya Sklady” — Salt Storehouses — Vitebsk, and others. Belarus not having a normal art market, most of the galleries existed thanks to the aid and enthusiasm of their founders. Almost none of them managed to carry on as purely commercial ventures.

Such galleries as, for example “Shestaya Liniya,” soon turned into influential centres of modern arts. In the course of a few years, the gallery movement changed the map of Belarusian art life radically: the bright new names of artists, including Ihar Kashkurevich, Viktor Piatrow-Khrutski, Artur Klinau, Alyaksandar Rodzin, surfaced from underground and began to outline the face of Belarusian art. Unlike Ales Pushkin, most of those artists were not connected with the Belarusian cultural opposition; however, after a while they rather energetically expressed their belonging in Belarus. It was also influenced by a radical change the Belarusian society underwent in 1995. The termination of “At Pushkin’s” opened the period of decline of the Belarusian art galleries. Actually, Lukashenka’s regime as such did not fight private art galleries. It rather created a situation in which nobody could help galleries. The authorities’ obvious dislike for anything private and free deprived galleries of support from the state and state-owned companies, while a general economic crisis in the country removed private sponsors.

Despite certain drawbacks, the cultural and educational policy of the Belarusian state in 1991–94 was on the whole based on concepts worked out within the Belarusian liberation movement. Censorship in its So-



Timofey Izotov's exhibition — new Belarusian realism

Home, or Hut), “Technology,” “Lecture,” the publishing company of the Belarusian Humanitarian Educational and Cultural Centre, the publishing initiative of the Polatsk-based Fellowship of Free Writers, “Navia Morionum,” “Arc,” and others. Later this movement of publishers was joined by the foundations “Nasha Niva” and “Euroforum”; there appeared a semi-governmental institution called “The Belarusian Books Collection.” The first half of the 1990s was marked by the liberty of publishing enabled by unclear legislation and chaotic attempts by Belarusian publishers to gain a stable place in the market.

### The Gallery Movement

In the 1980s, as governmental control faded, underground artists, musicians, and writers began to appear in Belarus. Newly founded arts groups like “Form,” “Black Square,” and others organised unoffi-



viet form was practically non-existent during that time. The people's rights to freedom of speech and conscience, to cultural self-determination were being limited, if anything, by economic factors, while the stature and popularity of the Belarusian language grew noticeably. However, Lukashenka's era was marked by gradual but radical 90-degree turn in all the areas.

### Upon Lukashenka's Coming to Power: 1995–2000

Although Lukashenka was elected president in 1994, the real turn the cultural (as well as linguistic and educational) policy began in 1995, after a referendum he called against parliament's will. The dubious results of that referendum were used as a basis for the returning of Soviet-like symbols and the assignment of Russian as another official language.

Old-school censorship was reintroduced to book publishing and the press: this moment can be distinctly identified as late 1994 when newspapers came out with express blank columns instead of a statement about corruption in Lukashenka's close entourage. The material was banned from the press and deleted from ready layouts by information minister Feduta.

Frankly speaking, the new regime never put together a particular cultural policy (there was nobody to do it), and it was pursued, if any, intuitively, to "please" president. Thus, the state generously backed pompous events called upon to extol "Slavic brotherhood," like the "Slavyanski Bazar" or "Zalaty Vityaz" (Golden Knight), or collectives particularly close to the authorities, like the court big band directed by Mikhail Finberg. Generally, the president was more into sports and physical education: the construction of "ice palaces" in almost every large town of the country used up budget funds that could have been used to support museums, libraries, theatres, or culture clubs.

Creative intelligentsia and intellectuals in general were once again facing the choice of whether to adjust themselves and service the regime or oppose the regime that ultimately showed itself as anti-Belarusian and anti-democratic.

The year 1995 can be marked as the return of cultural opposition in Belarus, or, more precisely, the rise of its new wave, qualitatively different from the previous ones. Firstly, it was much stronger: as an old "opponent" put it, "twenty years ago we could all be put in one bus, whereas now we would perhaps take several trainloads." Secondly, there had been founded various political and other non-governmental structures and centres (parties, creative associations, local studies clubs, NGOs, galleries, publishers, independent press) interested in national culture and involved in the cultural process. And thirdly, the total Soviet lack of freedom was no longer there.

One result of that situation was an exodus of talented authors from Belarus (not to work for some time but for good), another was social marginalisation of non-conformist creative intelligentsia. It might look as if a new underground movement was forming; however, unlike the Soviet underground whose relations with the regime sustained a certain status quo for de-

acades, the majority of the new cultural opposition were not content with the niche of underground art. Writers, artists, actors, and musicians wanted contacts with audience, the press, their colleagues in Belarus and abroad.

It is possible to say that the mutual disliking between the state and culture made independent cultural centres more active throughout the country. The state's lacking resources for and interest in culture damaged the state-run sector of culture more. Those who had abandoned the state "trough" were now better off with their hands free and relying on their initiative and talents, although without certain "social guarantees."

Mid 1990s were marked by the consolidation of existing cultural forces into rather established centres. In 1995, "Nasha Niva" founded a foundation under the same name, whose tasks included to set up an information, educational, and cultural infrastructure, not only for the needs of national democratic political opposition but with to enable the rise of a fully-fledged European nation. During the next years the foundation was publishing both the newspaper and books. Within it, the Archive of Modern History was organised in 1996, a new type of organisation for Belarus: it functioned as a non-governmental education centre, collecting and registering "traces" of modern history of the Belarusian society, mainly episodes of the liberation movement and repression. In 1997 "Nasha Niva" began to unfold a large-scale programme of presenting newest non-conformist culture of Belarus under a general title "Kingdom of Belarus" which we will return to below.

At that time in Minsk there was a strengthening group of young philosophers and writers associated with the centre "Euroforum" which published magazines "Fragments" and "Forum" as well as books. Another centre that influenced the cultural situation was "Bumbamlit," a group of young writers inspired by philosopher Valyantsin Akudovich. In Polatsk, the Fellowship of Free Writers directed by Ales Arkush and Vintsjes Mudrow became an influential centre: it published the "Kalosse" (Ears of Crop) literary magazine and many books, mainly collected poetry and prose by young authors, and staged various art events.

In 1995–96, Minsk even had an independent FM radio station, "101.2," which to some extent functioned as an cultural information centre. It was this station that stimulated Belarus' most famous musical project in the 90s — "The Popular Album."

General tendencies that prevailed in independent culture of middle and late 1990s were formulated in the above-mentioned programme "Kingdom of Belarus." The name, borrowed from a story by Marian Brandys, symbolised the final shaping of another, parallel to the official one, culture of Belarus. That alternative culture did not want to abide by the rules suggested by the regime. The civil enthusiasm of 1996–97 essentially formed a distinct parallel society in Belarus — the society of those who did not want to live in Lukashenka's Republic of Belarus. That society had

its own language — the Belarusian *tarashkevitsa*; its own national symbols — the flag and emblem banned by Lukashenka; its own press, literature, and arts. Paradoxical and romantic, the “Kingdom” was a precise, essential opposition to the artificial puppet “republic” painted in dead Soviet red and green.

The programme organisers succeeding in staging a performance very innovative for Belarus: it involved artists, writers, musicians, and new generation theatre. Their “Belarusianness” was not confined to painting horsemen with swords or Zyanon Paznyak’s portraits, like that of former “Pahonya” classics. The key point was that for them Belarus, with her traditions and problems, became a creative centre. In all other respects they were within most modern trends of world arts.

State pressure and ripen internal conflicts destroyed “Nasha Niva” and “Euroforum,” influential and structured organisations, by 2000. They were succeeded by more mobile organisations, not burdened by staff, bank accounts, and personal superambitions, and capable of taking over their functions — “Dyaryush,” “Cultural Contact,” and the Belarusian Musical Alternative. Gifted youth that left “Euroforum,” started the “Arche” and “Arche-Skaryna” magazines, which immediately occupied prestigious places in the Belarusian cultural set. The Young Front also showed itself as an organiser of cultural actions. In 1999, an organisation called the Association of Contemporary Arts was founded in Minsk to unite those who had co-operated within “Kingdom of Belarus” and artists from other groups and regions. The Association founded its activity on the following criteria: to be non-conformist, avant-garde, and Belarusian in the broad sense. The Association’s most famous action was “Navinki,” an annual international performance festival.

### The Publishing Movement

Lukashenka’s regime tried to re-introduce state control over the publishing business and books’ content. The main instrument here was “regulation of taxation and legislation.” In 1997, a majority of publishers lost their legal status as a result of “re-licensing” the publishing business which was carried out with the account of the political loyalty of organisations.

Since 1998 many of them operated unlicensed — illegally or under cover of someone else’s licences. The themes on their printing plans were as follows: Belarusian history and other humanitarian subjects, little-known books by Belarusian classics, newest Belarusian literature, and translations into Belarusian.

Simultaneously with the establishment of a number of relatively stable publishing initiatives, there appeared a circle of small private printing houses associated with them. The printers were also subjected to tax and legislative pressure.

The Belarusian branch of the Soros Foundation realised the importance of co-operating with the publishing movement, and in 1995 a number of publishers were invited to the programme “Open Society Series” that consisted mainly of Belarusian translations of the basic texts of the world humanitarian science and

democratic theory. Thus was formed the circle of mainly Minsk-based and quite professional Belarusian publishing groups.

With the help of the Soros Foundation, a state-independent book distribution network was underway (in Belarus today the majority of book stores are state-owned or connected with the single state-run distribution network — the “Belkniha”). As of now, there are only two private book stores, one in Minsk and another in Harodnya. One of the remaining independent book stores selling linguistic international literature at the linguistic faculty of the Belarusian State University was closed in 2000, simultaneously with the termination of the British Council in Belarus.

And still, despite all obstacles, a set of publishers had formed over the past five years who collectively managed to publish an influential body of Belarusian texts. It is worth mentioning books by the Belarusian Humanitarian Educational and Cultural Centre, the “Archive of Modern History” series (started by the “Nasha Niva” foundation and now continued by the association “Dyaryush”), publications of the Polatsk Fellowship of Free Writers and the “Brama” (Gate) association in Mahyleu, a series of the Belarusian Historical Review magazine, publications of the Belarusian Book Review, “Technology,” “Lecture,” etc.

Those are mainly publishers who try to stay on the surface by retaining certain lawfulness of their books which means the opportunity to influence a broader, “uninvolved” reader. Their books are distributed via regional NGOs and their branches, by post cash on delivery, and through official book stores whenever possible. Distribution remains one of the main problems of the publishing movement.

Given the situation of political fighting and censorship, attempts have been made to start totally underground publishing bodies, modelled after those under the military regime in Poland. One of the examples is “KONTRA-PRESS” which published in 2000 a collection of pamphlets about Lukashenka titled ‘Idiot the Most Real One’.

The musical movement and other movements, increasingly influential mainly among young people, are described in separate sections, therefore we shall proceed with an account of the cultural situation in Belarus before and after Lukashenka’s election — from early till the end of the 1990s.

### Regions

The Belarusian periphery has changed greatly over the second half of the 1990s. There has been a noticeable rise of the number and quality of non-governmental organisations which are in one way or other involved in cultural activities. This happened both due to internal tendencies and assistance of some western sponsors, above all the IDEE foundation. Traditionally, the prevailing type of regional organisations are those involved in local studies, however, there is no shortage of creative groups and folklore collectives.

The recent years’ tendency of setting up regional resource centres has been playing an important role. Many organisations functioning as information and

coordination centres together with media, educational, or social programmes, carry out or support projects in history or arts, publish books, compilations, or magazines. The cultural life of the third sector is most active, of course, in regional towns: in Harodnya, for example, a lot of cultural initiatives are supported by "Ratusha"; there operates the Western Belarusian Cultural Initiative, the Norbut Local Studies' Fellowship, "Pakhodnya," etc. In Mahyleu, apart from "Brama," there is an organisation "Kola Syabrow" (Circle of Friends) to help cultural activists. Among Byerastse organisations, worth noting are the "Bergamot" creative group and the Napoleon Orda association. However, strong cultural organisations are now operating in many district centres of Belarus, namely Navahrudak, Baranavichy, Lida, Polatsk, etc. the Fellowship of the Belarusian Language works in this field virtually everywhere, as do associations of ethnic minorities. Cultural structures are usually closely connected with the local independent press.

### The Local Studies Movement

In Belarus today there are several large regional associations for local studies, namely the Norbut Local Studies Fellowship in Harodnya, the Local Studies Fellowship in Vitsebsk, the Ramanaw Local Studies Fellowship in Mahyleu (which operates as an NGO). Apart from that, there is a growing number of local organisations in districts, towns, or individual schools. The search of one's own "small" history, even perfectly apolitical, inevitably end up in a certain conflict with the Soviet or Lukashenkist concepts of history, inspire in young people interest and respect to the ethnic and historical traditions of their land, which makes for adequate self-identification of citizens.

The Archive of Modern History in Minsk, with the methodological assistance of KARTA from Warsaw, held in 1998–99 a national contest for schoolchildren titled "Daily life in Belarus: 1945–65" with about 200 individual and group contestants. In 200, the Archive initiated the contest "My Genealogy. The Family Fate in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century."

Today a tendency is felt for a nation-wide democratic movement of local studies NGOs and, possibly, their national association.

As for international ties, the cultural NGOs traditionally have close contacts with Poland. It is worth noting Germany, Sweden, other Baltic countries, and the Ukraine. Until recently, there have been practically no contacts with the Balkans, whereas those with developed Western European countries are rather close. Unlike the official cultural ties, contacts with Russian colleagues play a much smaller role, and some Belarusian organisations consciously avoid such partnership.

Sometimes cultural initiatives in the third sector are really more influential on the cultural situation in the regions, on the "outward face" of the contemporary Belarusian culture, than the whole work of the ministry of culture, no matter that they have much less funds at their disposal and are usually not welcomed by authorities. The tendency to take over the

state in cultural initiatives witnesses the real essential role of the non-governmental community in Belarus. This was noted during a round table meeting of cultural organisations in Minsk in February 2000, and by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Assembly of Non-Governmental Democratic Organisations in January same year.

Traditionally, Belarusian opposition politicians and leaders of civic movements treat culture as a second rate issue. It is a paradox, given that many of them came from the cultural opposition. However, as time went on and they began to influence the situation, they adopted a traditional Soviet approach to culture.

In 2000, the non-governmental initiative "Cultural Contact" developed a programme of support of cultural initiatives in Belarus, aimed exactly on the widening of inter-organisational contacts, joint actions, information exchange and cross-advertising. The bulletin of the Belarusian Association of Resource Centres started to deliver information about cultural events.

The state institutions of culture are so inefficient and hefty that it is impossible to remedy the situation without a radical reform — even if they had money. However, in our opinion, it is the third sector structures that are capable today of producing an essential positive effect — even with relatively tight financing. It is through the development of people's initiative that this country in the middle of Europe can be effectively salvaged from a cultural and ethnic catastrophe.

To summarise this account, we can say that the Belarusian nation in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not give birth to people like Jerzy Giedroyc, Andrey Sakharov, or Vaclav Havel. There emerged no periodicals equal to Parisian "Culture" by neither thought, nor influence. The Belarusian non-Soviet, free culture has been building up on the work of thousands of less respected, less famous persons — soldiers of the cultural movement. However, their exploit does not seem to be in vain. Today we have a well-formed body of a modern European culture, have all the necessary basis for development, for the integration into the community of free nations. However, today Belarus finds itself in a situation where it needs a helping hand and real support, in the political and economic fields as well as culture.

**Vaclav Areshka**, born in 1955. Graduated from the Belarusian Academy of Arts in Minsk, a specialist in history of culture and theatre. Author of the thesis "The Radziwill Theatre in Nesvezh." Used to work in the Belarusian Youth Viewer Theatre, Belarusian National Museum, he was a lecturer of history and theory of culture at the Belarusian Academy of Arts. Co-operated with independent publishing houses like "Navia Morionum" and "Nasha Niva." In 1996–1999 worked for the "Nasha Niva" Foundation, co-ordinating its cultural and editing projects. Starting from 1989, he has been working as a programme co-ordinator at the Civil Society "Dyaryush," works mainly with editing programmes. Translated for "Spadzina" and other magazines texts by Polish authors of 17<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries — Franciszka Urszula Radziwill, Marcin Matuszewicz, Henryk Rzewuski, Stanislaw Mackiewicz, Michal Kazimierz Radziwill, Hieronim Florian Radziwill and Sergiusz Piasecki. Author of numerous essays on culture and theatre, as well as documentary film s' scenarios and texts for children. Co-operator of Belarusian branch of Radio Svoboda and Programme 2 of Polish Radio.

Olga Kopyonkina

## ALBARUSSIA: LOGIC OF THE NOMOS

The main criterion to identify the Republic of Belarus among other East-European cultural zones is related to the quality of its borders. The development of culture within the territories of the former state of *Rzeczpospolita* (Belarusian lands used to constitute one of its parts) was determined by the permanent migration, transparency and looseness of borders between the internal ethnic territories. It was only clear that Ger-

and a Russian woman having children, who are obviously Ukrainians or Lithuanians, illustrates the continuity of ethnic composition, which was the main factor determining culture in the frontier zone. Perhaps that is why Belarus is not still recognised at international art scene, and it continues to attach itself to some "supolnost" (e.g. community) existing in our historical memory.

Presently the artistic situation in Belarus is determined by two generations. One was formed in the 70s and 80s and is based upon the ideas and aesthetics of underground. The other one, which had not revealed itself till few years ago, is that of the 90s, its main characters stake on their own biography, not binding themselves to any traditions, successions or identities. It is paradoxical that when appearing on the international scene both generations avoid or are scared of public presentations and therefore subscribe to joint projects (uniting artists from different countries who vary by their level and quality), which serves to the restoration of the West-Russian brotherhood, which once existed in *Rzeczpospolita*, and to the legitimising of their choice to be with somebody (and with whom exactly) or to remain with themselves.

However the features of the Belarusian artistic consciousness are best seen in the international projects and abroad. One of such project was a joint German-Belarusian exhibition project called *Texts*, organised by the Goethe-Institut and shown in Minsk and several German cities. The art matter of the Belarusian part of the exhibition consisted of the text fragments, image symbols, which most likely appear in the moment of removing the language from its experience and not from the desire of its textualisation. A Belarusian artist at an international *rendez-vous* is seemingly breaking the rules by not bringing in any clear statement, neither discarding nor approving of anything. The artist subconsciously opposes any form of determination, breaking the links within symbols and codes, ruining the symbol, which has not yet emerged, and registering these ruins. Something of this kind is demonstrated in the work of Ihar Kashkurevich (at *Texts*). It is a text in German written on a vertical panel and accompanied by arrows pointing at several bins, which seem to be detached from the Soviet urban context. We are as if living within the circle of permanent reminiscence of discourses, which have never started, of unpronounced statements and unclear meanings. Hence the verbal shortage and the impossibility of putting together a Belarusian artist and language matter and presenting this artist as a consumer or a source of information.

Within the self-determination of the contemporary Belarusian topos one discovers the former communist



Ludmila Rusova, performance

many lies to the West, while Russia is in the East. The frontier zone was involved in a continuous process of "values migration" that withdrew all issues related to the cultural identification with an ethnic factor and shaped almost tactile perception of the Other and his determination in oneself. The joke about a Polish man



province's experience with its predestination of an empty ideological zone intended for the implementation of some political project.

If the Belarusian post-communist experience has brought anything at all, it is the feeling of the legitimisation of its borders — a factor, which induced a neurosis of isolation (or the end of this connection with the Other) and distance, perceived by the local artistic circles rather as a loss than as an acquisition. This experience is compensated by art projects connected with the feeling of a threshold, zero space, stop point, from which a new communicative movement can start and create the required field of interpretation in order to help constructing new forms of relationships with the West. From this point of view, understanding of the solidity any precise character of the borders corresponds to the statement by the Russian writer Daniil Kharms about one unit to register the world. "We are our most comfortable shape. Now when we have become totally independent, let us clean our facets to clarify where our presence ends" (Daniil Kharms).

At the present the main image for the Belarusian art consciousness is the image of an absolute periphery, when the whole world, Moscow and the West, turn into something external compare to Belarus. The centre seems to be elsewhere. We feel as if having a house on the North Pole, in which all windows face South; at the same time we feel at a safe distance from contemporary world. In his *Treatise of Nomadology* G. Deleuze set off a nomad against a migrant in relation to the space: the continuously perceived "space of individual events" of a nomad, which changes its structure reacting to the frontier's migration; and the space of a migrant — closed, exhaustive, centred. The image of a nomad, described by Deleuze, is close to the identity of a partisan, existing in the Belarusian art consciousness. Contemporary Belarusian art is trying to develop a psychology of a nomad-partisan and a migrant (as defined by Deleuze) simultaneously, e.g. to apply self-determination strategy through the context and to separate from it. In 1994-1997 everybody's attention was drawn by two exhibitions held in Minsk and Vitebsk, which were engendered by the context and turned the real available being into their own material. The most interesting was the *Partisan Galleries* project by Ihar Tishin, in which the exposition, consisting of various items, pictures and photos seemed absolutely naturally raised from the environment. The being was chosen in the shape of a private house transformed into a storage of partisan folklore. The disposition of things was interesting. Things were dissipated in the space, they conquered the space, appearing in one or another place. The house as a *nomos*, the intermittent space, expressed the essence of the artistic experience of the Belarusian territory, based on the partisan movement strategy. Tishin suggests this strategy as the only way of "territorialisation and deterritorialisation" (as defined by Deleuze), preventing the enemy from reading and acquiring the area. Tishin's projects define the role of an artist as a liaison officer between his own territory and the external evident world. He moves his territory's frontiers, expands the spring-board changes the location of centres and totally annihilates them, rejecting the *polis* and approving of the *nomos*. The reason why contemporary art institutions with serious

programs have not yet appeared in Minsk, might be that local artistic environment prefers pure strategy without rear or concrete battlefields. It is dissipated like sand in a desert, and realises itself through personal actions. In order to get acquainted with this strategy one has to study the territory. That is sometimes called partisan nomadism, which is the main feature of the Belarusian art situation. In the Western structured and dismembered universe, where a Belarusian artist appears to be a migrant and where traditional and new, technological and hand-made coexist without conflicts, where everything seems legitimised, partisan paraphernalia are becoming a communicative code, which helps an artist to establish him- or herself in the external international world. Everything, which used to be the depth, becomes the width and the surface, where all events are seen as if through a looking glass. That is an explanation of the exhibition called *The Kingdom of Belarus*, presently touring Poland, where the republic is presented as some East Slavic dissident zone (in contradiction to the empty ideological zone status). Here we find that the coarse material objects and installations with an unclear metaphorical meaning really depict the territory's psychology more precisely than any picture with some Belarusian landscape on it. The meaning appears where the event "leaves the premises," appears at the surface. It is important not to slide down from this surface back into the depth: into the false depth of the underground and discussions of national, territorial and other types of identity.

However the lack of symbols, the visual indecipherability of the Belarusian territory has become one of the main experiences of the local artistic circles. Photo projects presented by Igor Savchenko, small, with inexpressive spatial motives, intended for the most banal exhibiting, reflected the character of the area, impossible to be defined by its surface. The lack of a symbol, which could be used for the area identification is the main feature of the border territory, which can determine cultural and territorial identity.

For any outer world representative such projects match the "in-between" category: between stable meanings, concepts and myths. Once the border criterion still exists, the communicative space can appear only between the territories bearing the experience of being distanced. It is like recently, when artists from Eastern Europe created images of mobile periphery within European cultural space.

It seems that Belarusian art can use the Western desire to expand its cultural horizon, and to establish itself in the Western consciousness as some metaphysical frontier zone, involving some additional, but necessary articulation of the contemporary world picture.

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**Olga Kopyonkina** — graduated from Slavonic philology faculty of the Belarusian State University, deals with history and critique of contemporary art. In 1990s, worked as a curator in "The Sixth Line" Gallery and a lecturer of history of contemporary art at the European Humanistic University in Minsk. In 1998 emigrated to The U.S.A., in 2001 graduated from curators' studies at the Bard College in New York.

Belarus is the third smallest country in Europe.

Alena Areshka

## VIOLATION OF CULTURAL RIGHTS IN BELARUS

The violation of culture-related human rights is widespread and frequent in Belarus. It is generally known that human rights are protected both on the international and national levels. International human rights standards are developed. Individual countries then bring their legislation in line with those international standards. The Republic of Belarus declares that all its legislative acts conform with the basic provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights under which every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (Art. 18). The Republic of Belarus ratified the International Pact on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. Under Article 15 of the Pact every person has the right to participate in cultural life, use the achievements of scientific progress and its practical applications, the protection of their moral and material interests that may appear in relation to any scientific, literary, or artistic work. Every participant country in the Pact is to respect freedom that is unconditionally necessary for scientific research or creative work, and acknowledge the benefits of developing and encouraging international contacts and co-operation in science and culture. On the national level, Belarus has brought its laws in line with international standards. Thus, according to the Belarusian constitution, every citizen of Belarus has the right to

education (Art. 48); to retain their ethnic identity, to use their mother tongue, to choose a language for communicating with other people (Art. 50); the right to freedom of artistic, scientific or technical creativity and teaching (Art. 51). Moreover, every citizen is guaranteed freedom of thought, opinion and free expression (Art. 33); while censorship as well as the monopolisation of the mass media by the state, non-governmental associations or individuals are not allowed (Art. 33).

The Law on Culture in the Republic of Belarus was adopted in 1991. Under this law, enterprises and institutions of art and culture are independent in terms of choosing their artistic programmes and repertoire, and have the right to promote and distribute works of art and culture in various genres, forms and styles. Officials or state institutions have no right, unless provided with adequate motivation, to ban, limit or stop cultural actions, exhibitions, publications or performances of art works or other products of cultural activity intended for public display or distribution. In cases when cultural actions are stopped or limited, those concerned have the right to legal redress in a court of law concerning the related decision made by an official or an organ of government (Art. 24). The Republic of Belarus guarantees freedom of publishing and distribution of printed products regulated by its legislation (Art. 29).

In reality, however, all these rights are highly limited by various legal acts that essentially regulate culture-related issues. Since 1997, the freedom to publish has become dependent on a number of provisions. For instance, the resolution of the State Press Committee issued on 21 May 1997 to establish principles for issuing and using publishing licences has ipso facto strongly limited freedom of publishing due to the very need to obtain a licence from the state. In order to obtain a licence, a full-time employee of the applying publishing house (with a related degree and at least three years of work experience in the publishing business) has to pass a qualification test. Andrey Fyadorchanka, an expert publisher of the Humanitarian Foundation "Nasha Niva," who met all of the above-mentioned requirements, failed the qualification test in late 1997. He was unofficially informed that he would never pass the examination because he be-



Artur Klinau, the "Columbarium of World Literature" project



longed to a publishing house that printed independent literature. Indeed, after the authorities suspended all publishing licences on 1 December 1998, most of the independent printers failed to renew them and have since placed orders elsewhere (including foreign publishers). As a result, publishing costs borne by Belarusian NGOs increased.

Similarly, the resolution on the state registration (re-registration) of political parties, trade unions and other non-governmental organisations stated that after the year 2000, all parties, unions and organisations have to register (or re-register) within a certain period of time. The time limitation and multitude of minute formalities allow the authorities to selectively choose the NGOs it will (re)register. The Justice Department of the Minsk City Executive Committee denied registration to the non-governmental association "Cultural Contact" on 7 February 2000 on the pretext that its statutes contradicted legal requirements. A second attempt to register, after the statutes had been adjusted with respect to the necessary formalities, also failed on the same grounds. Members of "Cultural Contact" were informed by an employee of the Justice Department that an order came down "from above" not to register the association that had spontaneously staged a series of large-scale international non-governmental activities including the "Minsk Spring 2000" International Theatre and Music Festival. Therefore, despite the fact that Belarus has ratified international documents that impose certain obligations, and national legislation conforms to international standards, the state violates human rights in the sphere of culture. Consequently, the cultural originality and independence of this European nation is being abolished and conditions are being created for the elimination of its identity. The mass of legal acts, their subjective interpretation and the lack of appropriate opportunities for redress to an independent court authority make the activity of many artists and non-governmental cultural institutions semi-legal.

Other than applying pressure by legal means, the present authorities frequently use other prohibited methods. For example, the government censors or bans selected books, periodicals, art exhibitions and films by issuing a spoken order or through a telephone call. Occasionally, the governing bodies of creative associations are forced to issue those bans. It should be kept in mind that due to the lack of national business circles that could sponsor domestic cultural activity, all such associations are fully dependent on the state budget. It should also be noted that incomes in the field of culture are among the lowest in the country. The grounds for issuing a ban can also be a subjective interpretation of Article 24 of the Law on Culture: "It is prohibited to distribute works that call for the violent dismantling or changing of the constitutional state order, promote war, violence, and cruelty; racial, national, or religious hatred, or pornography." Another method of suppressing cultural life independent of the state is the creation of unbearable economic conditions for publishers and galleries that are taxed as regular com-

mercial enterprises. Over the past five years, some nationally well-known art galleries have disappeared, including "Shostaya Liniya" (The Sixth Line), "Kawcheg" (The Ark), and "Alter Ego" in Minsk and "Zyalyony Dom" (Green House) in Homel. As a result, cultural figures that are trying to retain creative independence and a civic conscience are being forced out of cultural life. Many have had to temporarily or permanently leave the country. Vasil Bykau and Svyatlana Aleksiyevech are two examples of artists who have had to emigrate in order to live and work. The scale of artists emigrating from the country, especially young artists, is frighteningly large.

The regime has also increased pressure on academic and university freedoms — freedoms that Europe has cultivated for centuries. This is evidenced by the fact that rectors of higher educational institutions are appointed not on the basis of qualifications but on the basis of loyalty to the government. The curricula of higher and secondary schools are forced to follow the ideological provisions of the Lukashenka regime. Textbooks written during the first years after Belarus declared its independence were virtually banned and abolished a few years ago. They have been replaced with "new" textbooks in which old Soviet dogmas are restored and imperialist ideas of "Slavic unity" predominate. These essentially racist and fascist ideas adopted by the ruling regime are disseminated with the assistance of the state-owned media, forced into the educational system, beautified by a few obedient artists, composers and writers as well as promoted through state budget-funded festivals.

Current government policy includes the elimination of the Belarusian language (in a country in which more than 70% of the population is Belarusian). The native language is being forced out of education, media, science, and the arts. The number of schools in which the language of instruction is Belarusian has declined several times during the past four years; print runs of books are lower; the Belarusian language is rarely heard on state-owned radio and TV. Human rights organisations are noting incidents of the police arresting and beating people for speaking Belarusian in the streets. Performances of Belarusian rock bands who sing about love and freedom in the native language are being banned (see Appendix) while pro-fascist Russian rock bands are allowed to give concerts unhindered.

Censorship is also applied in the theatre and visual arts. The authorities forced the Minsk theatre "Volnaya Stsena" (Free Stage) to change its name to the Laboratory Theatre of Belarusian Drama. The play *The Rise of Arthur VI*, a work with anti-totalitarian overtones, had to overcome many obstacles in order to premier. In September 2000 the Belarusian Ministry of Culture fired Valery Mazynski, the theatre's director of plays, and thereby eliminated a renowned Belarusian theatre group despite numerous appeals to the Ministry in support of Mazynski. Belarusian visual artists are becoming subject to stricter regulations. In 1995 and 1996 exhibitions of the "Pahonya" art group, traditionally held on 25

March (the day the Belarusian Popular Republic declared its independence in 1918) were censored and some of its works were removed from the exhibition. In 1997 the exhibition was open to the public for only two days. In 1998 the organisers only managed to stage the exhibition in some independent centres in the provinces.

State-run book publishing houses are subject to severe censorship. The board of the Belarusian Encyclopaedia was completely replaced and ideologically incompatible articles were removed from already produced and laid-out volumes. The publication of popular books on history written by independent authors is hindered (e.g., *Whence Our Kin* by Uladzimir Arlow). Entire sections of some historical works (e.g., *Belarus on Historical Crossroads* by American Professor Jan Zaprudnik) are simply not printed.

It is obvious that the authorities are not interested in national culture, but even worse, they are hostile toward it. This particularly applies to the present-day, avant-garde phenomena in Belarusian culture. The combination of the country's financial crisis and the implementation of government policy under president Lukashenka is taking Belarusian culture to the edge of destruction. The Appendix contains particular incidents of this between 1998 and 2001. From this list an objective picture emerges of present Belarusian society and relations between the state and the individual as well as between the state and society.



Ihar Tsishin, installation

1998

## DECEMBER

The Minister of Education, Mr. Dylyan, banned the study of the creative school of Belarusian writers, including N. Arsenyeva and M. Syadnyow (Belarusian emigrants to the USA) and the poet L. Heniush, who had never accepted Soviet citizenship in the protest against Russia's annexation of Belarus.

## 30 DECEMBER

The newspaper "Svaboda" (Liberty) published an appeal by the International Helsinki Committee

for Human Rights, in which deep concern and indignation was expressed about the fact that the film director Yury Khashchevatski was beaten up last December. The appeal also stated that Mr. Khashchevatski is a famous Belarusian film director who directed *Ordinary President*, a documentary about Aleksander Lukashenka in which the Belarusian president is portrayed in an unflattering light. The film was very popular in the world and won a special prize at the Berlin Film Festival last year. However, in Belarus *Ordinary President* was banned and could be seen only underground. In December of last year unidentified people broke into Mr. Khashchevatski's studio and beat him severely. The appeal, addressed to president Lukashenka, stresses that the perpetrators stole nothing from the studio so the attack was most likely politically motivated. On behalf of the organisation, the Executive Director of the Helsinki Committee's European Department, Holy Cartner, demanded the Belarusian president make every effort to find and punish those responsible. The Helsinki Committee also called upon president Lukashenka to allow the public screening of *Ordinary President* in Belarus.

## JANUARY

A group of well-known Belarusian writers visited the city and region of Harodnya where many meetings, co-sponsored by the Harodnya Board of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) and the Fellowship of the Belarusian Language, were held. However, the administrations in the town of Skidal and the village of Kaptsewka illegally banned the meetings in their respective areas.

## FEBRUARY

The Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus upheld the ruling of the Leninski District of Harodnya and thereby dismissed the claim of Yury Matsko, father of Agata Matsko who went to a Belarusian-language class in secondary school No 10. When Agata was transferred to a Russian-language class, her father demanded that his daughter continue her education in Belarusian. The school administration refused, and the court supported this decision that contradicts both the Constitution and the Law on Languages.

## 19 FEBRUARY

Uladzimir Plaksa, an employee of the state-owned enterprise "BelAeroNavigation," appealed to the Belarusian Helsinki Committee seeking assistance in defending his right to the unrestricted use of Belarusian as an official language. "I have been speaking Belarusian for four or five years. Accordingly, I am drawing up technical documentation also in Belarusian. Last year I experienced some pressure from the administration." Yury Kladaw, an assistant to the enterprise's director, stated that the ban on the Belarusian language was motivated by the Statutes of IKAO (an international organisation of countries participating in air

navigation). Together with his application, Mr. Plaksa enclosed a copy of the minutes of a meeting held by the staff of Minsk Aerodynamic Section of "BelAeroNavigation" held on 30 June 1997. One of the items on the meeting's agenda was Mr. Kladaw's ban on using Belarusian in technical documents and control communication.

#### 9 APRIL

The Ministry of Culture demanded, among other things, the stage be redesigned for a play staged by the "Lipavichki" Puppet Theatre in Harodnya. The script was written by Uladzimir Halubka and the play directed by Alyaksey Lyalyawski, the play director of the Minsk Puppet Theatre. Ministry critics did not like the decorations (a four-metre high national emblem towering above a Belarusian village, walls papered with issues of "Soviet Byelorussia," the BSSR anthem played three times through a street loud-speaker in the finale, etc).

#### 22 APRIL

A poster featuring the Belarusian president in a Napoleon-style hat was censored from an exhibition of W. Miranenka's work in Homel.

#### 23 APRIL

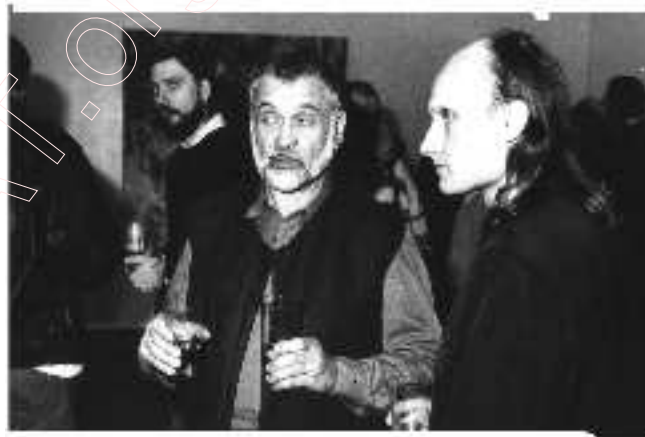
The Co-ordinating Council for the Protection of National Heritage in the Berastsye Regional Executive Committee compiled a list of the least valuable historical buildings, which would be subject to demolition. The idea to "clean the towns of the region from unsightly historical monuments" was advanced by the committee's chairman, Henadz Masko. In his opinion, many of the state-protected buildings were an eye sore because there was no money for their restoration.

#### 30 APRIL

Director Anatol Alay produced a documentary titled *Hastela* in the "Letapis" (Chronicle) studio of "Belarusfilm." The film attempted to shed light on the details concerning the mysterious death of the Soviet era hero and fighter pilot Hastela, who rammed his plane into an enemy plane. The mystery deepened when it was discovered during the pilot's reburial in 1950 that his grave contained the remains of other people. According to Alay's version, Hastela could have been captured and might still be alive. The film was produced with state funds in the "Letapis" studio. The Ministry of Culture did not pass the film, granted it the status of "filmtheque material" and archived it. The director's attempt to convince decision-makers that the cinematographic investigation should be continued using government resources was met with resistance from Minister Alaksandar Sasnowski.

#### 6 MAY

Four photographs were censored from the exhibition *In the Search of Belarus 12 Years after Chernobyl*, conceived by Swiss journalist Peter Hagi and art photographer Hugo Eggi together with Belarusian journalist Syamyon Bukchyn and photographer Syarhey Brushko. The exhibition is the result of the authors travelling around Belarus. The authors published an album which, as well as the exhibition, was financed by Swiss sponsors. The exhibition was first shown in Switzerland and then came to Minsk. Three out of the four photos banned in Minsk were connected with the newspaper "Svaboda" and its banning. Those photos were also cut out of the album. In addition, the censors "cleaned up" the text cutting out a paragraph about "Svaboda." As a result, the Belarusian edition of the album differs from its Swiss counterpart by four blank spots representing the censored photographs.



Opening of an exhibition in "The Sixth Line" Gallery

#### MAY

The police were out in force at the "Maladzechna-98" music festival. A group of Young Front members were escorted from the spectators' area by police officers, who initially charged five of the group and subsequently all of Young Front members with offences. The essence of the offence was that the boys held white balloons with "NRM"<sup>1</sup> written on them with a red marker. The famous singer Kasia Kamotskaya, a special guest of the festival, was not allowed to perform.

#### 11 DECEMBER

Minsk-based rock bands NRM, Ulis, and Novaye Neba were not allowed to perform in the Harodnya movie theatre Kosmas. After a telephone call from the City Executive Committee the theatre administration refused to supply power for the equipment.

<sup>1</sup> The name of a popular Belarusian-language rock band — PK.

1999

## FEBRUARY

Zoya Vrublewskaia, editor in charge of musical programmes on Belarusian radio, banned the groups Paganini, Skryabin, and Stravinski from the air, judging their music to be "devilish."

## 5 MARCH

A scheduled performance in Berastsye by the band NRM was cancelled after the club received a telephone call from the City Executive Committee. The organisers tried to re-stage the show in a cinema, but this failed when the police sealed off the building.



A group of artists at "The Sixth Line" Gallery

## 5 MAY

Navapolatsk city authorities closed a discotheque run by members of the local branch of Young Front. The establishment offered records and live music in the Belarusian language.

## JUNE

The Minsk City Executive Committee banned the editorial board of the newspaper "Belarusian Youth" to stage the annual rock concert dedicated to the Belarusian traditional holiday Kupalle. For the previous five years the concerts *Kupalle with the Belarusian Youth* had been held in Gorky Park in downtown Minsk. The first efforts at disrupting the event occurred as early as in 1995 when the city authorities cut off electricity to the stage.

## 21 JULY

On the last day of Aleksander Lukashenka's first term as president, the artist Ales Pushkin pushed a cart full of manure containing a festive portrait of Lukashenka, a 1996 referendum poster saying "Requesting Your Support," the reinstalled Soviet-style Belarusian national symbols, new bank notes, handcuffs and chains and dumped it front of the main entrance to the presidential administration building. Pushkin told journalists that the entire performance had been conceived as a work entitled '*A Thank-You to the FPRB<sup>2</sup> for His Five Years of Feverishly Hard and Fruitful Work for the People*'. The following November a court in Minsk found Ales Pushkin guilty of hooliganism and disrespect to state symbols and sentenced him to two years in prison (suspended).

## 28 JULY

The organisers of the "Youth For Belarus" concert were refused permission to stage the event in the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the October Revolution Park in Minsk.<sup>3</sup> On 19 June the Minsk City Executive Committee did not grant permission to hold a "Youth against Fascism" meeting and concert on the square in front of the opera house, and repeated the refusal on 11 July. Maladzechna officials refused to issue a permit for a meeting and concert on 27 July dedicated to Independence Day. A concert planned for 1 August in Minsk was also not permitted.

## 27 AUGUST

During a "Youth for Belarus" concert, organised by the Belarusian Musical Alternative (BMA) in Maladzechna, the police detained 30 people including BMA head Vital Supranovich. Some of the detained were fined for "violating public order during the concert." The lead singer of Happy Face was fined for speaking about Lukashenka's dictatorship from the stage.

## 8 SEPTEMBER

During the international performance festival "Navinki-99,"<sup>4</sup> the director of the Palace of Arts in Minsk demanded the "Zhest" theatre stop their performance (a Belarusian interpretation of the Japanese *butoh* dance), because he found it obscene. The director expelled the audience from the Palace and closed the festival. Due to the efforts on the part of the organisers, the festival managed to reopen.

## DECEMBER

Ivan Kakhanovich, editor of the youth board of Belarusian state-owned Radio 1, told the DJs and authors of the programme "Na Wsyu Mots" (Full Force), which promoted Belarusian-language rock,

<sup>2</sup> Supposedly meaning «First President of the Republic of Belarus» — PK.

<sup>3</sup> Just to make it clear: the park was planted to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1917 Socialist revolution. The revolution began on November 7, which date is still celebrated by some people in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium. However, according to the Russian Orthodox calendar that was then used in Russia, the revolution began on

October 25, and therefore Communist ideology idolised The Great October, even after having dismissed the old style calendar. Hence the name of the park built 50 years later — PK.

<sup>4</sup> Although literally meaning "novelties" or "small news", the word Navinki is commonly known as the name of the village where the Minsk regional mental asylum is situated.



that the station's director Mr. Yadratsaw ordered the programme be taken off the air.

## 2000

### FEBRUARY

World-famous writer Vasil Bykau left Belarus for Germany. His departure was motivated by the campaign of persecution conducted against him by the authorities through state-owned media.

### MARCH

The Minsk authorities banned the 25 March "Pahonya" exhibition in the Palace of Arts (see above).

### MARCH

The Berastsye City Executive Committee banned the "Mummification's Day" festival that was being organised by the New Front of Arts and planned for 5-6 March in a city club.

### MARCH

Leanid Halubovich's selection of poems titled 'Last Poems' was published as part of the 'Library of Kalosye Magazine' series. All state-run publishers refused to publish the book due to the oppositional content of some poems.

### 17 MARCH

An installation by Ales Karpovich and Piotr Rusak entitled 'Spring-2000' disappeared from the "Pahonya" exposition in the Palace of Arts in Minsk. Despite all attempts it was never found. The missing work of art represented an image resembling the head of the Belarusian state.

### MAY

During the "Minsk Spring" International Festival, the City Executive Committee banned Belarusian and Polish performers from playing in front of the "Dze-ya" theatre. The authorities equated these artistic actions to unauthorised rallies. The police detained some journalists who photographed the event as it was being broken up. The authorities did not allow a press conference to be held after the festival and threatened to close the "Reactor" club that hosted rock bands as the name of one of the Polish bands was "Pidzama Porno" and the club did not have a licence for male strip-tease.

### 16 MAY

The administration of the Talochyn district in the Vitsebsk region ordered Ales Pushkin's paintings to be removed from the district alleging that his art had a negative influence on the people's national identity. The paintings were exhibited in Talochyn's House of Culture and the exhibition (attended by young people from the neighbourhood) was visited by the artist himself who staged a performance.

## MAY

The Minsk City Executive Committee denied the youth wing of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Popular Gromada" authorisation to hold a reading of traditional poetry at Kupaly Square in downtown Minsk. The authorities suggested the event move to an uptown location.

### 31 MAY

The Minsk Pershamayski District Court heard the case filed by TV journalist Yaraslaw Byaklemishaw against Belarusian TV and Radio. The former host of a cultural programme directed to youth believed that he had been unjustly fired. One of Byaklemishaw's programmes had featured Yury Khashchevatski, which became the reason for the journalist's dismissal on the grounds of "severely violating the order of preparing and broadcasting a television programme."

### 1 JULY

The Minister of Culture sent a letter to the director of the National Theatre of Belarusian Drama stating that the ministry found it inappropriate to prolong a contract with V. Y. Mazynski, the theatre's art director since its founding. The theatre, once called "Volnaya Stsena" (Free Stage), lost its freedom-associated name due to actions by the ministry. Mazynski had previously had problems with the ministry involving 'The Career of Arthur VI' by Bertold Brecht. Perhaps, the cause for Mazynski's dismissal was his staging of 'Prince Mamabuk' by Belarusian playwright Dudaraw — a play in which the officials see allusions to president Lukashenka.

## SEPTEMBER

The Minister of Culture appoints Valery Anisenka Art Director of the National Theatre of Belarusian Drama to replace Valery Mazynski. Most of the troop had left together with Mazynski. The theatre began to recruit, under the threat of expulsion, students of the Culture University's Directing Department headed by Anisenka.

### 23 SEPTEMBER

The Harodnya City Executive Committee banned the first graffiti festival in the Park of Culture and Recreation. The festival was expected to attract 300 young people and special boards were specifically prepared for the event.

## OCTOBER

Despite a request from the German Embassy, the Culture Department of the Harodnya City Executive Committee banned the "The Invisible Wall 2000" International Bard Festival on the pretext that Harodnya "has planned a sufficient number of cultural events for this period." In the judgement of the festival organisers, the true reason for the ban was that the festival was planned before the election to Lukashenka's House of Representatives and thus was seen as a "suspicious political action." Nevertheless, the festival was held, without authorisation, in the *Kirche* that belonged to Harodnya's Lutheran community.

## OCTOBER

During the exhibition of Uladzimir Bazan's photographs entitled *'The Vitsebsk Courier — the Chronicles of a Newspaper Column,'* the Vitsebsk Regional Museum removed some of the photographs without the author's consent. The museum administration explained that the these photographs did not fall in line with the policy of the museum as a state institution. The discarded photographs pictured opposition activists, rallies and protest actions.



Ihar Tsishin, the "Little Partisan Movement" project

## 3 NOVEMBER

Students of the Belarusian Academy of Arts held a picket outside the academy building under the banner "Student. Artist. Pauper." Their fliers stated that the academy administration eliminated its world-famous graphics chamber for its lack of materials and conditions for students to work. The picket had not been authorised by the Minsk City Executive Committee although the organisers had filed their application in advance as required. The police filmed the protesters with a video camera. Henadz Rudovich, deputy head of the Interior Department for the Pershamayski District, warned that those participating in the picket would face administrative charges.

2001

## 1 FEBRUARY

During a conference entitled "Measures to Solve Problems connected with the Development of Culture and Art," Alaksandar Lukashenka ordered a National Chamber of Creative Workers be established in the House of Writers. Earlier, on 1 July 1997 the president had ordered the House to be placed under the control of the Office of Presidential Affairs "in order to ensure the efficient utilisation of state property," despite the fact that it was built with the private funds of the writers and was the property of the Union of Writers. The actual reason, according to Lukashenka himself, was that the building, constructed with state funds, hosted opposition meetings. The Union of

Writers believes that the new Chamber of Creative Workers is an instrument to irreversibly take away the property of the Union.

## FEBRUARY

Lukashenka issued the edict "On the National Council of Rectors of Higher Educational Establishments," a body made up of assigned rectors of state-owned universities and similar institutions. Under the edict rectors may "initiate and co-ordinate licensing, reorganisation and liquidation of higher educational establishments," change their names and statuses and introduce new subjects. The edict's text did not mention whether the council would also include rectors of private establishments.

## FEBRUARY

The State Committee for Youth Affairs, the founder of the Belarusian-language magazine "Pershatvet" (Primrose), decided to cease its publication. The official explanation was that the magazine was not generating a sufficient profit. "Pershatvet," the only state-run publication for young authors writing in Belarusian, was transformed into the Russian-language magazine "STO."

## 19 MARCH

The Board of the Harodnya City Branch of the Belarusian Union of Artists banned Yuras Matsko's exhibition "Dzyady" by a majority of votes. The opening of the local sculptor's exhibition had been planned for 23 March. The ban was initiated by Iryna Pratsko, director of the Union's exhibition hall in Harodnya, who justified the decision by claiming that a nationalist exhibition would "threaten public order." The actual reason for the refusal was not to let the opening coincide with an anniversary of the Belarusian Popular Republic, as the author mentioned his intention to invite opposition representatives to the event.

This monitoring of the violation of creative and academic freedoms is based on information collected from:

- a) Belarusian and foreign media;
- b) Belarusian non-governmental organisations;
- c) witnesses and other people.

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Syarhey Sakharau

## YOUTH SUBCULTURES: ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Belarusian humanitarian thought has yet to define its attitude toward youth subcultures. The prevailing opinion is that any expression of young people's free-thinking is to be considered strictly within the traditional context of conflict between generations: as the young mature and assume their positions in society the conflict exhausts itself, and therefore there is no particular need to pay attention to this area of culture. This thinking has been in vogue since the late 1960s.

The danger of ignoring the phenomenon of youth subculture became apparent with the arrival of Lukashenka's authoritarian regime. As the new order began to eliminate the democratic achievements that had changed the Belarusian situation so radically, it faced events like the 1996 Minsk Spring when, for the first time, several thousand young people between the ages of 14 and 21 took part in street demonstrations to protest the establishment of Lukashenka's regime and to claim their right to be heard. To further ignore youth subcultures was to risk a deepening in the crisis of the general culture.

### *The History of Belarusian Youth Subculture*

The term "youth subculture" first became applicable to the cultural situation in Belarus in the 1950s, when post-war Minsk was the home of several dozen "stylish" young people dressed in European fashion (hence the name "stilyagi"). Fashionable western outfits, unusual attention to appearance and their own English-based manner of speaking — the stilyagi were a great cultural shock to the grey "Soviet masses." Their subculture was extremely close-knit: the young people tried to create their own environment oriented at western cultural values. They were the first to wear American jeans, listen to jazz and rock'n'roll (popular in the West but unknown in the USSR) and to idolise Hem — the still banned American writer Ernest Hemingway. The close-knit



"The March of Freedom," Minsk, Oct. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1999.

Photo: IREX/ProMedia

character of this subculture allows it to be referred to as elitist, the more so if we take into account their homogeneous social status: most of them, their informal leaders in particular, were children of the Soviet party and cultural nomenclature who had the opportunity to regularly travel abroad.

Soviet society's initial aggressive response to the stilyagi, considered reactionaries against the established system of Communist moral values, gradually relaxed and took more liberal forms as a result of Khrushchev's thaw. The bloom of the stilyagi movement coincided with the appearance of beatniks in the field of Belarusian culture. The local version of beat culture was different from its American original: here the term "beatnik" was primarily applied to the musicians who played beat!

Beat music came to Belarus from Poland in early 1960s on smuggled Beatles' and other records, so it is little wonder that Belarus' first beatniks emerged in the border city of Harodnya. Hairy youngsters in bellbottom pants were repeatedly raided by the police who sometimes dragged them to police stations

and forcefully shaved them or cut their pants. However, beat soon became a mass movement and the Communist Party of the BSSR was forced to order the sole youth organisation, the Belarusian Komsomol, to explicitly supervise it. In 1965, the first festival of Harodnya beat bands was organised — under the aegis of the Komsomol, and in 1968 the first All-Belarusian beat festival was held in Minsk, co-sponsored by the Komsomol.

The situation changed radically in the summer of 1968: as Europe and America suppressed the Students' Spring, the Soviets attempted to eliminate beat culture and neutralise the hippies — a new youth trend that became very popular at the end of the 1960s. The local subcultures, previously amorphous ideologically, unexpectedly exhibited civil activity. On April 9, 1970 the hippies held an unauthorised meeting in Minsk in memory of Vyachaslaw Maksakaw, a young man who was mysteriously murdered. The police and KGB forcefully suppressed the meeting and harsh repression against all forms of juvenile free-thinking began. For example, Wladimir Kandrusевич (now a leading composer in Belarus) was expelled from the Conservatory for performing an English song at the 2<sup>nd</sup> beat festival.

For Belarusian hippies, fighting for their right to self-determination became a priority. Without permission from the authorities, they staged a demonstration in Harodnya's Central Square in 1971. Young people carrying posters that read "Let our souls be!" and "Hands off our hair" were beaten up by the police and a Komsomol "law enforcement" brigade. The next demonstration held in the summer of 1972, when Harodnya's hippies expressed political demands to the Communist regime, was met by several special-branch battalions. However, this action had repercussions: for months after, fliers were posted on the city's walls and anonymous appeals to schoolchildren and students to fight for their rights were circulated in educational establishments.

The Soviet regime totally controlled and eliminated any freethinking among youth. It organised a campaign aimed to prove that youth subcultures were echoes of western, capitalist culture. Nevertheless, in order to control as many young people as possible, the establishment employed selected features of the subculture. The Komsomol initiated, and the Soviet ideology romanticised, the spirit of youth hiking tourism, prototyped by western hitchhiking.

Meanwhile, the mid-1970s in Belarus was marked by various developments within the subculture movement. The more popular among them were musical subcultures, like hippies, rockers and punks, formed as new western musical trends were absorbed and found their way into Belarus. Another, smaller current was the intellectual dissidents, ideologically inspired by Minsk-based intellectual Kim Khadeyev around whom young people, mainly humanitarian students, associated. Young people met, read books by Russian dissidents, listened to forbidden music and discussed philosophical and cultural subjects in Mr. Khadeyev's flat. The notorious flat

was vigilantly watched by the KGB who thus tracked down young freethinkers and probably set up a network of agents within this subculture.

The given subculture should be considered within the context of the Russian intelligentsia and its influence on the cultural province as this subculture was primarily influenced by Russian culture, its texts and figures. Many figures in today's Russian-speaking cultural and political elite in Belarus came out of this subculture.

It is interesting to note that these two types of subcultures found common ground in Russian rock culture, which sprung up in the mid-1970s and had a significant influence on youth subcultures throughout the USSR by the end of the decade. Russian rock, because of the music, was of interest to the musical subcultures, while its philosophical lyrics fascinated the "intellectual" subculture in Belarus. Thus, the 1970s were characterised by the growing dependence of local subcultures on the Russian cultural situation and self-identification within the system of the "cultural centre" (Moscow) and the "cultural province" (the so-called "Soviet republics").

In the 1980s, however, a new wave of youth subculture was born connected with the emergence of Belarus' own cultural and political non-conformism. Approximately ten young students of Belarusian philology faculties in various Minsk universities founded the "Maystrownya" (Workshop) group whose initial aim was the revival of ancient Belarusian holidays. "Maystrownya" in fact became the successor of the creative centre "Na Paddashku" (In the Attic) that had united Belarusian-speaking intelligentsia in Minsk from the mid-1960s to 1985. Ironically, most of Maystrownya's informal leaders were children of the party, military or cultural elite of Soviet Byelorussia — people marked by national indifference. These young people did not join the Russian-speaking "intellectual" subculture of Khadeyev, partly because the Maystrownya group came from the Belarusian province, while Khadeyev's circle mainly comprised people from Minsk who consciously excluded people from the provinces.

Studying and promoting Belarusian national history and culture, "Maystrownya" witnessed the emergence of Belarus' own cultural dimension. It developed alongside the Belarusian establishment, which was manifested primarily within the scope of linguistic culture. The Maystrownya group spoke only the pre-reform version of Belarusian among themselves, while the establishment promoted the use of either Russian or a russified version of Belarusian. The strong political impact of this national subculture is worth noting, which mainly focused on the idea of the de-sovietisation of culture and Belarus' political sovereignty.

It was at this time that Belarus obtained its own musical subculture, the best known representatives of which were the first Belarusian-language rock groups Bonda and Mroya. Through contacts with "Maystrownya" members, these musicians believed that the use of Belarusian in music had to transition

from being a quirky cultural shock to a natural phenomenon. Rock culture, being extremely fashionable among Belarusian youth, and the phenomenal success of Bonda and Mroya, greatly contributed to increasing Belarusian cultural non-conformism. With the arrival of the latter, the term "neformal" (the informals), applied to the young representatives of subcultures who stood up against the linguistic, cultural (musical) and political norms established in Soviet society, took its place within the active vocabulary of the Belarusian establishment.

Thus, by the late 1980s the national subculture stood against official youth culture on one flank and against the Russian-language subcultural stream (with its de facto orientation to Russian cultural traditions) on the other.

During the period of 1991–1994, in conjunction with the establishment of an independent Belarus, the elimination of the Party's and Komsomol's monopoly on determining youth policy, youth subcultures (and particularly original Belarusian subcultures) were on the rise and began to become formally legitimate within the general cultural environment. In Minsk and the regions, artistic activities, including big art and music festivals, were organised. Rock clubs took on a great importance to the subculture: between 1991 and 1995 Minsk had three to five such clubs. These clubs became the centres of music and artistic non-conformism providing a place for the regular exchange of information and the creation of new ideas, projects and concepts. The popularity of these clubs reflected the development and creative ability of Belarusian subcultures.

Unlike Western Europe, Belarus did not experience a decline in subcultural enthusiasm with the onset of perestroika. On the contrary, as the political paradigm changed radically after Lukashenka came to power in 1994, a new page was opened in the development of Belarusian subculture.

#### *Youth Subculture During the Establishment and Consolidation of Authoritarianism*

The few years of democratic changes in society and increased contacts with the western youth culture crystallised the ideas of personal freedom and the right to self-determination in the minds of Belarusian youth. Therefore the first incidents of political repression by Lukashenka's regime in the first half of 1995 were taken by most of young people as a threat to their own independence.

By 1996, the authorities directed by Lukashenka began to restore state control over youth and its subcultures, however, the process was sporadic. The new regime was busy resovietising the entire structure of state, so youth mainly attracted the government's attention only when it "stepped out of line." One of the first youth protest demonstrations was by the Free Students Union of Belarusian State University in Minsk on October 14, 1994. Three hundred young people carried posters through downtown Minsk that read "Milk and bread are the student's lunch," "We want to eat!" and "The presi-

dent is our helmsman." At the House of Government, Lukashenka's residence at the time, the protesters ate "the student's lunch" and composed a petition demanding decent student aid. Lukashenka's aide, Lyabedzka, appeared and promised to help the students thereby settling the escalating conflict. In May 1995, Belarusian State University students burnt the state symbols of the non-existent Soviet Byelorussia in protest against the public defamation of the national flag by the head of the presidential administration. Andrey Ramashewski, leader of the Party of Beer Lovers (PBP) and one of the participants in the demonstration, faced a criminal charge.

The period up to the spring of 1996 is characterised by the structural development of youth subcultures. Many new sub-groups emerged: the wide ranks of punks and rockers were joined by heavy metal fans, the Nirvana-worshipping grungers, the *hopniks* (youngsters from working class neighbourhoods oriented to Russian mass culture) as well as by aggressive subcultures, such as the skinheads, Satanists, etc. That period was also the prime time for the Belarusian anarchists.

The anarchists began in the early 1990s by founding the anti-government group "Chyrvony Zhond" (Red Government). Unlike other subcultural formations, the anarchists stood out as a group with an ideology (ultraleft in their case), that saw its activity exclusively in the national context (the title "Chyrvony Zhond" referred to the Belarusian national liberation uprising in 1963 led by Kastus Kalinowski). In 1994, pro-anarchist youth legalised their activity through the Party of Beer Lovers (PBP), one of the most successful projects of that time. The PBP's declared priorities were "the purity and quality of domestic beer and an independent, neutral, and nuclear-free Belarus." The party and its leaders shocked the public into civil thinking, often using the traditions of happenings and performances. However, repression exerted against the party leaders halted its activity.

Total aversion to Lukashenka's authoritarian policy of incorporating Belarus into Russia, de-belarusification and russification gave subculture a distinct goal. One of the main tasks of the Belarusian anarchists was to conduct cultural projects as an alternative to the establishment's conservative cultural policy. Their performances, happenings, and cultural provocations took unusual forms that often shocked Belarusian society. One of their first acts, the lively political and satirical religious performance *The Mournful Integrational Ceremony* was performed on April 1, 1996 in "honour" of the union treaty being signed by Belarus and Russia. On March 1, 1997 they staged a puppet play *The Tyrant's Death* featuring recognisable satire of the political situation in the country at the time. By 1998, the "Navinki" newspaper political pamphlets printed underground became one of the most successful endeavours launched by the anarchists to date. Its name challenged society: "Navyin" (News) was the name of one of the most circulated opposi-

tion newspapers, whereas the Navinki village near Minsk is famous as the regional mental asylum. The editors stated in the first issue of "Navinki" that they believe *"absurdity is the best method of confronting modern Belarusian society"* and that the satire will be mainly directed at the policies pursued by the opposition and the official establishment.

Regional anarchists are extremely active: print - ing numerous samizdats (unlicensed, self-produced publications), including antifascist materials; organ - ising cultural events that yield valuable feedback; there is a powerful stream of punk music in the re -



gions (according to a poll of the "Musical Newspa - per," the Harodnya-based anarchist punk band Deviation was the most famous band in Belarus in 1999). The autonomous activity of regional anar - chists distinguishes this subculture from the others, most of which (especially the musical subcultures) are active within the so-called "Minsk ring road com - plex." They are not active outside the city and there - fore their development is slow. In connection with this it can be said that the anarchists are the first sub - culture operating all across Belarus (regions + cen - tre). It is worth noting that other weaker subcultures consolidate around the anarchists, which generally strengthens Belarusian subculture as a whole.

A critical moment for the subcultures was the spring of 1996, rich with mass protests actions of young people. The strongest rallies in the modern history of Belarus showed the "grown ups" in society that the brief democratic transformations had changed the status of youth who was now ready to take to the street for its own cultural and political rights. It was during the political events of 1996–97 that the BPF youth wing, Young Front, was founded as an organisation.

Within several months, the Young Front (YF) be - came the strongest political youth organisation in the country. This was due to the role its members played in fighting the regime: they were active in political protest marches, organised public protests (hung the national white, red and white flag in the most prominent places in Minsk and other towns). For example, the action "Belarus to Europe" was held on February 14, 1997: several thousands of boys and girls with whistles, Bengal torches and special valentines visited European embassies in downtown Minsk appealing to their governments. This and other youth actions stood out by their large-scale and spectacular character, which at - tracted an unbelievable number of participants. The Young Front united those young people who strove to realise, here and now, *their own* dreams about building *their own* country without Lukashenka. "Street democracy" with its known radicalism seemed a realistic and efficient means of resistance.

Five years of belarusification, above all in second - ary and higher schools, had created a positive atti - tude to the Belarusian language among youth. Most teenagers identified themselves as native speakers of this language. After the 1995 referendum, the au - thoritarian regime initiated the policy of eliminating the Belarusian language and of harsh russification. Aversion to this policy resulted in the creation of a Belarusian-language subculture. Belarusian became not so much a language of communication but a pe - culiar sign of being different, being engaged in the original Belarusian environment, and thus a sign of opposing the political, cultural, and linguistic situa - tion modelled and forced onto society by Lukashenka's regime. A specific characteristic of this subculture is that most of its members use Belarusian to communicate in Belarusian-language circles and switch to the dominant language once in a Russian-language environment. However, we can - not blame the Belarusian-language environment for not reaching towards its Russian-language counter - part: for example, the Young Front has been organis - ing public discos since 1997, where only western or Belarusian-language music is played. These discos are a form of active protest against the thousand of commercial public discos in the country that play low-quality Russian pop.

For ordinary young people, the Young Front has become the organisation that, apart from being active in "street democracy," is able to accumulate the cre - ative and intellectual potential of young people for the sake of resisting Lukashenka's regime. That is why hundreds of young people (mostly members of musi -



cal subcultures) come to the organisation's meetings. The Young Front appreciates the importance of modern cultural and musical non-conformism. Belarusian rock culture, the "music of freedom" became the expression of young people's aspiration for preserving the democratic values abolished by the regime. It is characteristic in this respect that during protest actions young people shouted (along with the mottoes like "Belarus to Europe, Lukashenka up the arse!" and "Belarus to NATO, Lukash behind bars!") the song 'Partyzanskaya' by N.R.M. (ex-Mroya) that became a kind of an anthem for Belarusian youth in the late 1990s.

The Belarusian Musical Alternative (BMAgroup), a non-commercial organisation that aims to promote Belarusian musical non-conformism originated from the ranks of Young Front. BMA publishes Belarusian-language music, stages the "Free Dances" rock concerts and assists in promoting the creative aspirations of nationally-oriented subcultural groups. One of BMAgroup's major ventures was a large open-air rock concert held in Minsk in 1998, the purpose of which was to demonstrate support for the political prisoners Alaksey Shydlovsky (18) and Vadzim Labkovich (16). Those Young Front members had been sentenced to two years in prison for painting political graffiti and "disrespect to monuments of architecture" (they poured paint on statues of Communist figures in Stowbtsy). The event's organisers and managers were arrested and fined before the show; after the concert, attended by 5,000 young spectators, the police carried out mass detainments.

Detainment and administrative punishment of young people following a rock concert of Belarusian bands has become a Belarusian tradition. For example, the Maladzechna police conducted a raid on underage teenagers after the June 1999 concert "Youth for Independence!" dedicated to the 9<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of Belarus. Leader of the grunge band Happy Face faced an administrative charge for expressing his attitude to Lukashenka's dictatorship by showing the finger.

According to human rights organisations, during 1999 the police raided Alaksandrawski Square (a popular hang-out of musical subculture associates in front of Lukashenka's office) several times, detaining young people solely for their "non-standard" appearance.

In 1998 state-owned media supported the information campaign to eliminate Belarusian alternative music and subcultures. In April, *Narodnaya Gazeta* (Popular Newspaper) printed an article that accused the owners of the private club "Reservation" of "inciting" youth who came to rock concerts. The club was subsequently closed. In May, the managers of "Sphere," another independent club, were unable to extend their leasing agreement.

In 1998, Belarus' only magazine of extreme music "Legion" was closed allegedly because its editors promoted violence and Satanism.

Isolation followed by elimination was just one of many ways Lukashenka's regime dealt with non-collaborating subcultures. After the mass street rallies in

1996–97, given the increased influence of the Young Front and the Young Hramada on the youth, state ideologists voiced the concept of establishing an influential youth organisation modelled after the Soviet Komsomol that would be under the president's control.

"The Plan to Establish an Influential Youth Organisation in the Republic of Belarus" signed by prime minister, head of the presidential administration and chairman of the state committee for youth affairs, was placed on the president's desk on January 15, 1997. The organisation that was to be given the exclusive right to forge loyal youth (mainly through youth media) was to be built on the basis of the pro-fascist movement "Direct Action," the leaflets of which stated that *"if enemies stand in the way they will be destroyed."* A scandalous response to "Direct Action" caused its initiators to change the name to the Belarusian Patriotic Union of Youth (BPUY). From the very beginning, the "young patriots" expressed their devotion to Lukashenka's policy who responded by signing the edict "On State Support for BPUY" in the summer of 1997. The edict stated that *"supporting BPUY in all possible ways should be considered one of the main tasks of the government's youth policy."*

BPUY, christened by the youth as *Lukamol* ("Luka" as in Lukashenka + "mol" as in Komsomol), did enjoy total state support. First of all, the organisation began to receive all the buildings that had previously belonged to Komsomol and during the period of democratisation had been rented to youth organisations. BPUY founded its own (state-run) youth media and was granted FM frequency 101.2 MHz previously used by the only independent Belarusian-language station. The building used by the "Reservation" club was transferred to BPUY; it has now become a BPUY cell in the Belarusian Radio-Engineering University.

BPUY leaders declare total support for the policies of Lukashenka, who became the first honorary member of the organisation. To publicly demonstrate their love for the regime, the organisation continues to attempt to organise street demonstrations. The largest of these demonstrations was held on November 24, 1999 one week after the Freedom March. In six towns of Belarus schoolchildren and students were brought to the central squares carrying posters with such slogans as *"Youth for a young president!", "I'm a Belarusian, I'm voting for the Union!",* and *"Stop, NATO!"*. These meetings were to over shadow the Freedom March. However, they were attended by only about 1000 people, which pales in comparison to the 25000 people that marched for freedom.

While claiming a desire to co-operate with other youth organisations, the government actually inspired conflict. During the second congress of BPUY, held in April 2000, Lukashenka said that this organisation does more patriotic work than democratic organisations that only *"run around to meetings with calls for 'Belarus to Europe.'" According to Wsevalad Yanchewski, first secretary of the BPUY Central Committee, patriotism "is the strife for the restoration of our unified Fatherland" [USSR — author].*

With all the financial and ideological support from the regime, BPUY has been unable to produce a single original idea to attract young people to their ranks. Its attempts to patronise and control electronic music and hip-hop culture as alternative to non-conformist rock culture failed due to BPUY's low popularity among young people.

Meanwhile the regime secretly supports radical groups, the most well-known of which is the Belarusian branch of the fascist Russian National Unity (RNU), also known as the "Russian skinheads." Their appearance in Belarus coincided with Lukashenka's coming to power in 1994. The RNU declares its adherence to pan-Slavic national socialism, with its primary goal being to attain power.

The activity of the Russian fascists is based on feeding the media with scandalous news which suggests that the regime uses them as a scarecrow for the man in the street, a sort of "extremists on call." Their biggest scandals include an attack of several skinheads on a peaceful march dedicated to Independence Day in July 1998 and the beating up Charter '97 leaders in downtown Minsk's Victory Square, where the memorial flame burns in honour of liberation from the fascists.<sup>1</sup> It is characteristic that Lukashenka's comment on the latter incident implied that the Charter '97 members attacked the skinheads. The president also added that Belarus has *"no soil for fascism to spread."* RNU members keep declaring their loyalty to Lukashenka's regime and mentioning their invisible lobbyists in state institutions. RNU head Andrey Sakovich claims that once members of his group, together with police officers, *"patrolled the streets of Minsk. And were even honoured with a diploma and a letter of thanks."* Circumstantial evidence of RNU's connection with the regime's armed forces is the fact that a Mr. Ihnatovich, arrested on the charge of having murdered Dzmitry Zavadzki, an independent journalist, and Mr. Samoylov, an ex-leader of the Belarusian RNU, once had served in an elite special forces unit and later supervised the physical training of RNU members.

One of the most active antifascist organisations is the unregistered sports and patriotic organisation "Kray" (Country). Juggling the concepts of patriotism and extremism, the regime publicly identifies "Kray" and the RNU as similar fascist organisations. This is happening against the background of the president's enmity to all organisations that do not adhere to the pan-Slavic ideology professed by Lukashenka's authoritarianism. Compared to the Young Front, "Kray" can be said to be more radical, in terms of the moral (patriotic) and physical qualities of its members. The goal of the organisation is *"building an independent state on Belarusian land."* "Kray" stands

for openness and strict obedience to the laws of the Republic of Belarus.

Thus, it can be stated that during the seven years of Lukashenka's rule youth subcultures have become more structured. The more popular and influential movements began to form organisations or organised groups that associate weaker subcultures around them (the most vivid example is the anarchist subculture). An important issue for Belarusian subcultures is their conformity or non-conformity to the regime, as the regime bases its youth policy on the criterion of loyalty. Some youth subcultures operate on the basis of not engaging in the situation modelled by authoritarianism, for example, the Young Front, BMAgroup, "Kray," etc. Most noteworthy is the phenomenon of the Belarusian linguistic subculture.

However, there is an original group (the largest in Belarus) that is receiving increasingly greater attention from engaged and not-engaged subcultures alike. Based on sociological research, the independent media began speaking about the "pofig generation." The origin of this term is derived from the youth slang expression "po fig" ("I don't care a fig") denoting flagrant indifference. The "pofigists" are people aged from 17 to 27, who most often study or work, live with their parents, hold liberal views, are pointedly apolitical (*"it can harm my career"*) and consume the mass culture offered by the Russian media. According to the Independent Institute of Social, Economic, and Political Research, the pofigists support neither the engaged nor the non-collaborating subcultures. The former are not supported because the policy pursued by Lukashenka through the mouthpiece of the BPUY and similar organisations is totally rejected by youth: the pofig generation sees the BPUY as a successor to the Soviet-era Komsomol and has only negative connotations. The latter are not accepted by the pofigists because of the state-drawn image of "political radicals" as well as a lack of a clearly formulated idea and a charismatic youth leader. Given the obvious lack of a pofig structure, an acceptable programme is precisely what is needed to draw them to the side of the non-conformist groups, which as a result would become the most effective force in Belarus.

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<sup>1</sup> The Soviet (and then post-Soviet) mentality mixes the terms "fascism" and "national socialism." Victory Square refers to the 1945 victory over the Nazi — translator.



Syarhey Zaprudski

## LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS IN THE 1990s

The Republic of Belarus, established in July 1990, partly inherited the language policy pursued by the BSSR in the last year of its existence. To a great extent, this policy was determined by "The Law of the BSSR on the Languages in the Belarusian SSR" adopted in January 1990. Article 2 of this law declared the Belarusian language the only official language in Belarus and qualified Russian as the "language of international relations among the peoples of the USSR." However, this law did not regulate the use of languages in unofficial communication. Various articles of the law were going to be gradually introduced during the next three to ten years. The adoption of the law on languages should be considered both as the result of external factors and a significant victory of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF).

The law on languages, adopted in 1990 after the Belarusian language had suffered a long period of decline between the 1930s and 1980s, should be seen as a legislative means aimed at defending a

weaker language. At the same time, the law stipulated a much broader use of the Belarusian language, which was supposed to change from a minority to majority language in the future.

Language legislation and related practical measures that were not secret but brought before the public were a novelty for state institutions of post-Soviet Belarus. No special bodies existed that could design and pursue a language policy, therefore, in the initial stage of implementation, the executive branch had to rely on the intellectual resources of a non-governmental organisation, which had experience in this field, the Belarusian Language Society (BLS) founded in June 1989. Thus, in May 1990, BLS together with the Ministry of Education of the BSSR held a scientific and practical conference entitled "The Official Status of the Belarusian Language: Problems and Ways to Implement the Law." In September 1990, the Council of Ministers adopted "The State Programme for the

Development of the Belarusian Language and Other National Languages in the BSSR" that stipulated a number of measures for implementing the law over the course of the 1990s.

Both in the BSSR and the USSR, the discussion regarding language problems in Belarus was under the control of the party. With the break-up of the Soviet Union, the declaration of independence of the Republic of Belarus and the suspension of the CPSU and CPB, possibilities of free speech increased greatly. The USSR, the regional superpower, was now gone from the world map, an independent Belarusian state emerged and protests arose among the Russian-oriented population, which to a large extent comprised the Belarusian elite. Just yesterday they identified themselves exclusively with the USSR and had no need for contact with the Belarusian language or culture. Finding themselves in this completely new situation, these people argued that the existing legislation is poorly grounded and attempted to discredit both the new linguistic trends and the social and political groups behind them. With Belarus adopting a multiparty system, language issues became an essential element of political discourse. Democratically-oriented figures fiercely competed for the right to speak on behalf of "the true" democrats and the political environment in Belarus saw many ephemeral pro-democratic associations seeking their own niches.

For example, following the establishment of the United Democratic Party of Belarus (UDPB) in November 1990 (the first party in Belarus), one year later the Movement for Democratic Reform (MDF) was founded, the program of which differed from that of UDPB only in respect to cultural issues. Inevitably, MDF used the new cultural policy as the arena for demonstrating its political views. The movement loudly criticised the 1990 language legislation for being undemocratic and accused BPF, the major democratic force in Belarus at the time, of Bolshevism, russophobia, isolationism and of "arousing nationalist instincts." In March 1992, MDF spoke in favour of granting the official status to both Belarusian and Russian "due to the linguistic situation that has developed and to give the citizens free choice in regard to the language of education" (*Narodnaya Gazeta*, 7 March 1992). With reference to the existing linguistic situation, MDF suggested that the perspective language policy be replaced with a retrospective one corresponding to the previous state of affairs. Proclaiming the antidemocratic and anti-liberal character of the 1990 law on languages and claiming that it "violates an individual's right of self-determination" (*Femida*, no. 21, 24-30 May 1993), MDF members and the publishing house "Eridan" compiled and published a draft law "On Languages in the Republic of Belarus" that provided both Belarusian and Russian with official status.

This activity of the "liberalist" parties forced the United Democratic Party of Belarus to clarify its attitude towards language legislation. In November 1994, UDBP's central council ordered its political commission to prepare a statement regarding the

right to freely choose the language of education and the need to enforce it. The program of the United Civil Party (UCP, a 1995 merger between UDPB and the Civil Party) stated that the citizens must have "the right to choose what language their children are raised and taught in." Granting parents the unconditional right to choose the language in which their children are taught, would probably have resulted in the parents choosing the language that in their eyes had real social advantages. Therefore, in this case the weaker and less prestigious Belarusian language would have become a victim of the emerging democracy in Belarus, should such an approach have been adopted.

The left was also active in the first half of the 1990s. Although in the late 1980s the Communist Party of Belarus (CPB) was forced to support (through the BSSR Supreme Soviet) the law that made Belarusian the only official language, in the 1990s, following some internal changes, it reverted to its original position. In the early 1990s newspapers supporting left-wing parties launched a campaign of discrediting existing language legislation and its practices. Two-language state model was a non-compromise demand in the programs of the Movement for Democracy, Social Progress and Justice (MDSPJ), founded in November 1991, and the Popular Movement of Belarus founded in December 1992. In September 1993, left-wing movements held a congress of the people of Belarus that adopted a resolution demanding to "remove violence and discrimination from language policy, adopt official bilingualism (Belarusian and Russian), legitimise the right of parents to choose the language of education for their children."

The media started a heated debate on whether the adopted language policy was justified and correctly implemented. The discussion showed that for Belarusian to be more widely used, more purposeful and focused efforts should be made in comparison with those employed by state authorities at the time. For example, the introduction of Belarusian in higher education and science encountered specific difficulties due to a shortage of teaching aids and scientific literature in Belarusian. The discussion also revealed that there were people in Belarus who categorically did not accept the existence of an independent Belarusian language, nor approved of any practical steps taken towards its development. It was primarily those people who saw the Belarusian language as inferior that became the foundation for establishing the pro-Russian party "The Slavic Union — White Rus" in August 1992. In its program, which the party adopted in December 1993, the Belarusian language was classified as merely a "regional" language and a dialect of the Russian language.

The Belarusian parliament regularly discussed Belarusian and other languages in the first half of the 1990s. It is worth noting that the 12<sup>th</sup> Supreme Soviet (that convened in May 1990 and which was domi-

nated by Communists with 86% of the seats) was not particularly interested in becoming actively involved in the use of Belarusian on a broader basis. Nevertheless, due to the declaration of Belarus' sovereignty, gradual de-monopolisation of the party's power and the suspension of communist parties in the USSR and BSSR (CPSU and CPB, respectively), communist MPs were forced to succumb to the efforts of the few national democrats. Consequently, laws on culture and education were passed in June and October 1991 that either directly referred to the law on languages (in the former case) or even slightly supported it (in the latter).

However, as the situation in countries neighbouring Belarus changed (former communists won elections in Lithuania, growing resistance to Yeltsin's reform appeared in Russia), BPF lost its influence in the parliament, CPB was resurrected in the summer of 1992 and the Supreme Soviet lifted its ban on the party in February 1993, the situation inside the country also began to change. In the first half of 1992, the former nomenclature set up the "Belarus" faction in the Supreme Soviet and began to oppose BPF's democratic and independence-oriented initiatives, primarily on the grounds of the weak position of the national democrats in language issues. For instance, when Supreme Soviet Chairman Stanislaw Shushkevich refused to sign a Belarusian-Russian collective security treaty in May 1992, the "Belarus" faction immediately "blackmailed" him by holding a referendum about the official status of the Russian language. The proposal to make Russian the other official language in Belarus, first voiced by deputies of veterans' organisations, became an increasingly more frequent issue in the Supreme Soviet.

Language issues were also debated in parliament in 1993 while preparing a new constitution. The parliamentary working group attempted to preserve the previous version of the article on language; however, neither that version, nor any amended one, was passed in May 1993. During the parliament's fall session, the version stipulating Belarusian as the only official language received even less support than in the spring. As all hope for passing the language article was virtually lost, the parliamentary constitutional commission attempted to leave it out altogether. However, this was strongly opposed by the commission for culture and historical heritage.

The practical implementation of the law on language encountered great difficulties, as the new language policy was being pursued simultaneously with economic reform that lowered living standards and was not always welcomed by the people. Some people, including the ideologically orthodox workers, associated (probably unconsciously) the ideologically "adverse" reconstruction of economic life with the new language policy aimed at creating advantages for the Belarusian language. This inspired their exceptionally aggressive attitude to the new trends in the linguistic situation in Belarus.

At the time, the educational system was the most receptive to implementing the law on languages, and

during 1990–1994 the situation in secondary schools radically changed to the benefit of the Belarusian language. Teachers of Belarusian enjoyed a 10% salary bonus. Higher educational establishments also began to experiment with teaching in Belarusian, and some pedagogical institutions taught solely in Belarusian. Meanwhile, loud protests from the people to revise the language law, the vague and unstable political situation during the first years of independence, the lack of will from the government to implement linguistic reform (and as a result mistrust of the people in regard to the state's intentions in this respect) as well as the general atmosphere of transition characteristic for early 1990s, resulted in the development of a strong state and legal nihilism and hampered the implementation of the 1990 law on language. With no faith in the



newly-acquired independence and having no idea which way the political wind will blow, many state functionaries found it better not to take any noticeable steps to implement the law on languages, as this would allow them to stay in the mainstream should for some reason state independence be lost and the Soviet political system restored. Top level officials remained indifferent in regard to the need to implement the language law; most of them used only Russian in public speeches anyway.

Another factor that made it complicated to implement the language law in Belarus was the fact that the 1990 law did not really set legal principles

but presented "a manifesto of national and linguistic self-identification," as Ms. N. Myachkowskaya stated. In particular, the law did not provide any guidelines should it be violated. Due to its concern regarding the poor implementation of the law, the Minsk City Council petitioned the Supreme Soviet at the beginning of 1993, requesting the right to de-

in Belarus to deal specifically with language issues. In March 1993, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the Belarusian Language Society suggested that the Supreme Soviet set up a commission to pursue an integral language policy in the Republic of Belarus. This suggestion was, however, ignored.

Nevertheless, the new constitution adopted in March 1994 contained an article that affirmed the official status of the Belarusian language; however, the same article maintained the right "to the free use of the Russian language as a language of international communication." The text was copied almost in full from the 1990 law, however, in the 1990 law, Russian did not have the status of a communication medium between different ethnic groups inside Belarus. The affirmation of Russian as the language of international communication unintentionally devalued Belarusian as the only official language. Under those circumstances, it seemed natural to ask whether Belarusian could truly become the only official language in a situation where it was not considered as a means of communication between different ethnic groups.

Whereas the use of the Russian language as a means of inter-ethnic communications undermined Belarusian rather in a symbolic manner, a more serious problem appeared in Article 50 of the constitution that guaranteed "the freedom to choose the language of raising and educating children." This article was also a response to the continuing debate on this issue. Later, alluded to this article, parents categorically claimed their unconditional right to choose the language of instruction for their children.

In January 1995, the constitutional court generally supported such requests from parents. In its statement directed to the president and Supreme Soviet, the court criticised Article 24 of the law on languages that allegedly obliged secondary schools to use "exclusively the Belarusian language." However, the constitutional court praised other articles of the constitution that guaranteed "the freedom to choose the language of raising and educating children" (Zvyazda, February 2, 1995).

In July 1994, supporters of official bilingualism gained strong support from the first president of Belarus, Alaksandar Lukashenka. Even while an MP, Lukashenka suggested granting the Russian language "a status equal to the official status." His program prepared for the presidential elections contained a paragraph on "providing a real opportunity for every citizen of the Republic of Belarus to think and speak the language he was raised in." After his election as president, Lukashenka addressed language issues for the first time when speaking at the Belarusian Pedagogical University on 1 September 1994. The president defended teachers of the social sciences and the Russian language who, as he said, had nearly become pariahs in some higher educational establishments. Alaksandar Lukashenka expressed his criticism of the educational policy (aimed at increasing the use of Belarusian) pur-



*Oppositional action against the election to Parliament,  
Minsk, Oct. 14<sup>th</sup>, 2001.  
Photo: IREX/ProMedia*

mand administrative punishment for not observing the language law; the permission to do so was not granted. Despite the fact that the law contained a special article that obliged officials to "speak both Belarusian and Russian languages," it did not contain any specific principles to enforce this article in practice. In fact, state functionaries were never assessed in regard to their command of the Belarusian language. After the law had been adopted in 1990, no institutions were established



sued during the previous years and said that the language of teaching should not be determined in an administrative way.

Lukashenka's speech at the Pedagogical University was a signal to begin a campaign of support for the Russian language. Just five days following the president's speech, an "Appeal of an Initiative Group" was distributed in the Vitsebsk Pedagogical Institute whose authors, including teachers, demanded that students and teachers themselves choose the language of instruction, "supporting the intentions of the President of the Republic to begin healing the social situation." In September and October 1994 parents in some schools went on strike against the "forced" teaching in Belarusian and, strangely enough, these events were covered by some of the most popular state-owned newspapers.

An interesting episode in the struggle for granting the Russian language official status occurred in the fall of 1994 when a group of members from the pro-Communist Popular Movement attempted to initiate a referendum on various issues, including the language issue. The request submitted by this group was considered by six parliamentary commissions and the Ministry of Justice. All of the seven institutions turned the request down for "more or less the same reasons," as the newspapers wrote. In their refusals, the institutions referred to Article 3 of the law on referenda that forbade holding referenda on issues "violating the inalienable right of the people of the Republic of Belarus to the state-guaranteed existence of Belarusian national culture and language." In October 1994, the central commission for elections and referenda explained to the applicants that the question as to whether the Russian language should be given official status "is directly forbidden by the republic's legislation."

In the fall of 1994, a committee "For the Free Choice of Language in Education" was founded in Minsk, under the aegis of the Slavic Union. On 29 November, the committee led a demonstration of approximately 20 parents, demanding education in Russian, to the building of the Minsk City Council. Footage of this rally, spiced with comments, was shown on state television.

Meanwhile, the manner in which the law on languages was being implemented and the on-going campaign for revising language legislation caused numerous protests from various organisations and parties, such as BLS and BPF. A non-governmental committee for the defence of the Belarusian language was founded at the end of 1994. Moreover, an alternative campaign was underway for Belarusian State University to completely transition to the exclusive use of Belarusian by 1 September 1995. In January 1995, activists of the committee picketed the buildings of the university, Ministry of Education, Constitutional Court and UN post. Later that month, the committee adopted a statement that called on the citizens to inform the Prosecutor's Office about all attempts at violating the official status of the Belarusian language by government employees. On

16 February 1995, the committee published its complaint to the Prosecutor General regarding president Lukashenka.

The president, however, intended to hold a referendum about the official status of the Russian language. He first shared this idea with representatives of veterans' organisations on 2 February, and soon confirmed his intention on 20 February. On 18 March, newspapers published a letter addressed to president Lukashenka, signed by 60 MPs (mainly delegates of veterans' organisations) in which they asked him to initiate a referendum concerning language issues. Three days later Lukashenka spoke in detail about the approaching referendum to the Supreme Soviet, although he did not present the precise questions. At the time, many seemed to believe that a referendum was rather unlikely, in view of the 1994 refusal. This was the opinion of Valery Tsikhinya, chairman of the constitutional court, expressed during a press conference on 22 March. He justified his point of view with Article 3 of the law on referenda. On 31 March, the general assembly of the Humanities Department of the Academy of Science adopted an appeal not to include a language-related question in the referendum.

Nevertheless, Lukashenka filed his proposal of initiating a referendum comprising four questions to the Supreme Soviet. However, the proposal was turned down on 11 March, after the parliamentary commissions had debated the proposal and objected to three questions, including the one on languages. The president responded by threatening the Supreme Soviet with holding the referendum without its consent, which resulted in more than twenty MPs beginning a hunger strike in the parliamentary session hall. However, on the night of 12 March they were thrown out of the Supreme Soviet building by a military detachment acting on orders of president Lukashenka. This extraordinary event resulted in the demoralised deputies violating procedure and adopting a resolution to hold the referendum on 13 March. On 26 March, the parliamentary commission for culture and historical heritage filed a request to the constitutional court to consider the legitimacy of the Supreme Soviet's resolution but the court refused to hear this case.

The referendum was held on 14 May 1995. The first of the four questions was as follows: "Do you agree with granting the Russian language equal status with Belarusian?" According to official data, voter frequency was 64.8%. Of those voting, 88.3% (53.9% of all eligible voters) voted "yes" with respect to this question. Numerous violations committed during the preparation and holding the referendum soon came to light.

First, Article 3 of the law on referenda was violated (the law mentioned above that forbids the holding of referenda on such issues).

Second, Article 148 of the Constitution did not permit any changes or amendments to the constitution during the final six months of the parliament's term of office.

Third, members of the referendum commission were appointed in violation of Articles 18 and 20 of the law on referenda.

Essentially, limitations were imposed on the campaign against the proposals of the referendum. As a result, the referendum had to be carried out under the strict control of the executive power. The state-owned media, especially the electronic media, mainly presented the views of the referendum's initiator. Before the referendum, the Belarusian Language Society twice asked the management of the State TV and Radio Company to allow Society representatives to go on the air. One of the deputy chairpersons of the Society recorded an interview for Programme 2 of Belarusian Radio. The interview was never aired and no explanation was given. Meanwhile, the State TV kept showing activists from the Slavic Union and the committee "For the Free Choice of Language in Education."

The 1995 referendum coincided with the parliamentary election campaign. The OSCE delegation that observed the referendum and the elections concluded that neither complied with international standards of free and fair voting. In particular, the delegation noted the government's control over the media (which resulted in the media broadcasting "edited" or false information), interference of the executive branch in the electoral process, discrimination against political parties, etc. The US State Department issued a special statement expressing its regret about the way and the atmosphere in which the leaders of Belarus conducted the 1995 referendum and elections.

Belarusian society, suffering economic hardships at the time of the referendum, failed to see (and to a large extent did not want to see) the threat posed to the Belarusian language hidden behind the "innocent" formulation of the question regarding the "equality" of the two languages. It turned out that Lukashenka's initiative suited the wishes of a large part of society, which wanted a return to the good old communist times with cheap sausage in shops and no language problems whatsoever. With the help of this referendum, the president of Belarus wanted (as he mentioned to members of Homel city council) to gain public support for his personal conviction that "the Belarusian language is simple and that it is impossible to say anything profound using it."

The results of the 1995 referendum shocked those supporting the broader use of the Belarusian language. It was only six weeks later that the secretariat of BLS adopted an appeal to the citizens of Belarus, questioning the results of the referendum as the expression of the nation's will. The authors of the appeal referred to the uncounted votes of "the people from the new generation — our children and adolescents who have tasted their native language in kindergartens and schools," to the will of "many generations of our ancestors" and "millions of victims of Stalinism and fascism." Moreover, the appeal admitted that "we have now been squelched."

Reacting to the results of the referendum, and hoping to get the situation at least slightly under con-

trol, the Supreme Soviet's commission for education, culture and preservation of historical heritage adopted two resolutions in June 1995. The first recommended ministries and other state institutions to implement various provisions in order to encourage state officials, leaders of organisations and enterprise executives to gain command of both the Belarusian and Russian language. The resolution stressed the need to learn the language, which the officials did not know, to a degree sufficient for them to conduct official duties. The other resolution recommended the Ministry of Education and Science to introduce an obligatory entrance examination involving both Belarusian and Russian in all higher and secondary special educational establishments. The latter recommendation actually only added Russian to the entrance exams lists as Belarusian had already been on these lists. Due to the fact that the term of office of the 12<sup>th</sup> Supreme Soviet was coming to an end, and the referendum worked against a wider use of Belarusian, the two resolutions had no legal or practical importance whatsoever. Aimed at lowering the status of the Belarusian language, the 1995 referendum was certainly not held to make state officials study and use Belarusian. On the other hand, the recommendation to make all university entrants pass two extra linguistic exams, no matter what they chose to study, sounded like a good idea but had no chance of support.

The statement issued by the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Congress of the Belarusian Pen Centre, regarding the May 1995 referendum (held in August), stated: "In practice, the introduction of Russian as the second official language will affirm today's real disparity of the Belarusian language and will assist in eliminating it, which means a continuation of the policy of russification and denationalisation of the Belarusian people previously pursued by the Russian empire and then the USSR." The congress adopted the resolution "On Freedom and Responsibility of the Media" that read in part "in Belarus, freedom of speech and press applies only to some citizens, mainly those close to power structures, whereas responsibility for the spoken, published or circulated word is imposed onto others who mainly belong to 'the opposition minority' or the 'Belarusian-speaking' part of the population." Congress documents mentioned that the referendum, the regime's occupation and subordination of the media to state power had paved the way for introducing "reservations for 'Belarusian-speaking' Belarusians." The referendum itself was referred to as a manifestation of "muscle democracy" or "democracy substituted by pseudo-democracy" (Nasha Slova, November 1, 1995).

Previously, advocates of the broader use of Belarusian referred to "the people's will," allegedly witnessed by the population census, whereas after the referendum they were shown the will of "another people," or rather, "another will," according to which the situation of the Belarusian language would be in acceptable only formally, on paper. Therefore, the issue of the Belarusian language having a "real existence" was no longer an urgent matter. The

importance of this lesson for the Belarusian intelligentsia, which is traditionally very strongly influenced by popular convictions, should not be underestimated.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Supreme Soviet elected in May and December 1995 was not particularly interested in language issues. On the one hand, there were very few MPs who, in the unfavourable situation of 1995–96, would raise the issue of developing the Belarusian language and resolve it in a positive way as no BPF representatives were elected to this parliament. On the other hand, after the idea of belarusification had been crushed by the referendum, this defeat could be used in practice by eliminating some of the acts that promoted the use of the Belarusian language. This was not difficult to do.

The results of the referendum were published on 26 May. On 30 and 31 May, even before the results were approved by the parliament, the Ministry of Education ordered the Russian language and literature to be added to the list of entrance exams of higher and special secondary educational establishments. The ministry explained that the entrants did not have to pass exams on both languages but could choose one of them.

In June 1995, the Ministry of Education published its guidelines in regard to enrolling children in the first grade and kindergartens. This was now to be done according to the wishes of their parents. The administrative offices of schools and kindergartens were instructed to hold parental meetings, during which parents were to submit applications in which they specified the desired language of their children's education. It was correctly foreseen in the ministry's document that such unlimited choice could result in schools becoming bi-lingual, but this was assessed as "a transitional period." The principle of choosing the language was not limited to kindergartens and first grades, it also applied to the second, third and fourth grades.

The new language-in-education policy soon yielded results. Aware of the new trend, a large majority of parents in the city began to choose Russian as the language of instruction for their children. In 1995, 62% of first grade pupils studied in Russian, compared to 25% during the previous year. As a consequence, the percentage of those studying in Belarusian fell from 75% to 38%. The following year (in 1996), this trend continued and the relation was 68% Russian and 32% Belarusian. The number of pupils in the 2<sup>nd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> grades, and sometimes even older, taught in Belarusian was also decreasing, but not as rapidly as in the case of the lower grades. Parents of children who attended Belarusian-language classes in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and higher grades sensed the change and began to demand those classes be changed to Russian, often ignoring the linguistic habits their children had developed and the terminology they used. Those demands were met.

The 1995 changes in the language structure of schools were accompanied by conflicts among the parents of schoolchildren as well as between parents and school authorities. In the new situation, advo-

cates of Belarusian-language schools in the city often found it difficult to collect enough applications to open a Belarusian-language class even in the larger schools. As a result, they either had to abandon education in Belarusian or look for a Belarusian-language school outside their neighbourhood. As for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and higher grades previously taught in Belarusian, parents frequently found themselves in conflict over the language of their children's education. While some demanded a change into Russian, others resolutely stood for maintaining the status quo. The choice of the language was in fact in the hands of the school administrations, which forced one of the sides to abandon their demands. Since the general trend of the summer and fall of 1995 implied education in Russian, those conflicts were resolved to the benefit of Russian. When pro-Belarusian parents became only a minority, these conflicts became latent and to a large extent were hidden from the public. In such cases, on perfectly "lawful" grounds and in accordance with the rules of democracy, it was suggested that the Belarusian-speaking children leave the class or school that had only recently had a Belarusian-language status. Sometimes pupils had to change schools several times as each new school they attended would adopt Russian according to the will of the parents. A parent filed suit against the Harodnya administration in 1997 complaining about a school that refused to educate his daughter in the Belarusian language after she had completed the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. He lost the case. In general, the social situation after the referendum was unfavourable for the Belarusian language and many complaints about violating linguistic rights and freedoms of Belarusian speakers were not considered, let alone resulted in legal action. Some schools themselves initiated changes into Russian and sent notices to the parents demanding that they submit applications for this change of language.

The rapid decline in the number of Belarusian-language schools and classes in the fall of 1995, accompanied by strong administrative pressure, resulted in the Executive Committee of the United Civil Party of Belarus issuing a statement in September 1995. The document protested against forcing the Russian language into school education, and pointed out that some officials interpret referendum results in a biased way. The party demanded that the rights of parents to teach their children in either Russian or Belarusian be not hampered.

Meanwhile, the 13<sup>th</sup> Supreme Soviet had not approved the results of the referendum. On the one hand, the rapid advance of Russian and the withdrawal of Belarusian were so blatant that they needed no legal grounds. On the other hand, individual leaders of the parliament spoke about the future of linguistic regulations in a way differing from the view of president Lukashenka. For example, spokesman Syamyon Sharetski did not think that the unconditional victory of pro-Russian forces in the referendum should have been affirmed automatically without consideration. The parliament's revision of the 1990 law on languages was delayed

until June 1998, three years after the referendum, when the house of representatives (the lower chamber of the parliament introduced by Lukashenka after the revolt in 1996) amended the 1990 law. The structure of the 1998 law was an almost exact copy of the 1990 law, however, the amended version had no preamble. (The preamble to the 1990 law presented an evaluation of the critical situation of the Belarusian language and stated the need to protect it.) The main characteristic of the revised law was that nearly half of its articles linked the Belarusian and Russian languages with the conjunction "or" (Articles 3, 9, 12–18, 21, 25, 28–30, 32), with "and (or)" being used almost as frequently (Articles 7, 8, 10, 11, 19, 20, 22–24, 26, 27, 31). For example, Article 14 maintains that legal proceedings in the Republic of Belarus are to be conducted in "either the Belarusian or Russian language"; and according to Article 20, the Armed Forces use "the Belarusian and (or) the Russian language." Despite the official status of both languages declared by Article 2, the excessive use of the conjunction "or" in the text paves the way to using either of them without the mandatory use of the other. The 1998 law consciously pursues a "policy of no policy," which enhances the disparity between the two languages and forces out the weaker language, Belarusian.

In the fall of 1996 another referendum was initiated by Lukashenka that gave him the support of voters in regard to a draft constitution, which greatly increased presidential power and involved Belarusian and Russian as the two official languages. The conflict between Alaksandar Lukashenka and democrats in Belarus became even more intense. The 1996 revolt presented an opportunity to reanimate activity aimed at a Belarusian-Russian union, the statutes of which were adopted in 1997. Article 38 of the statutes designated Russian the working language of the union's institutions. Between 1996 and 1999, democratic forces in Belarus held several mass rallies against Belarus' incorporation into Russia with Belarusian being the prevailing language of these demonstrations. In the late 1990s, the Belarusian administration was not interested in the development of the Belarusian language and the needs of Belarusian-speakers. The use of the Belarusian language was continually being pushed aside. The House of Representatives (the legislative body in the Lukashenka-appointed parliament) prepared official documents only in Russian. Some local administrations have been adopting legislation that banned the use of Belarusian. At the same time, Belarusian-speakers among the political opposition were being repressed. Some of the participants in mass political rallies were detained for speaking Belarusian. During court proceedings some people were forbidden to speak Belarusian or were charged for the services of interpreters.

As the conflict between president Lukashenka and the democratic forces escalated, along with the reduction in the official use of Belarusian and the

"disfranchisement" of politically active Belarusian-speakers, the Belarusian language began to be associated as an instrument for resisting presidential power. People who spoke Belarusian were almost automatically perceived as the opposition (unless they were the most socially backward part of the rural population that speaks Belarusian not because they stand for it but because they do not speak any other language). Having become a way of expressing opposition, the Belarusian language began to be used increasingly more frequently by democratic parties. When addressing the 50<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Sub-commission for the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in the summer of 1998, Mr. A. Sannikaw, co-ordinator of the political opposition movement Charter '97, mentioned the elimination of Belarusian culture, history and language as well as practices of "conscious mockery and suppression of the language" in Belarus. In February 1999, the Congress of Democratic Forces of Belarus adopted a special resolution entitled 'The Discrimination of the Belarusian language in the Republic of Belarus,' concluding that the Belarusian people's rights for the free development of their native language and culture are being "grossly violated."

Currently, the Belarusian language faces many challenges. It is insufficiently supported by the Belarusian state, the unfavourable situation of which continues to deteriorate. Issues regarding the development of the Belarusian language are traditionally neglected by the communist parties. As for democratic parties, the majority of them have only recently began to notice that the language is an important element of the Belarusian people's identity. This realisation was unintentionally inspired by the 1995–2000 state policy, aimed at forcing Belarusian out of normal, everyday use and into the realm of a marginal "opposition-related" phenomenon.

The repressive state policy towards the Belarusian language can be expected to be revised in the near or distant future, regardless of any major political changes occurring in Belarus.

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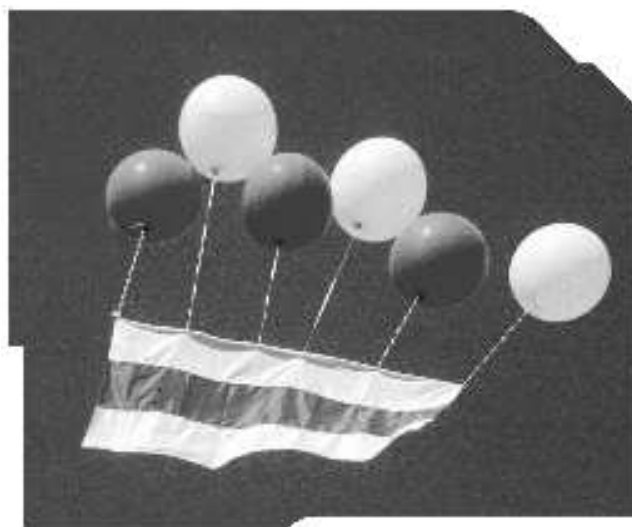


Ihar Lalkou

## NATIONAL SYMBOLISM IN BELARUS: THE PAST AND PRESENT

Belarusian society is deeply split. Less than a decade after the establishment of an independent Republic of Belarus, one part of society is so radically separated from the other that if a casual observer were to overhear conversations and read articles by the two groups, it could be concluded that they live in different worlds. Of the parameters that identify a nation, place of residence is the only thing these two groups have in common. They differ by language, their historical memory, identity (despite the fact that both call themselves Belarusians, the meaning is completely different), relations with other nations (close and distant), their vision of the country's future development, etc.

It sometimes seems that these two groups would feel more comfortable in two different countries. The two Belaruses already have two totally separate sets of national symbols. One set comprises the knightly emblem Pahonya (a knight on horseback against a red shield) and the white, red and white flag. The other set comprises a traditional Soviet shieldless emblem look-alike framed



*A white-red-white flag, Minsk, Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000.*

*Photo: IREX/ProMedia*

by a garland and a red and green flag with an ornamental pattern. The Pahonya was inherited by Belarus from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), a country in which the ancestors of most Belarusians lived during the greater part of their history (in the 13<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries). It was during this period that



the ethnic group later called “Belarusians” was actually formed. Together with the white, red and white flag, the emblem was adopted as the national emblem of the Belarusian Popular Republic (BPR), the first country to appear on these lands after the break up of the Russian empire. (It is still used by the BPR government-in-exile that had to leave the country in 1920 under the blows of Soviet Russia’s Red Army.) These symbols were also the first state

symbols of the independent Republic of Belarus between 1991 and 1995. The alternative set of symbols originates entirely from the period of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR), a puppet quasi-state within the USSR founded by the Bolsheviks in one part of the BPR. The BSSR emblem (1927 model) and flag (1951 model) were declared new state symbols of Belarus in 1995 (after minor modifications) when neo-Soviet dictator Alaksandar Lukashenka came to power.

Philosophers say that the structure of any symbol is “aimed at presenting a total image of the world.”<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, in the Belarusian situation the attitude taken to these symbols is the main indicator of a person’s world-view, the main test of whether a person is a citizen of European or Soviet Belarus.

It will be sufficient to quote three comments on the symbols made by representatives of the two opposed sides in order to illustrate the above. The statement below was made by the leaders of the so-called “National Assembly,” a representative body of today’s power, people assigned personally by Lukashenka after the 1996 dismissal of the lawfully elected parliament:

“In 1995 and 1996 the people of Belarus specifically and unambiguously expressed themselves on vital issues concerning the further development of our state and society. The old, anti-national symbols were rejected and the “new-old” ones approved. This means that the previous symbols with which a majority of Belarusian citizens associate their lives and the history of the Motherland before and after the war when Belarus was a flourishing republic, one of the 15 fraternal republics within the mighty Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, have been accepted.”<sup>2</sup>

And this is the “response” of Ryhor Baradulin, a People’s Poet of Belarus:

“Maybe, we’ve been bashed too little  
To long for an empire  
Under a Muslimish flag,  
With an Ivanish Politburo.”<sup>3</sup>

And the judgement of historian Aleh Trusaw, Director of the Fellowship of the Belarusian Language:

“The authorities pretty well understand (even now) the artificiality of their symbols. Their emblem disappeared from Belarusian postal stamps long ago and was never printed on its bank notes. And this is not incidental. The people have not accepted the symbols forced on them. As early as Independence Day (July 27) 1995, in the town of Lyozna in the Vitsebsk region the legendary Miron raised the white, red and white flag on a 40-metre chimney and left a note saying “Give people back their historical memory.” And it will soon return. The latest 40-thousand-strong Path

<sup>1</sup> The Philosophic Encyclopaedic Dictionary, Moscow, 1989, p. 581.

<sup>2</sup> Zvyazda, September 12, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Nasha Niva, May 15, 2000.

of Chernobyl adorned with national symbols is good testimony to that.”<sup>4</sup>

In order for the lay reader, unfamiliar with Belarusian politics, to form an opinion regarding the historical basis for the views on the state symbols (and therefore world-views), a more detailed presentation of the history of these symbols is given below.

According to old Belarusian chronicles, the Pahonya became a symbol in the 1770s or 1790s when the image of a horseman with a sword above his head “had been established as a symbol representing those who exercised supreme power in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania,”<sup>5</sup> a country that throughout its entire history (from the mid-13<sup>th</sup> to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century) united the lands on which Lithuania and Belarus appeared in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At various times, the ancestors of today’s Belarusians constituted S to s of the Duchy’s population, so it is not surprising that they dominated the culture of that country throughout its history (also evidenced by the fact that state documents of the GDL used Old Belarusian until the end of the XVII century when it was replaced by the kindred Polish language). Belarusian cultural domination also influenced the choice of state symbols. A mounted knight was a common subject in the heraldry of Europe at that time and was “an iconographic equivalent to the expression of dux (prince).”<sup>6</sup> However, only the Grand Duchy of Lithuania adopted this symbol on the state emblem (in 1566). Experts believe that the symbol originates from local Slavic traditions (that survived in Belarus until the XIX century) connected with the pagan deity Yaryla “who rides a white horse with a white mantle on his shoulders”<sup>7</sup> and from local iconography of the Christian saints most popular among Belarusians — St. Dzimistry, St. George, St. Barys and St. Hleb, depicted armed and riding a horse. Apart from the state emblem, the Pahonya was also present in the local emblems of most GDL administrative divisions and on the Duchy’s state gonfalon — a red rectangular banner “with the images of Pahonya and Virgin Mary with baby Jesus in a Sun.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, for more than 500 years all ethnically Belarusian lands existed “under the sign of Pahonya,” and the ancestors of today’s Belarusians simply did not know any other state emblem. The Russian empire also saw the Pahonya as a generally recognised and accepted symbol of the lands that were part of the GDL in the latter period of its existence (i.e., modern Lithuania and Belarus). Therefore this emblem continued to be used in these lands after their incorporation into Russia in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Anatol Tsitow, a well-known Belarusian heraldic expert, believes the following to be true for that time: “The representation of the ancient Pahonya on

Belarusian provincial, district, town, and military emblems was a phenomenon that certified the neighbouring peoples’ realisation of the identity of the two concepts: the geographic and ethnic Belarus and the heraldic Pahonya.”<sup>9</sup>

Under these conditions it looks perfectly natural that activists of the Belarusian national liberation movement, which manifested its full power in early XXth century, respected the Pahonya as a natural national symbol of their people. In 1916, Maksim Bahdanovich, a classic of Belarusian literature, wrote in his famous poem ‘Pahonya’:

“As I feel in my worried heart  
Fear for my native country,  
I remember the holy Sharp Gate  
And warriors on ferocious studs.

Clad in white foam the studs run by,  
Rushing, striving, and heavily snorting,  
The ancient Lithuanian Pahonya  
Can be neither broken, nor stopped, nor held  
back.”

At that time the white knight of the Pahonya adorned the red national flag as well. However, soon after, at the turn of 1916/1917, a new original flag of the Belarusian movement appeared. In full accordance with the wide spread principle of emblem-based flag design in Europe, when the colours of the main details (the emblem and field) are shown in the flag as a combination of horizontal stripes of different or same width, a draft of this white, red and white flag was drawn by Klyawdziy Duzh-Dushewski, a Belarusian architect and politician. In early March 1917 the white, red and white flag appeared in Petersburg on the building of the Belarusian Fellowship of Aid for War Victims, which Duzh-Dushewski worked for. On March 25 the Minsk Belarusian National Committee adopted the following resolution:

“1. Due to the fact that almost all towns in the Minsk province used the ancient Pahonya in their seals, we resolve to retain this heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Committee has unanimously adopted the Pahonya as the state emblem of the independent Belarus to come.

2. Due to the fact that Belarusian folk art is dominated by white and red ornaments, it is considered appropriate to use these colours in the Belarusian national flag. Thus the Committee has resolved that the flag is to consist of three horizontal stripes, white, red and white in equal widths, and its length be twice its width.”<sup>10</sup>

The new flag matched the ancient Pahonya so organically that in a short time it became a generally re-

<sup>4</sup> Nasha Niva, May 10, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> The Encyclopaedia of the History of Belarus, v. 5, Minsk, 1999, p. 367.

<sup>6</sup> Tsitow A., ‘Our Symbol — Pahonya: a Road through Centuries’, Minsk, 1993, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Afanasyev A., ‘Poetic Views of Slavs on Nature’, v. 1, Moscow, 1865, p. 441.

<sup>8</sup> Tsitow A., *ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Tsitow A., *ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> Source: Nasha Niva, 1995, #5.

cognised national symbol. In 1917 the "Statute of Belarusian National Cultural Educational Circles in the Army" obliged their members to "wear the Belarusian national sign — a white band with a red stripe in the middle; all three stripes — white, red and white — of the same width."<sup>11</sup> The following December, white, red and white flags decorated the session hall of the All-Belarusian Congress — the most important national constituent forum in the modern history of Belarus. The 1,872 delegates to the congress, representing all Belarusian organisations that existed at that time, spoke in favour of the country's self-determination as a free state. Thus the question of state symbols of the first modern Belarusian state had been de facto resolved in advance: the state emblem of the Belarusian Popular Republic founded in 1918 was the Pahonya, and the white, red and white flag became the national flag.

It was at this time that first problems related to those symbols arose. The problem consisted in the fact that the process establishing the new country on the Belarusian lands coincided with similar developments undertaken by Lithuanians, the other heirs of the history and traditions of the bygone Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In 1918, an independent Lithuanian state, first a monarchy and later a republic, was declared covering the former Zhmudskaye (Samahidskaye) region of the GDL (the only large administrative division that had its own emblem, a black bear on a silver field) and adjacent districts of the former Vilna and Troks voivodships (provinces). In order to emphasise its historical and legal continuity with the GDL (and at that time Lithuanian national leaders attempted to establish control over all the lands once constituting the Grand Duchy), the new independent Lithuania chose the Pahonya as its state emblem. Moreover, as official ideology declared this newly created Lithuania the only true heir to the former GDL, the descendants of Zhmudzins also usurped the right to use the emblem with an armed horseman on a red background. This caused repeated scandals, such as in December 1919 when a diplomatic delegation of the BPR travelling from Berlin to Riga was arrested on the Lithuanian border. The reason for the arrest, according to the minutes of detainment, was the discovery by customs agents of "blank passports of a so-called Belarusian Republic with the Lithuanian emblem on the cover."<sup>12</sup>

However, the Russian Bolsheviks arriving from the East were even less disposed to the Belarusians using the Pahonya and the white, red and white flag. During the All-Belarusian Congress their representative stated: "We stand for the fraternity of all peoples. There should be no separation into nations."

Pointing at the national Belarusian flag, he said, "Lower this flag."<sup>13</sup>

The Bolsheviks established power in Belarus in 1920 and founded "the first state of workers and peasants on Belarusian land." In 1922, along with other similar "states," the Bolsheviks incorporated Belarus into a single Communist empire — the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The only flag allowed within its territory was the red flag of the Bolshevik party. The only deviation allowed was an inscription in the upper left corner, in the case of Belarus — "BSSR." The same applied to the emblem. The first emblem of Soviet Belarus "was a copy of the state emblem of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) with a different inscription."<sup>14</sup> Liberalisation implemented by the Communist regime during the period known as the New Economic Policy included the right of the "Soviet republics" to show some degree of national identity. This raised the question of creating new "state" symbols for those administrative divisions of the USSR that were to be "national by form and socialist by content." In 1924 the BSSR announced a competition for the best design of such symbols. The Council of People's Commissars chose the version by Russian artist Valentin Volkov, who saw no reason to complicate matters and presented a slightly modified copy of Soviet Russia's emblem: a hammer and sickle, a five-pointed star, sun and garland. For local colour, the artist rendered the ribbons that wrap the garland in the colours of the national flag of Belarusians — white, red and white. On April 11, 1927, the 8<sup>th</sup> Congress of Soviets of the BSSR approved the "new" emblem after a "minor" adjustment: the ribbons were returned the original colour red. Local "comrades" knew better than the graduate of the Petersburg Art Academy, where the bacillus of "Belarusian bourgeois nationalism" hid. Nothing in the symbols of the "small brother" in the "brotherly family of Soviet peoples," which was taking steps toward the construction of a "new national unity — a united Soviet people," was to remind Belarusians of the times when they were trying to determine the future of their country without the assistance of the "leaders of the world proletariat." The 1927 project (with occasional modifications) became the "state emblem" under which Belarus lived until late 1991. One of the modifications involved the language of the slogan "Proletarians of all countries, unite!" written on the garland's ribbon. Initially, the text was written in Belarusian, Yiddish, Russian and Polish. On July 28, 1938, the Supreme Soviet of the BSSR decided to leave only the Belarusian and Russian slogans. Small wonder, as it was at this time that the NKVD was engaged in eliminating "Trotsky's agents" and "White-Polish spies" in Belarus. In May 1995 the

<sup>11</sup> Source: Nasha Niva, 16.03.1998.

<sup>12</sup> Nasha Niva, 28.07.1997.

<sup>13</sup> Source: October 1917 and the Fates of Political Opposition. Part III: The Reader on the History of Social Movements and Political Parties, Homel, 1993, p. 190.

<sup>14</sup> The Encyclopaedia of the History of Belarus, v. 3, Minsk, 1996, p. 246.



same "heraldic device" (which actually has little to do with traditional heraldry) appeared on the pediment of the presidential palace to symbolise the aspiration of the new head of state and a large part of the population to shed the burden of independence and return to the "bright Soviet yesterday."

The red and green flag that currently hangs above the same palace has an even shorter history. In the early 1950s Moscow ordered the administrations of the Soviet republics to complement the Bolshevik red flags featuring a hammer and sickle (that were considered state flags in all the member republics of the Soviet Union) with some standardised details to symbolise the "specificity" of each territory. In order to comply, the Presidium of the BSSR Supreme Soviet issued an edict on December 25, 1951 (without explanation!) that added a green stripe at the bottom of the red flag as well as an ornament (taken from a hand towel embroidered in 1917 by M. Markevich from the village of Kastsilishcha, Senna district) alongside the staff. This flag was designed (as was the BSSR emblem) by a Russian artist, this time Nikolay Gusev.

The Pahonya and the white, red and white flag remained the official symbols of the Belarusian Popular Republic and its government-in-exile around which the Belarusian political emigration was grouped, and therefore were automatically forbidden in the BSSR. Prior to 1990, these symbols could be used relatively freely in Belarus only between 1941 and 1944 when the Soviet occupation was replaced by the Nazi occupation. In an effort to gain some degree of loyalty from the local population, the Germans did not forbid Belarusians to use their national symbols. Naturally, under those conditions they were also used by some collaborationist organisations (the Belarusian Council of Trust, the Belarusian Central Council, the Union of Belarusian Youth, etc.). As is known, the Nazis did not gain much from this act of "generosity," but it later gave the Soviets grounds for political speculation concerning the symbols.

During the entire 70-year history of the Communist regime, these images remained the chief symbols for all people in Belarus in favour of restoring the country's independence. In the 1940s and 1950s, they were the symbols of the anti-Soviet partisan movement and underground (the Belarusian Liberation Army, the Belarusian Independence Party, the Union of Belarusian Patriots, etc.). In the 1960s and 1970s, their legal revival in Belarus was the dream of the humanitarian intellectuals of the Academic Centre (liquidated by the KGB in 1974–1975) and the dissident artists of the creative circle "Na Paddashku" (In the Attic) who distributed samizdat postcards and posters featuring the Pahonya. One of the postcards by Yauhen Kulik found its way abroad, was reprinted and evoked a great deal of interest. Therefore, those modest

works added the flavour of political liberation to this historical and cultural symbol, and showed the world that the Moscow-directed processes of national degradation and assimilation of the Belarusian people was not yet complete. In the 1980s, the Pahonya and the white, red and white flag became the well-known symbols of Belarus and independence, while their public demonstration was unambiguously interpreted by the authorities and their opponents as an act of national resistance. An example of this is an event that occurred in the autumn of 1985 when Mikhal Miroshnikaw and Yury Makeyew, students of the Hlebaw Art School in Minsk, tore the USSR flags off the school building and hoisted the white, red and white flag. As a result, the KGB started legal proceedings against six people; Makeyew was forced to leave school.

As the process of democratisation unfolded in the Soviet Union, the use of pre-Soviet symbols became wide-spread and demands for their legalisation were voiced (for the first time by the independence-oriented youth organisation "Talaka" in August 1988). It was under the white, red and white flag that the first opposition political meeting authorised by the BSSR authorities was held at the Dynamo stadium in Minsk on February 19, 1989. However, at that time people were often arrested and persecuted for using this flag and the Pahonya, particularly in the provinces. Even on June 19, 1991 when the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF, the largest opposition organisation at that time) was officially registered (two years after it was founded), the registration was granted on the condition that, within three months, the organisation bring its statutes into line with legislation, specifically by removing the provision stating that "the BPF uses the Belarusian historic symbols — the white, red and white flag and the Pahonya emblem."<sup>15</sup> This condition was imposed despite the fact that the flag had been legalised a year earlier in the capital of the BSSR. In 1990, the Minsk City Council adopted a resolution that allowed using the white, red and white flag as a national (not state) symbol of the Belarusians (not Belarus).

BPF never had to adjust its statutes to BSSR legislation. On September 19, 1991, exactly three months after its registration, the country was renamed the Republic of Belarus and adopted the Pahonya and the white, red and white flag. As a result of the continuing collapse of the Soviet empire and the failure of the coup attempt in Moscow earlier in August, the ruling elite in Belarus was ready to do anything to retain power in the country. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its Belarusian local branch were banned on August 25, 1991, and those in power found the communist symbols of little practical use. There were no other historic symbols of Belarus apart from those used

<sup>15</sup> Svaboda, 1993, #9.

by the opposition and there was no time to invent new ones. The opposition, through its minority in the parliament, submitted proposals for the de-sovietisation and de-communisation of the country, among which the demand to change the symbols appeared the least threatening to the pragmatic nomenclature. However, for the advocates of Belarusian independence, which represented a minority in the parliament, returning the national symbols to the status of state symbols was a matter of principle. Settling this matter was seen as a guarantee of the irreversibility of Belarus' independence and the belarusification of its society.

Thus, at the end of 1991 an independent Belarusian state was revived with its main emblems corresponding to those of the former states formed on this territory, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Belarusian Popular Republic. However, for a large part of the new country's population, people not particularly keen in the area of history (the "pre-Soviet" history of Belarus was hardly mentioned if at all in schools and universities of the BSSR), and those unfamiliar with the subtleties of political manifestos, those symbols appeared to be the "private" symbols of the opposition, who took advantage of the situation to "foist" them on the entire country. Moreover, the former rulers of the BSSR, who usurped power over the Republic of Belarus, proved absolutely unable to manage the economy under the new conditions. The first two years after the declaration of independence was the worst period of the economic crisis that began in the late 1980s in the former USSR. Instead of undertaking the necessary reform, the country's leaders preferred to present the problems flooding Belarus as the inevitable price of state independence so desired by the "nationalist opposition." It is therefore little surprise that under those circumstances the words "crisis," "deterioration of living conditions," "independence," "Pahonya," "white, red and white flag" and "opposition" merged in the minds of "ordinary people" into one synonymous series. Meanwhile pro-Soviet and pro-Russian forces, primarily grouped in so-called "force structures" (such as the never-reformed KGB) and who enjoyed strong support from outside, did not abandon hope to change the trajectory of history and involved themselves in incessant, secret and open, "work among the population." This "work" was most gratefully accepted by the older generation, Soviet veterans of World War II and pensioners, for whom the USSR was the country of their youth and the unexpected changes brought only poverty and want. It is worth noting that at that time those people made up almost one third of the working population.

All of these factors were the main reason for the victory of Alaksandar Lukashenka in the first free presidential elections in 1994. An advocate of restoring the USSR and returning to a Socialist economic system, the young retired KGB Major backed by Rus-

sia was bound to win. The following was one of Lukashenka's pre-election promises:

"I will return our native Belarusian flag [i.e. not the BPF flag — I.L.] and symbols. The people themselves will decide via a referendum! Let them choose from several versions. Not the one we want to thrust in their teeth but the one that raises their spirit."<sup>16</sup>

The promised referendum was held on May 14, 1995 and became the culmination point of the slide-back: Belarus was reverting to the pre-independence situation in terms of politics, civil rights and economics. The restoration of the BSSR-like emblem and flag was, for the initiators of these retrogressive processes, a necessary "last stroke" to complete the picture of the country's return to the blessed Soviet yesterday. The voting was preceded by an insane campaign in the state-run media (including the national television channel, the only one that covers the entire country) against the Pahonya and the white, red and white flag, the country's main symbols of state at that time! It was heavily stressed that those symbols were used by some collaborators during the World War II. Lithuania and its claim to the entire historic heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was thrown in as well. Lukashenka stated: "Brazauskas [then president of Lithuania — I.L.] said to me: why did you, Alaksandar Hryhoryevich, take my emblem? I answered: I didn't, I don't need it!"<sup>17</sup> Russian "psychics" pondered over the "alien ethnic bioenergy in the Pahonya and white, red and white flag."<sup>18</sup> However, the main point hammered into the heads of readers and viewers was the following: the difficult present is symbolised by the signs of independent Belarus and the "damned nationalists and democrats," whereas the better future (equal to the bright past) is represented by the BSSR emblems; to return to the communist symbols is a return to youth for the elderly or adolescence-childhood for the middle-aged. Have you never wanted to return to childhood?!

The trick worked! In May 1995, society in the Republic of Belarus split almost exactly in half. The about face to the old Soviet symbols was supported by 40.7% of the voters while 59.3% voted against or ignored the referendum altogether.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the press pointed out that some of those who answered in the affirmative to the question worded by Lukashenka's lawyers "Do you support the introduction of the new state symbols?" did not at all mean to vote in favour of emblematic re-sovietisation. This is illustrated in the letter below written by L. Dambrowskaya to the newspaper *Nasha Niva* :

"Dear beloved newspaper! At the referendum I voted for the new state symbols — the white, red, and white flag and the emblem Pahonya. Suddenly it turned out that the "new flag" meant the old red and green... For my 37-years of life the red and green flag is the old symbol. I am sure that this is true for many,

<sup>16</sup> Source: Svaboda, 1994, #21.

<sup>17</sup> Source: Svaboda, 28.04.1995.

<sup>18</sup> Free News Plus, 1995, #20.

<sup>19</sup> Nasha Niva, 10.05.2000.

many people. Has it been so long since we discussed and adopted the symbols of our newly born state — the historic banner and emblem? Whose fault is it then that political thought jumps around like Punch, bows now to one side and then to another, now to this and then to another audience? I think that many people did not question the decision already made about the new symbols of the new state, because new state symbols are not like new brands of sausage or vodka and there can not be several in the memory of one generation.”<sup>20</sup>

However, the authorities had achieved their aim. Lukashenka's proposal was supported by a majority of voters in the referendum. Despite the fact that legislative provisions specifically stated that issues of this importance could only be resolved with the participation of the majority of all registered voters, the presidential regime immediately announced its victory. Not waiting until a formal announcement of the voting results, Ivan Tsitsyankow, head of the presidential affairs department and former communist district leader, took the hated symbol of Belarus' independence off the main flagpole of the country (on the roof of the presidential palace) and publicly tore the white, red and white flag into shreds. That symbolic act of savageness opened an epoch of schizophrenic existence of the still-independent Republic of Belarus under the “new-old” state symbols of the sub-Soviet BSSR.

Seven months after the Soviet-style symbols were adopted, the absurdity of the situation was made yet more outrageous when the head of the presidential administration announced a “contest for the best explanatory text for the State symbol and State flag of the Republic of Belarus.”<sup>21</sup> However, explaining the signs that according to Vyacheslaw Nasivich, head of the State heraldic service, “are usually interpreted as slightly modified symbols of the Soviet period which illustrates the nostalgia of a large part of population for those times,”<sup>22</sup> proved a very difficult task. This is surprising, considering the extraordinary intellectual potential of the advocates of the “bright yesterday.” Jury member Arkadz Zhurawski, a notorious advocate of linguistic russification, provided an eloquent summary of the contest:

“As a whole, the versions sent in for the contest leave a sad impression. They show that the leading Belarusian writers, artists and publicists evaded the contest, and it is not by chance in the present political and ideological climate of Belarus...”

“Some of the versions are verses whose authors use a passionate and emotional form to express their positive attitude to the present symbols. However, one has to admit that these versified works do not meet the main requirement of the competition which

was to give the broadest context to the sense and meaning of the present state symbols as a whole or their particular elements...”

“The prosaic descriptions of the emblem and flag [sic!] submitted for the contest largely vary in both length and content... however, all of them are too short, on average one type-written page. Their general drawback is a complete lack of historic data.”<sup>23</sup>

The contest that started with a bang ended with a whimper. The “first two prizes — 50 minimum salaries each”<sup>24</sup> never found their owners, and the presidential promise to “publish the original text by the contest winner as a decorative brochure”<sup>25</sup> hangs in the air. The Belarusian intellectual elite demonstrated its attitude toward the policy of reviving the ghosts of the recent past.

Thus, by the end of 2000 the Republic of Belarus saw the coexistence of two symbolic systems that have the value of state symbols for two main groups in society.

Currently, the “Resolution on the State Emblem of the Republic of Belarus” and its counterpart regarding the state flag, endorsed by presidential edicts 213 and 214 dated June 7, 1995, are valid. These documents bestow national status on the neo-Soviet symbols. The symbols are maintained by the State Heraldic Service controlled by the State Committee for Archives and Records. Syarhey Rassadzin, the current director of the service, is perfectly aware whose “heraldic tastes” his institution is servicing:

“We enjoy total support of the leadership, and especially the leader of our state who expresses his interest in the development of symbols.”<sup>26</sup>

Lukashenka's “heraldmaster” Rassadzin (a historian) also unambiguously expressed his understanding of Belarusian heraldry and its prospects while writing on military heraldry:

“Modern Belarusian military heraldry has been and is developing based primarily on the achievements of Soviet military heraldry. The latter has been developing over many decades and has produced a consistent, original system...”

“In the 1990s the situation in military heraldry changed abruptly. In particular, the then official symbols of the Republic of Belarus, the Pahonya emblem and the white, red and white flag as well as their derivatives, were introduced into our military system of emblems. The problem was that the very style of the emblem and flag was essentially different from that used before, which caused numerous expenses...”

“The necessary prerequisites for the normalisation of military heraldry were made in Belarus after the 1996 national [sic!] referendum was con-

<sup>20</sup> Nasha Niva, 1995, #6.

<sup>21</sup> Directive of the Head of the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus #41ra of December 21, 1995 // The current archive of the State heraldic service of the Republic of Belarus.

<sup>22</sup> The letter from V. Nasevich to V.M. Saprykov, chief specialist of the State archive service of Russia, August 17, 1995 // Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> The resolution about the material of the contest for the best explanatory text for the State symbol and State flag of the Republic of Belarus // Ibid..

<sup>24</sup> The resolution of the head of the administration ... #41pa.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The Belarusian service of Radio Liberty, August 1, 2000.

ducted, when the state received its present emblem and flag...

[Among the urgent tasks] is, of course, to maintain continuity in the development of our military heraldry. To deny the best achievements of the Soviet epoch in this area is obviously morally unacceptable, if practically uneconomic... Furthermore, it is not worthwhile to replace the symbols that are firmly associated in people's consciousness with the heroic past of the Armed Force with new ones. Thus, the Battle Banner of a military department must remain red, and the star pentagonal."<sup>27</sup>

This long quote seems appropriate because it reflects the world-view of that part of the Belarusian population whose flag is now hanging above the country's administrative buildings: history beginning in 1917, the "golden age" in the Soviet past, the national symbols of the Belarusian as "signs of decline," etc. Meanwhile, the effort to meticulously regulate all expressions of social life, characteristic for Lukashenka's regime, resulted in the use of the symbols being largely reduced. For example, it is illegal to use them in the emblems of non-governmental organisations and the manufacture of state emblems is subject to licensing — at a costly rate.<sup>28</sup> The above mentioned presidential resolutions even introduce a list of officials who have the right to display the symbols in their offices. As a consequence, these symbols are used "informally" (that is, voluntarily and outside the office) only during events held by Soviet veterans of World War II or Communists. Even at such events, one is more likely to see the flag of the USSR and the original BSSR flag than the Lukashenka-modified replicas.

The picture is completely different with the present use of Belarus' pre-Soviet state symbols. They are used in whole or in part in the emblems of a large number of Belarusian political parties (from the conservative Belarusian Popular Front to social democrats) and various non-governmental organisations (from "Batskawshchyna" — Fatherland, the international Association of World Belarusians, to the regional Centre of Civil Initiatives in Maladzechna). They decorate mass rallies of those in favour of democratic reform. They appear as graffiti on the walls of Belarusian towns. These symbols have become the symbols of unity for everyone (no matter the ethnic background) who wants Belarus to become a democratic, lawful, economically strong and decent European state. Lukashenka's "law enforcement" responds to this by unlawfully fighting these national symbols. Their references to edict 990-X, dated April 9, 1981 (!) of the Presidium of the BSSR Supreme Soviet that banned "the use of unregistered flags and pennants" make no sense if only because the white,

red and white flag is an officially registered symbol of BPF. The police arrest and beat up people who use the disgraced symbols (the independent Belarusian press has been full of such incidents over the past five years) or, for example, ban the activity of the "Khata" (House) Publishing House for "printing the book *"Pahonya" in Your Heart and Mine* the contents of which is at odds with the results of the referendum on state symbols and thus negatively influences understanding, unity and stability in society."<sup>29</sup> However, all this only increases the attraction to these symbols in the eyes of the people who are displeased with the restoration of neo-Soviet order in Belarus (and even those unaffiliated with the Belarusian national movement).

Therefore, it can be said that the issue of state symbolism in the Republic of Belarus today originates from the uncertainty regarding the country's further political and civil development. The restoration of the Pahonya and the corresponding flag as the official symbols of an independent Belarusian state depends whether an European Belarus triumphs over a Soviet Belarus.

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<sup>27</sup> *Armia*, 2000, #1, c. 4–5.

<sup>28</sup> See: the Resolution about the order of licensing business entities for the production of the State emblem of the Republic of Belarus in the polygraphic form, out of metal, plaster or other material, as well as in the form of carved wood, embossed metal

and other three-dimensional forms. Approved by the Chairman of the committee for archives and record-keeping of the Republic of Belarus on March 13, 1996 // The Current archive of the State heraldic service.

<sup>29</sup> The order of A.I. Butevich, minister for culture and press of the Republic of Belarus, of September 11, 1995 #331 // Svatoda, October 13, 1995.



Henadz Sahanovich

## THE WAR AGAINST BELARUSIAN HISTORY

"A.G. Lukashenka is very persistent in struggling against the falsification of history, particularly in secondary school textbooks."

*Statement by the non-governmental organisation "Historical Knowledge"*

During the Soviet era, the history of Belarus did not exist as a separate subject in the curricula of secondary and higher educational institutions of the BSSR. It was studied as a part of the history of the USSR, or, de facto, Russia. The situation had not changed before the break up of the Soviet Union, when history as a science was freed from party control and a new political reality called for the appropriate renewal of historical education. The change began as early as 1991 with the publication of a conceptual draft for historical education in Belarus. According to the new concept, the history of the USSR was taken out of the curricula and its entire content was moved to world history, while the history of Belarus was granted the status of a separate subject — for the first time ever. The guiding principles of the adopted concept oriented the teaching of history toward the realisation of the national specificity of Belarus, the revival of historical memory and national awareness, and recognising patriots of Belarus regardless of their ethnic origin.<sup>1</sup> Those priorities were matched by the new curriculum of historical education developed by a competent committee of scientists and pedagogues chaired by Mikhas Bich and published as a separate paper after its trial publication in newspapers. Following this curriculum, experts developed 20 new aids on history that were published in Belarusian before the beginning of the 1993/94 school year. For the first

time in Belarus, the country's history was considered from the general viewpoint of the nation, not of class relations. The origin of Belarusian state traditions was associated with the Polatsk Duchy and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The authors unveiled the devastating wars that Muscovite Tsars fought in Belarus, and were decidedly negative in their evaluation of the totalitarian Soviet system.

The new textbooks interpreted the Belarusian past in an entirely new way, free of Soviet spin



<sup>1</sup> The Teacher's Newspaper. November 30, 1991.

which irritated the devotees of the bygone regime. Alaksandar Lukashenka's election as president spelt the end of democratically-oriented historians and set the stage for the return of a Soviet-style vision of the past. With replicas of the Soviet-style state symbols newly installed, Belarus' new leaders turned their attention to Belarusian historical science and began to shape interpretative models in accordance with the Soviet vision of the past. Since that time historical education in the country has become a battlefield under the keen eye of state ideologists.

In August 1995 the Main Department of Socio-political Information headed by Wladimir Zametalin announced, through the state-owned media, the president's decision to ban new textbooks on history and revert to the old, Soviet-era textbooks. Panic struck the Ministry of Education as such a move was unfeasible on purely technical grounds. On learning this Lukashenka publicly declared that the instruction to revert to the old textbooks did not in fact exist. A special conference with the president and representatives of the Ministry of Education on August 23, 1995 ended with the decision to temporarily allow the use of the "national democratic" textbooks while preparing alternative ones for the subsequent school year. A special state commission was established in the Cabinet to review and correct teaching aids on history. The commission was chaired by Zametalin himself and its members were primarily old Stalinist-school professors, the historians Piotr Petrykaw, Alaksandar Filimonaw, and Valery Charapitsa, philosopher Vyachaslaw Dashkevich and others. Thus, Belarus had openly taken a course to divert historical education to the new (that is, old) ideological track and specifically to its re-sovietisation. It was a war against Belarusian history. Three years later, during an official conference in the National Academy of Science, president Lukashenka first publicly voiced the essence of state policy on humanitarian education: he boasted of "having overcome in the past few years the de-ideologisation of the secondary and particularly higher schools of education."<sup>2</sup>

Sifting the texts of teaching aids through the sieve of ideological censorship, the state commission was guided by Lukashenka's policy rather than historical truth. However, even censored textbooks left many members of the commission dissatisfied. It is possible that the commission members themselves inspired the complaints concerning the books they had adopted. Newspapers printed numerous letters and articles by "veterans" and "teachers" denouncing the disgraceful books. The non-governmental organisation "Historical Knowledge," founded in the spring of 1996, played a spe-

cial part in the campaign against the new textbooks and the national approach to history. It united several dozen Soviet era scientists who proclaimed themselves "the protectors and advocates of Soviet state system and power,"<sup>3</sup> and assumed the role of a kind of expert body that became surprisingly authoritative among state leaders. The group headed by Professor Adam Zaleski published a programme that promised to "fight the falsification of the past... using the world experience of revolutions and counterrevolutions."<sup>4</sup> Naturally, the "falsification fighters" were most concerned about the presentation of World War II, the evaluation of the partisan movement and the Soviet order. However, the distant past was also within their interest. The critics, for example, saw russophobia in *The History of Belarus in the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries* by P. Loyka, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade textbook. They could not accept the author's positive evaluation of the 1596 Church Unia. Another "russophobe," M. Bich, author of *The History of Belarus. Late 18<sup>th</sup> Century to 1917*, was harshly criticised for not putting a positive spin on such a "great event" as the partition of Poland and Belarus' incorporation into the Russian empire. The 9<sup>th</sup> grade textbook *The History of Belarus between 1917 and 1992* by V. Sidartsow and V. Famin irritated the critics by the mere mention of a "totalitarian regime directed against the people" and "national and cultural oppression" in the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup>

The state commission was closely watching the curricula of teaching aids on both Belarusian and world history. From *Contemporary World History* it crossed out the definition of the term "totalitarianism," everything related to the Soviet Union's co-operation with Hitler's Germany as well as the mention of Stalin's negative role and his guilt for the beginning of World War II.<sup>6</sup>

In conjunction with criticising "disgraceful" publications, the representatives of the old Soviet school began to write their own, truly alternative textbooks, in which they evaluated events and epochs in full accordance with the regime's ideological course. For example, Vasil Milavanaw's 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbook *History of Belarus. Late 18<sup>th</sup> — 1917* printed in 1998 interpreted the partition of Poland as a "progressive move" that gave the Belarusians "an opportunity to shake off the oppression of Polish and Lithuanian landowners" (page 4). Another alternative book for 11<sup>th</sup> grade students was *The History of Belarus. Late 18<sup>th</sup> — 1999*, edited by Yauhen Novik. This book presented Russian General Mikhail Muravyov, known as the "hangman" for his cruelty in suppressing the 1863–64 national liberation uprising, as "an energetic statesman who knew well how to do what he was called upon to do." The denouncement of the 1922

<sup>2</sup> Vedy (Knowledge), #43–44 (1998).

<sup>3</sup> A. Zaleskiy. 'I Turn It the Way I Like It' // Narodnaya Gazeta. May 24, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> The statement of the scientific association "Historical Knowledge" // Narodnaya Gazeta. August 16, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> V. Chernyavskiy 'What Is the Alternative?' // Vedy. #25–26 (September 10, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Zgoda. #4. March 15–31, 1999.

USSR founding treaty and the founding of the CIS were referred to as state coups.<sup>7</sup>

The authorities paid equally close attention to historical education in institutes of higher learning. Before its re-sovietisation began, the Institute of History in the Academy of Science published the two volume *Studies of the History of Belarus* (Minsk, 1994–95) based on the national state concept. This was the first time that the country's history was rewritten in a sovereign Belarus. For the next few years it was used as an aid for students in higher educational establishments (HEES) but contradicted the new state policy of higher education. "Court" historians moved to fix the flaw, and by 1998 a group of history teachers produced an antithesis to the academic studies — a two-volume HEE aid entitled *The History of Belarus*. Its authors were so engrossed in political correctness that they made numerous factual errors while presenting the Belarusian past from the perspective of old Russian and Soviet historiography. Their product was a rehash of the history of "the north-western realm" which exasperated both the scientific public and students. The magazine "Belarusian History Review" (BHR) and the annual bulletin of the Institute of History published articles that criticised *The History of Belarus* for its numerous errors and blatant ideological re-assessment of history. The authors, however, retaliated with a political snitch: "The [BHR] magazine is edited by representatives of foreign countries, ... has its people in the USA and countries of Europe," "it is known who directs their music, who pays for it..."<sup>8</sup> The magazine was labeled as having a "pro-western, pro-BPF political and ideological orientation, being printed abroad and brought to Belarus."<sup>9</sup> The presidential periodical "Belarusian Thought" called the employees of the Institute of History "agents of western special services" who try to use the concept of history to "prevent the creation of a union state between Belarus and Russia."<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, other textbooks stamped with "passed by the Ministry of Education" (e.g., P. Chygrynaw's *Studies of the History of Belarus*) also sought to please presidential policy rather than seek historical truth.

As the campaign of textbook revision proceeded and the members of "Historical Knowledge" lodged political accusations against their opponents, the atmosphere in historical science and education turned foul. The situation was particularly charged by the open letter of old orthodox historians to Alaksandar Lukashenka eloquently entitled "The Work for the Restoration of Historical Truth Meets Furious Resistance from National Extremists."<sup>11</sup> The Board of the Belarusian Association of Historians responded with a



strong protest against labelling and attempts to turn back Belarusian historical science to the Bolshevik era.<sup>12</sup> However, the authorities openly sided with the small circle of Soviet fundamentalists who volunteered to "renew the historical truth."

Under these circumstances every attempt to revise Soviet history was met with a ferocious reaction from war veterans and Lukashenka's ardent adherents within Slav-patriotic circles. A characteristic example is the case of Ihar Kuznyatsow, a researcher of

<sup>7</sup> *The History of Belarus. Late XVIII — 1999*. A teaching aid for the 11<sup>th</sup> form. Editor: Ya.K. Novik. Minsk, 2000. pp. 59, 183.

<sup>8</sup> Ya. Novik, H. Martsul, Zi Zuyeva, I. Kachalaw, V. Lyutava. *Arguable Alternatives and Ordinary Falsification* // Education and Up-Bringing. Person, society, world. 2000. #2. P.p. 116, 128.

<sup>9</sup> Ya. Novik *To Write and Teach True History, Not Create New Myths* // The Belarusian Thought. 2000. #10. p. 158.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem p. 164.

<sup>11</sup> Narodnaya Gazeta. June 19, 1996.

<sup>12</sup> A Statement of the Board of the Belarusian Association of Historians // Narodnaya Gazeta. July 24, 1996.

Stalinist repression. Due to an intense campaign of slander conducted against him in the press he was forced to defend his honour in court. In 1998, in response to the scientific conference "Political Repression in Belarus: 1917–1997" organised by Belarusian historians, the head of "Historical Knowledge," Adam Zaleski,<sup>13</sup> and his colleagues (including artist Mikhas Savitski) requested the Prosecutor General of Belarus to initiate criminal proceedings against the authors of the conference publications in order to "protect the honour and dignity of president A. Lukashenka" (?!). Mikhail Myasnikovich, head of the presidential administration, sent a letter to the Institute of History with a stereotypical order to "sort out the workers" and "take appropriate measures." The "historians' case" was dealt with by the prosecutor's office. In addition to the voices of war veterans and their Soviet orthodox non-governmental commission (V. Korzun, A. Zaleski, etc.) who claimed that the Nazis were responsible for the mass shooting in Kurapaty, prosecutor general Aleh Bazhelka was now saying that it was unknown who was buried in Kurapaty. He alleged that the investigation was very biased before 1995 as it was conducted by "specialists of the Institute of Archaeology in the Academy of Science headed by Zyanon Paznyak."<sup>14</sup> The "new truth" about Kurapaty was becoming officially accepted.

Political censorship of historical literature was introduced in 1996. One of the first books removed from the printing list of the "Mastatskaya Litaratura" (Art Literature) publisher was (along with titles by Vasil Bykau and Larysa Heniyush) *Ten Centuries of Belarusian History* by W. Arlow and H. Sahanovich. Officials considered the latter work "written tendentiously with a russophobic slant" despite the professional review the book had undergone in the Institute of History that recommended it for publication. In 1997 responsible officials secretly decided to stop the sale of a popular book *Whence Our Kin* by W. Arlow. An unmistakable sign of the introduction of censorship was the removal of the Pahonya emblem from the cover of the third volume of *The Encyclopaedia of the History of Belarus* in 1996. This was done by the new leaders of the Belarusian Encyclopaedia publisher, the deputy editor-in-chief of which was Piotr Petrykaw, formerly director of the Institute of History and one of the most zealous apologists of the bygone Soviet era. He severely criticised management of the Encyclopaedia claiming that the first volumes of *The Encyclopaedia of the History of Belarus* were permeated with "a strong anti-russianism and stubborn

russophobia."<sup>15</sup> Mr. Petrykaw cited articles written by employees of the Institute of History and accused the institute of the "complete falsification" of history. Mikhail Kastsyuk, director of the institute, and his deputy Mikhail Bich entered the debate pointing out the groundless and political nature of the accusations by their ex-colleague.<sup>16</sup> However, this failed to clear the menacing clouds that were gathering over the institute's board.

Under the new leadership of the Belarusian Encyclopaedia, the subsequent volumes of *The Encyclopaedia of the History of Belarus* were edited during the publishing process. Even articles already set for printing were withdrawn for censorship. Mr. Petrykaw completely eliminated the word "russification" and removed all criticism of Russia and the Soviet regime. This crude interference with the text resulted in many historians (in particular, Valyantsina Vyarhey, Andrey Kishtymaw, Wladimir Konan, Mikola Kryvaltsevich, Henadz Sahanovich, etc.) resigning from further co-operation with this publisher and withdrawing their articles.

The next blow to national historiography was the attack on an editorial of the historical chronicle "Pamyats" (Memory). In 1998, "Historical Knowledge" members K. Damarad and A. Khakhlow sent a letter to the presidential administration and the state committee for the press that strongly criticised the chronicle's publication as well as Ales Petrashkevich, head of its organisational and methodological centre, who allegedly belonged to "the reactionary school of Belarusian historical science" that emerged after the "counterrevolutionary revolt in October 1991."<sup>17</sup> The publisher was accused of the same old sins: its local chronicles did not highlight the importance of 1917 to the world; they diminished the role of the Communist party, socialist construction and victory in World War II; exaggerated Stalin's political repression; glorified exploiters (i.e., princes and landowners) and encouraged an anti-Russian attitude. The dispute resulted in the removal of Petrashkevich, a famous Belarusian playwright and historian, from his executive position in this important encyclopaedic centre.

The siege on the "falsifiers'" main stronghold, the Institute of History (a centre of historical studies that comprises the country's best minds), began in 1995 and is not yet over. The official press called the flagship of Belarusian historiography "a nationalistic reserve"<sup>18</sup> and complained that its activity "contradicts the historical truth and the policy of the president of the Republic of Belarus."<sup>19</sup> The most vicious attacks were made by the newspaper "Vedy"

<sup>13</sup> A. Zaleski published the book 'I.V. Stalin and the Treachery of His Political Opponents'; Minsk, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> A. Prakaopovich. 'Prosecutors Get Hold of Historians' // Naviny. #119 (November 6, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> P. Petrykaw. 'The Mist of Russophobia Shrouds in the Belarusian Encyclopaedia' // The Belarusian Thought. 1996. #3.

<sup>16</sup> M. Kastsyuk. 'Politicised History Cannot Be true Science' // Holas Radzimy. August 8, 1996; M. Bich. 'The Mist of Dilettantism and Tendentiousness' // Holas Radzimy. September 12, 1996.

<sup>17</sup> A. Petrashkevich. 'The Old Hoop of a Mankurt is Back above the Head of the Belarusian' // Narodnaya Volya. December 22, 1998.

<sup>18</sup> 'The Optimal Version is the Golden Mean': An interview with N. Stashkevich // Byelorusskaya Niva. 1999. #402.

<sup>19</sup> P. Petrykaw. 'The Mist of Russophobia Shrouds in the Belarusian Encyclopaedia' // The Belarusian Thought. 1996. #3.



(Knowledge), a periodical of the National Academy of Science and the Ministry of Education. Mr. V. Dashkevich, member of the State Commission for Teaching Aids, was appointed editor-in-chief. The newspaper's most persistent and crude criticism was aimed at the academic *Studies of the History of Belarus*, which it accused of the same old "anti-Russian orientation and diminishing the role of the Soviet period"<sup>20</sup> as well as a general distortion of history. The critics tried to present the historians of the Academy of Science as professionally inept and placed the main blame on Mikhail Kastsyuk, the director of the institute. Printing dilettantish, often anti-scientific articles by members of "Historical Knowledge," permeated with emotion and political clichés, Vedy's editor-in-chief promised to assemble them into a special teaching aid "with which all secondary schools and HEEs must become familiar."<sup>21</sup> To prevent the re-election of Academician Kastsyuk as director, the Presidium of the Academy of Science violated its own statutes and did not announce a contest for the vacancy. Moreover, in October 1999 during the celebration of the Academy's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary its president Alaksandar Vaytovich made severe political accusations (reaching the level of insult) regarding the institute's management. One month later he issued an edict assigning Mikalay Stashkevich as acting director of the Institute of History. The new appointee once worked for the Institute of History of the Central Committee of the Belarusian Communist Party.

An expressive symbol of the organised attack on the Institute of History was a memorial board attached to its wall in early 2000. The tablet commemorated, in the Russian language, Pavel Horyn, a former president of the Belarusian Academy of Science and the person entrusted by the Bolsheviks to smash the national democrats and organise an academy that would be "truly communist and subordinate to the interests of socialist construction."<sup>22</sup>

It would appear that Mikalay Stashkevich has not yet accomplished the task to re-educate the academic historians. The viability of the faculty of the Institute of History and the inefficiency of the bulldozer policy were shown by the elections to its scientific council in early 2000. Primarily scientists with an expressed professional, civil, and national attitude were elected in secret voting. Therefore the academic presidium, despite its promise to hold an official election for director by the end of 2000, never dared give the institute's employees the lawful opportunity to elect their leader themselves. Instead, academy president Alaksandar Vaytovich publicly warned that he had a plan to abolish the Institute of History and, in its place, establish a national institute of history within the presidential administration, em-

ploying only cadre with a suitable political orientation. Perhaps, that would be the only way to get rid of those who, out of their professional duty, do not agree with placing historical science at the service of a political regime.

If this plan is implemented and the presidential administration gains control over historical science, one can only guess what the newly-fledged historians will "discover" about Belarusian history! The credo of the "correct" coverage of Belarus' history (in fact, a pathetic version of "west-Russian" and pan-Slavic theories) was recently expressed by one of these "experts" in a publication of the institute of socio-political studies of the presidential administration: "The Belarusian... by his theoretical and practical life is a Russian person" whereas the anti-Slavic West "is fighting a total information and psychological war against the pan-Russian worldview of our people..."<sup>23</sup> No comment.



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<sup>20</sup> A. Zaleski. 'On the Account of the "national concept" ' // Vedy. September 24, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Vedy. January 28, 2000.

<sup>22</sup> S. Kandybovich. 'The Defeat of the National Movement in Belarus'. Minsk, 2000. p. 65.

<sup>23</sup> L. Krishchapovich. 'Belarus and the Russian Civilisation'. Rus and Belarus. Minsk: the Institute of Socio-Political Research within the Administration of the president of the RB, 1999. pp. 134-135.

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## FROM THE RHETORIC OF BROTHERLY UNITY TO THE RHETORIC OF INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATION. ARTEFACTS FROM CONTEMPORARY OFFICIAL BELARUSIAN IDEOLOGY

1.

The list of Belarusian media containing elements of official ideology is both limitless and limited at the same time. In reality, every issue of hundreds of state newspapers, bulletins and magazines is a mouth-piece for directives programmed by the current regime in Belarus, and state radio and television are



"The March of Freedom – 3," Minsk, Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000.  
Photo: IREX/ProMedia

also sweating over the same task. Not all the printed media are able to provide reports of equal value, however. One gets the feeling there is a kind of *kitchen* somewhere, where dishes heavily spiced with ideology are being prepared for widespread public consumption.

The real name of this kitchen is the Belarusian presidential administration. Work to ideologically indoctrinate the masses is constantly underway within certain sub-departments of this administration's numerous branches. This is where the country's "information security" is deployed as an invisible shield against invisible enemies.

The almighty presidential administration is only co-founder of a mere handful of publications. How-

ever, they differ from the rest of the press since they are allowed to cover politically and ideologically important topics and problematic issues on their own. They are the ones who generate the "politically correct" examples and stereotypes that lower level administrative units (*i.e.* the regional and workers' press) can go on to implant into the mass consciousness with varying degrees of devotion. Under Lukashism there are actually not so many of these publications, which include the liberal daily *Sovietskaya Byelorussia*, the Belarusian-language, Belarus-centric daily *Zvyazda*, and the very presentable magazine *Belaruskaya Dumka*. We will start there.

2.

Whatever Lukashenka and his Lukashites might say, the breakdown of "decades of hard-earned contacts" came as a relief for them in 1991. This was the last year of Moscow's active presence in Belarusian cultural issues and, to some extent, media. How that annoyed representatives of the traditional Belarusian elite! Previously, Moscow was the cultural medium between Belarus and the Western world. The potentially dangerous ideas of political and cultural pluralism, building a civil society, multiculturalism, and religious freedom (which endangered the very essence of the political regime) used to make their way to Belarus after transiting via Moscow. Traditionally, the West was still Public Enemy No.1, while Moscow (*i.e.* its liberal and pro-Western elite) gradually turned into Public Enemy No.2.

This specifically colonial type of *enlightenment* disappeared from Belarus together with the collapse of the USSR. Previously, the world's leading intellectual, cultural, artistic and other knowledge was never transmitted to Belarus directly, but in a roundabout way via the imperial centre. Objectively, the loss of this cultural communication channel was convenient for some of the conservative and revanchist-minded Belarusian power elite. Since Minsk did not possess anything like the intellectual potential that Moscow did, education came to a near standstill. A cultural

vacuum formed, thus creating a situation where new, culturally-relevant ideas and practices from abroad became inaccessible, while the old ones had already lost their relevance. This vacuum has allowed a nihilist-reactionary return to the deceased spiritual heritage of the recent Soviet past.

We are faced with a paradoxical situation — once it had gained its independence, Belarus only managed to grow even more distant from Europe. How long this communication breakdown will last depends not only on political, but also on cultural factors. As long as serious Western politicians remain unaware of this, one should not expect any serious change in Belarus.

This lack or shortage of intensive cultural communication with the West morally legitimises the ruling group of people who pose as guardians of supposedly pristine Soviet values in Belarus today. Strictly speaking, however, there is nothing left for them to do but exist as social parasites in this respect, since they are simply unable to come up with any radically different ideas for their own survival. Apart from this, the Belarusian regime is also fairly successful at using the ideology of integration with Russia in order to have a more effective influence on public opinion, and reap its political dividends. These two points (the nihilist-reactionary return to the Soviet system of values, plus the persistent promotion of pro-integrationist ideology) are vital for one to start understanding the main traits of contemporary Belarusian ideology. That is, of course, if one does not mention social-populist rhetoric.

### 3.

Despite all the official statements and reassurances, the integration of Russia and Belarus has never been "all-inclusive." It has always been limited to clearly-marked economic and military domains, and one cannot speak of any serious integration in, for example, cultural, educational or information policy. There are several explanations for this:

Firstly, for president Lukashenka, the concept of "Russia" implies something different to the usual symbolic interpretation. For the Belarusian president, "Russia" is not so much a geopolitical reality or a real country with its own problems, but rather a tradition of despotic rule. In other words, because Lukashenka has opted for "Russia," he has chosen despotism and uncontrolled power. The kind of Russia Lukashenka prefers is associated with crude, uncouth masters who seem completely uneducable; a "Russia" where the political will of its leader, who represents the state and its interests, is everything, whereas the will of the individual is meaningless. The fact that such a picture of "Russia" can only exist in a fantasy world is a constant source of disappointment to Lukashenka. However, no matter how hard you fight it, Russian despotism is unbeatable, and its appearance in contemporary Russian politics has allowed Lukashenka to raise his hopes that his imagination and objective reality will actually coincide someday.

Secondly, the Belarusian regime's main objective is currently to survive politically, not just to unite and become a subject of the Russian Federation. Official Minsk is integrating with official Moscow selectively, only in areas which guarantee relative stability to permit its continued existence.



*"The Chain of Not Indifferent People" in frames of a campaign "We Want to Know the Truth!",*

*Minsk, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2001.*

*Photo: IREX/ProMedia*

Thirdly, as far as the present-day situation and psychology of political leaders is concerned, the Muscovite recentralisation process accelerated by our Eastern neighbour's power elite has dealt a powerful blow to any "all-inclusive" integration between the two countries. This process will probably lead to Russia becoming a unitary state.

Increasing the strength of the centre while weakening the authority of the regions (including by redistributing the tax payments system and other financial sources to benefit the metropolis as one can see in Russia today) makes the political integration of our two countries rather problematic. This is because the Belarusian leader could once have aspired to the sta-

tus of a major regional leader with gleaming prospects of making a career for himself in the "centre" (if one imagines hypothetically that Belarus were to join Russia). Nowadays, however, he can only count on a provincial governor's post, with his authority under the constant control of newly-appointed "presidential deputies". One should also not forget that Lukashenka has had the taste of power for a long time. He has grown accustomed to trips abroad and meetings with foreign guests, being the "supreme commander-in-chief", and extending his power into the agricultural sector, heavy industry and construction projects. Lukashenka might experience psychological trauma were he to move to a new position, so he would never agree to it voluntarily.

Consequently, the current Belarusian regime is using the epithet of integration "between two brotherly nations" to its own ends — it is greeted and welcomed whenever it corresponds to the regime's underlying interests and, vice versa, is ignored or neglected whenever it threatens the existing power structure.

#### 4.

Lukashenka is a truly nationalistic politician, but it is another matter that his nationalism is specifically Eastern European, yet not at all Eurasian, and he certainly has no opposite number in the West. At first sight, Lukashenka's nationalism lacks dominant national features. It would be wrong to say that Lukashenka is a Russian nationalist, for example. In reality, Lukashenka's nationalism dates back to the time when Russia had yet to become a nation state with a specific national identity, and its starting point is so-called "Soviet patriotism."

Lukashenka is promoting a specific form of nationalism known as *gosudarstvennichestvo* (= "state control") in Russian. Additionally, he has a particular soft spot for his "little homeland" (the Shklov district), and Belarus as a whole. Lukashenka's national pride awoke in the far from nationalistically-structured Soviet society, and is therefore based on two ideological concepts: the "greater homeland," which is to be understood as the "state," and the "little homeland," which implies a certain living environment. In this case, the "greater homeland" sets the highest level of (crypto)national identity responsible for rational activity, while the "little homeland" represents its lowest echelon that is responsible for direct emotional reactions.

Therefore, it should be emphasised that the main inspiration for Lukashenka's nationalism should be seen as "pride" for a "state" in which national feelings have always been suppressed. This "state" should be perceived in the broadest sense, as a huge territory, an extensive state apparatus, and an unusually strong military capability that includes a hypertrophically efficient army and airforce. It is also a social security system designed to ensure a poverty-free existence, plus international peace and order. It goes without saying that the prototype for this "state" was in fact the far less attractive Soviet state. Once the latter had passed away, it only grew even more alluring to its sympathisers.

In turn, the "little homeland" probably only evokes recollections of the family home, herds of cattle at dawn, the first snows at *Dziady* (a day of remembrance for the dead), morning mist over the fields at harvest time, and a stork flying overhead. In short — pleasant, ordinary things.

In his uncommonly profound and searching analysis *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, Zbigniew Brzezinski stated that the transition into post-communism would be accompanied by a nationalist dictatorship phase for certain Eastern European countries. The disappearance of communism from highly-Sovietised societies with a "totalitarian social organisation model" would lead to a vacuum that could be filled by nationalistic ideology. "... Stirring up nationalism undoubtedly reinforces authoritarian tendencies. It strengthens the institutions of power that are most capable of making effective use of nationalistic symbols for a dictatorial regime, thus halting the development of democracy."

Unfortunately, we have to admit that this forecast has come true in Belarus. The seven years of Lukashenka's rule have been spent not on building up a civil society, but a power-pyramid type of nationalistic dictatorship, i.e. an authoritarian mechanism of rule. More proof that Lukashenka's regime is a nationalistic dictatorship is its aggressively intolerant attitude towards cultural, political, and other differences. Independent Belarusian culture, the Polish national minority, and sexual minorities alike are being persecuted (along with organisations representing them), but the regime turns a blind eye to militarised semi-fascist groups like Russian National Unity, whose members used to meet and train at a stadium near the water sports palace in downtown Minsk. No doubt the regime feels closer to them ideologically.

This nationalistic dictatorship is not afraid to employ barbaric methods in order to neutralise nonconformity. Shedding the blood of protesters at peaceful opposition rallies has become common practice in Belarus, and the recent disappearances of prominent politicians and businessmen have shown that the country is developing according to the Latin American "Pinochet" model. The Belarusian political leaders have definitely crossed the line that makes them criminally liable for their decisions and actions.

#### 5.

President Alaksandar Lukashenka is always proud of how close he is to "the people." He constantly emphasises that his policies are supported and praised "by the people." The advertising slogan "*Alaksandar Lukashenka is with the people*" figured in his election campaign back in 1994. The official media are also forever proclaiming Lukashenka's unbreakable bond with "the people."

However, in a nationally-underdeveloped society, the concept of "the people" is rather specific. Content-wise, it does not correspond to the concept of a "nation" or a "civil society." In a pre-national society, "the people" is a community that emerges in a terri-



tory over a period of time, and is united by a certain level of consumption and ideological indoctrination. Furthermore, not all social groups or strata are part of "the people." The Lukashenka era has shown that one cannot count the anti-collaborationist section of the Belarusian intelligentsia as being with "the people" ("since it is always distant from the people," as the saying goes), just like the business elite is not controlled by the Lukashenka administration. In short, "the people" does not include independent journalists and opposition party activists, but rather steel-smelters, bobbin-winders, wool-spinners, manual labourers, agricultural workers, militiamen, border guards, and Belarusian servicemen.

This vulgar concept of "the people" is employed as a means of political manipulation and extends to segments of Belarusian society which depend directly on the state. "The people" implies workers from the state system, state industrial sector, and organisations funded by the state budget, *i.e.* areas which used to be the backbone of the totalitarian Soviet state. This kind of "people" has no common cultural or religious identity, let alone a national identity. It is united in its general, subservient dependence on a totalitarian state it hopes will guarantee its well-being.

*Lukashenka is not a protŭgŭ of "the people," but of those forces which stand behind this so-called "people" that so obediently voices their interests.* In reality, Lukashenka is both the protŭgŭ and the hostage of Belarusian state elites that formed back in Soviet times, and are still a force to be reckoned with today. Once he had achieved the full extent of his political power, he mostly began to serve the interests of the Belarusian military-industrial complex and agro-industrial lobby.

The fight over which candidate would be most capable of consistently maintaining these interests was the main intrigue behind the 1994 presidential elections. By using aggressive pre-electoral slogans, it was Lukashenka, not Vyacheslav Kebich, who managed to mobilise widespread support from Belarusian society. Independent politicians didn't even have the slightest chance at those elections, since they were standing for nothing but phantom expectations of being able to provoke a sudden explosion of national consciousness among the masses.

It is no coincidence that even after Vyacheslav Kebich was no longer actively involved in politics, Alaksandar Lukashenka still saw him as his most threatening competitor in the struggle for power.

Lukashenka's main political capital is that he is trusted by lobbyists from the military-industrial complex and other mainstay branches of the economy, and enjoys strict control over senior armed forces, militia and secret service officers. His impetuous, unrestricted social populism only comes second but, contrary to what certain analysts have stated, actually assists him. To all intents and purposes Lukashenka, being a pragmatic politician, has concluded an obscure "non-aggression pact" with these lobbyists, allowing them a certain degree of economic freedom in exchange for loyalty to him. There-

fore, one can say the Belarusian economic and power elites are in a state of *fusion*.

Since he is interested in his own political survival, the Belarusian president has recently begun sending out cautious feelers into new business elites to try and woo their support. In this respect, the results of the autumn 2000 elections to Lukashenka's "house of representatives" were highly indicative, because several dozen loyal businessmen and entrepreneurs were voted in as deputies. Having sensed the increasing potential of this relatively new social group and economic force, the Belarusian president will be striving to procure a mutually-beneficial compromise with them in the future. In the Belarusian situation, such a compromise might be restricted to satisfying a few of their economic demands, as long as they remain politically loyal to the authorities.

I would also like to say a little about the economic reasons behind policies that have been designed specifically to escalate Belarus' political isolation during Lukashenka's term of office. The fact is that the stability and sustainability of the current regime can only be guaranteed by maintaining the current economic structure. In Belarus, military-industrial enterprises set up under Soviet rule have never undergone any serious reforms. Like other major branches of the Belarusian economy, they concentrate mostly on the Russian market. On the one hand, this orientation suits Lukashenka perfectly, since he is essentially offering political cover for this one-track economy. On the other hand, the Belarusian economic elite (heads of state or state-controlled factories, plants and other industries) are eternally indebted to Lukashenka who is, *de facto*, providing for them. Politics and economics are on an equal footing when any significant change in the economy leads to political change, and vice versa.

Belarus' international isolation is beneficial to Lukashenka because it ensures the economic *status quo*. After all, a large influx of foreign capital would mean a complete rupture of the existing economic order in Belarus, with fatal consequences for the political leaders and the political line they have been following. The aforementioned political and economic equality would be destroyed once and for all, and Belarus would be drawn into Europe and the European economic community by the iron hand of market mechanisms.

This is what the first Belarusian president fears more than anything else. His political statements and actions designed to escalate Belarus' international isolation are increasingly strained, deliberate, and artificial, like a mandatory political ritual.

Belarus' political leaders are only satisfied by a purely cosmetic presence of foreign capital in the country. The fast-food chain *McDonalds*, *Siemens* & *Bosch*'s own-brand domestic appliance shops, and a small *Coca-Cola* factory in Minsk are just necessary concessions the regime has to agree to. In actual fact, Belarus is a black hole on the world trade map.

Consequently, true power for Lukashenka means having total or near-total control over the Belarusian economy. Understanding this helps in devising

methods to counter Lukashist policies in Belarus. Basically, in order to assure the cultural and economic "Europeanisation" of Belarus, one must augment the private sector and support independent cultural institutions, as well as guarantee the political conditions necessary to obtain large-scale investments of foreign capital.

6.

President Lukashenka's likes and dislikes, particularly in politics, clearly point to the type of culture in which he was brought up and developed as a person. Lukashenka's political priorities show a devotion to vulgar, functional approaches. "Vulgar functionalism" is a specific product of Russian cultural circles. Proponents of "vulgar functionalism" are marked by their focus on the socially-valuable attributes of strength and power. He is excited by volitional, suggestive decisions, even if they are completely imprudent politically or economically. He actually treats culture as if it were a social institution designed to gloss over the existing social order. Culture and literature are one and the same to him — a waste of time, a fruitless occupation. For him, real creativity is to be found on the construction site or by the fireside at home, for that is where true values are created. According to this logic, cultural products are ephemeral and vaguely suspicious. If things are left to go on "haphazardly" the way they are, however, they might cause social disturbances in future which the authorities did not anticipate.

In the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Belarus, it has been the Ministry of Culture's task to prevent this from happening. This institution has always had a predominantly controlling function, including through its exclusive support of cultural projects, initiatives and institutions which are beneficial to the regime. Cultural events organised by the current Belarusian Ministry of Culture clearly show that the "vulgar functionalist" approaches are alive and well among the power elite. The Ministry's sphere of influence includes the *Belarusfilm* studios, several dozen state theatres, museums and galleries, a network of libraries and cultural centres, youth centres, and a variety of clubs and societies — that's almost everything.

In its present form, the Ministry of Culture is attempting to preserve the past instead of supporting the contemporary cultural experience. A more fitting title for this body would be the "Ministry for the Conservation of Soviet Cultural Heritage."

The issue of Russian culture deserves a separate mention. Now, more than ever before, there is a distinct cultural dichotomy in modern-day Russia. One Russian cultural tradition is very positive. At its roots lie the colossal, spiritual works of Aleksandr Radishchev, Aleksandr Herzen, Lev Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Kazimir Malevich, Andrey Bely, Daniil Kharnis, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Andrey Sakharov. This tradition is characterised by its spiritual searches and insights, progressive artistic experience, European intellectual context, and world-acclaimed cultural achievements.

However, a negative Russian cultural tradition had already been outlined by literary figures like Smerdyakov and Sharikov. It incorporates the dark side of Russian society, with its qualities like spiritual indigence, obscurantism, vindictiveness, pettiness and treachery. This tradition was directly encouraged by the long-term communist experiment performed in the country, in which whole social groups and classes perished along with their unique cultural heritage. In the West, socially-relevant cultural values and practices have traditionally been shaped by the *higher echelons* of society, whereas in the Soviet Union the opposite happened. The dominant culture came from the *lower reaches* of society — whether it be the working class that led the proletarian revolution, or the poverty-stricken rural population. The domination of this type of culture essentially signalled the triumph of the unenlightened mind.

A few words must also be said about the Soviet "army" and "prison camps." These institutions have traditionally had a major influence on Soviet society. Under Soviet totalitarianism, a great number of people went through the "camps," and practically all of the male population served in the "army." The negative type of Russian culture began to take on particularly nasty, anti-humanist forms in the "army" and "camps." Very few people were able to withstand its intrinsic amorality, depravity, degeneration and depression. You will understand what I mean if you listen carefully to the Russian spoken by unskilled middle-aged or older workers. Here, language is an infallible indicator of the mental traumas and cultural influences they were exposed to.

The criminal regime of "nomenclaturist capitalism" built by Alaksandar Lukashenka again shows just how habits and routines picked up in the "camps" have become rooted in people's minds. Apparently, Lukashenka has still not gone beyond the psychology of a "godfather" with his politics, offering "protection" in exchange for servitude and obedience.

7.

Lukashenka himself established the style for official Belarusian ideologists with his incomparable linguistic outpourings, such as "*Russian Orthodox atheist*" and "*lousy fleas*" (N.B. said when referring to businessmen). Compared to this, quotes like "*Gorbachev's pseudo-perestroika*," "*adventurist jokers*" and "*backroom conductors*" (as uttered by Vladimir Velichko, a "Meritorious Cultural Figure of the Republic of Belarus, Academician of the International Academy of Organisational and Management Sciences," editor-in-chief of *Belaruskaya Dumka* magazine, and one of the main Belarusian ideologists to boot); or Igor Akshevskiy's "*political shapeshifters slicing into a single, living organism*," "*small-town guardsmen who have already tried on the emperor's robes in secret*," "*well-wishers from abroad*" and "*the market maelstrom*" just seem like truisms. Here are a few more examples of similar creativity — "*The logical crash of democratic illusions*" (from Vsevolod Yanchevskiy, "First Secretary of the Central Commit-

tee of the Byelorussian Patriotic Youth Union"); *"Western thought offers us no alternative, forcing us to wear its worn-out raincoat covered in holes"* (from Vitaliy Smirnov, "Professor and Dean of the Foreign Policy Department of the Belarusian Presidential Management Academy"); *"The abyss of the rampant market and the anarchy of independence"* (from "Kandidat of Philosophy" Vasiliy Novikov); *"Oedipus, Freud, and other complexes"* (from another "Kandidat of Philosophy", Boris Lepyoshka).

Vsevolod Yanchevskiy is right in saying that *"We have become very nasty and aggressive over the last fifteen years (since the beginning of perestroika)"*.<sup>1</sup>

Belarusian ideologists do not conceal the fact that their job is aimed at "ideological hardening of the masses." The aforementioned Velichko writes *"We need general values for development which can then become part of a strong internal ideology."*<sup>2</sup> He emphasises not "new," but "general values," implying traditional Soviet ones which have only been partially reinterpreted and supplemented, then reassembled into one system.

With rare exceptions, these linguistic constructions from Belarusian ideologists tend to be based not on rational arguments, but on emotional impulses and affective mobilisation of "simple people's" subconscious fears, using tried-and-tested KGB methods. Essentially, these ideologists are mere minstrels of Soviet people's frustrations, although their songs are more like collective hysteria overloaded with nationalistic phraseology.

8.

Nothing characterises Belarusian ideology better than its orientation towards the Russian cultural context. In *Belaruskaya Dumka*, one can find countless references to various authoritative Russian figures (Dmitriy Mendeleyev, Fyodor Abramov, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin) but next to nothing about Belarusians. Sometimes, some of our homespun ideological operatives simply identify themselves with Russians, and Belarus with Russia — *"For instance, tell me how I am supposed to call my own brother a foreigner just because he lives in Nizhnevartovsk and is a citizen of another country? And what about my eldest son and grandson, also Russian citizens who recently settled down in the beautiful Russian city of Kostroma?"*, asks Igor Akshevskiy.<sup>3</sup>

Russia is also a strong argument in the controversy with the West (as the Belarusian ideologists imagine or would like to imagine it). They understand perfectly well how comical and incomparable it is to place Belarus and the West into sharp ideological opposition to one another. However, if one makes

Belarus and Russia appear to be one and the same, then this contrast starts to seem more credible.

Spurious reasons are thrust upon us in order to justify the contrast, but the quality of arguments used in this controversy wouldn't stand up to any kind positive evaluation. *"For example, where does the rallying cry of 'Let's Join Europe!' come from?"* exclaims Boris Lepyoshka, a philosophy teacher from Berastsye. *"It comes from the mythologisation of history because, after all, 'Europe' has crushed and burned the Belarusians, baptised them into its faiths, quashed any protests, and snatched or bought up all our best intellectuals."*<sup>4</sup>

This same Lepyoshka, conditioned by neo-Slavophilic dogma, goes yet further in his falsifications of history — *"Looking at our historical experience, we have often been forced into a pro-Western position, but let's examine what Westernism has brought the Slavs. Take the 17<sup>th</sup> century for example — Princess Sofia and Grand Duke Golitsyn were fascinated by the Catholic Europe of Austria and Poland, whereas Peter the Great was captivated by Protestant Holland. Neither one of them ever brought us anything good, however."*<sup>5</sup>

Basically, this is the tenacious nationalist in Lepyoshka talking, since he only associates Slavism with the Slavonic nations that did not yield to Western influence. The next step would be to identify Slavonic traditions with Russian traditions.

The longer the Russification of Belarus goes on, the closer Russia will become for us. This is the gist of the argument proffered by *Belaruskaya Dumka* writer Larisa Yakovenko — *"It is difficult to understand people who are fighting for a union with anyone, whether it be America or Europe. But this is not the case with Russia, which is close to us in spirit, with blood ties and a common history which one cannot dismiss or rewrite."*<sup>6</sup>

Belarusian ideologists would simply be unable to survive without Russia. They need it most of all in order to disguise their own futility. Without it, they would just be a band of paranoiacs but, with it, they can be a united family capable of intimidating the whole world with nuclear weapons again.

Belarus' true economic interests do not always coincide with Russia's. It is appropriate that this is understood better by people who directly define the country's economic policy. Ivan Shakola, president of a state-owned national food concern, writes that *"Russia has also been implementing a package of defensive measures since 1998. In spite of our common customs zone, it has taken steps to defend its own market from products manufactured in Belarusian sweet factories using imported raw materials. We can also expect more of this kind of exclusionist policies in the near future."*<sup>7</sup> Then he adds — *"Is it better to*

<sup>1</sup> *Belaruskaya Dumka*, No. 7 (2000), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Belaruskaya Dumka*, No. 6 (2000), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Belaruskaya Dumka*, No. 6 (2000), p. 188.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 7 (2000), p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

support our own domestic sugar production, or imports from Poland, Russia or Lithuania?.”<sup>8</sup>

One must assume that this Manichean split personality will also be defining the Belarusian leadership's policies in future. On the one hand, Belarusians will feel what they want to feel – political *rapprochement* with Russia will continue, ending in complete unification of the political systems. On the other hand, all future behaviour will be dictated by Belarusian economic interests (and the regime's own economic interests).

9.

In the minds of Belarusian ideologists, “The West” stands for the complete opposite of “Russia.” “Russia” is familiar, but “The West” is alien. “Russia” brings good and enlightenment, but “The West” brings evil and hopelessness. “Russia” will give the world a future, but “The West” is preparing global destruction. Thus, these ideologists' inability to see the world the way it really is, not just in black-and-white, is reaching its climax.

Moreover, these home-grown Velichko and Lepyoshka types have very little idea what “The West” means. To them, the concept usually signifies the active prohibition of the Soviet system of values in all areas of society, plus a complete rejection of the Soviet way of life. Of course, this concept is not taken geographically, but in a purely ideological sense. “The West” is a collective aggressor composed not of separate countries, but one hostile political bloc.

The fact is that Belarusian ideological workers are also under-informed because “The West” is a unified concept to them as well. None of them ever states directly that Germany, Holland or Spain are the West. The USA, however, is an exception to this rule, and is really seen as a separate partner [of the West].

In the eyes of the Belarusian ideologists, the frontline countries of “The West” are Ukraine and Poland. To them, each of these countries represents a highly undesirable development model in its own way, and all appropriate means are used to discredit them. Therefore, Vladimir Velichko casts doubts on how democratic the last Ukrainian elections were, saying “*During the recent Ukrainian elections, Leonid Kuchma's team successfully applied Yeltsin's sure-fire 'reformist president versus red revenge' scheme*”; Igor Akshevskiy criticises Ukrainian agricultural policy — “*Thank God our fields aren't overgrown with weeds like in neighbouring Ukraine, but are bountiful and bear rewards for the diligent hands of the peasants*”;<sup>9</sup> and Bronislav Sprynchan, a poet of Ukrainian descent, wants to change the country's name from “Ukraine” to “Malorussia” (= “*Little Russia*”):

*And yet, a 20-year old Malorussian,  
Heeding the wisdom of your testaments,  
Has bound his soul to thee, Belarus,  
And fallen in love with thy people and land.*

10

Belarusian State University lecturer Mecheslav Chasnovskiy specialises in unusually tendentious coverage of Polish economic reforms. His invective is also directed against “Polish reformers” (“*Polish reformers have failed to grasp that liberal market economies operate differently in the USA and Western European countries*”) and “liberal platforms” in general (“*... liberal platforms have not even justified themselves economically, despite the fact that those in favour of maintaining the liberal status quo claim them to be a success*”).<sup>11</sup>

Chasnovskiy claims his point of view is based on his “*concern for simple people*.” He writes — “*The ones who lost the most due to the reforms are people who were guaranteed social security and employment by the previous system, particularly workers and peasants*.”<sup>12</sup> But this was not enough for him, and by the end of his article he had expanded his arguments to state — “*During the reforms, workers and peasants were the first to lose out. The interesting thing is that craftsmen and entrepreneurs also felt they had suffered when they started finding it hard to buy groceries. All these losses negated the great hopes of society. Practically everyone who thought the transition from totalitarianism to democracy was positive ended up losing out*.”<sup>13</sup>

So there you have it. People “*who thought the transition from totalitarianism to democracy was positive*” lost out. This loss, Chasnovskiy feels, was accompanied by a whole nightmare in which “*About two-thirds of the adult population were forced to try and make ends meet — their consumption of electricity, hot water and heating went down, they had to deny themselves any luxuries, repair old things instead of buying new ones (or buy only discount goods), turn to their relatives for support, spend their savings on food, and refuse hire-purchase or other benefits. They lost their aims and plans in life, and began living more modestly from day to day*.”<sup>14</sup>

Chasnovskiy sees the reduced role of the state in the national economy as the reason behind the Polish “*economic disaster*” — “*... The Poles... have lost their buying power because the state has refused to offer them security and guaranteed employment*.” Chasnovskiy's reasoning is that — “*As a result, market mechanisms actually made it harder to achieve a high degree of social solidarity and consolidation. If anything, they probably contributed to increased insecurity and [social] differentiation*.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., No. 7 (2000), p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., No. 6 (2000), p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., No. 6 (2000), p. 104.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., No. 6, p. 105.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., No. 6, p. 109.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., No. 6, p. 106.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., No. 6, pp. 105–108.



However, Chasnovskiy's strained falsifications cannot compare to the things Belarusians think and say about the United States of America. Here, "economic arguments" fade into the background, and nationalist rhetoric and psychoses take over. Prof. Yuriy Kharin, PhD, head of the Belarusian State University of Radio and Computer Engineering's philosophy department, informs us in alarm that — *"Violence has become a model in their daily lives of some school-children. In the USA, there have been numerous cases where adolescents have shot their own classmates."* To Prof. Vitaliy Smirnov, head of the Belarusian Presidential Management Academy's foreign policy department, there is no difference between fascist Germany and the USA today, which he considers to be "neo-fascist" — *"National ideas are born out of the development of society, become a mass phenomenon, and are then put into practice. This is how fascism and the fascist ideology appeared in Germany, and how the USA's current neo-fascism and world dictatorship ideology emerged."*<sup>16</sup>

Vitaliy Smirnov's verdict is clear — *"... Western thought offers us no alternative, but dictates and imposes its templates and notions of 'progressive development' onto us with no need for concepts like national sovereignty, statehood, love for one's homeland, patriotism, national pride, etc. Behind all this lies the triumph and craftiness of the victors. It is in their interests to give us inferiority and historical guilt complexes, and turn us into the outcasts of modern civilisation."*<sup>17</sup>

Vasiliy Novikov, PhD, suspects that "The West" is guilty for the slowing of social progress in post-Soviet republics — *"... A small group of Western countries is currently defending its egotistical interests left, right, and centre; creeping in disguised as new concepts, and attempting to force its system of values onto the rest of mankind."* Then he expresses his hope that *"... crossing the threshold into the third millennium, mankind will say goodbye forever to the Western European mentality paradigm which has been forming throughout the entire existence of bourgeois Western society. This is essential if true human values are to develop and replace the limited illusions and interests of class and civilisation."*<sup>18</sup>

The Belarusian ideologists' claims against "The West" vary greatly. For example, Prof. Valentin Akulov, PhD, is concerned by the "superfluous" law-abiding nature of Western citizens — *"In the past, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union created 'new men,' but modern Western democracy produces 'new citizens' — robot men who live according to the program they call their legislative system."* Without stating his sources, Kandidat of Philosophy Fyodor Prikhodko, head of the political science and philosophy department of the

Belarusian Agricultural Academy, attributes the following statement to one famous American politician — *"Responsible Western politicians are coming to the conclusion that they must change their countries' strategies. For example, US vice-president Albert Gore admitted that 'Consumerist market civilisation has not only exhausted itself but, what's more, it has driven American society into a dead end, and is leading our planet towards its destruction.'"*<sup>19</sup> Surely this is a falsification?

Heightened international isolation always causes increased paranoia inside a country. Undoubtedly, the unofficial leader of "paranoid tendencies" in official Belarusian ideology must be *Belaruskaya Dumka's* editor Vladimir Velichko. According to him, "The West" has launched an "undeclared war" against Belarus — *"An undeclared war which has entered the public consciousness, and is being waged on several fronts at once. These include the destructive economic reforms they are imposing, the flood of sects, youth drug abuse, the prevention of childbirth under the naive pretext of 'family planning', etc..."*<sup>20</sup>

This statement clearly shows that Belarusian ideologists are trying to blame the country's internal problems on external influences. The saddest thing is that this kind of interpretative model still finds its sup-



Happening of journalists, 1996.

porters in Belarusian society. It is most convenient to offload one's entire burden of responsibilities onto someone else. On a personal level, this is nothing more than a return to infanthood, but if it is on a national level, this kind of attitude tends to get marred by xenophobia and nationalism. The quasi-logical syllogisms in support of this read approximately as follows: a) the country's economic, cultural, political and other systems are near-perfect; b) system break-

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., No. 7–8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., No. 7, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., No. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., No. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., No. 6, p. 10.

downs occur exclusively due to outside forces; c) it is therefore only possible to stabilise the system once those forces have been neutralised. Only a fool would be able to find any signs of perfection in the Belarusian state system, however. Like all authoritarian regimes based on a pyramidal control system, it is in a constant state of crisis, but overcoming this crisis would mean destroying the state model.

10.

Belarusian ideologists also loathe "The West" because it supports the independent press and opposition in a variety of ways. Vladimir Velichko confirms this, saying — "... Western countries are not mean when it comes to the electronic and printed media. In the past, our press was looked after by the CPSU, but today the "independent" publications are completely dependent on Oligarch Oligarchson, and have turned into a collective disinformers, manipulators and agent provocateurs."<sup>21</sup>

Belarusian political reality is unique because, from the ruling regime's point of view, independent media are equally or perhaps even more of a threat than conventional political opposition. They are the main target for Lukashist propaganda, and every reasonably important Belarusian ideologist feels it their duty to drag the independent media's name through the mud.

For example, the aforementioned Yuriy Kharin stresses the spiritual damage caused by the opposition media — "*The mass media (especially television) are cultivating an atmosphere in the society of the CIS which is giving rise to reduced moral standards, irrational thinking, and the dehumanisation of culture.*"<sup>22</sup> Belarusian State University tutor and Kandidat of Philosophy Yegor Konyev is convinced that the media are also subverting the Belarusian economy — "*As you know, the lack of foreign investment in our economy is the most damaging consequence of the "information vacuum" which the foreign media have created around Belarus.*"<sup>23</sup> Vsevolod Yanchevskiy, chairman of the Byelorussian Patriotic Youth Union, almost puts the non-state media on a par with the political opposition — "... *In Belarus, the combined strength of the anti-presidential media is much greater than that of the state media. The most popular Russian TV channels and more than ten Belarusian opposition publications have been denigrating Belarus and its authorities with painful regularity for several years now... The opposition periodically organises small demonstrations in Minsk, but they are never broken up unless someone starts throwing sticks and stones at the militia.*"<sup>24</sup> Newly-hatched "House of Representatives" deputy Yanchevskiy is obviously lying when he says

"*in Belarus, the combined strength of the anti-presidential media is much greater than that of the state media,*" and this can be put down to his personal devotion to the president.

These remarks by Belarusian ideologists are supposed to make you think the independent media are just foreign bodies in our society, inspired artificially by "The West," not objective social processes. In so doing, they exaggerate "The West's" role in all kinds of ways. Not only is it maintaining its presence on the Russo-Belarusian Union State's information market, but it is also expanding. "*Isn't this why those Babitsky types who criticise the Russian troops in Chechnya have been multiplying like Colorado beetles recently?*", exclaims Vladimir Velichko poetically. One can sense his KGB training by the way he speaks about the Belarusian opposition — "*This method... is being used so blatantly by our noisy opposition. Out of their minds with freedom, these people create permanent confrontations, duping any journalists with a pathological penchant for "hot stories," inflaming anti-Belarusian feelings in the former Soviet Union and abroad, provoking the isolation of their own country, and mocking its recent history. Seemingly harmless political propagandist events are in fact immoral, because they ruin friendships with other nations and spread delirium.*"<sup>25</sup>

It is revealing that the ideological machine sees the "Belarusian opposition" as a fairly homogenous mass or "dark force" (like "The West"). Belarusian ideologists use the same tools for the "Belarusian opposition" as they do for the "The West." Valentin Akulov states — "*Who could doubt, for example, that the people and the people alone have the right to decide how to organise their own home, how to live in it, who to make friends with, and who they should just stay on good terms with. I don't even think the Shushkevich/Grib/Sharetskiy trio of former parliamentary speakers would argue with that. But when it came down to a referendum on vital issues for the people, it turned out that the people were "sick" and "dumb." Not people at all, just a "herd of cattle."*"<sup>26</sup>

It is very difficult to read *Belaruskaya Dumka* and similar publications without feeling disgusted. The world has changed, but Belarusian ideologists have remained exactly the way they used to be — brutal, incorrigible, bloodthirsty, and low on intellect. Since they are more like common ignoramuses than social scientists, they have never managed to surpass their ideological predecessors or those who inspired them, e.g. Black Hundred members like Salanevich. Moreover, it sometimes seems as if Lukashenka is playing a devilishly subtle game — by giving the ideologists *carte blanche* for their extremist displays of

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., No. 6, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., No. 8, p. 42.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., No. 8, p. 142.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., No. 7, p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., No. 6, p. 9. N.B. Andrey Babitsky is a *Radio Liberty* journalist who was arrested by Russians in Chechnya in January 2000 for "participating in an illegal armed formation," but the real motive was presumably the anti-war tone of his reports on the events.

<sup>26</sup> *Belaruskaya Dumka*, No. 6, p. 123.

xenophobia and nationalism, he appears to be a "moderate," "rational" politician in comparison.

11.

Whatever they might say, the Soviet Union has been gone for a long time, but the independent Republic of Belarus is still alive in spite of all its woes. Belarusian ideologists will still need to re-evaluate the Soviet legacy one day in order to come up with promising methods for developing the country.

It turns out that Vsevolod Yanchevskiy, who has yet to turn 25, likes to dwell on the "Brezhnevian-Andropovian Soviet Union" — *"Life wasn't so bad in the Brezhnevian-Andropovian Soviet Union, just fairly boring. We discovered later that it wasn't so bad compared to the perestroika and post-perestroika periods, but we were already annoyed by the boredom before that."*<sup>27</sup>

Belarusian ideologists are also faced with the task of showing the current political regime in a positive light. They are prepared to contrast it with the Soviet regime in order to make it seem a little better — *"We should not evaluate our political regime according to whether it is liked or corresponds to someone's ideas about democracy, but should concentrate on its newer components instead, since they are more progressive than those of the previous regime."* The author of this remark, Fyodor Prikhodko, adds — *"... Here, we will never have communism and the plenty it promised, or capitalism like in the West."*<sup>28</sup>

The new "more progressive" system that is being built in Belarus could be described not just as "market socialism,"<sup>29</sup> but also as "social-capitalism." This was hinted at by Nikolay Yegorenkov, head of the international relations department at Gomseimash (the Gomel state agricultural machinery plant) — *"Social-capitalism is the same social system that Lenin described as the 'civilised cooperatives' system, that is to say socialism."*<sup>30</sup>

Belarusian ideologists obviously fail to comprehend that they are discrediting the regime when they write that the political order being built in Belarus does not conform to generally-accepted "ideas about democracy" or "foreign stereotypes" of "human rights, democracy and sovereignty."<sup>31</sup> History has seen a great number of regimes which did not conform to generally-accepted "ideas about democracy," including German nazism, Italian fascism, and Soviet communism. Every single one of them rejected "foreign stereotypes" of "human rights, democracy and sovereignty," but we all know how they ended up.

Naturally, "social-capitalist" Belarus ought to have its own "national idea." Fyodor Prikhodko puts it this way — *"... Belarus is currently going through a*

*period in its history where it needs a national idea just like a lost traveller needs a path. The Belarusian idea is something both the right and the left, believers and atheists could agree on; something that would be supported by Belarusians, Russians, Jews and Poles alike — citizens of all nationalities living in the republic."* Note that, strictly speaking, this is not so much "Belarusian" or a "national idea," but some third kind of "subnational" concept designed to unite "the multinational Belarusian people" in social solidarity and material prosperity — *"... The basis for the Belarusian idea should be a desire to strengthen human potential... Our basic values should be a healthy way of life, decent education, effective health care services, and reasonable [personal] requirements."*<sup>32</sup>

In order to achieve social, political and national harmony, a few more decisive measures must be applied: banning all political parties, cutting ourselves off from Europe (Larisa Yakovenko writes — *"So far, we are poor relatives, if not simply strangers to Europe — Our Common Home," and this will be the case for a long time to come. This is because we were raised in different circumstances and live in different conditions, with our Belarusian Slavonic mentality and Russian Orthodox religion*"), and making Russian Orthodoxy the state religion (in Boris Lepyoshka's view — *"... Russian Orthodoxy is the choice of many centuries, like the orientation towards Eastern values in the civilised sense"*)).

Just what kind of future are the Belarusian ideologists preparing? One where Belarus would be Russian-speaking and Russian Orthodox, free from political parties and independent media; one where Belarusian society would not transform into a civil society, but stay just the way it is — as a conglomerate of internally- and externally-dependent people.

It depends on us alone as to whether Belarus will really develop along these lines or not.

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<sup>27</sup> *Belaruskaya Dumka*, No. 7, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 6, pp. 38–40.

<sup>29</sup> A famous quote from Lukashenko, circa 1997.

<sup>30</sup> *Belaruskaya Dumka*, No. 6, p. 44.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Vitaliy Smirnov — *"... We should not fear false accusations of violating human rights, democracy and sovereignty. We should have our own attitudes towards these concepts, and they should not depend on imposed foreign stereotypes"* (*Belaruskaya Dumka*, No. 7, p. 24).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 6, pp. 38–40.

Feliks Gawin

## REPORT ON OBSERVATION OF RIGHTS OF NATIONAL MINORITIES AND GUARANTEES OF CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT OF EDUCATION IN ETHNIC MINORITY LANGUAGE IN HARODNYA REGION

### Introduction

The region of Harodnya is a multi-ethnic region of Belarus. If within the republic 22% of the population belongs to ethnic minority category then within Harodnya region 37.7% of the population is ascribe themselves to ethnic minorities. As a result of this large composition of minorities Harodnya Region can be perceived as a region which acutely reflects national policy of the current Belarusian government on the local and national level.

In Harodnya region the ethnic minorities frequently live in union. For example, the Lithuanians, of which there is only 0.2% in the region, are concentrated within two regions: the Voronovski and Ostrovetski regions where the large array of minorities represent the overwhelming majority.

### A Brief Analysis of Legislation of the Republic of Belarus and International Documents Ratified by

### Belarus in the Sphere of Defence of National Minority Rights, and Guarantees for the Using of National Minority Language.

I will begin the analysis of international documents in the field of national minority rights with the Belarusian ratification of an International Pact of Civic and Political Rights and a optional protocol which gives the citizens of Belarus the right to appeal directly to the UNO with a complaint about any violations of human rights, if there are rights within the confines of the pact. Articles 8 and 61 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus also fix these rights. The UN laws pertaining to national minorities were ratified in the General Declaration of Human Rights in Article 2, which decrees against discrimination of individuals who belong to national minorities. Another important UN document is the International Pact of Political and Civic Rights. These are laws which reach significantly deeper than the declaration, and except



for a decree against discrimination, insure minorities certain rights, for example, (Article 27) and the right of religious self-determination and the right of engaging into religious ritual ceremonies, the right to use one's ethnic culture and to use mother tongue.

A very important document of the UN is the Declaration of the rights of individuals who belong to national ethnic, religious and language minorities. The declaration obliges (Article 4) all countries to insure for minorities, wherever it is possible, the conditions, which promote learning the ethnic minority language or teaching in it.

The Republic of Belarus is a member of the Organisation Of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and is required to adhere to the documents signed by OSCE pertaining to the guarantees of rights, and freedoms of individuals, who belong to ethnic minorities. Among these documents it is worth drawing attention to a document of the Copenhagen Conference on human issues in 1990. In its paragraph 30 we read:

"Countries-participants which belong to the OSCE admit that questions pertaining to national minorities could be solved in a positive way that adheres to a democratic political framework, which is based on the supremacy of law; and to conditions functioning of an independent legal system."

They also recognise the equally important role of non-governmental organisations... in supporting tolerance, multiculturalism and solving problems pertaining to national minorities.

Subsequently in paragraph 34 of the document we read: "Countries-participants will seek to guarantee, for individuals which belong to national minorities, independently from the need to learn in the official language, or other state languages of a country, the opportunity to learn one's father language or to learn in one's mother tongue, also there where it is possible and necessary to use it in governmental bodies according to the legislation."

In the context of instruction of history and culture within educational institutions, they will also take into account the history and the culture of the national minority.

During the following meeting of the countries-participants of OSCE there has been underlined their good will towards the observation of rights pertaining to national minorities. The same case was in the Paris Charter for a new Europe, in 1990, in a document of the Moscow Conference. A specific place among the documents which were accepted by the Copenhagen Conference is occupied by the Declaration of the Helsinki meeting which were held at the highest level and Helsinki Decree in 1992, on the basis of which there was established the institution of the High Commissioner on Issues of National Minorities.

An analysis of the internal legislation of Belarus should be begun from an act the highest level and of special significance to each democratic country, i.e. the Constitution

The changes proposed by the president pertained primarily to the chapters of the Constitution

which regulate the state system. What pertains to the rights and freedoms of citizens, chapters I and II were left without changes. In regards to the rights of minorities, the following articles of the constitution are important: 2, 14, 15, 16, 17, 50, 61.

Article 14 requires the state to regulate the relations between national communities on the basis of equality before the law, respecting their rights and interests.

Article 15 obliges the state to be responsible for the preservation of historical-cultural and spiritual heritage, the free development of cultures of all national communities living within the Republic of Belarus.

Article 16 proclaims the equality of religions and beliefs before the law.

Article 17: "The state languages in the Belarusian Republic are Belarusian and Russian." This article was changed according to the results of the referendum in 1996.

Article 50 of the constitution has a great significance.

"Everybody has the right to maintain their ethnic predisposition, and also no one should be forced to determine and indicate their ethnic pre-disposition."

An offence of one's ethnic dignity is persecuted in accordance with the law.

Everyone has the right to use his mother tongue, to choose of language of communication. The state guarantees according to the law freedom in the choice of the language of upbringing and education."

The Constitution of the Belarusian Republic corresponds to the international standards in guaranteeing the defence of national minority rights, established upon in the UN system and the OECD.

The following laws regulate relations in the field, which concerns us:

Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Education in the Belarusian Republic." This law was accepted by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October, 1991; with changes on March 22, 1995 and May 03, 1996.

Law of the Republic of Belarus "On National Minorities in the Belarusian Republic"

Was accepted by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus on November 11, 1992.

Law of the Republic of Belarus "On the Rights of Children"

The Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus accepted this law on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1993; with changes on May 3, 1996.

Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Languages in the Republic of Belarus."

President of the Republic of Belarus A. Lukashenka; July 17, 1998.

Law of the Belarusian Soviet Socialistic Republic "On Culture in BSSR" was accepted by the Supreme Council of BSRR July 04, 1996.

An analysis of the laws should be begun with the law pertaining to "On Languages in the Belarusian Republic." This legal act is especially important due to several reasons. Firstly, this act "On Languages," in differentiation from the other

laws, was accepted by the new "parliament" and signed by Belarusian president A. Lukashenka. One would assume that as a result of this the current government should respect it. (Lower it will be mentioned about the practice of its applying) Secondly, the law on languages systematises the relations in the sphere of using of national languages and with its resolutions frequently doubles other normative acts. Thirdly, it regulates the relations between two national languages (defined in Article 17 of the Constitution, after changes of the referendum in 1996) and other national languages, which are used by the population, which in accordance with article 2 of the law the state concerns with.

In accordance with article 3 the citizens of Belarus have the right to refer to state organs in the Belarusian language, Russian or in another language which is acceptable for both sides

Article 6 of the law does not allow for the: insult, deprecation of the state languages and others, creating hurdles and limits in their use and instigating friction between ethnic groups on a language basis.

Article 21: "The right to up-bring and obtaining and educate in the national language.

The Republic of Belarus guarantees for each person the right to up-bring and acquire education in the Belarusian or Russian languages. The system of primary schools, secondary schools, technical schools and institutions of higher education realise this right.

People of different nationalities, living in the Belarusian Republic, also have the right to up-bring and acquire an education in the ethnic minority language.

Administration and other workers of the educational system should be capable to fully communicate fluently in Belarusian and Russian.

Article 23: The language of education and up-bringing, the teaching languages in secondary schools.

In the Republic of Belarus the process of education and up-bringing in secondary schools are carried out in the Belarusian or Russian languages. In accordance with the interests of the citizens, on the basis of decisions undertaken by local government and executive bodies, there can be founded secondary schools or classes where process of up-bringing and education is undertaken in the language of the national minority or the language of the national minority is taught.

In all the secondary schools of the Republic of Belarus the instruction of Russian, Belarusian and an additional language is obligatory.

For people who belong to the national minorities and also those who belong to functioning organisations, which unite the citizens belonging to the national minorities, the law "On national minorities in the Republic of Belarus" is very important. It is worth drawing attention to article 5, which guarantees national minorities equal political, economic and social laws and freedoms which include: a) the right to receive assistance from the state for development of

national culture and education; b) the right to educate and use the mother tongue...

Article 12 prohibits discrimination on the basis of national indications.

It is also worth referring to the law, adopted in times of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic which continues to have legal validity on "On culture in the Belarusian SSR" of 1991. Article 10 of the law guarantees the right to expand the culture and language, to create of a national school, and also cultural and educational associations and other types of institutions.

In the Belarusian Republic there also exists a special state organ — State Committee on Religious and Nationalities' Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, whose status was established by the Decree of Council of Ministers on April 17, 1997. The fundamental goals of this organisation are:

The support of harmonious and spiritual development of the citizens of different nationalities living in the Belarusian Republic.

The defence and support in realisation of the rights of Belarusian citizens of different nationalities in the fields of culture, education, language and informational insurance, co-ordination of action of Republican organs of state administration for the creation of conditions and rendering assistance in educational activity of national minorities.

The solving of questions pertaining to constitutional guarantees of freedom of belief.

An important normative act for the realisation of rights of people, who belong to national minorities, is the Instructive-Methodical Letter of the Educational department and Minsk Executive Committee "On organisation of education of children in the Belarusian Republic who belong to national minorities." In the letter there presented ways of creation of schools and classes with a national language of instruction and also other methods of education in the national language, culture and history.

Nevertheless, the way from the legal acceptance of the law to realisation of its goals is a complex process. If the legal basis of the guarantees pertaining to the defence of national minority rights is adequate to international standards, then the realisation of these guarantees is complicated to the degree that one can label certain norms of mentioned here laws one can label as "mortis causa," i.e. dead norms. The practice of enactment, or being accurate — practice of ignoring laws, will be discussed in the next part of the report.

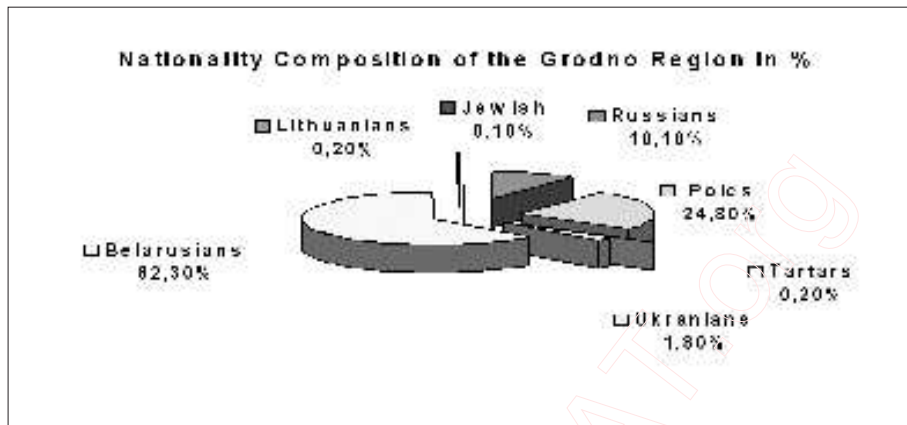
### **The General Situation in the Sphere of National - ity Politics in Harodnya region**

Today's state of affairs pertaining to the observation of national minority rights is tightly bound to the post-war history of Belarus, including Harodnya, in relation to the politics of total russification of the inhabitants, that did not exist in any Soviet Republic. First of all, the Belarusian language was discriminated, and in this situation, of course, there could be

no discourse on the education of languages of other nationalities.

From 1948 until 1988 in Harodnya region, which was occupied by 26.5 percent by Poles, 0.3% Lithuanians, 2% Ukrainians and other nationalities, there was no instruction in schools or classes where the national minorities were taught in their language. (Diagram 1)

Diagram 1



Nevertheless, the period of 1989–1994 could be viewed as a renaissance of national culture and national minority cultures of those who were living in Harodnya region. In this period there appeared a large number of national creative organisations, publishing houses and national cultural non-governmental organisations.

The situation began to change since 1994, i.e., from July 10, 1994 when Alaksandar Lukashenka was elected as the president of Belarus. A. Lukashenka is a scrupulous believer in "the old system" and everything turned backwards. This digression also affected all initiatives, which were associated with the improvement of human rights. The politics of the government towards national minorities became unfriendly.

#### The Russians

A privileged national minority in Belarus, even in relation to Belarusians, is Russians.

Currently, in Harodnya region there live approximately 119,200 Russians, i.e., 10.1 percent of the total number of inhabitants. This is the third place after the Belarusians and Poles. On the 14th of June 1995 a local branch of the Russian Alliance was founded. On July 15<sup>th</sup> 1995 a centre named "Russian Style" was opened. The representatives of the Russian Alliance take part in holidays of national cultures, organise excursions for recreation children, in the Sanatoriums of Smolensk region, also invite to Harodnya musical bands from different cities in Russia.

Citizens of Belarus, who consider themselves as the members of the minority, do not have any diffi-

culties with the education of children in their mother tongue, beliefs, and in the cultivation of their Eastern Orthodox Church. The media, through certain means, propagates and heightens Russian culture and language. The Russian language began to dominate in local authorities, television, radio, press, schools, universities.

#### Tartars

The Tartar minority tightly lives in Iye, Navahrudak, Mir and Lida. There exists a Mosque, which allows the Tartars to cultivate their Islamic religion; language lessons are undertaken in the local school.

They appeared in Harodnya region in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. These were supporters of Tokhtamysh-Khan, they ran away in massive exodus after a civil war. Prince Vitovt, the leader of the Great Duchy of Lithuania ac-

cepted refugees for military service. Besides, in the Great Duchy of Lithuania, there were located hundreds of former slaves: Crimean Tartars and Karaimes, who later served for the Guards of the Prince. The Tartars began to speak to the Belarusian language. However, their prayers remained in Arab and Tchagatai. Currently, in Belarus there lived 12,000 Tartars. A Cultural and Educational Association named "Al-Kitab" has been founded and a quarterly edition "Bayram" is published. In Harodnya region there currently live 2155 Tartars, it is approximately 0.2% of the inhabitants. The first national organisation was established in July of 1989. In 1990 from this organisation emanated the Islamic cultural centre. In April 1991 Harodnya Centre of Tartar Culture was established. The Tartars have their own musical group "Kitch-Ituru" and they have also a religious .

#### Ukrainians

The cultural organisation of the Ukrainians "Barvinok" was established in 1997. It is composed of 30 people; there exists an amateur art activity group and a place to work. In the region there live 21166 Ukrainians, it is approximately 1.8% of the inhabitants of the region.

The situation of the Polish, Lithuanian and Jewish national minorities is far more complicated.

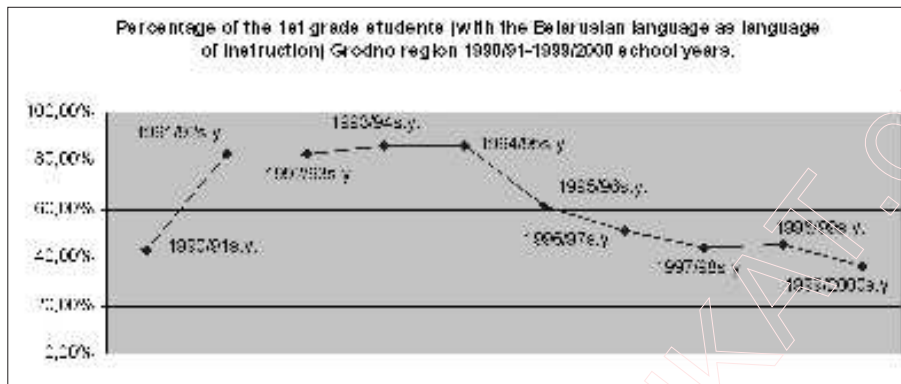
In 1999 among the national minority organisations in Harodnya region there arose a mutual problem-the method of undertaking the census of population.

The actions of the census counters create the presumption that they received an order to persuade citizens within the fifth paragraph.<sup>1</sup> In the first

issue, "mother tongue" and in the second, "language spoken at home," that this language is Russian. Taking into consideration that in Belarusian towns the most frequently used language is Russian, similar actions of census counters are serious violations of the rights of people who belong to national minorities.<sup>2</sup> The actions of the census counters discriminate not only the national minorities but also against conscious Belarusians.

### The Realisation of the Right of the Belarusians to Educate their Children in their mother tongue, and the Guarantees of Using the Belarusian Language.

Graphic 1



In the 1990/1991 school year, at the beginning of the belarusification of Secondary Schools in Harodnya region, 43.6% of the first year students applied for education in Belarusian. On the first of September in 1999 — 45.1% of first graders entered into a Belarusian language school. And preparation courses were entered by 37%.<sup>3</sup> Between 1991/92 and 1994/95 — 80% of first year students were educated in Belarusian.

Table 1 effectively illustrates the politics of the previous government. In 1991 in accordance with the law "On Languages in the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic" and the state program of development of the Belarusian and other national languages the government began work focused on its realisation. The Belarusian law on the rebirth of national languages was one of the most lenient among all the Post-Soviet republics. It envisaged the return to the mother tongue during 10 years beginning with the first-grade.

Within the initiative groups, which opposed the education of children in Belarusian were parents who recently arrived in Belarus (for example military). Thanks to the teachers they were successful in obtaining signatures of the rest parents for the transi-

tion into the Russian language education. Arguments used by these groups were: a lack of language perspective, a lack of a strong teaching core, a lack of methodical aids, which reduce the level of education and, as a result, the opportunity to enter a university.

Not all the teachers of the primary schools spoke the Belarusian language, however, this indicator was not terrible: 669 primary school teachers in Harodnya, 496 spoke the Belarusian language which is approximately 74.1%. In the kindergartens the situation was worse: 2265 of staffs, 1371 had the capacity to speak Belarusian, that is approximately 60.5%.<sup>4</sup> In general the policy of belarusification of the Secondary.

In the schools of the city of Harodnya there were organised 49 circles, 38 study groups and 9 folkloristic groups and 5 clubs within which the Belarusian language was learned.

During this period, a very important element of the success of belarusification was the proper policy administered by the Teacher Training Institute, the organ responsible for the accreditation of teachers. In the whole, the

teachers have an impartial view in relation to the idea of national rebirth. There were those among them which were against the belarusification, after all, they became the basis of this politics. The Harodnya Institute at this level, was not able to deal with the established goal. Within this period the work of conscious creation had a very great significance.

It is an interesting fact, that today, when Belarusian classes are liquidated, many teachers, those that were previously against the introduction of Belarusian into the school system, are actively against a transition to education in the Russian language. Children from Belarusian grades behave similarly. An interesting occurrence took place at Secondary School 21 in Harodnya. The administration of the school wanted to introduce Russian as the primary language of instruction, but the students had formed an opposition against this transition. Similarly, this type of event occurred in school number 3 and these two occurrences are not exceptions.

<sup>1</sup> From a copy of the statistical graph in the Appendix.

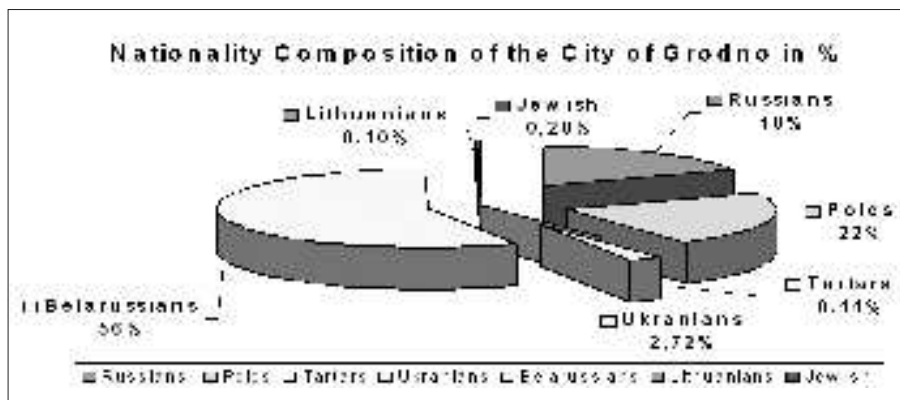
<sup>2</sup> People whose names are known to the author can confirm the given incidents.

<sup>3</sup> In association with the reform of the Secondary School educational system and passing to a 12-year system.

<sup>4</sup> Confirmation through Harodnya Region Department of Education in Harodnya is located in Appendix.



Diagram 2



In 1999/2000 school year, in Harodnya region, none of children began an education in of preparatory courses in the Belarusian language. Only in 1 first grade class room did kids were learnt in the Belarusian language, this was equal to less than 1 percent in a city where 56.1% are the Belarusians. (Diagram 2)

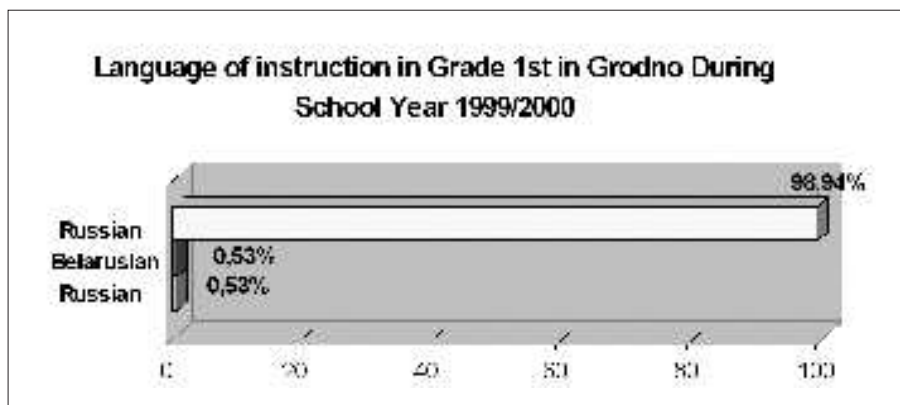
**Percentage of Students of Grades 1–11 of Harodnya Region with Belarusian as the Primary Language of Instruction**

School Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1990/1991	43,6 %	22,5 %	22,4 %	22,1 %	23,5 %	23,9 %	22,9 %	22,8 %	22,8 %	21,3 %	22,1 %
1991/1992	83,0 %	43,6 %	22,5 %	22,4 %	22,1 %	23,5 %	23,9 %	22,9 %	22,8 %	22,4 %	21,3 %
1992/1993	82,9 %	83,0 %	43,6 %	22,5 %	22,4 %	22,1 %	23,5 %	23,9 %	22,9 %	22,7 %	22,4 %
1993/1994	86,5 %	82,9 %	83,0 %	43,6 %	22,5 %	22,4 %	22,1 %	23,5 %	23,9 %	22,8 %	22,7 %
1994/1995	86,5 %	86,5 %	82,9 %	83,0 %	43,6 %	22,5 %	22,4 %	22,1 %	23,5 %	23,9 %	2,9 %
1995/1996	61,5 %	76,2 %	81,2 %	79,3 %	69,6 %	42,8 %	22,5 %	22,4 %	22,1 %	23,5 %	23,9 %
1996/1997	50,8 %	59,7 %	72,0 %	76,6 %	71,3 %	69,5 %	43,1 %	22,6 %	22,6 %	20,5 %	22,0 %
1997/1998	44,1 %	50,0 %	58,6 %	70,3 %	69,1 %	68,9 %	68,5 %	42,2 %	22,6 %	21,4 %	20,8 %
1998/1999	20,1 %*	43,8 %	49,2 %	57,5 %	63,7 %	65,8 %	68,1 %	66,0 %	42,1 %	20,3 %	21,6 %
1999/2000	?? %**	19,6 %	43,7 %	48,3 %	53,5 %	62,5 %	64,1 %	64,7 %	66,0 %	36,1 %	20,2 %

\* In 1998/1999 and also in 1999/2000 school years there were developed preparatory courses. The percent of children who undertook instruction there in the Belarusian language amounted to 45.5% and 37% respectively.

\* The data are given for the school year 1999/2000 not known.

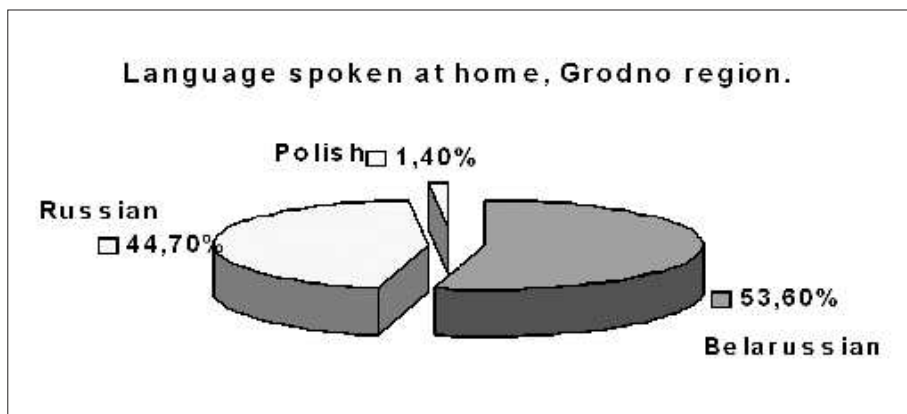
Chart 1



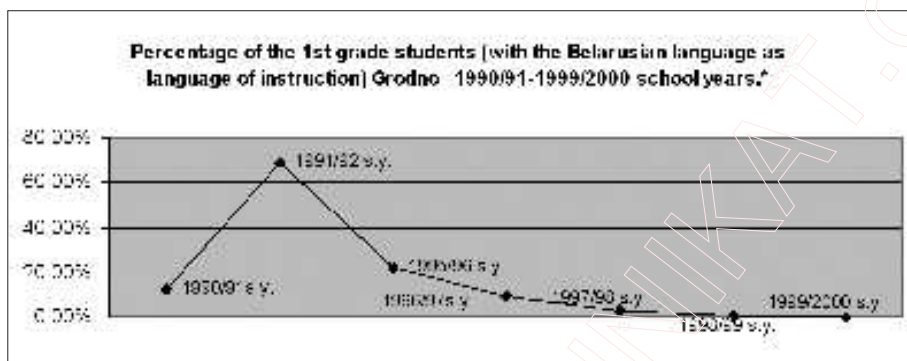
Let us return to Belarusian schools. As it is seen in the chart and tables above, the breaking point was reached in the 1996/1997 school year, i.e., 2 years after the elections of the first president of the Belarusian Republic and 1 year after the May Referendum of 1995 which served as the formal basis for the depreciation of the Belarusian language.

Harodnya Regional Executive Committee released the statistical

Diagram 3



Graphic 2



\*The data of 1992/1993–1994/1995-school years in Harodnya are not known, but we may assure that they are similar to the data of 1991/1992 school year.

census for 1999.<sup>5</sup> The information reflects that the percentage of inhabitants of Harodnya region who indicate the Belarusian language, as their mother tongue, increased by 4.5%. At home 53.6% of the people of Harodnya region speak Belarusian. This to a large measure is an indication of the protest against the politics of russification.

### The Polish National Minority

The Poles, together with the Belarusians and Lithuanians, are considered, in fact, aborigines of Harodnya territory. The representatives of this nation came here from the regions of the river Visla and Mazurian Lakes in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. More intensive migration to the lands of Harodnya region was after adoption Krev Union in the 14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> cc.

The census of 1989 established that 418,000 Poles live in Belarus, from which 13.3% of these people consider their paternal language Polish.

In accordance with the given of the last census in 1999 the Polish minority within the Harodnya region amounted to 294 000 people which represents 24.8% of the population of the region. The Poles are the second largest ethnic group after the Belarusians. Over ten years ago, the Polish National Alliance was established in Belarus and now it has a membership of approximately 30,000 members. About 50 amateur clubs were established. The newspaper "Glos znad Niemna" is published by the group. Two schools were established.

After the referendum in 1996, the Belarusian government began a massive attack not only on all elements

associated with the Belarusian culture, language and history but they also began to limit the rights of national minorities.

A fundamental problem of the Polish national minority is that equally through the national government and the local level, the right for children to be educated in their mother tongue is not being enforced. From 1988, under the influence of activists of the Polish Cultural and Educational Union of Adam Mickiewicz, who organised parents to submit requests for the introduction of Polish as a subject within the school system, the authorities started to organise instruction in the Polish language in the school system, however, they did everything to restrict its introduction only to study groups and courses. This is how, for example, there is a refusal for the building of a school in Navahrudak because there are organised clubs. "Let's learn the Polish Lan-

<sup>5</sup> Given from the Census results from Harodnya region.

guage" in the city<sup>6</sup>. Everyone understands that the level of instruction associated with club is far from the level of instruction during classes which has a direct effect on the result of learning.

Since 1988 the Polish Alliance in Belarus began an active discussion with the authorities of Harodnya and the Republic pertaining to the building of Polish Schools in Harodnya. At a meeting which took place in 1994 between the leadership of the Polish Alliance and the Prime-Minister Kebich, there was signed an agreement, which in accordance with there were to be constructed two Polish schools in Harodnya, one at the costs of the Polish Republic and the second at the cost of the Belarusian Republic. After the acquisition of governmental authority by A. Lukashenka, a new government was created and the Polish National Alliance received a written rejection of performance of duties which the Belarusian government had entered into agreement upon. This was motivated by a lack of financial ability to meet the costs of construction.

This is best exemplified by a speech of Deputy of National Assembly. In which the Poles were openly called citizens of the second category, because they are interfering the process of integration with Russia. According to the Deputy Kostyana, the Poles within Belarus, are like the "Fifth column, which is ready at any moment to betray the Belarusian nation."<sup>7</sup>

The President of the Polish National Alliance approached the head of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly with the request of explication of the words spoken but there was no response. The prosecutor office also did not react.

The Belarusian President in his "Statement to the Parliament," had charged the Poles with the desire for autonomy. Even though international standards in the field of defence of national minority rights encourages for states the support for the creation of autonomy. In Belarus, autonomy is associated with separatism of the worst meaning of the word.

President Lukashenka has a strange habit, to divide the people into two parts. In the same way he is behaving towards the citizens of Belarus of Polish origin, dividing them into the simple and uneducated who support his politics and "a handful of nationalists trying to impose the Polish question." These types of statements by the very person who should guarantee the constitutional integrity of the state can create concern if indeed the constitution is adhered to by anyone.

One of the most serious violations of human rights, belonging to national minorities, is the practice of KGB functionaries to "speak" which activists of the Polish national movement. The President of the Polish National Alliance in Belarus turned to the au-

thorities with the request to leave the leadership of the alliance be left alone because the activity of the Polish National Alliance takes place within the framework required by the constitution.<sup>8</sup>

Since 1996 until today the authorities in Berastsye, Navahrudak and Harodnya have refused the Polish Alliance the construction of Polish schools at the cost of the Polish National Alliance of Belarus.

A group of initiative parents obtained 3,067 signatures under an appeal to the president of the Republic of Belarus, which indicated a concern over the fact, that the question pertaining to the construction of schools with Polish language instruction within the Suburb of Vishnevet in Harodnya and that "within the past 8 years there has not been created even one school text-book for grades 2-8 in Polish" had not been considered.<sup>9</sup>

In Navahrudak the authorities do everything to liquidate the education of children in the Polish language. They were able to do this with a first grade class in the 1997/98 school year with one of the Navahrudak schools. Firstly, there is a pressure initiated upon the parents who are bullied by the threat of loss of employment. Secondly, the mass media assists in an attempt to portray the lack of perspective by such an education. In addition, the authorities in Navahrudak requested from the parents of the children which began their education in the Polish language, to show proof of their Polish origin, which is a serious violation of the rights of parents and their children. As a result of these violations, the President of the Polish National Alliance turned to the head of the Harodnya Regional Executive Committee with a request that the head reign in his department and personnel to respect the law.<sup>10</sup> There was no undertaking. The Polish Alliance also referred to the prosecutor's office of Harodnya region, however, the violation of law "On Languages" were not noticed.<sup>11</sup>

For four years the Polish Alliance has attempted to receive a license from the authorities of Navahrudak to build a school in the Polish language of instruction. From the beginning the authorities of Navahrudak motivated the refusal to build the school by a result of a lack of funding in the cities budget.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the refusal was also based on a insignificant amount of Belarusian citizens of Polish national identity living in Navahrudak. The amount of citizens of this ethnic origin is 5.3%.

The leadership of the Polish National Alliance requested a commentary in this situation. The case was referred to the President of Belarus A. Lukashenka and also to the State Committee on Religious and Nationalities Affairs by The Cabinet of Ministers.<sup>13</sup> From the perspective of the authorities there has been no

<sup>6</sup> The response of the Regional Action Committee can be found in Appendix.

<sup>7</sup> The response of the Polish National Alliance to the head of the State Committee on Religious and Minorities Affairs and the Prosecutor's Office can be found in Appendix.

<sup>8</sup> The paperwork concerning the protest can be found within Appendix.

<sup>9</sup> The request by the initiators can be found in Appendix.

<sup>10</sup> The request to the head of the GOKW pertaining to the behavior of the authorities in Navahrudak can be found in Appendix.

<sup>11</sup> The respond of the prosecutor can be found in Appendix.

<sup>12</sup> The rejection for the construction of the school can be found in Appendix.

<sup>13</sup> The copy of the letter can be found in Appendix.

steps taken in the direction of a constructive solving of this question.

In a response to the violation of rights by the authorities of Navahrudak, the Polish Alliance had turned to the Harodnya Municipal Executive Committee with a request to obtain a license to picketing the building of the Harodnya Regional Executive Committee, but they did not receive permission to organise a protest.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the Polish Alliance had undertaken a protest on the territory which was adjacent to the administrative building of the Polish Alliance. After 30 minutes of the protest, in accordance with the requirements of the police, the protest was halted. An illegal protest was also organised in Navahrudak. On March 3<sup>rd</sup> of 1999, the President of the Polish Alliance had referred to the regional court of the Navahrudak region with the goal of asking for a recall from the decision pertaining to the rejection of the building of the school and the ability and the uselessness of opening classes with the Polish language of instruction.<sup>15</sup> The decision of the court did not satisfy the Polish National Alliance.

The laws of the Polish national minority are infringed in the community of Voronovo where the population is approximately 80% Polish. The problem is framed in terms of macro-economic difficulties in Belarus, nevertheless, two classes were liquidated, one with Polish language of instruction and the other with Polish as a subject. The President of Voronovski Regional Official of the Polish National Alliance referred to the leader Voronovski of the Regional Executive Committee with the request to maintain Polish classes and obligated himself to except upon his social organisation all the costs associated with the education of children.<sup>16</sup> Parents wrote letters containing similar requests to Voronovski Regional Executive Committee and the head of the Harodnya Regional Executive Committee, in which they stated that they would not allow their children to participate in school until the issue is resolved positively.<sup>17</sup> The actions of the parents and activists of the Polish National Alliance did not bring any results

In Lida, the authorities also prevented the creation of classes with the Polish language of instruction, motivating their decision similarly as in Navahrudak.

The inactivity of the Ministry of Education in the department of creating a state program of education in the mother tongue, and also that in Belarus school text-books and educational supplements are not published in the Polish language can be viewed as a restriction of rights to educate in the mother tongue.

In 1997 the Polish National Alliance had sponsored convocation of its organisation. Responses were accepted to the government informing of the

Religious situation within Belarus. A request was formulated pertaining to the construction of kindergartens and schools in the Polish language of instruction. The Polish National Alliance received a written caution of the Ministry of Justice of the Belarusian Republic, which informed, that the given responses violate the legislation of the Belarusian Republic.

Recently, the authorities do not permit the entrance of Polish teachers into Belarus who have the goal of teaching Polish.

In April of 1998, the Association of Polish Doctors by to the Polish National Alliance turned to the Harodnya Municipal Executive Committee with the request for a license for a educational conference pertaining to the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the renowned Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz.<sup>18</sup> The response of the committee was negative. This was motivated by the good of medical practitioners of different nationalities, which the association is discriminating due to ethnic allegiance.

In Belarus, there live citizens of the Republic of Belarus, former soldiers of the AK (Domestic Army) who fought Fascism during the II world war. They have not been given the recognition of state soldiers, and for this reason they are prevented from obtaining certain exemptions which are given to participants of war. These are the only people from the coalition against Hitler, who are not given exemptions. Soldiers of the defence war which was carried out in 1939 by Poland, have the status of veterans of war, however, they are also prevented from any exemptions.

### The Lithuanian National Minority

Harodnya region has a long border with Lithuania. In spite of long term habitation in a mutual state of the Great Duchy of Lithuania. There are not many Lithuanians in the region; approximately 2,964 people, which is about 0.2% of the population. There were Lithuanian school in the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic until the 1970's, when the last one was closed. Similarly as to the other nationalities the Lithuanians experienced the peak of their rebirth in the beginning of the 1990's when there was the creation of Lithuanian schools. In general, there are 25 Lithuanian villages, and two Lithuanian Parishes. Children of Lithuanians living in the regional centre, learn the Lithuanian language in Sunday school. In accordance with the census of 1999 the Lithuanian minority within Harodnya approximates 2,964 people, which is about 0.2% of the number of the inhabitants in the region.

The Lithuanian Association in Harodnya named "Tevine" was established in 1995. The main goal of

<sup>14</sup> The request and denial for the organisation of the protest can be found in Appendix.

<sup>15</sup> The reasons can be found in Appendix.

<sup>16</sup> The letter of President of Voronovski of the local branch of the Polish National Alliance to the Head of Voronovski of the Regional Action Committee can be found in Appendix.

<sup>17</sup> The letter of the parents to the Harodnya Regional Action Committee can be found in the Appendix.

<sup>18</sup> The statutes of Belarus prevent the organisation of such projects without the approval of the authorities.



the Lithuanian Association is educational activity. Lithuanians have in the Harodnya region two schools with the national language of instruction in the town of Rymdzyuny (Ostrovetski region), a secondary school and primary school in Giry where the largest number of Lithuanians live. The next largest community is in Pelyasy, Voronovski region.

The president of the regional department of "Tevine" Algimantas Dirgintchus names the following problems in the activity of this association which are the result, according to his belief, of the fault of the authorities and which infringe upon the rights of minorities: lack of educational staff, lack of a legally defined positioning of schools and centre of Lithuanian culture in Rymdzyuny and difficulties associated with the renting out of premises for Sunday schools. Up until the present, the Ministry of Education of Belarus has not developed regulations pertaining to Sunday schools. Even though "Tevine" had referred to the authorities with these difficulties numerous times. An instructive-methodical letter "On the Organisation within the Belarusian Republic of the education of children, who belong to national minorities" speaks of schools on free days, however, it does not define concretely as to what type of study groups are these schools.

The authorities are deliberately referring teachers to these schools which are poorly prepared, thus lowering the level of education in the national schools. In Belarus there is no of high school with a department of Lithuanian language and culture, even more, in the National Academy of Education there is not even a department for Lithuanian language and culture.

A serious problem for the union "Tevine" is the lack of a defined legal statute pertaining to the Centre of Lithuanian Culture in Rymdzyuny. Later the Lithuanian side started to finance the construction project itself. This means that the Belarusian side did not invest anything into the construction of the centre (the Lithuanian investment is approximated at 2.5 mln USD) but established the direction of its construction. The authorities of the Ostrovetski region turned to the Lithuanian side with a proposition of negotiations on the issue of the legal status of the centre, simultaneously requesting a halt to construction. Lithuania agreed to negotiate but did not cease the construction of the centre.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 1995, in Minsk, there took place negotiations between the Prime-Minister of the Lithuanian Republic A. Shlzhawitchus and the Prime-Minister of the Republic of Belarus M. Chygir, during which it was established that the owner of the centre will be the Republican Association of Lithuanians in Belarus.<sup>19</sup> On July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1996, there was established a working group of experts concerning themselves with the development of a functional

mechanism for the Lithuanian Cultural and Educational Centre.<sup>20</sup>

Currently a danger of amalgamation of two schools in Rymdzyuny which are to have Belarusian and Lithuanian languages of instruction. The amalgamation of the schools was planned of September 1<sup>st</sup> 1999, however, due to the protests of the Lithuanian Association the amalgamation has not taken place.<sup>21</sup>



Point 7 of the aforementioned protocol indicates that the director and teaching staff of the school are called to their position with the acceptance of the opinion of the Republic Association of Belarusian Lithuanians. When it came to filling the positions, the director of the school was occupied by a person who was completely unknown to the Lithuanian Association, that insisted on a candidate from the Giry school with experience in working at school with the Lithuanian language of instruction. Several months later, at the request of the local Lithuanians, the director was fired due to drunkenness.

Contrary to the agreement between the governments of Lithuania and Belarus, the property of the Centre has not been transited to the Republican Union of Lithuanians. Today the authorities are working through an idea proposed by the Lithuanian side to create a variation of a partnership "Lithuanian Centre of Culture, Education and Information.

Decree of the Justice Department of the Harodnya Regional Executive Committee postponed the re-registration of "Tevine" as a social organisation.<sup>22</sup> As for the Polish Alliance of Belarus, "Tevine" changed an issue in the statute in which a goal is labelled; defence of the rights of Lithuanians. The term "Lithuanians" in the statutory documents is changed to "members," i.e. the group "Tevine" can only defend the interests of its members and not Lithuanians according to this certification.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> A copy of the protocol of the agreement can be found within Appendix.

<sup>20</sup> A copy of the protocol of the meeting can be found in Appendix.

<sup>21</sup> The report is written by V. P. Zametalin.

<sup>22</sup> The decision can be found in Appendix.

There are many Sunday schools, where the Lithuanian language, history and culture is not only learned by children but adults who do not have no other opportunities for this type of education. There is no help, besides the exemption from rent for the Association office in Harodnya of the regional and central authorities for the Lithuanians.

### The Jewish National Minority

The Jewish massive arrival on these territories is connected with the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when in Western Europe (Germany, Spain and others) began to castigate the Jews. They found their security in the Great Duchy of Lithuania. Here people of different religious beliefs were treated with tolerance. The first communications were established in Harodnya at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. There existed Jewish spiritual seminars (yeshibot) in Volozhyn and Mahylou and a Talmud academy in Mir (yeshiva). In Harodnya in 1578 and in Slomin in 1642 brick synagogues were built. From the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century one could observe an intensive migration of the Jews from Germany and Poland. Then the Jews began to acquire significant position in the ethnic structure of the population of the Duchy. After the Russian occupation of these territories, they were labeled as the "borders of settlement." The Tsar's government in 1794 forbade the Jews to move from these areas to other places such as Moscow or St. Petersburg. Before the Second World War, the Jewish population comprised 14% of the population of inhabitants of Belarus. In the cities and villages of Harodnya region the Jewish population in some instances amounted to 50%–60% of the total inhabitants.

In the 1920's Yiddish was one of the 4 official languages of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. In the years of the Great Patriotic War by the result of Nazi genocide 300,000 Jews died. The Jewish population amounted to 8.2% of the population in 1926, however, they amounted to 1.8% of the population in 1959. Currently there live approximately 112,000 Jews in Belarus approximately 1% of the population and many of them are currently emigrating.

Currently, within the region, there live 937 Jews, about 0.1 percent of the population and the majority lives in Harodnya. There was created a regional association of Jewish culture after the name Leiba Naidus. In May of 1997 the charity organisation "Khesed Nokhum" was established. There is a Sunday school, in which the Ivrit (modern Hebrew) language is taught. There is a musical group for adults, and a group for the youth "Freilakhs."

With a small amount of the Jews there can be no talk of the creation of classes with the national language of instruction, or even about teaching the language. Before the Second World War there were

several Jewish schools in Harodnya. The massive migration of the Jews from Belarus continues. According to the last census the number of the Jews during the past ten years continues to decreased at a double pace of approximately 57.6%. The activity of the union is largely concentrated on cultural affairs and the organisation of grades in Sunday school.

### Conclusion

Today in Belarus rights of different national minorities and also rights of the Belarusians are roughly violated. Authorities do not take any measures to improve the situation.

Worsening atmosphere, reluctance to help the citizens of national minority are rough violation of international norms. Reaching an agreement between the authorities and PAB is a vital necessity. With this purpose it's worse conducting "round-table" discussions.

The ministry of Education has urgently to work out programs of instruction in language of national minorities, and to publish necessary text-books.

The Belarusian language is to be back to secondary and high school, administrative bodies. It's necessary to illustrate the history of the people objectively, to revive the Belarusian culture on the state level.

On the whole, national politics of the government of the Republic of Belarus has to be completely changed.

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<sup>23</sup> A page of the statute with the changes can be found within Appendix.

Yauhen Androsik

## CONFESSIONS

The first of the world religions to come to Belarus was Christianity. It began to infiltrate from Byzantium in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. By the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Christianity was established in the Duchy of Polotsk, the oldest state formation within the territory of today's Belarus. The official year in which Christianity was adopted is considered to be 992 AD, when the Polotsk Bishopric Chamber was founded. The arrival of Christianity from Byzantium conditioned the domination of Eastern traditions which are also present in Belarus today. Therefore, Christianity had appeared and established itself in these lands even before its official split into the Orthodox and Catholic churches in 1054.

Catholicism of the Latin tradition enjoyed a significant expansion after Grand Duke Jagiello of Lithuania, signed the Krev ("blood") Union in 1385 (when Belarusian lands became the nucleus of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, or GDL, founded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century).

Islam came to these areas in the 14<sup>th</sup> century with the Tartar troops hired by Grand Duke Vitaut in order to reinforce his army. A large part of those Tartars later settled in the GDL. Famous literary and historical evidence of this is a copy of the Koran written in Belarusian, but using Arabic ligatured script.

Judaism was brought by Jewish merchants, and their presence increased as the foreign economic ties of the GDL extended. A great number of Jews moved to the GDL in order to escape oppression, because this state offered a certain degree of tolerance in its relations between religions. Another factor that influenced the concentration of Jews in this area was Catherine II's edict of January 3, 1792 that first introduced the so-called settlement line — a certain radius from large cities, inside which Jews were banned from settling. Due to

those circumstances Jews made up 50 or more percent of the population of various towns in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They preserved their faith by living in compact communities.

The Reformation brought Protestantism to the GDL, and it was spreading from as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the forms of Lutheranism, Calvinism, Aryanism, and so forth<sup>1</sup>. Those trends, however, did not become widespread, remaining as the faiths of individual prominent feudal lords (particularly Cal-



Oppositional action "The Charnobyl" ' Way 2001,"

Minsk, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

Photo: IREX/ProMedia

vinism and Lutheranism). Some of their subordinate peasants were also forced into those faiths, as well as Germans and other immigrants from Protestant backgrounds. The growth of Protestant churches was largely halted by the signing of the Lublin Union, following which GDL Catholics were able to rely on

<sup>1</sup> Encyclopaedia of Belarusian History. Vol.5, Minsk, 1999, p. 568.

strong support from Poland in fighting against the Reformation <sup>2</sup>.

The Lublin Union of 1569 merged the Polish Kingdom and GDL into a federal unitary state and gave Roman Catholicism additional opportunities to expand into the East. An important milestone in this process was the Church Union signed in Brest in 1596; to a great extent the preservation of the Byzantine tradition in these lands was possible thanks to that treaty. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of Uniates resident in the Belarusian parts of the GDL <sup>3</sup>.

The Old Believers came to the GDL in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to escape oppression by the Russian authorities, and settled in compact groups all across the GDL.

Thus, thanks to historical circumstances, the GDL developed a tolerant attitude towards different faiths, resulting in the presence of a multitude of religions among the population.

The annexation of the Belarusian lands to the Russian Empire in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century brought about changes in the religious life of the people. Despite the fact that all faiths were formally permitted, the Orthodox Church enjoyed much greater opportunities for expansion because it was the state religion of the Russian Empire.

Before the partitions of Poland (*Rzeczpospolita*), there was one Orthodox eparchy whose seat was in Mahyleu. In 1755, Georgiy Kaninskiy became head of the eparchy and started an active campaign to promote the spread of the Orthodox Church. When the first partition occurred in 1772, he requested permission from Catherine II to convert Uniates into Orthodoxy. In 1780, permission was granted to appoint Orthodox priests to vacancies in Uniate churches. Thus, the expansion of the Orthodox Church into Belarusian lands occurred mainly through conversion from the Uniate faith<sup>4</sup>. Until 1905, conversion from Orthodox to another faith remained illegal<sup>5</sup>.

The partition of 1772 meant that about 100 000 Catholics went over to the Russian Empire. Catherine II decreed that all directives and messages from the Apostolic Capital could only be publicised among the Catholic population with the empress's approval<sup>6</sup>. The annexation of new territories entailed changing of borders of Catholic bishoprics. A large part of the Catholic clergy were displeased by this joining and the changes that were taking place in the Catholic Church and society. Conspiratorial organisations started to form, and some of the clergy sided with the French during the 1812 invasion and participated in the uprising of 1830–1831. An 1832 edict led to the closure of a great number of monasteries. The next step was to reduce the amount of monasteries and categorise them as

“regular” or “irregular,” the latter were prohibited from accepting new monks. If there were less than eight monks left in a monastery, it was closed down.

The Tsarist attitude towards Catholics varied. Periods of loyalty would change into oppression, especially after an uprising. The 1905 law on religious tolerance led to numerous Orthodox Christians converting to Catholicism, but the Tsarist establishment only tolerated Catholics as long as their interests did not conflict with those of the empire.

As far as the Uniate Church was concerned, the attitude of the Russian Empire was strictly negative. An edict of April 1794 ordered that any obstacles preventing Uniates from returning to Orthodoxy be removed. Uniate priests were banned from staying in areas where they had formerly had temples. Generally, the official policy aimed to abolish the Uniate Church. Tsar Nicholas I planned to strengthen the Western provinces of the Russian Empire by increasing the presence of the Orthodox church. This was achieved by converting Uniate churches to the Orthodox faith. The Uniates suffered a severe blow following the uprising of 1830–1831, when more than half the Basilian monasteries were abolished to avenge their monks' participation in the uprising. Simultaneously, the Tsarist government was pursuing a policy aimed to control the Uniate Church, which resulted in it being abolished by merging it with the Orthodox Church in 1839. The 29<sup>th</sup> Cossack regiment was sent to Vitsebsk province in January 1839 in order to prevent unrest among believers. The feared unrest struck nonetheless, and the Basilian monks and nuns put up the strongest resistance. The Uniates were doomed, however, since their poor clergy, gentry, and peasantry were unable to withstand state policy and the treachery of the Orthodox Church patriarchs.

The Russian government's attitude towards Protestant movements was rather liberal. This was mostly to do with the fairly small Protestant population and their inconsequential influence on society, but the Tsarist authorities nevertheless took steps to limit the Protestants' activity. “*Once Belarus had been joined to Russia, its Protestant traditions were put on ice, as if awaiting better times.*”<sup>7</sup>

The first communities of Baptists and Evangelist Christians appeared in Belarus in the 1870s, followed by Adventists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, then Methodists, Jehovah's Witnesses and others which gained an increased following throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The establishment of the Soviet regime radically changed the nature of relations between religion and the state. Throughout its history, the USSR applied a policy of state atheism, according to which fighting religion was seen as being akin to the fight against capitalism, and it was Karl Marx who dubbed religion the

<sup>3</sup> Faiths in Belarus (end of 18<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries), Minsk, 1998, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Faiths in Belarus (end of 18<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries), Minsk, 1998, pp. 32–33, 43.

<sup>5</sup> The Byelorussian SSR. A Concise Encyclopaedia. Vol. 1, Minsk, 1978, pp. 616–617.

<sup>6</sup> Faiths in Belarus (end of 18<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries), Minsk, 1998, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Lych L. — The Protestant Church in the National and Cultural Life of Belarus: Traditions and the Present // an annual publication by the Belarusian Academy of Science's Institute of History, 1999, p. 116.



"opium of the people." This policy dealt a serious blow to all faiths.

The state paid special attention to banning the "revivalist wave" among religious organisations which had become quite influential in the early 1920s. The Uniate Church was unable to revive itself in Soviet Belarus, but continued to exist, despite certain difficulties, in Western Belarus which was then part of Poland.

Even early as the first few years of its existence, the Soviet regime began to take a heavy toll on the material position of all churches by expropriating their buildings and other property. The church-robbery campaign reached its peak in 1922, based on a resolution by the administration of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) entitled "Concerning means of confiscating church valuables in use by groups of believers." This was implemented under the pretext of a need to help the starving people of the Volga<sup>7</sup>. Priests and laymen were harshly repressed if they opposed the state policy. In 1922 alone, 201 Orthodox priests were executed by shooting in the Byelorussian SSR<sup>8</sup>.

The next step taken by the CEC to limit the rights of churches was its 1929 resolution "On Religious Associations," which banned all clerical activity outside of churches and temples.

The repression campaign of the 1930s hit the Catholics painfully. The overwhelming majority of the clergy were repressed, which meant that, by the end of the decade, the religious life of Catholics in Eastern Belarus was in fact only able to carry on deep underground.

Other religious movements also suffered from the destructive effects of the 1930s' repression which effectively forced them into the underground as well.

After WWII, all the religions were in a difficult situation, but the Soviet regime remained most loyal towards the Orthodox Church. Aleksiy Simanskiy, elected Patriarch of Moscow and All The Russias in 1945, was awarded four Orders of the Labour Banner during the course of his patriarchate<sup>9</sup>. The way the church hierarchy was treated, however, did not reflect the actual state of the Orthodox Church. The number of parishes, monasteries and convents was dwindling; strong anti-religious propaganda resulted

in reduced followers of all the religions; and especially strong pressure was put onto the Protestant and Judaistic communities.

Belarus's religious life in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has been marked by a great diversity of religions which are both traditional and non-traditional for the region. The points at which they all began to grow more active coincided with the beginning of the democratisation process at the turn of the last decade, and with preparations for the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Russian Christendom celebration in 1988.

Another factor that stimulated the emergence of various religious movements was the collapse of the USSR and the restoration of independence to the countries that had once constituted the Soviet empire. The changing way of life, streams of new information, and dropping standards of living forced former Soviet people to change their outlooks radically. After realising that the "Communist paradise" had been a myth, many people started to seek true heaven.

People's inner urge to turn towards religion was a good basis both for the expansion of traditional beliefs (Christianity, Islam and Judaism) and the formation of movements which were new to Belarus (Krishnaism, Buddhism, Baha'ism, Aamoto), as well as for the widening of various Protestant movements within traditional religions. Unfortunately, destructive sects also began to multiply in Belarus, including the White Brotherhood, Satanism, Aum Sinrikyo, the Church of Jesus Christ's Disciples, etc. In co-operation with some state institutions (e.g. the state committee for religious and nationality affairs), representatives of traditional faiths are striving to prevent the spread of this kind of sects, and this has had some positive results. For example, in recent years it became possible to limit and, to some extent, liquidate branches of such sects as the White Brotherhood, Aum Sinrikyo, the Family of Love, and Ahmadzia<sup>10</sup>.

According to the state committee for religious and nationality affairs, the following list of religious organisations were active in Belarus by January 1, 1999:

Obviously, the degree to which these various faiths affect life in Belarus differs greatly. The leading faiths are traditional Catholic and Orthodox ones, with Protestantism clearly becoming more influential.

		All Belarus	Berastsye region	Vitsebsk region	Homel region	Harodnya region	Mahyleu region	Minsk region	Minsk City
1	Orthodox Church	1081	299	144	142	166	67	240	23
2	Roman Catholic Church	399	51	64	19	169	15	73	8

<sup>7</sup> Faiths in Belarus (end of 18<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries), Minsk, 1998, p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> *Bozhim shlyakham* ("In A Godly Way"), No. 50, 1952, p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> Yakunin G. — The True Face of the Moscow Patriarchy, Brest, 1996, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Koktysh A. — The Sweet "Flute," *Svobodnye Novosti Plus* ("Free News Plus"), No. 7, 2000.

		All Belarus	Berastsye region	Vitsebsk region	Homel region	Harodnya region	Mahyleu region	Minsk region	Minsk City
3	Greek Catholic Church	13	3	2	2	2	1	1	2
4	Catholics of Roman tradition	2							2
5	Old Believers	36	1	20	2		7	3	3
6	Reformed Church	1							1
7	Lutheran Church	4		1		2			1
8	Evangelist Christians/Baptists	233	75	26	21	19	27	50	15
9	The Council of Churches	31	10	3	3	3	5	6	1
10	John the Baptist Church	1				1			
11	New Apostle Church	20	3	3	5	6	2		1
12	Church of the First Christians	1	1						
13	Christians of Evangelical Faith	414	132	35	50	32	32	114	19
14	Christians of Complete Gospel	47	6	5	12	6	1	7	10
15	Christians of Apostolic Faith	9	5			3			1
16	Christ Church	6	1			1	1	1	2
17	Messianic communities	2							2
18	Seventh Day Adventists	45	13	9	7	5	3	6	2
19	Jehovah 's Witnesses	21	3	6	6	4	1		1
20	Mormons	3							3
21	Judaists	13	3	2	2	1	3		2
22	Progressive Judaists	8		2	1	2	2		1
23	Muslims	24	2	5		10	1	4	2
24	Baha 'is	5	1	1	1	1			1
25	Aamoto	1							1
26	Krishnaists	7	1	1	1	1	2		1
		<b>2427</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>105</b>

The state's attitude to religion is impossible to sum up briefly. Although they do not support most religious organisations in any way, from time to time the authorities do grant certain privileges, particularly to the Orthodox Church. *"The Belarusian Orthodox Church is under the patronage of the state, of President Lukashenka."*<sup>11</sup> Evidence of this can be found, for example, in Aleksandr Lukashenko's speech during a visit to Minsk by Aleksiy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All The Russias, in July 1995: *"Just recently, the state assigned aid to the church which amounted to 1 billion roubles... Although this, of course, is clearly inadequate, but we will be continuing with this policy."*<sup>12</sup>

Inter-faith co-operation is developing mainly in social fields.

Ecumenical dialogue is obviously becoming more active. For example, there is a group for interclerical dialogue based at the Minsk International Education Centre IBB. In 1999, some meetings were held as part of a project entitled *Reconciliation in Europe — The Church's Mission in Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and Germany*, which began with interclerical dialogue designed to bring peace between the churches of Germany and Poland in the early 90s. The chosen theme for the jubilee year of 2000 was *Social Work of Christian Churches in Belarus*. The first working meeting was held on January 21–22, 2000, with representatives of the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Evangelist Baptist and Lutheran Christian churches in attendance. As a result of the meeting, a provisional working group made up of representatives of all the aforementioned faiths was set up to co-ordinate social programmes.

There have been a number of larger-scale ecumenical activities with joint participation from different faiths e.g. *The Samaritan's Purse*, a Christmas present-giving event for children organised by the Biblical Society of the Republic of Belarus; the publication of the Gospel according to St. Mark in four languages (Belarusian, Old Church Slavonic, Greek and Russian), edited by the Belarusian Orthodox Church's biblical commission (N.B. the BOC is the Belarusian Exarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church) with the participation of the Inter-Faith Biblical Society.

The Biblical Society's activities generally focus on distributing the Bible and other religious publications, and producing video films (including cartoons) on biblical or daily-life topics, aimed at teaching children and adults the Christian way of life.

Recent years have also marked the return, or revival, of the Greek Catholic church in Belarus. It has come a long way in the ten years since it resumed its activity, making it difficult to imagine an ecumenical dialogue without representatives of this faith nowadays. Lutheranism is also growing in popularity.

The various Protestant movements are the most active in co-operating with other Christian faiths.

The Catholic church organises its ecumenical activities according to resolutions from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Assembly and the "Rules for the Application of Ecumenical Principles and Norms" of the Papist Council for the Development of Christian Unity.

At present, ecumenical dialogue is most productive wherever it provides practical assistance in social matters, publishing and some other fields. It is usually implemented through joint projects finalised during ecumenical seminars and conferences. The round-up documents from these events include plans for various projects to be undertaken by representatives of all the faiths present at each given meeting.

The introduction of religious education into the school curriculum was supposed to result in an expansion of ecumenical activity, but the subject is usually taught by teachers who are non-believers and had an atheist education. Among the clergy, Orthodox priests have the biggest influence over the educational sector and control other faiths' access to it. There have been incidents where Protestant teachers were expelled from schools on the pretext that complaints had been received from parents who claimed their children were being forced to learn from "the wrong Bible."

To summarise, we can state that the Belarusian Orthodox Church maintains the strongest position in Belarus, and enjoys a certain amount of support from the state. The Roman Catholic Church is also quite well rooted. The rest of the faiths come well behind in terms of their membership and influence on life in Belarus. In fact, other faiths are only allowed to expand their activities with the approval of the BOC hierarchy, which also has significant sway over the Belarusian authorities.

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<sup>11</sup> Faiths in Belarus (end of 18<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries), Minsk, 1998, p. 324.

<sup>12</sup> Vestnik Belarusskogo Eksarkhata ("The Belarusian Exarchy Newsletter"), No. 2, 1995, p. 12.



### 1. Cultural organisations:

dark points — cultural organisations

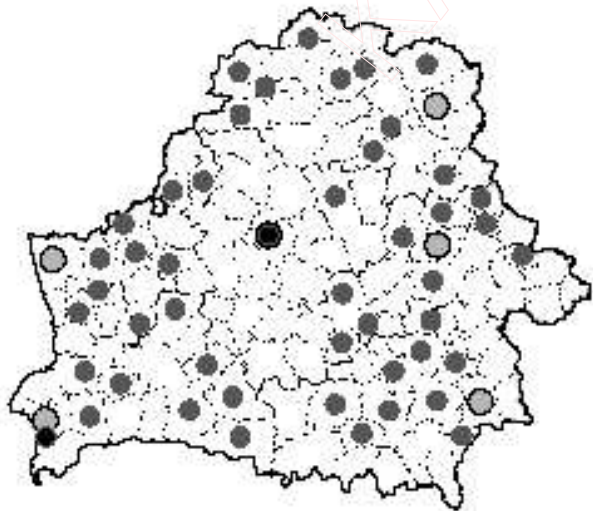
light points — The Society of Belarusian Language



### 2. Local press:

big points — non-periodical issues (bulletins)

dark points — state press



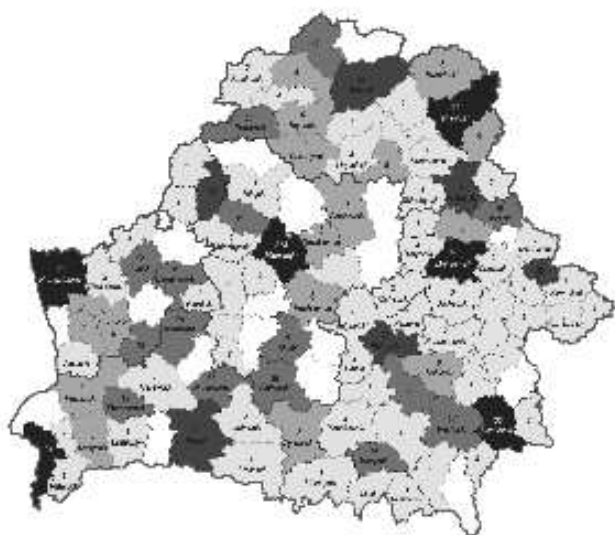
### 3. Members of the Belarusian Association of Resource Centres (BARC):

bicolour points — regional resource centres

a four-colour point — "BARCNEWS"

one-colour points — resource mini-centres





4. Non-governmental organisations.



5. Organisations dealing with human rights' defence and self-governance:

dark points — human rights' defence

light points — self-governance



6. Ecological and social organisations:

dark points — ecological organisations

light points — social organizations

Alaksandar Shalayka, Syarhey Mackevich

## NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN BELARUS IN 2001: THE FIRST STEP MADE, WE ARE MOVING ON

The night of September 9, 2001, sleepless for most NGO' activists in Belarus, opened a new phase in the life of Belarusian society and development of its third sector. Initial shock gave way to apathy. For a long time, a lot of those people had been concentrating their efforts on September 9. As that day went down in history, time challenged them to move on. Many asked themselves wither, with whom, and whether it was altogether worthwhile. The easiest option was to declare a defeat of the democratic movement, sprinkle one's head with ashes and do nothing. If so, then the democratic movement was not truly worth the victory it was striving for. Instead, one has to realise that first steps are always difficult, but they have been made. Time is come to scrutinise them in order not repeat one's mistakes and use the achievements accomplished.



The specific feature of the Belarusian situation is that political parties are not developed enough to fill up their niche. The state automatically perceives any activity independent from it as political opposition, and that was why NGOs did not have to think twice whether to participate in election campaigns. Non-governmental organisations are called upon to solve problems of society, and if some problems

cannot be solved without radical changes in the state, the only way to solve them is through making citizens vote.

In order to plan further activities of non-governmental organisations, it is necessary to analyse their activity in 2001. The present article is an attempt of such analysis and does not claim to encompass everything or be complete.

The election process in 2001 was made up of two non-political components — a mobilising campaign and observing the elections, and three political ones — a negative campaign, collecting signatures, and agitation. Some members of non-governmental organisations participated in some of those parts.

Let us now consider each of them in more detail.

### The mobilisation campaign "Vybiray!"

The experience of Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe in 1996–2000 proved that given general apathy of the voters, election results can be strongly affected by mobilising certain categories of the electorate, which usually do not vote. In Belarus, like in many European countries, the least active voters are the young and the educated. Those strata were the main target of the mobilising campaign carried out according to a decision by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the Assembly of Democratic Non-Governmental Organisations of Belarus (more than 500 member organisations) in December 2000.

The campaign was mainly aimed at fullest possible involvement of responsible votes in the campaign.

The three tasks of the campaign were:

1. To deliver objective information about the situation before the election and general situation in the country to the target groups by using various media.
2. To create an optimistic message and confidence in the possibility of changes for the better, which challenged to cope with the fear of repression, being in a minority, and disbelief in change.
3. To call to come to vote on the last day of election (instead of early voting) to minimise the opportunities for rigging the election.

The campaign was titled "Vybiray!", which in Belarusian and Russian alike means both "Elect!" and "Choose!".

The campaign drew on the following guiding principles:

1. Community (it had a co-ordinated emblem, logo, style, and concept).
2. Positive character.
3. Being separated from other campaigns.
4. Decentralisation, i.e. co-ordination by a staff.

The campaign was carried out in the following stages:

1. Preliminary evaluation (December-January): to assess forces and identify target groups.
2. Preparation (February-May): to develop a concept and schedule of the campaign, to draw a structure of the headquarters, to train staff.
3. Advertising (June-July): official advertising, concerts, and other actions.
4. Informational (August-Election Day September 9): distribution of booklets, special issues of newspapers, mass-scale distribution of the merchandise.
5. Post-electoral analysis.

To achieve its aims, the campaign used about 90 kinds of actions, most successful of which were the following:

- a) The Good Will movement in the Berastsye region.
- b) A series of concerts under the motto "Rock for Change."
- c) Sand plain air "Lion's Grave" in Mahyleu.
- d) Bicycle races in the Barysaw and Maladzechna districts.
- e) Happenings during Town Day (July 3).
- f) The 9.09 service by Young Hramada.
- g) Actions in market places.
- h) Family festival "When We Are Together."
- i) "The Orange Mood" by the Association of Belarusian Students.
- j) Concerts in small towns (Kasya Kamotskaya, Viktor Shaukevich, Zmitser Bartosik, Zmitser Sidarovich), organised in co-operation with local organisations.

Let us describe some of the above mentioned actions in brief:

1. The Good Will movement was a hiking journey in the Palesse area in July 2001 and took 20 days. About 50 young people walked through villages and towns staging sports and cultural events, giving away souvenirs (made centrally or by themselves) and newspapers.

2. The Family festival "When We Are Together" was organised by the Belarusian organisation of working women. Originally planned to cover 35 towns, it was banned in many of them. The form included contests and fairs in small towns. The main characters were mommy-the-hostess (wearing a "Vybiray!" apron) and a boy called Vybirayka (wearing a T-shirt, cap, and badge with the "Vybiray!" logo). The shows advertised the election date and the need to vote in order to provide children with normal future. The prizes included ball-pens, balloons, T-shirts, etc. with the campaign insignia.

**9.09.2001**  
**НОВЫЙ**  
**ПРЕЗИДЕНТ**



**ХОЧАМ!**  
**МОЖАМ!**  
**ПЕРАМОЖАМ!**

**09.09.2001**



# ВЫБІРАЙ БЕЛАРУСЬ



Those actions (about 500 total) were held in more than 100 towns of the country by about 200 organisations.

The mobilisation campaign combined centralised and decentralised approaches. The authoring of the motto, drawing up the schedule, producing the large batches of printed material and other attributes, and work with the media was carried out in a centralised fashion. At the same time, local groups had the opportunity to independently choose the format, place, and time of their actions, produce their own material, and distribute functions among themselves. This made the campaign truly democratic.

The Belarusian Association of Resource Centres (BARC) as an information network was responsible for timely collection of information and its distribution. The campaign encountered some temporary problems with printed media, some of which in the beginning did not consider "Vybiray!" interesting for the reader.

Educational programmes were also important: the training centre ran programmes for local NGO activists. There were over 30 seminars for 103 civic organisations organised. The campaign's web-site devoted to teaching methods became quite important tool, too ([www.vybary.net/mk](http://www.vybary.net/mk)).

A very important development, both for the campaign in general and for the third sector in Belarus, was the founding of youth coalition. In particular, the youth coalition "Peramenaw!"<sup>1</sup> was joined by the Young Front, the Association of Belarusian Students, the Association of Young Entrepreneurs, Young Hramada, the UCP Youth, the Belarusian Association of Young Politicians, Youth Solidarity, and the Youth Christian Social Union (YCSU).

Unfortunately, only one part of the "Peramenaw!" coalition joined the "Vybiray!" campaign. The other decided to pursue an independent mobilisation campaign, which of course sprayed the forces of youth organisations. Among the actions by that independent campaign worth mentioning is an action under the title "Let's Exchange the Old for the New," within which old Soviet books were being exchanged for new Belarusian ones, and old Soviet flags for Belarusian ones.

Some other organisations were also busy with independent mobilising activities, including the "Pilgrims" caravan by Next Stop — New Life jointly with a number of other organisations.

The results of the mobilisation campaign can be considered from two viewpoints. On one hand, in the short-term, the campaign as an instrument of affecting the result of the election, failed, mainly because of a weak campaign of the democratic candidate and cheating the election during the voting. However, the official reported turn-up of 83,86%, even if overrated

<sup>1</sup> "Peramenaw!" in Belarusian and "Peremen!" in Russian, the name means a demand of changes.



by the electoral commissions, shows that the mobilisation objective of the campaign was accomplished.

The main problems encountered by the "Vybiray!" campaign:

- a) A lack of co-ordination with the agitation campaign (often because there was none) and confusion between the campaigns.
- b) Some organisations did not even intend to work within the coalition, some only declared this intent.
- c) Some organisations used the campaign to promote themselves.
- d) Shortage of experience, especially for regional organisations.
- e) Sometimes the campaign targeted groups that would have voted anyway ("doing it for our lot").
- f) Due to shortage of time, some organisations limited their part to posting stickers and giving away information booklets.
- g) It took quite a while to persuade journalists of independent media to take part in distributing information about the mobilisation campaign, even not in a way of direct participation in it, but dissemination of its ideas and aims.

The main achievements of the campaign, useful for future work:

1. Organisations have been revealed that can be relied upon in nation-wide campaigns.
2. Various kinds of campaigning have been tried out.
3. Non-governmental organisations expanded their influence onto new groups in society.
4. A creative expert group was set up.
5. Experience in running nation-wide campaigns.
6. New volunteers were attracted to non-governmental organisations.

### Observation

In 2000, non-governmental organisations for the first time tried to organise systematic observation of elections by means of a body called the Central Co-ordination Council<sup>2</sup>. The election in question was that to the House of Representatives, boycotted by most democratic forces in Belarus, which did not allow non-governmental organisations to fully realise their potential of organising observation. For example, although the Assembly of Democratic Non-Governmental Organisations officially did not take part in observation in 2000, many representatives of its member organisations did it privately. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the Assembly decided that the Assembly was to participate in the observation to maximise the number of participant organisations and observers as such. The Assembly commissioned Ales Byalatski, head of its Working Group, to head the Central Co-ordination Council.

Among the Assembly's member organisations, about 200 supported participation in the observation, including the Frantsyshak Skaryna Fellowship of the Belarusian Language, the human rights centre "Vyasna" (Spring), the association "Legal Assistance to the Population," the Centre for Human Rights, and others.

The Assembly set up an observation network that created both new possibilities and new issues to tackle. One of the issues was co-ordinating the activity of two networks, which was resolved by introducing co-co-ordinators working jointly at both national and local levels. The joining of the two observation networks gave rise to the civic initiative "Independent Observation."

The main tasks of the Independent Observation initiative are:

- To create a strong, effective network of independent, non-party observation of elections throughout the country.
- Civil control of presidential elections in Belarus to ensure it is democratic, open, public, and transparent.
- To inform the Belarusian public and international community about true results of voting in the country.

More than 16,000 observers were trained for those purposes in about 320 courses. Two educational brochures were published intended for observers of two stages, described below.

The observation process was organised in two stages. The first, longer stage consisted in observing the pre-electoral proceedings: delegation to the electoral commissions and their work, collection of signatures, registration of candidates, etc. The second stage consisted in observing the very process of voting, both early (started five days in advance) and on the election day, and the counting of ballots. One of the first important facts was delegation of members of non-governmental organisations to territorial and local electoral commissions, since working within them is the most efficient way of preventing violations. Political parties and other non-governmental organisations delegated more than 600 persons to territorial commissions, however, only 1% of them was admitted. Thus, at this stage the authorities did not allow active participation in electoral commission of non-governmental organisations or representatives of non-governmental circles in general.

Collecting information from observers was tried out during the first stage.

During the voting before schedule and on the election day, the observers had two main tasks: to register violations and carry out parallel counting of votes. The former task was carried out jointly by the

<sup>2</sup> The following non-governmental organisations participated in the Central Co-ordination Council: the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, the Belarusian Republican Club of

Voters, the Free Trade Union Belarusian, the Lew Sapeha foundation, the "Belarusian Initiative" Centre, the Belarusian Women's Information and Co-ordination Centre, and the Movement for Democratic and Free Elections.

two networks so that two persons from either network were present at each polling station. The latter task employed a joint sub-network run by representatives of both structures.

According to those in charge of the observation, approximately 25% of participants in the observers' network could have quitted before the election due to objective or subjective reasons. They might have given in to repression, exercised by state bodies onto future observers: under that pressure, about 4,000 people refused to observe. This situation remained until the very eve of election, when the registration of officially delegated observers of the human rights organisation "Vyasna" was cancelled the day before the election. Some observers quit on their own, giving in to pressure. Thus, well according to original forecasts, about 10,000 observers were present at polling stations on election day.

The purpose of parallel counting of votes was to reveal violations during the transportation of ballots to higher commissions and the summing of figures by territorial and the central electoral commissions. To fulfil that purpose, the observers were to collect copies of counting statements signed by members of local electoral commissions, sum them independently from higher commissions and compare the results with those published by the Central Electoral Commission. Strong difference in the two versions would give grounds for questioning the election results.

The parallel counting was carried out, however, it failed to produce concrete figures, being based on data rendered useless due to the following reasons:

- Observers were not admitted to be present during the counting of ballots in such a way to really observe it.
- The electoral commissions in most stations refused to openly check the turnout with the amount of signatures in their lists of voters.
- Ballots were counted out of all the boxes together (not separately for pre-schedule voting).
- The observers were not allowed to familiarise with the records of electoral commissions.

Those infringements did not allow for parallel counting based on trustworthy data.

In general, non-governmental organisations encountered the following problems while organising observations:

- Pressure from authorities.
- Shortage of prepared, experienced observers.
- Insufficient co-ordination between the two sub-networks.

The positive achievements of the observation were that a lot of new people are ready for further work and the organisations received experience of running a large-scale observation on the national level.

### **The Negative Campaign**

A negative campaign against present president Alaksandar Lukashenka is the most understandable

from the perspective of the campaign aim and least safe in terms of conditions under which it was to be implemented. This clearly political campaign was carried out mainly by an unregistered movement called "Zubr," initiated, among others, by representatives of the civic initiative Charter'97. Thanks to Charter'97, Zubr have enjoyed professional assistance since its founding in January 2001. Its organisers wanted copy the Yugoslav movement "Otpor" (Resistance), with adjustment to specific Belarusian conditions. Zubr built its structure within a very short time. An important asset of the movement was experience in designing promotional material, although ordinary Zubr members did not have a possibility to do it. The fact that Zubr was building its network on concrete work, that is, spreading promotional material, at the time when other youth organisations had neither plans for their campaigns, nor printed matter, enabled Zubr to quickly engage a lot of activists of other organisations. Also, they managed to involve in their activity young people, who have not participated in such movements before.

Among the outcomes of the negative campaign, it is worth mentioning its broad advertising and public awareness of it. This circumstance is very important for Belarus where few organisations are known to society. At the same time, central management resulted in a certain level of discipline, self-organisation, and responsibility.

Inside the campaign, unfortunately, it was scarcely democratic.

Although Zubr activists did their best to reuse the experience of their Yugoslav colleagues, some aspects of that experience were not properly heeded.

The negative campaign aimed to destroy the positive image of the president in office, highlight his personal negative aspects and the shortcomings of his policy.

It is disputable whether the movement Zubr belongs to non-governmental organisations. On one hand, one can argue that the core of the movement was made up of former or actual members of other youth non-governmental organisations. On the other hand, Zubr considered those organisations its main rivals in image-making. Brought about for a negative campaign, Zubr sometimes radiated negativity elsewhere, for example, into relations among non-governmental organisations. The movement almost never co-ordinated its activities with other organisations.

A major flaw was Zubr's running a negative campaign against president in office alongside with their mobilisation campaign under the motto "Time to Choose (Elect)." One of the secrets of Otpor's success was separation of a negative campaign from a positive one (the black and the white one in the Yugoslav version). Running the two campaigns under one name harmed not only Zubr's mobilisation activity, it also affected the "Vybiray!" campaign.

The structure of Zubr, based on vertical management, has more in common with military subordination than a democratic non-governmental

organisation. Material incentive, widely used by Zubr to recruit new people and motivating its activists, did probably rise their efficiency during the campaign, but washed apart foundation of the movement as a potential non-governmental organisation that would be viable in a longer run.

Evaluating the role of Zubr in the election run-up, one should remember their campaign of enquiry about the fate of missing people, touching also on the human rights in Belarus. That campaign, of rather civic character, was backed by the one the United Civic Party ran under the motto "We Want to Know the Truth."

Another challenge Zubr faced was to defend the victory of a democratic candidate should it have happened, or make sure a second round of election took place. Those tasks are only meaningful under two conditions, one being the victory in the first round or such results that call for a second round of elections, and second being the will of broad masses to take to the street. Neither condition was created.

The negative campaign as such was a precedent of a mass-scale negative campaign in Belarus, and succeeded in instilling an atmosphere of denial. Another matter is whether that atmosphere was effective in influencing voting, especially given that the electoral campaign of the single nominee of the opposition was also built on a negative message, if any.

#### Collection of Signatures

The presidential election in 2001 did not offer a choice between democratic candidates, it was rather an attempt to return Belarus to a democratic path of development. Under those conditions, participation in collecting signatures for one of the democratic runners was a civic action, not just politics.

Activists of non-governmental organisations took part in those processes, above all, as individual citizens. Most of them collected signatures for Syamyon Domash, yielding about 163,000, a second highest result after president in office. The collateral indicators — few signatures turned down and a large share of signatures collected on the periphery — witness for organisational abilities of NGOs. The civic and political movement "Regional Belarus" played an important part in that process.

Syamyon Domash withdrew in favour of Uladzimir Hancharyk (singled out as the joint hopeful of a coalition of democratic forces), despite the large number of signatures collected for him and Hancharyk's disputable chances. This can also be explained by the fact that many of those who had collected signatures for Domash had their background in the third sector and therefore a developed sense of civic duty.

#### The Agitation Campaign

The agitation campaign for the single opposition hopeful failed by most assessments, and did so thanks to not using the staff and organisational resources of NGO activists, who collected signatures for any democratic candidate. Hancharyk's campaign was built on the negative, because it was be-



lieved that he was put forth too late for unrolling a positive campaign and making a positive image for the coalition nominee. His negative campaign on top of those negative campaigns against Lukashenka, the one run by Zubr in the first place, created a situation in which the voters sought to isolate themselves from those negative feelings, the people who were instilling it, and the person in the focus of the campaign. Without a positive perspective or an attractive way out of the negative situation, the electorate did not see the opposition candidate as a real alternative.

The agitation campaign for the single opposition hopeful produced leaflets, posters, and other material too late. Therefore the headquarters had to make do with material of the mobilisation campaign while motivating their volunteers' structures, which harmed mobilisation. Late distribution of agitation material (a week or a few days before election day), a lack of a positive message, not using resources of non-governmental organisations — these factors made other elements (mobilisation, observation, and the negative campaign) come short not only because of their own flaws, but due to mistakes of the agitation campaign.



### Conclusion

The 2001 president election took place in the atmosphere of repression of participants in political and non-political campaigns alike. Numerous arrests of Zubr activists, seizure of NGOs' property<sup>3</sup> and material of mobilisation campaigns were actions within one policy. The main instrument of fighting the presidential rivals was Decree No. 8, which made it very difficult or impossible to receive foreign aide. Some non-governmental organisations put up a coalition to counter the decree (including Next Stop — New Life, BelAPDICH, the Belarusian Organisation of Working Women, and the Independent Society for Law Studies). The coalition initiated public dialogue about Decree No. 8.

The results of the 2001 election disappointed many people in Belarus and abroad. They were disappointed with specific personalities, organisations, working methods, approaches, ways of putting up coalitions, etc. Everybody has the right to disap-

pointment. Non-governmental organisations do have the right to two kinds of disappointment: that in society, because all our efforts are for its benefit, and that in the work we have done, because it was not in vain.

Over the past five years, Belarusian non-governmental organisations have evolved from separate and small organisations into all-national networks, so that now they can influence civil processes.

For the third sector, 1996–2001 became a period when organisations had the opportunity to develop and educate themselves, build structures, train their members into professionals, try out new people and ways of functioning. No doubt, this activity must continue. However, one of the problems revealed by the last electoral campaigns is insufficient contact between non-governmental organisations and society, insufficient knowledge and trust in NGOs and their leaders. At the same time, electioneering distracted NGOs from concrete problems in society. Some of the organisations have come to interpreting politicisation as a sign of unity, which results in a wrong perception of their role by political parties. Non-political NGOs have to avoid the danger of assuming the biological rhythm of political parties — from election to election, no matter how important they are, because the goal of those organisations is to build civil society. NGOs have to de-politicise.

The main positive outcome of the election for non-governmental organisations is a unique experience and new people. The next challenge is to win confidence of society. For this, non-governmental organisations have only one possibility: to work for the benefit of society and show it this benefit. This has to become the top priority for NGOs for the next several years: exactly those kinds of activity that are both positive and clearly beneficial for society. NGO leaders have to gain a reputation of those who really care about people's problems.

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<sup>3</sup> This happened to the Lew Sapeha Foundation in Vitsebsk and Mahilew, Hart and Civic Initiatives in Homel.



Boris Zvozkov

## DECREE NO. 8 — COMMENTS

The Decree No. 8 "On Certain Measures of Regulation of the Procedure of Receipt and Use of the Foreign Gratuitous Aid" of March 12, 2001 was issued, as it asserts, pursuant to part three of the Article 101 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus.

At the same time:

The Article 101 in its first part states, that the Legislative Body may delegate the power on issuing decrees to the President.

Part two of the same Article states that "the delegation to the President of powers on issuing decrees providing for restriction of the constitutional rights of the citizens is inadmissible."

It follows from analysis of a number of provisions of this Decree that it has been issued in defiance of part two of the Article 101 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus.

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The Decree No. 8 assumes the possibility of confiscation of property and funds from those persons, who are not the owners of such property.

Confiscation is deprivation an owner who has not committed any unlawful act of its property. Such actions do not agree with part 2 of the Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as with the Article 13 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, and with the parts 1, 2 and 3 of its Article 44.

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Civil society does not provide for intervention of the State in the legal activity of organisations and institutions of this civil society itself. The citizens have the right to define the directions of their public activity on their own, provided that such activity ensures recognition and respect of rights and freedoms of the others, and meets the just requirements of morality, public order and public security.

Restriction or depreciation of these rights is inadmissible by political causes, on consideration of reasonability.

The Decree noticeably complicates and restricts the receipt of the foreign gratuitous aid and its use for such kinds of activity as creative work, protection of human rights, enlightenment, propaganda of healthy way of life, youth programs, etc.

Such actions of the State contradict to Article 30 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, part 1

of Article 2 of the Declaration "On the Right and Obligation of Individuals, Groups, and Bodies of a Society to Stimulate and Protect Universally recognised Human Rights and Basic Freedoms," and Article 10 of the named Declaration.

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Bans and restrictions imposed by the Decree do not as well conform to the regulations of the International Pact on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Articles 2, 4, 15), the International Pact on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 19, 21, 22).

In the whole, the Decree forces the citizens to fulfil obligations not provided for by the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, or to deny their rights, what is treated as the infringement of Article 58 of the Constitution.

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Conditions for forced liquidation of non-governmental organisations are defined in Article 29 of the law "On Non-Governmental Associations." The provision of the Decree as regards to the forced liquidation in case of violation of the Decree do not conform to the named Article.

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The measures of responsibility for disregard of the requirement of this Decree do not correspond to the notion of adequacy and justice.

Thus, the minimum wage in Belarus, as of March 23, 2001 equals to 4.47 USD. Consequently, the amount of penalty imposed on a natural person can amount to about 900 USD, and on a leader of the organisation up to 1300 USD (the average wage in Belarus does not exceed 70 USD).

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Elena Tonkacheva

## NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS. LEGISLATIVE REGULATION AND ISSUES OF LAW APPLICATION

*The present material is an analysis of the statement of the legislation of the Republic of Belarus for August 1, 2001 in comparison with the law application practice. Base for analysis of law application practice is the consultation activity of the Social Association "Independent Society for Law Research" within the period from 1995 till present.*

*We kindly ask you to refer to authors when using this material, as well as to source and date of receiving of the material.*

### 1. ANALYSES OF LEGISLATION

#### **Constitution.**

Some provisions concerning civic associations are contained in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus of 1994 with amendments adopted at the Republican Referendum on November 24, 1996. Till present time the result of this referendum are subject of conflict between official authority and united political opposition. By the opinion of opposition (it is also supported by world community) amendments adopted to the Constitution of 1994 by the referendum are not lawful. Our task is not the analysis of this situation because these amendments of Constitution did not touch upon issues interesting for us.

We should note that provisions of the Constitution are declarative and are adjusted by special legislation. The practice of law application (including court practice) is characterised by refusal of application of its articles as standards of direct action.

The Article 33 of the current Constitution guarantees freedom of opinion, conviction and free expression of them to everybody. No one may be forced to express his opinion or to cancel it. Censorship is prohibited, as well as monopolisation of mass media by the state, civic associations or individuals.

The Article 36 of the Constitution fixes everybody's right to freedom of association. There are limitations for judges, prosecutor's office employees, interior officers, the Committee for State Control, Security Services, military servants. These citizens may not be members of political parties and other civic associations that have political goals.

However, according to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus #2 the activity of unregistered civic associations is prohibited. Thus, the right of everybody to freedom of association is under the question mark due to obligatory and permissive order of registration which limits civic activity by the only activity through creation of the juridical person.

The Article 35 of the Constitution contains an important provision for non-profit organisations which stipulates freedom of assembly, meetings, street marches, demonstrations and picketing that do not brake the law and order as well as rights of other citizens.

But according to the current legislation it is necessary to pass quite a long procedure to get an agreement for a planned event. Quite often the importance of a meeting, a demonstration or a march is lost after such a procedure. Moreover, during last ten years a tradition of such events appeared: dates, events, place of holding. Actually official authorities provoke breaking of the order of such events changing their places etc.

The Article 69 of the Constitution grants the right to nominate candidates for positions of members of a legislature to civic associations among other.

According to the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On elections of deputies of Local Deputies' Soviets of the Republic of Belarus" the right to nominate candidates to deputies of Local Deputies' Soviets is granted to political parties registered by the Ministry of Justice of Belarus, to working collectives as well as citizens by mean of collection of signatures. Thus, according to this law civic associations are deprived from the right to nominate candidates to deputies.

According to the Article 36 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus everyone has the right to freedom of associations. In addition, the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Legal Status of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Republic of Belarus" dated June 3, 1993 says that foreign citizens and stateless persons in the Republic of Belarus shall enjoy the same rights and freedoms as citizens of the Republic of Belarus. Limitations of rights and freedoms of foreign citizens and stateless persons may take place only in cases when it is necessary for protection of rights and basic freedoms of citizens of the Republic of Belarus, state security, protection of public order and health of the population. However, the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Civic Associations" grants the right to charter civic associations only to citizens of the Republic of Belarus thus limiting exercise of this right by foreign citizens and stateless persons. Moreover, the Article 14 of the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Legal Status of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Republic of Belarus" dated June 3, 1993 states that the right of foreigners to join Belarusian civic associations shall depend on their permanent residency in the territory of the Republic of Belarus. At the same time, the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Civic Associations" (Article 2) does not limit the right of foreign citizens to join a civic association.

### **Types of organisations. Objectives.**

From July 1, 1999 a new Civil Code of the Republic of Belarus is put in force. This Code contains a new clause on non-profit organisations what is of course a positive moment in the development of national legislation (there wasn't articles relating non-profit organisations in the previous Civil Code).

According to the new Civil Code legal persons that are non-profit organisations may be established in the form of consumer co-operatives, civic or religious organisations (associations), owner-financed institutions, charitable and other foundations as well as other forms provided for by the legislation. The Civil Code of the Republic of Belarus itself envisages the following types of non-profit organisations:

- 1) consumer co-operatives — are voluntary associations of citizens and legal persons on the basis of membership in order to satisfy economic (property) and other needs of participants to be fulfilled through accumulation of property share inputs of its participants;
- 2) civic and religious organisations (associations) — are voluntary associations of citizens that have united according to the procedure established by law on the basis of their common interests and for satisfaction of their spiritual or other non-economic needs;
- 3) foundations — are non-profit organisations without membership chartered by citizens and/or legal persons on the basis of voluntary property share inputs that pursue social, charitable, cultural, educational or other public benefit objectives;
- 4) institutions — are organisations chartered by an owner to perform managerial, social and cultural or other non-profit functions and financed by him fully or partially;
- 5) unions of legal persons (associations and unions) — are non-profit organisations established by an agreement between commercial organisations with the aim to co-ordinate their entrepreneurial activity as well as for representation and protection of their common economic interests, or associations of non-profit organisations.

Such types of associations as foundations, institutions are new for Belarusian legislation. Despite their being stipulated in the Civil Code of the Republic of Belarus their establishing faces difficulties because of lack of explicitly expressed in the legislation approaches to the registration.

Separate legal acts regulate establishment and activity of such types of non-profit organisations in the territory of the republic of Belarus as:

- political parties;
- civic associations;
- religious organisations;
- professional unions.

The sources of direct regulation of the above listed associations of citizens are: the Law "On Civic Associations" dated October 4, 1994, the Law "On Freedom of Religious Beliefs and on Religious Organisations" dated December 17, 1992, the Law "On Political Parties" dated October 5, 1994, the Law "On Professional Unions" dated April 22, 1992.

According to the Law "On Civic Associations" a civic association is a voluntary formation of citizens created by them on the basis of their common interests for joint implementation of civil, economic, social and cultural

rights. Associations of citizens that pursue different objectives (protection of labour and social and economic rights and interests, satisfaction of religious needs for practising and dissemination of beliefs) are to be established and functioning according to procedures ruled by other legislative acts. The Law also does not envisage a possibility to create civic associations with the purpose to protect political rights (we mean the right to vote, the right to elect and be elected, etc.).



*Participants in an action of communist movement organised for the 83<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution, Minsk, Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>, 2000.  
Photo: IREX/ProMedia*

It is also disallowed to create civic associations which activity is aimed at overthrow or violent changes of the constitutional regime, a violation of integrity and security of the state, propaganda of war, violence, fomentation of national, social, religious and

race hatred. According to the amendments to the Law "On Civic Associations" it is not allowed to create civic associations which activity may harm physical or mental health of people.

As application of law practice shows, the registering bodies freely overstep limits of objectives for creation of civic association determined by law. According to the data base of "Independent Society for Law Research" registering bodies prejudice legality



Day of Independence, Minsk, July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1999.  
Photo: IREX/ProMedia

of such objectives as "assistance for protection of lawful rights and interests of juridical and natural persons," "promotion of the legal culture," "assistance for intellectual development," "spiritual improvement of personality," "control for legality of elections," "introduction of proposals for improvement of legislation" etc. Registration bodies perceive "intervention in the activity of state bodies," "religious activity" etc.

The legislator does not provide distinction between civic associations that pursue public benefit objectives and those that serve private and mutual benefit of their members.

Also the problem consists in the fact that the legislation doesn't allow legal and natural persons at the same time to unite into a non-for-profit organisation: this undoubted gap in the legislation must be made up by mean of introducing amendments to the Civil Code.

#### **Requirements to the procedure of state registration and membership in a civic association.**

According to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 2 dated January 26, 1999, an activity of non-registered civic associations in the territory of the Republic of Belarus shall be prohibited.

According to the amendments to the Code of the Republic of Belarus of 1999 on Administrative Infringements, an administrative responsibility up to administrative detention is envisaged for the activity on behalf of unregistered civic associations.

According to the Law of the republic of Belarus, depending on a territory of activity of civic associations they may have:

- 1) the status of an international civic association;
- 2) the status of a republican civic association;
- 3) the status of a local civic association.

An international civic association is the one which activity covers the territory of the Republic of Belarus (one or several administrative and territorial units) and the territory of one or several foreign countries and has its organisational structures in such a country.

A republican civic association is the one which activity covers all the territory of the Republic of Belarus. A local civic association is the one which activity covers the territory of one or several administrative and territorial units.

As application of law shows, since 1999 registering bodies treat the organisation of events (participation in events of other organisations) by a civic association out of administrative territory where they are created as the infringement of the territory of activity that provoke the warning for infringement of the current legislation and possible forced liquidation of the civic association.

According to the amendments to the Law on "Civic associations" of 1999 for creation and activity if civic associations it is necessary:

- for international civic associations at least 10 founders (members) from Belarus as well as founders (members) from one or several foreign states;
- for republican civic associations at least 10 founders (members) from the majority of 'oblasts' of Belarus and the City of Minsk, it means at least 50 citizens of Belarus;
- for local ones — at least 10 founders (members) in the majority of administrative and territorial units of the area to be covered by activity of an association.

The registration of international and republican civic associations is fulfilled by the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus.

Local ones are registered by justice departments of the executive committees of the 'oblast' and Minsk city Deputies' Soviets on the place of location of the leading body of the association.

Subsidiary, branches, representative offices and other organisational structures of civic associations of foreign states are registered by the Ministry of Justice.

According to the current law, foreign and citizens and stateless persons may join civic associations if it is provided by their statutes.

As application of law practice shows, the right of foreign citizens to take part in a civic association is re-



stricted. Under the requirement of registering body the member of a civic association may be only foreign citizen — resident of the Republic of Belarus.

According to the new Civil Code of the Republic of Belarus the name of a legal person should contain pointing to its organisational and legal form, and the name of a non-profit organisation should also contain pointing to the nature of its activity. According to the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Civic Associations" it is not possible to use the words "The Republic of Belarus," "Belarus" or an official name of another country in the name of an association. According to the amendments to the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Civic Associations" the list of words not to be used in the name of a civic association has expanded. In addition to the above it is not allowed to use the words "people's," "national" in any of their cases.

After considering materials submitted for state registration a registration body should submit them to the Republican Commission for registration (re-registration) of civic associations which in 5 days since receiving materials gives a verdict about the possibility to register a civic association and returns them to the registration body. A decision on state registration of an association should be taken by a registration body on the basis of a verdict of the Republican Commission. A chairperson of the Republican Commission should submit reports to the President of the Republic of Belarus about the work done upon the need and at least once a quarter.

This provision is a newly introduced one, and before the Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus dated 26 January 1999 was adopted a decision on registration was taken only by a registration body. In practice if the Republican Commission takes a decision on prohibition of registration of an association, the same decision is taken by a registration body.

An application about state registration of an association should be considered by a registration body within a month since the day it is received.

As application of law shows, the average term of the registration of a civic association is 2 months. During last six months this period takes 2 to 4 months.

If registration of a civic association did not take place within the due term or if it was refused according to motifs that are not believed to be reasonable by founder of a civic association, they may challenge the decision taken in court within one month after they receive such a decision. A decision of the Ministry of Justice may be appealed against to the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus and decisions of departments of justice of executive committees of 'oblast' council executive committees and of the Minsk City Council Executive Committee — to 'oblast' courts and the Minsk City Court accordingly.

In practice cases about registration in courts are resolved in favour of a registration body. Though decisions to refuse registration are taken on the basis of verdicts of the Republican Commission for registration (re-registration) of civic associations, a registration body becomes a defendant in court. The Republican Commission may not be a defendant in court as it is not a legal person (there is not even a Regulation on Commission).

### **Commercial activity of civic associations.**

According to the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Civic Associations" a civic association may undertake production and economic activity aimed at achievement of chartered goals and objectives. At the same time the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus "On Approval of the Procedure of Undertaking Economic Activity by Persons that are not Economic Entities" dated 6 August 1996 #513 refers to economic activity only. Both of these legal acts strongly limit the possibilities to undertake economic activity. The Civil Code of the Republic of Belarus includes the right for a civic association to undertake entrepreneurial activity. The notion of entrepreneurial activity implies an independent activity focused on regular profit from using the property, selling things produced, worked out or purchased for sale as well from fulfilment of work or rendering services if these works or services are meant for other persons and are not used for personal consuming.

Civic associations shall use revenues earned by them from economic (entrepreneur) activity for their chartered goals and objectives within the limits established by their statutes if otherwise not provided for by law.



Unknown people are stopping Valery Shchukin, a participant in "The Chain of Not Indifferent People", Minsk, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2001.  
Photo: IREX/ProMedia

Civic associations may perform some types of economic (entrepreneur) activity that require a special permission (license). In this case they are obliged to obtain a necessary permission (license) according to the established procedure. An economic activity performed without such a permission (license) is illegal. Revenues received by a taxpayer from undertaking of prohibited types of activity as well as from licensed types of activity without a proper permission (license) should be withdrawn in favour of the budget as well as the fine in the amount of revenues obtained from such an activity.

As it is shown by practice the following types of activity are the most important ones for civic associations: publication, printing, social services to families and some categories of citizens, provision of household services, hiring foreign workforce to the Republic of Belarus, receiving and distribution of humanitarian aid, dissemination of legal information, providing lawyer's services, organisation of treatment of children abroad, arrangement of concerts. When receiving licenses by civic associations for a certain type of activity a legal collision



may emerge as such licenses may be issued to economic entities only. Civic associations are not such entities according to the Resolution # 513. Accordingly, a licensing body might use this circumstance as a reason for refusal to issue a license.

The issue about the limits of economic activity is very difficult. The Law as well as the other legal acts to not provide a definition neither for production and economic nor for commercial activity.

## 2. THE RE-REGISTRATION OF PUBLIC ASSOCIATIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS IN 1999. PREPARATION OF GOVERNING AUTHORITIES TO PARLIAMENT AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IS A MASS REDUCTION OF THE NUMBER OF PUBLIC ASSOCIATIONS AND CREATION OF "DATABASE OF NAMES" OF CIVIC ACTIVE POPULATION.<sup>1</sup>

### *Legislation.*

According to the official version of the authorities the re-registration of the public associations was aimed at putting the public associations' documents in accordance with the Civil Code of the Republic of Belarus entered into force on July 1, 1999 (the part "Legal entities" — on March 1, 1999). In addition, the re-registration had to find and remove destructive sects and institutions existing only in the documents and dealing with capital movement. However, the analysis of the normative acts being in force at the moment when the state re-registration of the public associations was declared shows that both the Civil Code of the Republic of Belarus and the Presidential Decree No.2 of January 26, 1999 did not introduce essential changes of legal frameworks for the public associations (with the exception of membership of legal entities in the associations). From the juridical point of view, the Decree was mainly oriented towards creating of a new law field for the political parties and trade unions. And already in the course of the re-registration (law application practice) new requirements directly for the public associations began to appear. This fact confirms that political motive namely an attempt to limit participation of the active part of the population in political events initiated at that period by the opposition is the true goal of the declared re-registration.

The re-registration was held from February 1, 1999 to October 1, 1999. From 2502 Belarusian public associations only 1537 applied to the registration bodies for the re-registration. 211 of public associations were denied in registration. The re-registration of political parties, trade unions and other public associations was held based on the Presidential Decree No. 2 of January 26, 1999 "On some measures of regulation of the activities of political parties, trade unions and other public associations." Realisation of this normative act led to essential changes both in legal system concerning public associations and in law practice. The fact that the situation of the "third sector" became worse in the result of the imposition of harsher regulations is out of question.

A number of points of the Presidential Decree No. 2 of January 26, 1999 doesn't correspond with the Belarusian Constitution namely article 8 (in the part of recognition by the Republic of Belarus of the priority of the universally recognised international law principles and bringing national legislation into conformity with

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is a thesis prepared for the brochure "Re-registration of the Belarusian NGOs 1999" (*The Assembly of Belarusian pro-democratic non governmental organisations, Minsk, 2000*).

them) and article 36 (in the part of providing everybody's right of free unification) as they added to the system of national legislation:

- the principle of getting an authorisation for the establishment of a public association instead of previous principle of registration;
- the prohibition of the activities of non-registered and received the denial of registration associations on the territory of the Republic of Belarus.

To our mind these violate firstly, international principles fixed by the International Civil and Political Rights Pact (December 16, 1996) and by the Convention of CIS on rights and main human freedoms (May 26, 1995); secondly, the constitutional right to the freedom of assembly. These violations are legal hindrances on the third sector development.

Till today the Republican NGOs' Registration (Re-registration) Commission is working in Belarus. Jurisdiction of this Commission is not defined by any normative act, the Commission is not a legal entity. Courts refused to arraign the Commission as a defendant. Handing down a decision about registration (denial of registration) the registration bodies are guided by Commission's conclusions whereas the conclusions themselves haven't a justification part and could not be appealed in the court.

During the re-registration some requirements, which were not regulated by any normative act, were introduced and realised in practice by the Republican NGOs' Registration (Re-registration) Commission. The following claims for the re-registration were illegally introduced in the course of the re-registration:

- for international public associations — no less than 10 founders from the Republic of Belarus and also no less than 1 founder from one or several foreign states;
- for republican public associations — no less than 10 founders from the majority of the Belarusian regions and also from the city of Minsk;
- for local public associations — no less than 10 founders from the majority of the administrative-territorial units of the territory where an association will operate;
- public association can have only fixed membership;
- public association can not use in its name words as "national," "people's" in any case.

These innovations were legitimised only on November 29, 1999 by including changes and additions into "The Public Associations Law" of the Republic of Belarus. (The Law "On Including of Changes and Additions into some Belarusian Laws"), that is when the re-registration under such conditions was finished.

Till this moment the public associations had to submit to the Republican Commission's illegal demands under threat to be refused in registration.

#### **Law application.**

The results of the analysis of the denials in the re-registration and the courts conclusions on the NGOs appeals showed that neither the registration organs, nor NGOs were ready for the re-registration. Both the juridical qualities of documents prepared by NGOs and of denials made by the registration bodies testify this.

The registration bodies paid particular attention to the text of the statute, aims, tasks and working methods

of a public association. During the re-registration the registration bodies actively propagandised a "precept" that a statute should contain one aim, three methods and five tasks. Such an approach was not fixed in normative acts, however it became widespread. It has become a normal practice when on the re-registration stage the registration bodies made editing (stylistic) corrections of statutes' texts what is, to our mind, unfounded interference



*Members of the Young Front are flying a balloon near the President Administration building; the happening was organised on the occasion of the International Day of Meteorologists, Minsk, Mart 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2001.  
Photo: IREX/ProMedia*

into internal activity of NGOs, especially, connecting with questions of aims formulation, working methods, management, membership, etc.

The re-registration process showed that both NGOs and the registration bodies were not ready for it. Neither registration bodies, nor legal requirement were prepared properly. The clarification campaign of the re-registration process among NGOs was very weak, too. A small number of NGOs got an independent professional juridical help that affected the quality of presented to the registration bodies documents as well as the courts' decisions.

During the re-registration the registration bodies often violate legislation. The terms of the documents' examination weren't observed. In the number of cases denials in registration didn't correspond with legislation especially concerning enumeration of all motives of a refusal. As a result, in several courts pre-



cedents during hearings the grounds of some denials were completely changed by the registration bodies.

In order to check if the documents correspond with the legal requirements they are systematically being sent for an examination to different state institutions depending on the character of declaring by public association aims. Being formally only recommendations, experts' decisions in practice have a great influence on the registration bodies' po-



sition. To our mind, the formed practice of so-called documents' examination is pernicious as it unfoundedly drags out terms of the registration. The extent of such examination expediency is not quite clear as well. If this is a real analysis of documents' correspondence with legislation it's exactly the registration bodies' jurisdiction but not of the Religious and Nationalities Committee, the Central Election Commission, the Academy of Sciences, etc.

It is necessary to note, that sometimes preparing documents for the re-registration NGOs didn't meet the legal requirement. So, very often NGOs didn't include into the statute obligatory parts, presented incomplete set of documents (the certificate of giving up of the stamp or the document confirming that the announce of the state registration was paid., for instance, were absent).

One of the main reasons of low juridical level of NGOs documents is an absence of high-quality, sufficient and accessible assistance for NGOs. This thesis can be proved by the fact that only few NGOs whom rights were violated during the re-registration appealed to the court.

According to official data, only 7 republican and international NGOs appealed to the Supreme Court of Belarus against the denial of the re-registration made by the Ministry of Justice. We have no full statistical information at the republican level but accounting to our

estimate the total quantity of court precedents is about 20. The majority of decisions admitted by courts are in favour of the registration bodies. Owing to the few appeals, the courts have now sufficient experience of working with such a category of cases. They do not fully understand the importance of the freedom of assembly and do not use the Constitution as a norm of direct action. However, after some hearings judges gave private comments to the Ministry of Justice pointed out the violations of current legislation made by the Ministry during the state re-registration.

First of all attention should be paid to the most repeated motives of the denial to NGOs have been used by the registration bodies and become a matter of the courts hearings.

A. Statute's provisions consider the interference into activity of state bodies and authorities what violates the article 5 of "The Public Entities Law" (the case the Belarusian Republican Voters' Club against the Ministry of Justice; the case of the Analytical Laboratory of Law Problems against the Department of Justice of Minsk City Executive Committee; the case of the Belarusian Association of Young Politicians against the Ministry of Justice).

According to the registration bodies such tasks and kinds of activity as observation of the elections, assistance in the dissemination of law knowledge and law culture in the society, study of international experience in the sphere of law regulation of relations, co-operation with authorities and administration do not correspond with the current legislation. The legislation doesn't prohibit and underlines the necessity of co-operation between the state and NGOs. Several normative acts fixed the possibility of such cooperation. So, "The Elections of Deputies in Local Soviets of the Republic of Belarus Law" directly states the right of NGOs to participate in elections. "The normative Legal Acts of the Republic of Belarus Law" allows to NGOs to send their proposals about normative legal acts' acceptance (promulgation) or present a normative legal act projects in the given order. "The Education Law" stipulates that NGOs promote cultural and aesthetic education and upbringing of high moral qualities in the society. Legislation includes also a number of other examples of possibility to co-operate with the state institutions. What is more, adhering to the fundamental principle "what is not banned is allowed," it's clear that these motives would be legal being directly prohibited by the law.

B. The Statute of a public association considers economic activity (the case of the Belarusian Union of Consultants against the Ministry of Justice).

In accordance with the registration bodies conclusions such activities as advertising service including advising one are not included in the list of rights of public associations fixed in article 22 "The Public Associations Law." Correspondingly the registration bodies characterise NGOs as legal economic entities but not as subjects of enterprise activity. To our mind, such a situation contradicts the norms of the Belarusian Civil Code.

The Civil Code enables NGOs to undertake enterprise activity and contains the definition of enterprise



activity. Emanating from the norms of the Civil Code it is possible to say that there are no restrictions concerning this right of NGOs with the exception of one stipulation, that such an activity is possible if it is included in the Statute's goals and corresponds with them. Besides, legislation has no definition of economic activity. Therefore it's not clear based on which criteria the registration bodies distinguish "enterprise activity" and "economic activity". Unfortunately the court didn't give a proper clarification of this problem.

C. Goals, tasks and methods of public associations activities do not correspond with the requirements of Belarusian legislation (the case of the Republican Centre "Dianetica" against the Ministry of Justice; the case of the Belarusian Association of Young Politicians against the Ministry of Justice).

Very often the registration bodies unfoundedly limit NGOs' choice of desirable aims, tasks and methods. Legislation outlaws establishment and activity of NGOs oriented to overthrow or violent change of the constitutional system, violation of the state security and integrity, propaganda of war, violation, igniting of national, religious and racial hostility. And since November 29, 1999 it also bans NGOs the activity of which could negatively influence on the physical and moral people's health.

Freely interpreting legislation, the registration bodies worked out a position essence of which is the following: the activity of a public association can affect only members of this organisation. A public association can not set as its statutory goals giving assistance to non-members of this organisation. The courts considered this position as unfounded. However, in practice the registration bodies continue to resort it.

D. The activity of local NGOs envisaging international contacts violates article 6 "The Public Associations Law" (the case of the Analytical Laboratory of Law Problems against the Department of Justice of Minsk City Executive Committee).

In accordance with the registration bodies conclusions maintaining international contacts by local NGOs is a violation of the territory of their activity.

In contrast to this thesis it's necessary to note that "The Public Associations Law" (article 30) enables NGO's, irrespective of its status, to enter any international public association, participate in the establishment of the international unions of NGOs, maintain direct international contacts and relations, sign corresponding agreements and make any other steps non-contradicting with Belarusian legislation and its international obligations. The Minsk City Court supported the Juridical Department of Minsk City Executive Committee. The Supreme Court didn't give a due clarification to this question.

E. Activity of an organisation is beyond bounds of public associations and contradicts to "The Public Associations Law" and to the Constitution of the Republic of

Belarus (the case of the Republican Centre "Dianetica" against the Ministry of Justice; the case of the Children-Youth Centre "Magic Flower" against the Department of Justice of Minsk City Executive Committee).

All the denials of the registration bodies were based on the results of the State Religious and Nationalities Committee. The words "spiritual," "self-improvement," "improvement of individual activity to solve life problems," etc. used in statutes were interpreted by the State Committee as religious activity. Admitting their own decisions, the courts based on the State Religious and Nationalities Committee conclusions.

**3. DECREE NO. 8 OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS (MARCH 26, 2001). PREPARATION OF GOVERNING AUTHORITIES TO THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IS A TOTAL CONTROL OVER FINANCIAL FLOW IN THE NGO SECTOR.<sup>2</sup>**



*Oppositional action against the election to Parliament,  
Minsk, Oct. 14<sup>th</sup>, 2001.  
Photo: IREX/ProMedia*

On March 15, 2001, Decree No. 8 of the President of the Republic of Belarus of March 12, 2001 "On Certain Measures to Improve the Order of Receiving and Using Foreign Aid" was published in official publications. Implementation of the Decree will materially worsen the standing of the Belarusian "third sector" and be a significant hindrance to its normal development and operation.

<sup>2</sup> This chapter was published in the Spring 2001 Issue of SEAL (European Foundation Centre).

The strategic intent of this document is to attempt to impose an unprecedented level of government control over the activities of NGOs and their financial support from foreign and international organisations which finance programs and projects of independent public associations. Based on provisions in the Decree, this objective will be accomplished by the introduction of a system for Belarusian organisations requiring state permission for the use of funds received from foreign governments, international organisations and individuals, the imposition of total state control over all programs and projects being undertaken through support from foreign organisations, and the introduction of repressive measures against organisations (leading to their very dissolution) and their managers.

Public associations of citizens (which, for purposes of this article, do not include political parties, trade unions, and religious organisations) are the primary recipients of foreign aid. This situation is a result first of all of the lack of internal resources within the Republic of Belarus which could be allocated to charitable activities. In the current political situation, access to government resources (what little there are) allocated to charitable projects is given only to pro-government organisations, which by their essence are not voluntary associations of citizens but merely echo the political will of those in power. As a result, the only sources for obtaining a realistic source of financing medium and large-scale programs and projects of public associations have been and continue to be international and foreign organisations and individuals.

It should be noted that even before issuance of the Decree, the terms regarding the receipt and use of foreign aid were quite clearly set forth in the Belarusian legislation. The Decree sets forth provisions which strengthen state control and limit opportunities of public associations. Article 23, for example, of the Law on Associations states that monetary aid and property are the result of "voluntary contributions." These monies and property may be only used towards achieving the objectives of the association's charter. Paragraph 4 subpoint 3 of the Decree forbids those public associations which have as their purpose of operations work regarding electoral law from receiving financial support from any foreign governments, international organisations and individuals. In accordance with the Law on Income and Profit Taxes, the tax authorities are authorised to oversee the appropriate use of an association's funds in accordance with its charter. From now on, however, oversight over an association's use of its funding can be conducted by the Committee of State Control, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Tax Committee, the State Customs Committee, the State Financial Investigative Committee and its local offices, the Department of Humanitarian Activities of the President of the Republic of Belarus, and other state entities. In other words, everyone will be able to control these associations as well as have the power to impose sanctions. For example, all of the following actions will henceforth be legal violations subject to administrative (civil) penalties: i) use of foreign aid by recipients prior to receiving authorisation from the government, ii)

use of foreign aid for activities prohibited in the Decree, and iii) failure to deposit foreign aid donated in monetary form in a bank of the Republic of Belarus within 5 days after its receipt or import into the territory of the Republic of Belarus. Any of the above listed government agencies will be able to write up reports regarding the violation of these directives.

Unions, foundations, public associations, and other non-governmental organisations are subject to liquidation, even in the event of a one-time violation, for the use of foreign aid for purposes prohibited or not provided for in the Decree. This contradicts Article 29 of the Law on Public Associations, since a public association can be liquidated only by order of a court for only the following: activities aimed at overthrowing or forcibly changing the constitutional regime; violating the integrity or security of the government; spreading war propaganda or violence; igniting national, religious or racial hostility; undertaking actions which might negatively affect the physical and psychological well-being of citizens; allowing repeat occurrences of violations in the course of one year, for which a written warning had been issued; and legal violations committed by the association's founders at the time of registration. There are no other legal grounds allowing dissolution of a public association.

The procedure for registering foreign aid is to be established by the Department of Humanitarian Activities. Considering that prior regulations regarding registration, storage and distribution of humanitarian aid left much to be desired, one can only hope that the procedure for registration of foreign aid will not worsen an already difficult situation for public associations. Moreover, the Decree entrenches the selective approach used thus far by the authorities in granting tax and customs benefits and allows the president to decide who will receive tax benefits and who won't. This case-by-case system of granting privileges serves as an effective means of influence over objectionable organisations.

The legislation of other countries contains examples of additional statutory regulation regarding the receipt by NGOs of foreign assistance. However, in every instance of such supplementary regulation, the primary objective of the law is to provide the recipient of the assistance with substantive tax benefits after successfully meeting the criteria of the statute. These laws do not allow or call for benefits to be provided to particular beneficiaries (i.e. at the discretion of the president), interference in the activities of associations, required "authorisations" to begin using the assistance, or oversight by police bodies to verify proper use of the assistance (assuming no criminal activities). Moreover, improper use of the tax benefits generally results in their revocation (as opposed to the variety of fines and administrative sanctions set forth in the Decree).

The Decree is rife with contradictions and illegalities under Belarusian law. It is senseless even to analyse this document from the perspective of its legal coherence, its adherence to the constitution, or its value in compensating for gaps in current legislation. From a constitutional point of view, it allows blatant interference into the activities of public associations. From a civil law

point of view, it is an outright violation of the freedom of contract. Once again the authorities are attempting to demoralise the third sector and divert the active segments of society from participating in political activities by creating additional barriers to prevent them from organising and functioning effectively. This is a standard tactic which was already tested in the spring of 1999 when Presidential Decree No. 2 was issued. It succeeded in keeping the senior-level individuals and leaders of NGOs, under threat of serious legal sanctions, occupied with restructuring their organisations to bring them into compliance with the new legislative changes. Based on the prior experience of Decree No. 2 and the timing of Decree No. 8 earlier this month, it is clear that the true objective of the Decree is to create additional instruments of influence over the socially and politically active segments of society during the period leading up to and following the presidential elections.

#### 4. OUR RECOMMENDATIONS (ABOUT DIFFICULT PROBLEMS IN LIGHT FORM).

The present section is an attempt to formulate ideas which do not allow me personally and to "Independent Society for Law Research" to continue working in the direction we choose in 1995.

Extremely briefly our recommendations are as follow: "Optimism and using all real mechanisms." We should note at once that the supposition about soon changing of political situation as result of the present political fight is considered by us as unwarranted and unjustified optimism.

Probably, on examination of the present material there is not a lot of space for optimism. However, our point of view that in every situation the movement if necessary. By our opinion the subsequent movement in our country and in the actual period is a reliable strategy and mobile tactics.

Under our concept the tactics should be as follow:

1. Civic associations should learn to exist fairly in the framework of the existing legal situation. Thereby they will move the state away from the idea of discredit of all sector.
2. It is necessary to act for providing the access to the professional legal assistance for civic associations. Existing specialised legal groups are not able to cover existing and potential amount of work. We think that the creation of the network of co-ordinated legal groups (centres) is appropriate.
3. The legal groups should popularised the necessity of regular appeal to courts for protection of lawful rights and interests of non-profit organisations. The analysis of the court practice, a broad distribution of positive precedents is also an important component part.
4. Be mean of co-ordination of their efforts, organisations should use all existing opportunities for participation in the preparation and adoption of normative acts relating their activity. The present work should be enough professional unlike the existing actually examples.
5. Non-profit organisations should learn to understand how their imagine the non-profit legislation in future. This is the time for explanatory work, semi-

nars, training with the participation of well-prepared experts and for the distribution of the corresponding literature.

6. As for the "fans of jurisprudence," to whom first of all we refer ourselves, it is necessary to work on creation of an "ideal concept of legislation" for non-profit organisations and on the filling of this concept with texts of drafts of law. This should be available for the moment when appears a real possibility to trust to a new political power as liberal and devoted to democratic principles.



A fragment of the happening "The Final Diagnosis,"

Minsk, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2001.

Photo: IREX/ProMedia

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## THE THIRD SECTOR IN HOMEL — AN ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION

### I. HISTORY OF THE THIRD SECTOR IN THE HOMEL REGION

The third sector in its present form began to develop in the Homel region in mid-1980s and early 1990s. As in other parts of the USSR, one of the main factors that led to increased social activity was the growth in national self-awareness and the desire by a large portion of the population to restore the historical record. Perhaps, the first non-governmental organisation in the region with a more or less distinct goal was the historical and cultural association "Talaka," established in 1995. The relatively liberal political situation at that time and the wave of election campaigns of 1989–1990 was conducive for increased social activity and restructuring society.

However, the major cause for intensive development of the third sector in the Homel region was the Chernobyl disaster. A wave of strikes and rallies swept through the most effected districts and the city of Homel in the summer and autumn of 1989. Those actions became a kind of instrument of civil control over the authorities, not limited by Chernobyl-related issues. It is characteristic that the Homel region stood out from the other regions in Belarus in terms of civil activity.

Mass protest actions soon initiated the founding of non-governmental organisations, among which were The Voters Club (actually the first officially registered structure resulting from a grass roots initiative), "Protection from the Atom," and "Children of Chernobyl." The relatively democratic local elections in 1990 facilitated this process. The newly emerged non-governmental associations campaigned for their candidates, resulting in democratic factions or groups, among others in Rechyt'sa, Zhlobin and Loyev, having a presence in the representative bodies of power. In Homel, the Voters Club even won the election.

These factors resulted in the rapid development of civic initiatives in very diverse areas of activity. Between 1991 and 1994, there were approximately 200 initiatives. This period remains the most favourable for non-governmental organisations in terms of co-operation with the authorities, local businesses, media and the general population.

### II. SPECIFIC NATURE AND PROBLEMS OF NGOS IN THE HOMEL REGION

Analysing the structure of the third sector in the Homel region, it can be seen that Chernobyl remains a very specific and very essential factor. However, being the main stimulus of civil activity in late 1980s and early 1990s, its importance gradually waned in middle and particularly in the late 1990s. From 1989 to 1999 the re-

gion's population declined 120,000 (i.e., nearly 10%). The decline in the population was greater in more contaminated districts. For example, on February 2, 1999, the population of the Khoyniki district was 68.5% of that in 1989, Brahlin district 66.7%, Chacherski district 65.2%, Vetkauski district 60.7%, Naroula district 59% and the region was a whole 92.6% (according to the regional department of statistics).

Generally, the most active people were the first to abandon the unsafe radioactive areas (which, to some extent, meant the entire region). This included young people, able to adapt to new places, the intelligentsia as well as highly qualified white- and blue-collar workers. It is from these groups that most social activists originate.

The region's administration encouraged emigrants from the "hot spots" in Russia and other ex-Soviet republics to settle in the abandoned areas. Many settlements in the region today have virtually no indigenous inhabitants and those that do remain are largely pensioners. The lack of tradition and continuity has almost completely halted the development of civic processes in those areas that appear to be vast "civic deserts." In my opinion, this is the main reason for the relative weakness of the region's third sector.

Despite the above, the activity of non-governmental organisations in the region is gradually increasing. Since 1997, the share of Homel region NGOs in Belarus' third sector has been increasing. In 1997, they constituted a mere 6% of all NGOs registered in Belarus, increasing to 11% in 1998 and to 11.3% in 2000 (according to United Way data). Moreover, this period includes the infamous campaign of reregistering non-governmental organisations that reduced the number of NGOs in the Homel region from 281 on February 2, 1998 to 196 on June 1, 2000. Non-governmental organisations were completely eliminated in some of the districts. At present, 9 out of 21 administrative units of the region have no NGOs. The situation is not quite as bleak when considering non-registered NGOs, but their possibilities and abilities to operate are extremely limited by the political and legislative conditions in Belarus. For example, non-registered NGOs may not fully participate in election campaigns (delegate observers or representatives to electoral commissions) or legally rent office space or venues for their activities. Moreover, according to legislation adopted in 1999, they are officially banned. Any form of promoting their activities is liable to punishment.

Regardless of these difficulties, non-unregistered initiative groups are frequently active and influential in their areas. Many of these groups have gained the respect of the local population. The following are the main reasons that hinder organisations from acquiring legal personality:



- The problem of obtaining a legal address: an organisation may not be registered at a home address, while almost all administrative premises are owned by the state;
- The requirement of an extremely high minimum number of founding members;
- Difficulties associated with holding a founding assembly and producing various documents;
- Financial problems. The entire registration process costs approximately 100 USD. In Belarusian conditions, this is a significant sum for an operating NGO, not to mention an initiative group.

Registration offices frequently refuse to register non-governmental organisations for no reason at all, using any formal pretext such as “specified areas of activity unclear” or “statutory provisions unclear,” etc. Some organisations have been refused registration because, in the opinion of the registering authority “the name does not correspond to the statute activity of the organisation being founded.”

### III. STRUCTURE OF THE THIRD SECTOR IN THE HOMEL REGION. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS.

As of June 1, 2000, the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Justice of the Homel regional administration had registered 196 non-governmental organisations, including:

- 3 international organisations;
- 1 national organisation;
- 6 branch structures of national organisations;
- 38 regional organisations;
- 148 city, district, cross-district and other organisations.

For a more comprehensive and objective evaluation of the Homel region's third sector, at least 76 of the more well known and influential non-registered initiative groups should be added to this number. Therefore, for purposes of analysis, there are 272 non-governmental organisations operating in the Homel region.

Non-governmental organisations are very unevenly distributed among the administrative divisions of the region. More than 70% are concentrated in Homel, the regional centre, the population of which comprises only 30% of the region's population. As throughout the country, social activity manifests itself mostly in larger towns such as Mozyr, Svetlahorsk,



*“The Chernobyl ‘Way,’” Minsk, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2000.  
Photo: IREX/ProMedia*

Rechytza or Zhlobin. A total of 12 organisations (4.5%) operate in the countryside, only 5 of which are registered with the Ministry of Justice. The rural population currently comprises 31% of the total population of the region. It is interesting to note that along with Homel the highest rates of NGOs *per capita* are in the district of Loyev and the towns of Svetlahorsk and Rechytza.

In terms of areas of activity, the Homel region differs from the other regions of Belarus and from the country as a whole, primarily in regard to the share of Chernobyl-related and volunteer organisations.

**The number of Chernobyl-related and volunteer non-governmental organisations in the Homel region compared to other regions**

Organisations (percent of total number)	Region							
	Berastsye region	Vitsebsk region	Horadnya region	Mahylou region	Minsk region	Minsk city	Belarus	Homel region
Chernobyl- related organisations	2,19	1,05	1,13	3,8	2,12	1,98	2,8	<b>10,17</b>
Volunteer organisations	5,13	7,72	4,51	7,6	7,94	7,99	8,32	<b>16,93</b>

As for areas of activity, most non-registered NGOs are engaged in human rights protection, local area studies, dissemination of information or serve as resource centres (see charts 3 and 4). This suggests that organisations engaged in these types of activities are currently the most difficult to register. Local area studies and publishing initiatives are separate categories in chart 4 due to the large number of them currently operating in the region. Considering the fact that these publishing initiatives do not intend to become commercial projects in the future and the collection, processing and dissemination of information are social activities, these organisations are considered pure non-governmental organisations.

Among the most well known non-governmental organisations in the region, distinguished by their high level of activity, original programmes, broad networks and influence on social processes occurring in their local communities, the following should be mentioned:

- **social organisations:** the Homel city "Association of Families of Children with Cerebral Paralysis and Spinal Pathologies," the Homel regional non-governmental organisation "Children's Haematology," the non-governmental organisation "The Homel

Regional Centre for Socio-Psychological Support "Spirituality";

- **Chernobyl-related and volunteer organisations:** the Homel regional foundation "Life with Chernobyl," the international volunteer non-governmental organisation "Chernobyl Children Aid";
- **resource centres:** the Homel regional non-governmental organisation "Civil Initiatives," the Rechytsa-based non-governmental organisation "Slavutsich";
- **youth organisations:** the regional non-governmental organisation "the Homel Association of Children and Youth," the Homel city non-governmental organisation "the Youth Centre "Hart";
- **cultural and local studies organisations:** "Talaka," a Homel youth non-governmental organisation for local studies; "Karani," a Loyev non-governmental organisation for the protection of the environment and cultural and historical heritage;
- **publishing initiatives:** the youth organisation "Roskvit," the Rechytsa youth organisation "Zyalyonka" and "Rechytsa Review."

As in other regions, Homel has a large coalition of non-governmental organisations, the Assembly of Democratic Non-Governmental Organisations. This is a branch of its nation-wide counterpart, the membership of which fluctuates between 42 and 83 organisations.

Resource centres as well as youth and cultural organisations are the most efficient in co-operating within their areas of activities. However, not a single "professional" organisation of NGOs has yet been established.

#### IV. THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM

The process of building a multi-party system in Belarus in early 1990s was not particularly dynamic. There are a couple of reasons for this.

First, the absence of any real economic reform did not provide an opportunity for society to divide along party lines. Almost all enterprises, the means of production and land remained in the possession of the state, while often-heralded privatisation or degovernmentalisation campaigns merely resembled an imitation of economic reform.

Second, elections to all representative and legislative bodies in Belarus were based on a majority vote, which did not promote a classic multi-party system. Perhaps, only the 1994 presidential election and elections to the Supreme Soviet in 1995-96 were characterised, to a greater or lesser degree, by an active participation of political parties.

It was after the infamous 1996 referendum, leading to the adoption of the anti-democratic constitution, that the already weak political parties completely lost their *raison d'être*. Currently, these parties more closely resemble NGOs than political parties in the classic sense.



Nevertheless, even under such circumstances the country retains political parties and some of them are rather well known to a majority of the population. These include the conservative Belarusian Popular Front (BPF), the liberal-conservative United Civil Party (UCP) as well as various social-democratic and green parties.

Two weak and divided communist parties exist in Belarus. However, they are primarily interested in extracting revenge rather than influencing the political situation in the country.

The same political spectrum is seen also in the Homel region. However, the region has its own specific characteristics. Among democratic parties, the regional organisation of UCP is the strongest. UCP has more members and sympathisers, a broad network and strong support among the business community and intelligentsia.

Another regional characteristic is that of all the political parties registered in Belarus there is only one with its legal address and governing body in Homel — the Belarusian Party "Zyalyoniya" (Green).

Other than the above-mentioned parties, there are two conservative parties operating in the region, BPF and the Conservative-Christian Party (CCP), an offshoot of BPF. The best known social-democratic parties are the Belarusian Social-Democratic Hramada (BSDH) and the Belarusian Social-Democratic Party "Popular Hramada" (BSDP PH), also factions of a once united party.

Inter-party co-operation in the region appears to be much better than in the country as a whole. This co-operation increases along with the size of a town or district and it is not limited by joint actions but goes as far as co-ordinating activities and considering different parties' interests during elections or other nation-wide events.

#### THE ROLE OF RESOURCE CENTRES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CIVIC SOCIETY

*Since it was founded, "Hramadzyanskiya initsyatyvy" ("Civic Initiatives") has continually broadened the scope of its services and influence, increased the number of organisation-clients as well as improved methods of activity and the system of co-operation with partners.*

*While in 1996–1997 the organisation was merely outlet for technical assistance for a limited number of NGO's, today it can be said that it is the most influential independent institution supporting a civic society in the Homel region. Civic Initiatives (CI) not only assists existing organisations but also stimulates the establishment of new groups, finds partners for them and provides initial 'nourishing.' Progress has been made in this area and those people who are orientated in the dynamics of third sector development in the region would undoubtedly agree that in the course of the last 2–3 years CI has strengthened the third sector not only in the capital city but through the region as well.*

*However, it should be noted that to date the organisation has operated more on intuition and too little emphasis has been placed on development plans for*

*the future. It could be said that analysing the current situation is usually the general approach, but it clearly seems that the organisation lacks long-term strategic planning for the development of the entire third sector and not only individual organisations. Despite the attractive results on paper (the number of new organisations established, larger number of clients, etc.), activity is poorly organised and results of it are not evaluated on a regular basis. In this regard, the classification presented below is the first attempt to systematise the organisation's activity, and for this reason, if for no other, it is imperfect and incomplete.*



Day of Independence, Minsk, July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1999.  
Photo: IREX/ProMedia

#### I. TARGET GROUPS AND SPHERES OF INFLUENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION "CIVIC INITIATIVES"

Despite the fact that the resource centre operates for the benefit of non-governmental organisations and that one of its main tasks is increasing the number of clients, it must be said that not all NGO's in the region are using its services.

*NGO's that are not clients of the resource centre "Civic Initiatives."*

##### 1. Self-sustainable NGO's.

These organisations primarily operate in one specific field (e.g., treating children who suffered as a result of the Chernobyl disaster or the treatment of disabled military veterans). They usually have a very good resource base and permanent partners (including foreign) that renew projects every year. Co-operation with CI is rather unnecessary.

##### 2. NGO's with which Civic initiatives does not want to co-operate.

This group includes pseudo-NGOs artificially created by the government, such as Belarusian Patriotic Association of Youth (BPAY), women's councils and peace committees. These groups are financed by the state budget and their leaders even include representatives of the presidential administration. Regardless of this, these "NGOs" are included in registers and directories of non-governmental organisations.



Also included in this group are organisations, the statutory activity of which does not correspond to the ideals of a civic society, such as the organisation of KGB veterans and pan-Slavic groups.

### 3. NGO's that do not want to co-operate with Civic Initiatives due to the negative image of CI presented by the regime.

This group mostly includes organisations operating in the sphere of social assistance, which of course is very much needed. However, at present, these organisations count on support from the government and are afraid to damage relations with it. Many organisations representing this category eventually come to learn that placing hopes in the government is a waste of time and no doubt will eventually become our future partners. For example, the regional organisations "Paediatric Haematology," "Parents Association of Children with Cerebral Palsy," "Harmonia' Social and Psychological Rehabilitation Centre" as well as 9 other structures of this type expressed an interest in co-operating with CI. Next year, broader contacts with organisations of this type are planned and CI plans to broaden the scope of its activity. This is important for the Homel region as, in comparison with other regions as well as national statistics, such organisations are much more numerous (see Chapter III. Structure of the Third Sector in the Homel District. Comparative Analysis).

### 4. Organisations that have no objective information concerning the activity of Civic Initiatives.

The problem here consists in the fact that not only does CI lack advertising possibilities, but the government has conducted a long-term and systematic campaign against Civic Initiatives. Nevertheless, these organisations have development prospects for future co-operation. CI plans to conduct a festival of NGO this year (based on the Polish example) during which, other than concerts, games and competitions for the city's inhabitants, CI and other NGOs will promote their activities. Also necessary is seeking new, non-traditional methods of working with potential partners.

## II. PARTNERS AND CLIENTS OF THE RESOURCE CENTRE "CIVIC INITIATIVES"

### Non-governmental organisations.

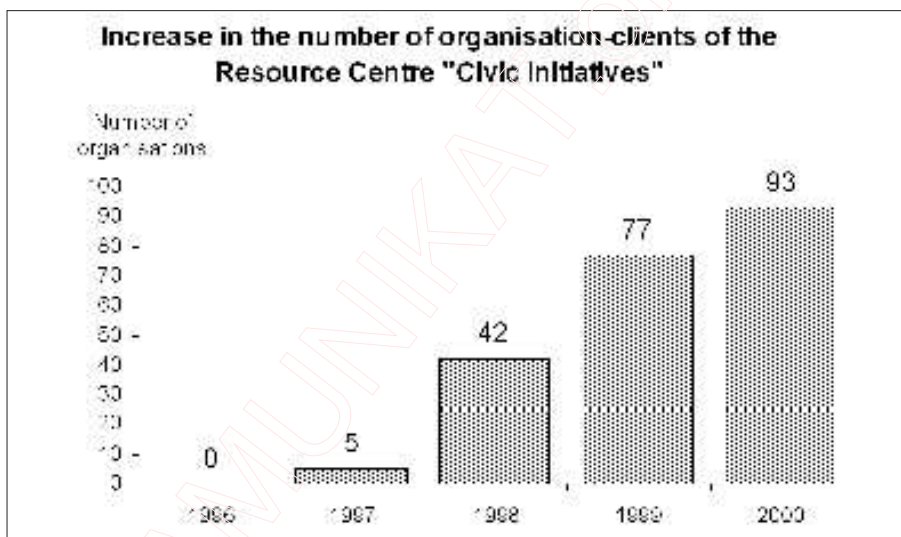
The primary partners and clients are non-governmental organisations and it makes no difference whether they are registered and not. The number of NGOs continues to grow, as does the scope of offered services.

In 1997 Civic Initiatives co-operated only with organisations in Homel. Currently, CI's NGO clients are based in the 17 administrative regions of the district. The number of client-organisations is entered in the register of services rendered every year. Based on this data, plans are made regarding the appropriate quantity of the necessary material, technical and other resources for the next year.

It should also be mentioned that in 1997-1998 CI was unable to co-operate with all NGOs. Clients were selected according to the following priority areas of activity:

- human rights, local government, the state and law;
- youth NGO's;
- NGO's not based in the capital city of Homel.

Since 1999, when Civic Initiatives began to participate in the Open Society Institute program, some limitations were eliminated and co-operation expanded considerably, to the exclusion of pseudo-NGO's created in order to support the ideology of the government.



Clients of Civic Initiatives can be classified in the following manner:

#### ■ according to legal status

- registered — 25 NGO's;
- registered branches of national, regional and interregional associations — 12 NGO's;
- no legal status — 56 NGO's.

#### ■ according to primary area of activity (the majority of NGOs have several areas of activity):

- human rights — 7 NGO's;
- state, law — 21;
- youth — 12;
- social assistance — 26;
- culture, local history, history — 25;
- resource centres — 8.

In addition, there are women's, environmental and professional organisations as well as organisations associating various groups of hobbyists.



■ **according to geographical area of activity:**

- main office located in Homel — 44;
- main office located outside Homel — 49.

Some client-organisations receive only one-time assistance from CI (10% of organisations), other NGO's (40%) are almost totally dependant on the Resource Centre. In conjunction with opening consultation-information centres in such cities as Rechytsa, Svetlohorsk, Buda-Koshalevo, Kalinkovichy, Rogachov and Zhlobin, CI has changed the form of contact with regional NGO's. They currently receive technical assistance and basic consulting from the nearest town where the services are available. Nevertheless, CI continuously makes contacts and organises roundtables, conferences, etc. Practice shows that this type of activity is very important as, other than the intellectual effort expended during a meeting, representatives of organisations exchange experiences and co-ordinate their activity (e.g., during joint participation in observing local elections), and this creates a feeling a solidarity among NGOs and favours the formation of coalitions.

In connection with the ban on activity of non-registered NGOs, the problem arose of legalising them. The problem is particularly important in small localities where there are no other similar organisations. A partial solution involved creating branches of Civic Initiatives, which is a less complicated procedure than registration of a new organisation, as it does not require financial expenditures and permits the use of a private residence as a legal address. Moreover, and most importantly in this case, permission of the special NGO registration committee (chaired by assistant director of the president's administration) is not required. As a result of this activity, CI has opened branches in 11 regions of Homel District, which are actually legal umbrella structures for all democratic NGOs. Civic initiatives plans to open 4 more branches in the near future.

### **Publishing Initiatives.**

Other than NGO's, Resource Centre clients also include two independent regional newspapers *Homelskaya Dumka* (3000 copy print run) and *Rehyon-viesti* (4200 copy print run). Moreover, 6 associations publish information bulletins due to support and assistance granted by CI.

Independent projects occupy a separate place in this activity, of which there were more than 30 in Homel district in 2000. This activity involves youth and topic-based periodicals as well as regional information bulletins, the majority of which has no intention of transforming into a newspaper. Civic Initiatives considers them to be a specific form of social activity. It very frequently occurs that a small initiative group, usually in a small town, plans to create a NGO in order to solve a local problem. This could involve environmental or youth initiatives connected with human rights or any other sphere of activity.

However it is not that simple, not everybody knows where to begin. When CI receives a request for assistance in such cases, it usually advise them to begin by collecting and distributing various types of in-

formation (depending on the sphere of interest). In order for their bulletins to be printed, they must answer the following questions:

- who is the target group?;
- how will the bulletin be distributed?;
- what are the prospects for activity?

In this way, several important tasks are realised. First, the group begins its activity in a more responsible way and continues it by working systematically. Second, the frequency of the bulletin and its quality testify to the seriousness of the group's intentions. Experience shows that organisations that begin activities in this way, frequently begin to initiate other programs and publishing a bulletin becomes just one area of activity. As a result, supporting publishing initiatives is important.

### **Social Activists**

A particular target group, to which CI directs activity, is social activists, as they can be treated as potential leaders. Members of this group are located through publications of the mass media or through other sources and sometimes they find CI. The database of social activists, created in 1989, presently contains more than 1200 people, 25 of whom have gone on to establish NGOs, while others have joined the ranks of existing NGOs. The majority of these people receive CI's information bulletins, as possibilities permit, others receive independent periodicals. Each year, CI organises educational and training seminars for 30-40 social activists. This activity is conducted within the framework of "Leader," a separate program of Civic Initiatives. More than 120 people have attended these seminars. Particular attention is devoted to activists from localities in which no non-governmental structures exist. This activity currently involves representatives from the towns of Aktyabrski, Turau, Khoyniki and Vasilevichy. The program has resulted in the establishment of 25 NGOs to date, of which 6 have been registered and 8 are in the process of registering (see diagram).

### **Professional and Interest Groups.**

For more than a year the activity of Civic Initiatives has included various professional groups such as second school teachers, lecturers from the schools of higher learning, student interest groups, artistic groups and specialised groups of upper secondary students (e.g., economics or journalism).

By supporting teaching groups, CI has the possibility of working directly with youth. CI currently has good relations with teachers' groups in 3 secondary schools and 3 schools of higher learning. Co-operation with journalism classes is particularly interesting. It started as a competition for the best article among young journalists. Later, with the assistance of the Stefan Batory Foundation (Poland), the winners of the contest were given an internship in mass media outlets in Poland. To date, articles of more than 30 participants of this project have appeared in the regional and national press. Moreover, through the assistance of CI, the region's best

youth newspaper *Shkolnaya hazeta* is published, which is edited almost exclusively by secondary school students and journalism department students. This project could soon solve the current problem of a shortage of journalists in the region. This is the most interesting example, but both this and similar projects show that this type of activity should be continued in the future.

#### Artists.

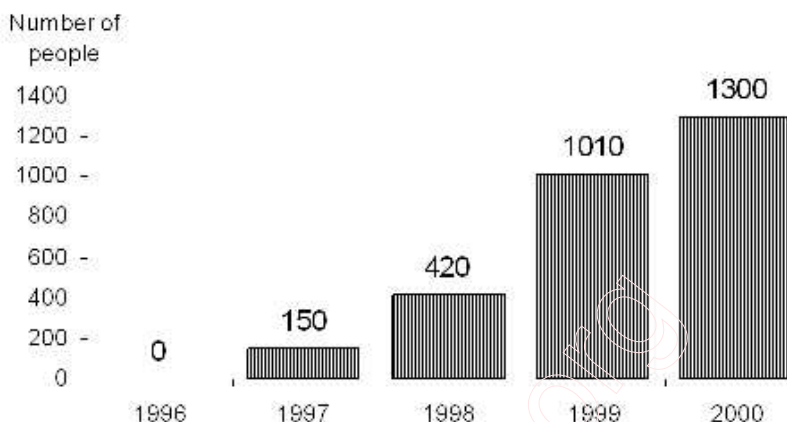
This group includes local artists, musicians, writers, etc. Musicians and writers are the two groups that are able to reach a broader audience in society. In assisting a local artist to organise an exhibition, Civic Initiatives is also making its own mark in society. Naturally, not only artists can benefit from such support, but also those who have an established social position. CI currently co-operates with 9 such people.

*The above-mentioned groups are currently the main partners of Civic Initiatives. CI plans to broaden existing contacts in the future and establish contacts with both new target groups and individuals (e.g., historians, lawyers, etc.).*

### III. NETWORK OF RESOURCE CENTRES IN THE REGION

Time has shown that the selected direction of activity for strengthening the third sector through the establishment of resource centres was appropriate. Due to this activity, the work of many NGO's gained a certain purposefulness. Fairly stable access to material and

### Increase in the number of Homel District social activists registered in the database of "Civic Initiatives"



technical resources as well as to computer equipment allowed client-organisations of the resource centres to plan their activities in a realistic manner.

Co-operation between resource centres and initiative groups has been particularly productive, as many organisations have been established due to this co-operation. Civic Initiatives has established 42 such organisations, of which 16 are registered as independent non-governmental organisations.

It is also obvious that among the positive results of the resource centres is the consolidation of the third sector on the regional level and eventually on the national level.

However, practise shows that one resource centre in a district is unable to meet all needs in the creation and development of social organisations. Considering the fact that the territory of Homel district covers more 40 thousand square kilometres and has a population of almost 1.5 million people, it becomes obvious that technical assistance should be available closest to those who need it.

Therefore, it was decided to establish several additional centres that could take on part of the work themselves.

Several criteria were considered in establishing these centres:

- the possession of various types of resources;
- the territorial factor;
- the professionalism of the personnel;
- the number of structures and potential clients;
- the social activity in the region.

In this way, first three and then 4 more additional resource centres were established in the Homel region. These centres were created on the basis of existing NGOs, which were completely independent. At present, the situation has changed slightly and in order to legalise these



"The March of Freedom," Minsk, Oct. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1999.  
Photo: IREX/ProMedia

NGOs (which were not registered), CI created "umbrellas" in the form of regional structures of "Civic Initiatives."

CI informed its clients about the establishment of the additional centres and about their possibilities. The main principle was that everyone could use the most convenient resource centre, including the district Resource Centre. Moreover, co-operating organisations in all cities were asked to grant assistance, within their means, to these centres. The majority of the organisations supported the move and three organisations in Petrykov, Buda-Koshelevo and Dobrush continue to permit others to use their equipment.

It is still too early to issue a final summary of the results of this activity, but some successes are already evident. If the criteria of the number of new NGOs in the region and the increase in the number of social activities are used, then the most successful have been the activities of the resource centres in Rechytsa and Svetlohorsk, the least successful in Mozyr, Zhlobin, Pohachov, Loyev and Kalinkovichy.

Nevertheless, all centres have realised the main task. Fundamentally, they were and are the only place where the democratic element of the community in individual cities can meet together.

Today, in the majority of district cities with populations of more than 70 and even 100 thousand people, the resource centre office is the only office of a non-governmental organisation in the town! Therefore, without a doubt, it can be stated that the small resource centres are irreplaceable in the process of increasing civic activity in their communities and regions.

## TRENDS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The authorities have recently been intensifying their efforts against non-governmental organisations. This will force NGOs to further consolidate and seek efficient ways of defending themselves against the authorities' aggression.

This is perhaps the reason for the growing politicisation of NGOs in Belarus. The emergence of inter-sector coalitions, associations and unions of non-governmental organisations, political parties and trade unions cannot be ruled out.

Increasing the influence of NGOs on social processes in areas outside the large towns remains a challenge. This is beyond the capacity of one small organisation, let alone one operating illegally. Therefore the establishment of NGOs in the provinces is a strategic goal of donor organisations, existing coalitions of non-governmental organisations and resource centres. A temporary way to legalise non-registered organisations in rural areas may be converting them into local branches of regional organisations. This is particularly feasible in areas affected by Chernobyl, where it is difficult to find even the 10 people required for registering an NGO.

Foreign donor organisations are today the main and almost the only source of financing the third sector in Belarus. Therefore, it is important to create small-scale local resource centres to serve the common needs of all NGOs in a respective locality, espe-

cially under the present circumstances of limited resources.

Considering the social and political situation in Belarus and the Homel region in particular, defending human rights, disseminating objective information, supporting various youth initiatives and preserving the cultural and historical heritage are essential areas of NGO activity.

As most provincial organisations lack experience in obtaining grants and find it difficult to compete for resources with their colleagues in the capital and larger cities, special competitions should be organised for them.



Joint projects between organisations in the Belarusian countryside and foreign organisations would be especially interesting and beneficial. Such co-operation is possible in any area from social projects to human rights defence, in the form of long-term patronage of a Belarusian NGO, volunteer exchange or educating NGO leaders. The main objective of such programmes would be to support Belarusian social activists who operate under extremely complicated conditions created by the totalitarian regime.

It is generally known that foreign donor organisations are the only source of financing the third sector in Belarus. Therefore, in conditions of extremely limited resources, establishing small resource centres for meeting the general needs of all democratic non-governmental organisations operating in individual localities remains a problem.

All resource centres cannot be treated equally. Their skills and experience, the territorial factor and the number of NGOs in this and other regions must be taken into account. Finally, all structures of this type must have a detailed strategic plan of activity. Generally, all resource centres can be divided into three groups: district, interregional and regional or municipal. They should also have a defined scope of services that they are able to offer.

This classification could be as follows:

### Services offered by regional or municipal resource centres:

- providing technical assistance (photocopying, access to a computer);
- providing means of communications;

- conducting regular consultations (including with specialists invited from other cities) connected with NGO activity;
- providing access to premises for conducting small events organised by NGOs;
- access for clients at designated times (2–3 hours a day or 1–2 days a week).



*Oppositional action against the election to Parliament,  
Minsk, Oct. 14<sup>th</sup>, 2001.  
Photo: IREX/ProMedia*

#### **Services offered by interregional resource centres:**

In addition to all services offered by municipal resource centres, interregional resource centres should also:

- possess full-time consultants assisting in solving current problems connected NGO activity;
- organise seminars and training sessions devoted to founding and registering NGOs as well as to computer and other office machine basics;
- be accessible for clients on a daily basis;
- service not less than 10–15 client-organisations;
- include several local governmental administrative bodies within the scope of their activities.

#### **Services offered by district resource centres:**

The scope of their activity should cover the entire district. In addition to providing assistance for NGOs, they should also engage in analytical activity and work planning for an extended period of time (2–3 years). Other than the services offered by the above-mentioned centres, the district resource centres should also:

- provide consultations connected with legal, economic and other aspects of NGO activity;
- have access to the Internet and other modern means of communications;
- offer such services as text translation from the most popular languages;
- seek partners for client-organisations, including foreign partners;
- grant assistance in preparing project proposals;
- have the possibility of conducting seminars (2- or 3-day) for partner organisations;
- grant assistance in composing and printing bulletins and small newsletters, as well as publishing, at least, small brochures;

- possess a library for the needs of social activities, subscribe to local, regional and national newspapers.

However, this is the external and the visible side of resource centre activity. Most important is that they be structures responsible for the development of the third sector in their respective areas. They should not only assist existing NGOs, but also promote the establishment of new NGOs, and precisely this must be one of the criteria in evaluating their work. In turn, assistance for the resource centres should be provided by the district resource centres as well as Belaruskaya Asatsyatsya Resursnykh Centrau (Belarusian Association of Resource Centres — BARC), of which these structures will comprise a component part in the future.

If it is assumed that the work of a resource centre should be continually broadening the database of social activists and increasing the number of client-organisations, legal (i.e., registered) work with youth is very important. For example, if conducting classes with a neutral topic is supported with a small grant, an opportunity of establishing contacts with students exists. Therefore, it is very important that district resource centres maintain a small sum of money for micro-grants. With all respect to national small grants competitions, it should be acknowledged that their flexibility is limited, and sometimes it is necessary to operate quickly. Therefore, a district resource centre should have 5–7 thousand USD available for this purpose. In some sense, all projects that are entered in district competitions are experimental projects, which create the risk of using these funds. But as practise shows, the result is significantly greater than the risk. The district resource centres should present a more detailed conception of regional small grant competitions when submitting subsequent proposals for awarding grants.

## **II. TERRITORY AND TARGET GROUPS OF RESOURCE CENTRE ACTIVITY**

Many organisations were engaged in creating resources centres in the last 2–3 years. On the one hand this is understandable and it explains the urgency of the problem. However, there are doubts if this is not transitory activity for some activists and their participation in the creation of such resource centres is conditioned by the missions of donor organisations. Therefore, organisations that intend to become resource centres should have experience in third sector work, experienced and successful members as well as have some authority among partners.

The experience of Civic Initiatives shows that the most important growth areas of social activity are mainly the large cities, schools of higher learning and the youth environment generally. In addition, the need for establishing a resource centre in a given locality should also depend on size of the population, the existence of secondary schools and schools of higher learning and the number of potential client-organisations. Considering the above, CI believes that maintaining the following resource centres is important:



**Interregional:**

**Rechyt'sa** (population — 108 thousand, of which 66 thousand live in the capital of the region and 6 thousand in other towns of the region). The city has two institutes of higher learning: teaching and agricultural schools. Number of potential clients — 8 NGO's and 2 information bulletins. The regions of Khoyniki and Brahinsk are also located within the scope of activity of this resource centre.

During the past year, many new organisations were established in the region. "Slavutsich," the most influential and enjoying the most authority has operated as a resource centre for more than a year.

**Svetlohor'sk** (population — 98 thousand, of which 73 thousand live in the capital of the region and 5 thousand in other towns of the region). The town has a branch of a private school of higher learning and an industrial-technical school. Number of potential clients — 8 NGO's and 5 information bulletins. The region of Aktyabr'ski is also located within the scope of activity of this centre.

This resource centre was selected due to the fairly large number of NGOs operating in this region and the fact that the only private Belarusian-language secondary school in the Homel district is located in this city. Many graduates of this school actively work in the third sector.

**Mozyr** (population — 130 thousand, of which 109 thousand live in the capital of the region). Mozyr has a teaching institute, branch of an international humanities institute, technical school and medical school. Number of potential clients — 15 NGO's and 3 information bulletins. The regions of Zhytkovitski, Lelchyt'ski, Petrykovski, Yelski and Narovlanski are also located within the scope of activity of this resource centre. Until recently, Mozyr was an administrative centre of Poleski district and even after its incorporation into Homel district it retained its influence on surrounding regions. Unfortunately, the city is not now characterised by substantial social activity, but it has a lot of potential and an important strategic significance.

**Regional**

**Kalinkovichy** (population — 72 thousand, of which 38 thousand live in the capital of the region and 1.5 thousand in other towns of the region). Base organisation — "Social Centre." The town has a higher agricultural school. Number of potential clients — 4 NGO's and 2 information bulletins.

**Zhlobin** (population — 106 thousand, of which 71 thousand live in the capital of the region and 1.4 thousand in other towns of the region). Base organisation — "Krynitsy." The town has a branch of Homel Technical University and a higher agricultural school. Number of potential clients — 4 NGO's and 1 information bulletin.

**Rogachov** (population — 71 thousand, of which 35 thousand live in the capital and 0.7 thousand in other towns of the region). Base organisation — "Civic Choice." The town has two higher schools of learning: a medical school and a teaching school. Number of potential clients — 4 NGO's and 1 information bulletin.

**Loyev** (population — 18 thousand, of which 8 thousand live in the capital of the region). Base organisation — "Karani" ("Roots"). The town has a teaching

school. Number of potential clients — 3 NGO's and 1 information bulletin.

**Buda-Kashalevo** (population — 44 thousand, of which 10 thousand live in the capital and 5 thousand in other towns of the region). Base organisation — "Radzimichy." The town has an agro-technical school. Number of potential clients — 3 NGO's.

In the future, such resource centres should be established in each of the 21 regions located in the district.



"The March of Freedom," Minsk, Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000.  
Photo: IREX/ProMedia

Other than a structure based on the administrative division, resource centres for individual target NGO groups should also be established, taking into account the specific conditions in a given region. For example, the social organisation "Hart" is already working as a resource centre in Homel. It has its steady clients comprising organisations associating youth.

**Viktar Karneyenka**, born 1957. Graduated from the Homel Polytechnic Institute, with an engineer-economist's degree. Deputy of the Council of USSR in 1989. In 1991–1994 vice-mayor of Homel, resigned after Lukashenka's accession to power in 1994. In 1994–1996, vice-president of The Lev Sapieha Foundation. Since 1996, president of the Homel Regional Society "Social Initiatives." Engaged in social activity and economic development of the region.

Alaksandar Shalayka

## WHAT IS THE ASSEMBLY?

The initiative to co-ordinate the activity of non-governmental organisations in Belarus appeared in the second half of 1996. It was a time of radical changes in the Belarusian society, when dictatorial tendencies in the country's political system escalated and resulted in a coup that brought about Lukashenka's presidential dictatorship.

A majority of organisations understood that their further internal development was impossible without co-ordination, information about the activity of other NGOs, or common strategy in relation to sponsors. Those problems were solvable only with the help of a structure which, on one hand, would have function as a co-ordination and representative body, and on the other, respect the sovereignty of each, even the smallest, member organisation.

Long debate about approaches to co-ordination ended up with the founding of a single organising committee of what was called the National Assembly of Democratic Non-Governmental Organisations of Belarus. The organising committee agreed to the need for a broad and open coalition of democratically oriented NGOs to operate throughout the country. This approach was approved by 250 organisations that took part in the 1<sup>st</sup> Assembly, which also introduced its co-ordination body — the Working group. Several months later, the Executive Bureau was formed as a professional organ of the Assembly.

The Assembly faced the following challenges:

To establish co-operation among NGOs in the field of information exchange;

To build a system of mutual services;

To expand the scope of the third sector's influence onto society;

To build a system of collective defence of NGOs' rights;

To attract new members to the Assembly.

A bulletin of non-governmental organisations of Belarus, in its electronic and printed versions, was very important as it became the main medium of information exchange for democratic NGOs.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of Non-Governmental Organisations was held on November 14, 1998.

Upon the issue of the presidential edict about re-registration of political parties, trade unions, and other non-governmental organisations, which threatened the existence of a democratic third sector in Belarus, the Assembly started a salvage programme in 1999 called "SOS — The Third Sector."

In summer 2000, the Assembly of Democratic Non-Governmental Organisations of Belarus carried out a campaign to defend the rights of NGOs and recover from the effects of the state re-registration. Within the campaign, the Assembly published a brochure titled "The Re-registration of Non-Governmental Organisations in Belarus in 1999," held a press conference, a rally in Minsk and pickets in four other towns of Belarus.

Before the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress, the Assembly re-registered its members internally. The congress, held on December 2–3, 2000, decided to register the Assembly as an association of non-governmental organisations under the name "Assembly," approved its Statute and signed a constituent treaty.

The congress also decided to participate in the 2001 election by organising a mobilisation campaign and observing the election. In 2001, those campaigns were carried out and were among the most successful actions during the run-up to the presidential election.

Under the conditions after the election, the focus of the Assembly's effort returned to developing contacts with the people and winning their confidence. Of high importance for this activity will be National Programmes planned by the Assembly, which join efforts of various non-governmental organisations in that field.

Another important line of activity is further development of international co-operation with non-governmental organisations in other countries. This applies to already existing strategic partnerships such as Poland or the United States, and to new developments like Wales, Germany, or the Ukraine.

## SELECTED NGOs — DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

### ADUKATAR

Youth association Adukatar was founded in the spring of 1999 in Vitsebsk. The main goals of Adukatar are to make secondary and high education more democratic, to contribute to educating and instilling values in youth, to contribute to legal awareness and to build a civic society in Belarus.

The association currently has 12 members, who have a higher and specialised secondary education — including law students and lawyers. Members are actively engaged in various political parties and social associations and participate in mass meetings and seminars.

The association has conducted and participated in training courses on law, local government, negotiations, leadership in social organisations, co-operation, human rights and the "School of Modern Political Techniques." Members have also volunteered as public observers in election districts during the deputy elections to local Councils, members of

the election commission for the presidential election, public defenders in court proceedings concerning the removal of the Suworov bust by V. Pleshenko. Moreover, association members have distributed information by O. Karach and L. Chernusava.

Adukatar co-operates with various organisations in Vitsebsk Region: Vitsebsk branch of the L. Sapieha Foundation, the Vitsebsk Youth Initiative Centre "KONTUR," the Vitsebsk branch of the Human Rights Centre "VIASNA," the Vitsebsk branch of the Belarusian Association of Students, the Orsha Youth Centre "PERSPECTYVA," Navapolack organisation "KROK RAZAM" and other youth organisations.

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## HOMEL ASSOCIATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The Homel Association of Children and Youth (ASDEMO) is a non-profit and non-governmental organisation registered on November 14, 1996.

ASDEMO is based on principles of voluntary work and desire in order to actively participate in the life of society. The association helps children and young people of Homel and the Homel region in fulfilling their potential and in the process of socialisation through conducting informational and educational activities and various developmental programs. All ASDEMO members are volunteers, including the organisation's director and board.

The main principles of activity are democracy, equality, and freedom.

The mission of ASDEMO is to provide youth an opportunity to express themselves and contribute to society.

The main areas of activity are:

### ■ Environment.

ASDEMO grants assistance to activities aimed at improving the level of environmental culture within the population, developing a public movement in the sphere of environment protection and ensuring ecological human rights. Within this area, the association has conducted the following activities:

- Environmental education for children and youth;
- Promotion of alternative sources of energy;
- Annual international environmental camps (since 1997);
- Independent eco-laboratory for monitoring the environment. The basic task is monitoring the quality of drinking water and natural reservoirs in Homel and the Homel region;
- Conducting environmental-based seminars.

### ■ Leisure time activities.

- Sports clubs and competitions between them;
- Environmental education and sources of alternative energy.

ASDEMO hopes to establish a youth centre in one of the most densely populated districts in Homel. There is a significant need for such a centre as the few state youth centres that exist in Homel are inadequate for a city with a population of half a million people.

### ■ Anti AIDS activities.

Unfortunately, the Homel region is famous for having the highest level of AIDS in Belarus. ASDEMO is planning to open an independent AIDS Centre. ASDEMO is currently conducting the following activities in this field:

- Sex education for children and youth, particularly in regard to preventive measures against AIDS and drug addiction;

- Annual charitable cultural youth project on the 1st of December, the World Day against AIDS. Begun in 1996, and now widely known and very popular with the youth, "Fight AIDS" includes exhibitions of drawings and pictures made by children and youth, professional medical consultations and a much loved concert of rock bands.

### ■ Helping refugees.

This is a new area of activity for the association. There are more than 1500 refugees from all over the world in the Homel area. Most of them come from Afghanistan, Tadjikistan, and Chechnya. ASDEMO is launching a project that will lead to opening a social information centre for refugees. The centre is to assist in finding employment for the refugees and organise leisure activities.

### Other activities:

- Supporting public initiatives for peace, democracy, and human rights;
- Hosting charitable meetings for schoolchildren, orphans, and the blind;
- Organising cultural exchange programs (festivals, exhibitions, concerts, competitions, etc.).

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## "ASLONA" SOCIAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE DEFENCE OF TAXPAYERS AND CONSUMERS RIGHTS

The Social Association for Taxpayers' and Consumers' Rights Defence "Aslona" is a regional, non-governmental, non-profit organisation established in December 1995 through the initiative of deputies (lawyers, journalists, and businessmen) to the Supreme Soviet and the Municipal Council. The activity of the association is mainly conducted in the southern part of the Harodnya region ( 'oblast' ).

### ■ Goals:

- Promoting democratic reforms in the fields of human rights, local self-government, economics, and culture;
- Establishing a civil society;
- Increasing the educational level of residents of the Harodnya region in the fields of human rights, local self-government, economics, culture, and historical heritage;
- Promoting the ideas of democracy;
- Supporting the activity of social associations and social initiatives;
- Supporting the independent mass media and publishing activity.



#### ■ Tasks:

- to provide and defend the legal rights of citizens in state, economic and social bodies and organisations;
- to conduct educational activities in the fields of human rights, local self-government, economics, culture, ecology;
- to assist in the development of a civic society, the observation of human rights and the rule of law;
- to support public initiatives;
- to support NGOs.

#### ■ Methods:

- counselling to organisations and private individuals in the fields of human rights and taxpayer and consumer rights;
- holding meetings, seminars, lectures, conferences (regional, national and international);
- organising educational activities in the fields of human rights and taxpayer and consumer rights for residents of the Harodnya region;
- publishing advertising and information materials.

#### Activity.

The social association "Aslona" is actively engaged in the defence of human rights and education for the residents of the southern part of the Harodnya region. The association also provides counselling, informational and practical assistance in the fields of human rights, labour rights and taxpayer and consumer rights. The Information Centre for Human Rights Defence operates on the basis of the social association "Aslona." Chambers for legal defence have been established in Vaukavysk and Slonim which grant counselling and practical human rights defence assistance to the residents of the region. The social association "Aslona" provides technical, material, informational, and counselling assistance to non-governmental organisations in the region and functions as a resource centre for them. "Aslona" also publishes the human rights bulletin "Viestki."

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## VITSEBSK BRANCH OF THE BELARUSIAN ORGANISATION OF WORKING WOMEN

Through educational activities among women the Belarusian Organization of Working Women assists in raising social consciousness and establishing democratic institutions in Belarus. The basic objective of the Vitsebsk branch of the Belarusian Organization of Working Women is to unite women

in order to protect their social, economic, labour and other legal interests, their families and children.

#### ■ General areas of activity:

- Granting legal assistance to women in order to protect their rights and interests;
- Vitsebsk Legal Centre;
- Hosting meetings with lawyers for women from other social organisations;
- "Hotline" for legal questions on the pages of the information bulletin "Women's Herald" ("Жаночы вiеьник");
- Informing women about the development of the women's movement in Vitsebsk region ('oblast'), Belarus and other countries;
- Establishing and maintaining contacts with other women's organisations;
- Participating in national and international seminars, meetings, congresses;
- Granting assistance to large families and single parent families;
- Publishing the information bulletin "Women's Herald";
- Assisting young poets and writers through publishing their works in the cultural and educational newspaper "Pradslava."

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## BUSINESSWOMEN'S CLUB

The Businesswomen's Club (BWC) in Berastsye is a municipal non-governmental organisation. The club was established in October 1993, registered in November 1995 and re-registered in September 1999.

BWC's primary goal is to increase the significance and role of women in society.

The organisation strives towards this goal through:

1. Getting women involved in social affairs as well as assisting women in professional development;
2. Conducting educational and training programs for women and youth;
3. Assisting women who have found themselves in a difficult situation;
4. Disseminating information regarding issues covered by BWC's activity;
5. Establishing a network of women's organisations in the Republic of Belarus.

#### The activity of BWC:

#### ■ Social programs

- Sending Christmas presents to an orphanage in Yastrembel;
- Organising a series of charitable events "How is your service, son?" in the 38th brigade of mobile troops of the Republic of Belarus;

- Participating in the environmental movement "Women for Nature Protection";
  - Running an educational program on HIV/AIDS prevention entitled "Changing Sexual Behaviour (safe sex) in the Republic of Belarus";
  - Running a program of providing assistance to women in a difficult situation;
  - Conducting a project which involves working with women in prisons;
  - Holding educational seminars for unemployed women entitled "Economical Development of Women."
- Cultural and educational programs
- Organising the I Municipal Conference for Women under the banner "Women Will Make the World Better by the Year 2000";
  - Organising a youth peace and dream event entitled "Red Balloons Celebration";
  - Organising the "The World through Women's Eyes" exhibition;
  - Organising the "The Image of a Businesswoman" seminar;
  - Organising the "Monitoring Elections to Local Councils" seminar.

BWC is a member of the International Federation of Clubs for Business and Professional Women (IFBPW) 1997, and the Assembly of Democratic Non-governmental Organisations.

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## ASSOCIATION OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN HAVING CEREBRAL PALSY AND SPINAL PATHOLOGY

The Association of Families with Children Having Cerebral Palsy and Spinal Pathology was established in 1992. The basic objective of the association is to grant social and psychological assistance to disabled children and their families.

Members of the organisation include 310 families with disabled children having cerebral palsy and spinal pathology under 25 and living in Homel.

### Activity.

- Humanitarian and material aid;
- Rejuvenation of disabled children in foreign countries and in Belarus;
- Organising activities (parties, celebrations, discos, going to a theatre or circus);
- Psychological assistance to disabled children and members of their families;
- Project "I Want to Know Everything," establishing a computer class for disabled children, English and German classes and

psychological counselling (sponsored by the American foundation "Counter Part");

- Holding roundtables for social organisations that work with disabled children with motor and spinal pathologies aimed at finding common problems and searching for ways to solve them on the state level.

The President of the Association is Yauhenya Mastavaya.

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## KALINKAVICHI REGIONAL SOCIAL ASSOCIATION "CIVIC CENTRE"

The Kalinkavichi Regional Social Association "Civic Centre" was established in July 2000. The basic objectives of the association is to preserve and develop historical and cultural values of the Belarusian nation and to assist in the processes of bringing constitutional human rights and freedoms to fruition.

### Activity:

- legal clinics granting help in legal issues;
  - supporting the teachers' association.
- The organisation co-operates actively with the Social Association "Public Initiatives"

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## HOMEL REGIONAL PUBLIC ASSOCIATION "CIVIL INITIATIVES"

The Homel Regional Public Association "Civil Initiatives" sees its mission in assistance to democratic processes in Homel region in the field of human rights, economic reforms, science, culture and ecology, solution of the socially important problems and development of information space.

### The activity is directed to:

- extension of public activity in Homel region;
- studying problems relating to public movement, interaction between non-governmental organisations and mass media;
- creation of informational network with the database on regional public organisations;
- development and support of NGOs and independent mass media.

### **The Association realises the following programs:**

- "Partnership" (co-operation with the non-governmental organisations in Homel region)  
The program aim — assistance in establishment, development and activity of non-governmental organisations in Homel region.

The program foresees:

- study and analysis of public organisations' activity and problems of public movement;
- granting material, organisational, and technical assistance to the regional public organisations, duplication of information materials, access to computers and other office equipment and communication means;
- conducting seminars, trainings and conferences on the problems of the third sector activity;
- granting consultations for citizens and public activists on the problems of the third sector activity;
- strengthening interaction between regional non-governmental organisations and mass media;
- working out and publishing periodicals and specific informational bulletins for non-governmental organisations.

- "Leader" (leadership in public organisations)

The program aim — training and consulting the leaders of non-governmental organisations and other active people in the field of management, establishing coalitions and influencing the government decisions.

The program foresees:

- conducting training seminars for the leaders involved in public activity;
- establishing training centres for public activists in Homel region;
- publishing brochures in management and organisational processes.

- "Youth"

This foreground program is directed on the assistance in establishment and development of youth non-governmental organisations and involvement of active young people in public life.

The program includes:

- educational and competitive projects for young journalists, economists and other kind of progressive youth;
- access to computers and modern means of communication;
- training seminars on actual problems of youth, conducted by professionals;
- counselling, technical, and methodological assistance to young organisations.

- "Publishing Centre"

Project goal — assistance in establishment and development of independent mass media in Homel

region, issuing different kinds of printed materials for non-governmental organisations.

Main directions are:

- education and consultations for editors and journalists from independent mass media in the region;
- advertising and other publications about NGOs' activity and independent mass media;
- assistance in publishing independent newspapers, NGO bulletins, works of local poets, writers, historians, artists and others;
- help in distribution of printing production.

### **Service.**

The Resource Centre for Civil Initiatives is established on the basis of the Association. Its aim is the technical, counselling and organisational help to non-governmental organisations in Homel region.

The Centre provides the following service, which is free of charge:

- training seminars, consultations in actual problems of the third sector activity;
- translation of the necessary information;
- assistance in preparing the documents for registration of non-governmental organisations;
- technical assistance (copying machines, computers, means of communication, access to Internet, etc.);
- assistance in establishing contacts with partners in Belarus and abroad;
- putting the office at the disposal of non-governmental organisations (up to 20 persons).

Today the Resource Centre grants assistance to more than 60 NGOs in Homel region.

### **Perspective.**

- Establishing a network of informational counselling centres for NGOs in provincial towns of Homel region;
- Designing the database of public activists in Homel region;
- Developing the weekly Discussion Club for young public and political activists;
- Establishing the Computer Class and Internet Centre for training young people in practical work with computers and modern means of communication;
- Improving the technical, publishing and communication base of newspapers and NGOs, issuing their bulletins;
- Extending the zone of distribution of independent mass media to areas outside of Homel;
- Developing and realising educational programs in human rights.

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## KRYCHAU SOCIAL ASSOCIATION "CONTACT CENTRE"

The Contact Centre was established in March 1999 and registered on 23 February 2000. The organisation currently has 13 members and 15 regular volunteers. The mission of the organisation is to promote self-fulfilment within a true civic community in Krychau Region and thereby assist in building a new European Belarus.

### Activity is concentrated in the following areas:

- Establishing common information network;
- Human rights (defending the rights and freedoms of the population in Krychau Region);
- Granting assistance to initiative groups and residents who live in the region;
- Publishing;
- Health, physical training and sports in the life of Krychau 's population;
- Environment protection;
- Culture and education.

### Main forms of conducting activity:

- Organising clubs, hobby groups, workshops for local people;
- Running the Regional Human Rights Defence Chamber;
- Granting technical, professional, and methodological assistance to social organisations and public initiatives;
- Running the Regional Information Centre (Service);
- Granting assistance in conducting educational and cultural summer camps for youth in the region;
- Organising and conducting recitals, readings, meetings with writers, education courses, seminars, round and discussion tables, concerts;
- Informing the population about its activity by the means of mass media, including its own.

#### 1. Activity of the Regional Human Rights Defence Chamber.

The Centre provides counselling and assistance for all residents of Krychau Region (Krychau, Klimavichi, Kastsyukovich, Mscislau, Cherykau). The "Krychau Human Rights Defence Bulletin" is published on the basis of the Centre.

#### 2. Activity of the Regional Information Centre (Service).

A divaricate information network has been established. The purpose of the network is to collect and disseminate information about the political, economic, civic, and social life in the region (Krychau, Klimavichi, Kastsyukovich, Mscislau, Cherykau). A monthly periodical "Our Thought" ("Nasha Dumka") is published by the Centre.

#### 3. Activity of the Social Laboratory "Pozirk."

This project includes monthly public opinion polls of the residents of several eastern Belarusian regions. Poll results are published in leading Belarusian media outlets.

#### 4. Activity of the Regional Resource Centre for NGOs.

This project includes granting assistance to regional initiatives as well as conducting various youth, publishing and cultural projects. A youth oriented bulletin "Youth Courier" ("Maladziozhny kuryer") is published by the Centre.

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## HARODNYA REGIONAL COUNCIL OF YOUTH ORGANISATIONS "COUNCIL-23"

The Harodnya Regional Council of Youth Organisations "Council — 23" is an apolitical, voluntary and independent association of social youth organisations in Harodnya region (oblast). The Council was registered in December 1996.

### ■ Goals:

- Increasing the effectiveness of activity conducted by social youth organisations through co-ordinating their work;
- Strengthening the role of young people in the process of establishing a civic community.

### ■ Activity:

- co-ordinating the work of association members in the region, the country and on an international scale in order to achieve common goals;
- representing the interests of local youth organisations in national and international forums;
- representing and protecting the interests of local youth organisations in state administrative bodies;
- educating leaders and members of social youth organisations;
- developing and sponsoring projects aimed at the realisation of statutory aims;
- collecting, maintaining and exchanging information;
- granting assistance in establishing and registering new social youth organisations in the Harodnya region.

### ■ Methods:

- Establishing an information centre;



- Establishing consulting centres with the aim of assisting social youth organisations in the Harodnya region to solve local problems;
- Granting legal, methodological, organisational and technical assistance to initiative groups while establishing and registering social youth organisations in the Harodnya Region;
- Conducting research programs, analysing the problems of organisations and activity of local social youth organisations in the Harodnya Region;
- Organising and participating in conferences, seminars, roundtables, educational courses and other similar activities;
- Preparing and conducting the "project fairs" for local social youth organisations in the Harodnya Region;
- Presenting organisational technologies to local social youth organisations in the Harodnya region;
- Co-operating with state and independent mass media, establishing informational bodies, conducting publishing activity.

In January 1997 Council — 23 conducted the educational seminar "Registration of Social Organisations and Document Preparation" in co-operation with the "VIT" association. As a result 5 new youth organisations in Harodnya Region were registered. Since February 1998 Council — 23 has been conducting a program aimed at supporting youth initiatives in Western Belarus.

## THE SOCIAL ASSOCIATION OF CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES "USYASLAV CHARADZEY"

The Social Association of Cultural and Educational Initiatives "Usyaslav Charadzey" (SACEI "Usyaslav Charadzey") was founded in Navapolatsk on 2 April 1998.

- **Goals of activity:**
  - the spiritual and cultural revival in Polatsk Region;
  - increasing the use of the Belarusian language and establishing it as the official language of the Republic of Belarus;
  - development of traditional handicrafts;
  - preservation and development of the ethnic, cultural and natural potential of the Belarusian lands and people.

Among the most interesting and important activities conducted within the community in the recent past were concerts of Belarusian minstrels, the celebration of the traditional archaic holiday "Kupalle," conducting studies at National University and establishing a new organisation, the "Philomateurs' Society" (Tavarystva Filamatau), etc.

SACEI "Usyaslav Charadzey" operates as a regional resource centre and provides technical, infor-

mational and methodological support to democratic and non-governmental organisations in the region. Moreover, most members of the association have considerable experience in developing and conducting various environmental programs and projects, due to the fact that they comprise the founding members of the ecological movement in Navapolatsk in the mid-1980s, which opposed industrial enterprises polluting the environment in the town and region.

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## YASEP DRAZDOVICH EDUCATIONAL CENTRE

The Yasep Drazdovich Educational Centre is a non-governmental non-profit organisation engaged in arts related issues in Sharkaushchiny region of Vitsebsk 'oblast'.

### Activity:

- conducting seminars, devoted to Yasep Drazdovich and Michas Raychonak;
- conducting exhibitions in Minsk, Polatsk, Vitsebsk, Braslau and other towns;
- organising a contest of children's drawings "Following Yasep Drazdovich";
- youth festival of regional studies, field trips;
- presentations of books, meetings with authors;
- preparing a film "The Soul Is Grieving Over Its People," devoted to the memory of Michas Raychonak;
- editing the newspaper "Batskaushchina";
- participating in the political life of Belarus.

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## VITSEBSK YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL ASSOCIATION "EKAVITA"

### Main activity:

1. **Education.** EKAVITA activists deliver lectures on environmental ethics and American environmentalism both for senior pupils and students. We designed special software (environmental training programs), which is now used in schools. We co-operate closely with secondary schools No. 1, 6, 34, 37, 40 in Vitsebsk, No. 1 in Lepiel, No. 6 in Navapolatsk, No. 3 in Salihorsk, ecological gymnasium No. 3 in Baranavichi, the ecological lyceum in Domzharychi and others.

2. **Research.** EKAVITA activists publish articles and abstracts in scholarly journals on environmental issues concerning the Belarusian Lake District.

3. **Information and Publishing.** EKAVITA members search, analyse and distribute environmental information originally placed on web sites by both Belarusian and other environmental organisations ("EkaSupraciu" ["EcoResistance"], "Khraniteli Radugi" ["Rainbow Keepers"], "Green Peace," EPA, etc.). Members also publish articles in the local press. ECAVITA is constructing its own web-site on the Internet.

4. **Politics.** The vast majority of members are also members of the Belarusian Popular Front, the Belarusian Democratic Hramada and other democratic parties and NGOs. Some EKAVITA activists participated in election campaigns as candidates and as observers.

The leader of the organisation and program director is Uladzimir Slabin.

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## THE F. KMITA REGIONAL CENTRE FOR THE SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRATIC REFORMS

The F. Kmita Regional Centre for the Support and Development of Democratic Reforms was established in Orsha in March 1997 by representatives of four Orsha-based democratic social associations.

The basic objective of the association is to support democratic reforms in Orsha region through strengthening the sector of social organisations and independent mass media.

Since its establishment, the F. Kmita Centre has assisted in establishing several NGOs in the region. These associations have already demonstrated an ability to work effectively. Since the summer of 1997, the F. Kmita Centre has published the municipal newspaper "Kutseyina."

Due to support provided by the Centre since 1997, the following newspapers were established: "Belarusian Collector" (Orsha), "RShA" (Orsha), "Stsyana" (Vitsebsk), "Zolak" (Kochanova), "Recha lukomli" (Navalukomi) as well as "Youth Step," the newspaper of youth associations in Vitsebsk Region.

The Centre holds educational courses, seminars, and lectures. In addition, it functions as a regional resource centre for regional NGOs.

The F. Kmita Centre hosted the Assembly of NGOs in the city of Orsha on July 2, 1998. In accordance with the decision of the Assembly, 11 NGOs were charged with supporting informational con-

tacts on behalf of the Assembly and the F. Kmita Centre.

## CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

The Mahylou Social Association "Circle of Friends" ("Kola siabrou") was established in August 1994 on principles of democracy, openness, friendship, Belarusian sovereignty and values common to all mankind. Members support private and social initiatives, both independently and through partnerships. The objective of the Association is to establish a prosperous community in its environment and in society.

The association conducts activity in different spheres — information, youth, cultural, and humanitarian. The Women's Support and Self-Education Centre developed into an independent organisation. Circle of Friends maintains a library and hosts an Internet-club. The association was one of the founders of the Belarusian Association of Resource Centres (BARC).

Since its establishment, Circle of Friends has been actively co-operating with the Charitable Children's Foundation "Praposhask." During this period over 600 children from Mahylou Region were able to participate in a rejuvenation holiday abroad. Circle of Friends assists in providing channels for humanitarian aid (especially for the population of Slauharad District, hospitals, and homeless-shelters in the region).

Circle of Friends has succeeded in establishing a unified information network in Mahylou Region, which includes regional information centres. They collect and disseminate information concerning local events and primarily the activities of local civic organisations. Moreover, such information centres attract other local initiatives to co-operate and assist in their successful development. A series of joint projects has been conducted for leaders and activists of local organisations. As a result, members of the organisations obtained practical skills involving the use of computers, editing programs, e-mail and the Internet.

The Youth Centre "Ratusha" (on the basis of Circle of Friends) co-ordinates various youth initiatives. Eight regional youth organisations are part of the Centre. The Centre supported over 15 youth projects in 2000.

The cultural initiative of Circle of Friends involves conducting exhibitions, concerts, meetings with famous writers and assistance in promoting creative ideas.

The Women's Support and Self-Education Centre is very active. Young ladies and women can receive an education at the Individual Success School. Children can spend their free time at the Children's Recreation Centre. The Centre has established a library for women and conducts roundtable discussions.

Circle of Friends publishes a monthly bulletin "Nota Bene," which covers the activity of the civic organisations of Mahylou Region. Circle of Friends is one of the founders of the "Mahylou Weekly" newspaper, which informs people about life in Mahylou. The paper is distributed in all regional districts.

The Internet Club "Sadruzhnast" is a new direction in the Circle's activity, which was launched in 2000. The aim of this project is to inform citizens about Mahylou regional organisations, their activity and achievements. It has created an Internet-site (<http://krug.hypermart.net>), which includes analytical reviews, information from the "Mahylou Weekly" newspaper and the "Nota Bene" bulletin. This site provides information about 40 social associations and non-formal initiatives in the region. The forum allows visitors to discuss any problem.

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## HALSHANSKI ZAMAK CLUB

The Halshanski Zamak (Halshany Castle) Club was founded in June 1999. The organisation's activity is concentrated on various population groups within a single locality — Halshany village (Ashmyany region, Harodnya oblast). Selected achievements and projects of the organisation are presented below:

- seminar "Experience in Patriotic Upbringing in Village Schools" (1997);
- training seminar "Leadership Problems in Youth Groups" (1997);
- fair dedicated to the 380th anniversary of the Catholic church and monastery in Halshany (1998);
- publishing the bulletin "Halshanski Zamak."

The Club co-operates with the K. Narbut Belarusian Society of Regional Studies and the organisation "Belarusian Perspective" ("Bielaruskaya perspektiva").

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## HOMEL MUNICIPAL YOUTH CENTRE "HART"

The Homel Municipal Youth Centre "Hart" was founded in 1997, was registered in July 1998 and re-registered in October 1999. The basic objective of

the organisation is to raise the level of social activity among Homel youth by seeking out and supporting youth initiatives, organisations and establishing an independent youth-based media network.

### Activity:

#### ■ Supporting youth organisations

The Centre operates as a resource centre for youth organisations and initiatives. Several Homel youth associations use the Centre's facilities and office equipment, including the Organisation of Regional Studies "Talaka," Young Social Democrats, Journalist Club "Roskvit," "Roznyia-rovnyia," Amnesty International and others.

#### ■ Developing a network of youth publications in the Homel region

"Hart" is participating in the development of an independent youth-based media network in the region as one of the fundamental components of a civic community. Such newspapers as "Ratusha," "Underground," and "Roskvit" were established with help provided by the Centre. The Journalist Club "Roskvit" works on the basis of the Centre.

#### ■ Civil Education of Young People

In order to develop the youth movement, the "Hart" Centre operates the "Young Leader's School," where young people learn how to work effectively in social associations. The first students graduated in June 2000.

#### ■ Political and Civic Education of Young People in the Homel region

The Centre conducted the following activities between August and December 1999 (within the project "Youth and Elections" and with support provided by the Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands):

- cycle of lectures in political science, economics, history, politics, etc. for the youth from Homel and Homel region;
- cycle of seminars with representatives of Ukrainian youth NGOs aimed at acquainting Belarusian activists with the broad spectrum of questions concerning democratic elections.

#### ■ Development of the Youth Movement in Homel region

The "Hart" Centre organises field trips to different locations in Homel Region (oblast) for the purpose of finding the most active young people in order to educate them and establish regional youth NGOs.

#### ■ Cultural education

In order to establish Belarusian national culture in youth circles "Hart" conducts the following activity:

- meetings with famous Belarusian writers and minstrels;
- contests of creative works in Belarusian history and culture among students in secondary schools, lyceums, colleges;

- field trips to cultural celebrations (Knights' Tournament in Rechytsa, Minstrels' Festival in Slavuchichi, etc.).

#### ■ Information bulletin "Hart-inform"

The bulletin provides monthly information about the activity of "Hart" and other non-governmental associations in Homel region.

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## HOMEL REGIONAL SOCIAL ASSOCIATION WOMEN'S "INITIATIVE"

The Homel Regional Social Association Women's "Initiative" was established in July 1998 as part of the Belarusian League of Women — Electors. After the League was disbanded, the association re-organised into the social association "Initiative" and was registered in September 1999.

Representatives from 9 districts of Homel region are members of the association.

The goal of the Homel Regional Social Association Women's "Initiative" is to unite the efforts of women to participate in social, economic, and cultural democratic reforms.

#### ■ The tasks of the organisation are:

- to increase the participation of women from Homel region in the public movement for their rights;
- to develop initiatives aimed at improving the social status of women.

The association has conducted several activities in conjunction with social organisations. In particular, a campaign was organised to monitor the problems associated with the government's failure to realise its program on the social and legal protection of disabled people, roundtables were organised in order to discuss common problems and define a policy of joint activities for social organisations and their co-operation with state structures.

One of the main areas of the association's activity is education and specifically leadership training for women (participating in joint programs with the National Women's Educational and Consulting Centre, the Women's Non-State Institute "Envila" and the Belarusian Association of Women Lawyers).

#### ■ The association is engaged in:

- unifying women's efforts for participating in democratic reforms;
- developing women's initiatives aimed at improving their social status;

- granting psychological and legal assistance to members of the organisation, protecting their interests;
- contributing to women's cultural and spiritual development, improving their educational and professional skills.

#### ■ The association plans:

- to conduct educational seminars for women aimed at developing leadership skills
- to hold round tables, meetings, conferences, presentations
- to publish a quarterly bulletin for women that reflects the problems and perspectives of women's non-governmental associations
- to establish contacts with other women's organisations in Belarus and abroad
- to participate in activities for women, conducted by other social organisations, foundations, and associations

#### ■ The association hopes for:

- broadening and strengthening the organisation through adding new members
- support for association activity by partners and sponsors
- attention to our problems and needs, assistance in achieving established goals
- co-operation with everyone whose activity is aimed at the consolidation of democratic circles in Belarus.

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## YOUTH CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL CENTRE "YARAVIT"

The Youth Cultural and Educational Centre "Yaravit" was founded in the autumn of 1996 and registered in April 1997.

#### ■ Main objectives:

- to use and develop the intellectual potential of different youth for the purpose of self-fulfilment, thereby strengthening the Belarusian nation and state to become an important mover and shaker in international life;
- to increase experience and promote the ethnical and cultural heritage of Belarus;
- to develop and strengthen the usage of the Belarusian language and Belarusian intellectual circles;
- to study the social, cultural, environmental, demographic and other aspects of modern life as factors of determining the existence of the Belarusian nation.



#### ■ Methods:

- organising and conducting scientific, cultural, artistic and other campaigns and activities (e.g., conferences, presentations, exhibitions, expeditions);
- distributing books, magazines, advertising and informational materials, periodicals and other printed information;
- providing access for interested organisations (libraries, archives, mass media, etc.) to information, printed materials, audio-video-photo materials on the Centre's conditions;
- conducting cultural exchange programs through organising exhibitions, concerts, meetings with professionals in the fields of culture and science.

#### ■ Achievements:

- Since August 1996, more than 2000 books and magazines and over 200 Belarusian tapes were distributed in Homel and Homel region through the Centre's activity.
- April 1997 — a seminar with IDEE representatives in Homel.
- September 1997 — the Regional Forum of Youth Non-Governmental Organisations.
- January 1998 — literary and musical presentation by "EuroForum" and "Nasha Niva."
- Spring — summer 1998 — the international conference project "Belarus — Ukraine: Historical Ways and Perspectives. Youth Outlook, and publishing a collection of materials.
- May 1999 — "ARCHE" presentation; organising a concert of the Belarusian bands "Novaye Nieba" and "Ulis" (in conjunction with the Belarusian Students' Association in Homel).
- November 1999 — scientific conference "The Tradition of Belarusian Sovereignty. Lessons from the Past and Ways to the Future"; subsequent publication of a scientific book.
- Winter 2000 — the project "Educating Village Schoolchildren."
- March 2000 — the jubilee presentation of the Belarusian Historical Survey with the editor-in-chief H. Sahanovič at the History Department of F. Skaryna Homel State University.

Since the autumn of 1996, more than 40 people have become actively involved in social activity (including those joining other organisations through the Centre's activity). Several initiatives were supported. Since 1997, 15 seminars have been conducted. More than 20 people have received a thorough education through participating in large educational projects. Educational activities are conducted on a regular basis among students, teachers, businessmen and workers.

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## LOYEV SOCIAL ASSOCIATION "KARANI"

The Loyev Social Association for the Preservation of the Environment and Cultural and Historical Heritage "Roots" ("Karani") is a district-wide non-governmental, non-profit association, registered on 6 March 1996 and re-registered on 29 October 1999.

The social association "Roots" consists of 14 members and 34 regular volunteers. Among them are teachers and engineers of Loyev schools, vocational schools and businesses. The director of the organisation is Mikalay Anisavets.

#### Objectives and goals:

Searching for effective ways and means of preserving the environment as well as the cultural and historical heritage; monitoring the environment; invigorating people; developing in people a solicitous attitude towards nature, cultural and historical heritage.

#### ■ Methods of activity:

- seeking and implementing private initiatives; initiating and conducting programs and projects aimed at achieving the aims of "Roots";
- granting financial, consulting, informational and other assistance to organisations and private persons;
- conducting humanitarian, charitable, industrial and economic activity aimed at realising statutory objectives and goals;
- interacting with the mass media, publishing and distributing printed and other materials;
- organising and conducting meetings, seminars, conferences, lectures, exhibitions, public opinion polls, debating clubs;
- co-operating with educational establishments, enterprises and state structures in solving environmental problems and preserving cultural and historical heritage.

#### Activities:

"Roots" conducts activity based on various programs developed by the association's governing bodies. Several seminars have been conducted within the "Ecology" program, in which specialists from environmental laboratories participated. The seminars were devoted to the problems of monitoring the environment, environmentally appropriate technologies for cultivating potatoes on private land. Due to a "Roots" initiative, the Loyev District Executive Committee adopted and conducted the Comprehensive Program of Preserving the Environment in the Loyev

area during 1996 — 2000. A system of gathering environmental information was established.

The program "Preserving Cultural and Historical Heritage" included a number of seminars devoted to legal, political and economic topics. The members of the association have also conducted research connected with evaluating and preserving local historical and cultural memorials. The reference book "Monuments and Memorials in the Loyev Area" was published as a result of this work. Members have also compiled and published a poetry collection of local poets entitled "Songs along the Dniepr" ("Piesni nad Dniaprom"). The monthly informational bulletin "Roots" ("Karani") has been published since March 1999.

"Roots" is currently preparing a musical folklore festival "Our Heritage" (Nasha Spadchina) and a collection of "Studies in Loyev Area History" ("Narysy historyi Loyevshchiny"). The association also conducts activities connected with defending human rights.

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## THE VITSEBSK CENTRE OF YOUTH INITIATIVES "KONTUR"

The Vitsebsk Centre of Youth Initiatives "Kontur" is a social association of the youth in Vitsebsk region. The Centre was established in 1998 as a result of the activities of several activists from youth non-governmental organisations in Vitsebsk region. Democracy, freedom of speech, national culture and the history of Belarus are considered the most important values of "Kontur." The Centre unites the most committed youth in the local area.

The Centre of youth initiatives comprises representatives of various youth organisations and groups. The main criterion for selecting new members is their professionalism and commitment. "Kontur" members are specialists and professionals in their respective fields.

The mission of the Centre of Youth Initiatives "Kontur" is to support youth initiatives in Vitsebsk region, assist in the development of national culture and education for the purpose of establishing democracy and a civic community in Belarus.

### ■ Tasks:

- information exchange;
- educating young journalists;
- organisational and counselling assistance to youth NGOs in Vitsebsk and Vitsebsk region;
- stimulating and granting assistance in registering new NGOs;
- co-ordinating NGO activities;
- training leaders and activists.

### Activity:

Since May 1998, "Kontur" has issued "Sciana," a public and political newspaper for young people and rendered qualified technical and counselling assistance to NGOs in their journalistic and publishing activities. CYI "Kontur" held several lectures devoted to political science in the summer of 1998 and organised study course devoted to basic economics as well as the Belarusian language and history in the autumn of 1998. With the support of the Centre several concerts by leading Belarusian rock groups were held in Vitsebsk in January 1999. During 1999, "Kontur" held a number of seminars for leaders and activists of youth NGOs in Vitsebsk and Vitsebsk region devoted to the following topics: leadership, management in social organisations, publishing activity, fundraising and organising summer camps. The independent regional information agency "Kontur-Info" was founded in December 1998 with the assistance of the Centre.

Members of the Centre are continually seeking and developing new directions of activity.

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<http://www.vitebsk.net/kontur>

## CENTRE FOR THE SUPPORT OF PUBLIC INITIATIVES "KRYVICH"

The Centre for the Support of Public initiatives "Kryvich" was established in August 1999.

### Tasks:

- Information exchange between independent public organisations.
- Informing the public about political processes in the region, Belarus and abroad.
- Assisting (organisational, methodical, technical and consulting) NGOs in Orsha and Orsha region.
- Promoting and assisting in the establishment and registration of new NGOs.
- Co-ordinating NGO activity.
- Training NGO leaders.
- Supporting and developing independent media.

### Basic activity:

Informational, educational, consulting and publishing work with NGOs of Orsha and Orsha region. Seeking, processing and distributing information among the population and NGOs concerning public affairs in Belarus and abroad. Training leaders and members of NGOs. Assisting public organisations in the registration process and in publishing bulletins, newspapers and magazines.

- Since August 1999 "Kryvich" has rendered technical and consulting assistance to the following organisations:

- Kohanava Youth Association «Kram»;
- Orsha City Club of Taxpayers;
- Orsha Association of Belarusian Students;
- Orsha Youth Organisation for Women «Roskvit»;
- Union of Women in Baran;
- Orsha branch of the Belarusian Language Society;
- Orsha branch of the Association of Belarusian Schools;
- Orsha branch of the All Belarusian Voters' Club;
- Orsha branch of "Youth Social-Christian Union";
- Baran Local Historical Club.

- The following literature is published with the support of "Kryvich":

- "Demarsh", published by the Council of Democratic Forces of Orsha;
- "Orsha-Info", published by the Council of Democratic Forces of Orsha;
- "Z'viaz", published by Orsha organisation "Z'viaz";
- "Youth Step," published by «Kryvich» Centre;
- "Zalik," published by the Orsha branch of the Association of Belarusian Students;
- "Zolak," published by the Kohanava regional organisation of youth «Kram»;
- "Taxpayer," published by Orsha Club of Taxpayers;
- "Words for Women," published by the Orsha branch of the Belarusian League of Women.

- The "Kryvich" Centre has participated in organising the following seminars:

- "Communication in Organisations";
- "Leadership and Management";
- "Journalistic Skills, Genres of Journalism, Types of Journalism";
- "Working in Groups, Psychological Aspects of Journalism".

- Future plans of the "Kryvich" Centre include:

- Sociological research involving the local population;
- Regular «Oxford» debate concerning the most urgent problems for youth;
- Intellectual competitions in educational institutions.

## THE YOUTH SOCIAL ASSOCIATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND REGIONAL STUDIES "NIERUSH-CENTRE"

The Youth Social Association of Environmental and Regional Studies "Nierush-Centre" was established in November 1996.

The main goals of the association include:

- Collecting information about the environment;
- Conducting environmental, historical, social, and political research;
- Disseminating ecological information as well as establishing an Environmental Library;
- Organising lectures, seminars, training courses, summer camps and exhibitions;
- Publishing ecological ("Nierush") and historical ("Altanka") information bulletins.

The activity of the "Nierush-Centre" is involves conducting environmental, social and historical programs, which are supported by other social organisations (the Regional Development Agency "Varuta," the Lutskevich Brothers' Foundation in Baranavichi, the Centre for Social Initiatives "Viezha" in Berastsye as well as the International Association of Humanitarian Co-operation in Minsk), educational establishments and individuals who are interested in the environment, its condition as well as the nature of Man and Society.

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## THE OTAN HEDEMAN BRASLAV SOCIETY OF REGIONAL STUDIES

The Braslav Otan Hedeman Society of Regional Studies (BSRS) is a regional social organisation established in 1989 on the basis of the Braslav Museum of Historical and Regional Studies (since 1998 — the Association of Museums in Braslav). In 1998 the Society was named after Otan Hedeman. Otan Hedeman (1887 — 1937) was an outstanding scientist in local history and folklore, the author of several treatises in the history of the Braslav area and one of the founders of Regional Studies Organisation in Braslav, which existed between World War I and World War II.

Members of the Society are museum workers, teachers, and scientists, who study the history of the Braslav area.

The basic objectives of BSRS are to conduct and assist in conducting thorough and impartial historical research of Braslav region, to promote historical heritage and to co-ordinate the students' movement in regard to regional studies.

- Areas of BSRS activity:

- Scientific conferences on regional studies;
- Publishing activity;
- Methodological assistance for teachers and students;
- Field trips;

- Archaeological excavations.
- Main achievements:
  - Participating in the organisation of scientific conferences on regional studies "Braslau Readings" (Braslauskiya Chytani — 1989, 1991, 1994, 1997). Publishing a collection of articles from the conferences.
  - Publishing 14 newsletters and brochures devoted to regional studies, including "The Braslau Lakes" (Braslauskiya aziory — 1989), "Castle Hill in Braslau" (Zamkavaya hara u Braslave — 1994) and the teachers' manual "Our Land — Braslau Area" (Nash kray — Braslaushchina — 1993).
  - Participating in preparation of the historical chronicles of Braslau District "Memory" (Pamiat' — 1998).
  - Publishing 3 issues of the historical periodical "Braslau Notebooks" (Braslauskiya Sshytki" — 1996, 1997, 1999).
  - Organising a humanitarian summer camp "Ratsyunki" (1999).
- The Braslau Society of Regional Studies
  - would like to co-operate with everyone interested in historical research and the region's past
  - would like to establish contacts with organisations that have similar interests
  - provides historical information about the Braslau area
  - grants assistance in arranging field trips around the region

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## PAKHODNYA

The Harodnya Municipal Historical and Cultural Social Association "Pakhodnya" was the first social organisation in Harodnya region. Its basic objective is to unite people devoted to their Motherland.

### Activity:

- participating in preparing the Vitsebsk region against floods and Palessye from melioration;
- advocating the removal of missile troops from Belarus;
- restoring the traditions of Kupalle, Kalady, Dzyady in Harodnya;
- establishing boy scout troops;
- establishing the church choir;
- taking part in saving architectural monuments, conducting archaeological excavations, cleaning Harodnya's graveyards and the F. Bahushevich House in Kushlany, assisting in

- erecting several monuments in the Harodnya region;
- participating the ecological movement.

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## THE STUDENT SCIENTIFIC ASSOCIATION "PALADA"

The Student Scientific Association "Palada" (SSA "Palada") was established by students from the Baranavichy branch of the Belarusian Law Institute, for the purpose of educating students in the fields of Law and Economics, conducting independent scientific research as well as motivating students to learn new things, analyse what they had learned and draw conclusions and to check and — if necessary — to contradict the acquired information. The society began its activity in September 1999 as a non-governmental, non-profit and apolitical organisation.

The basic fields of SSA's activity include:

1. Debate club
  - discussing urgent problems
  - reading reports
  - conducting excursions and field trips
  - issuing a newsletter
2. Laboratory for social research
  - preparing and conducting public opinion polls and social research, analysing and publishing results
  - developing scientific programs with a social and economical character
  - preparing and publishing scientific articles
  - participating in scientific conferences and seminars

The society has established contacts with the Youth Centre for Human Rights (Pinsk), the Baranavichy branch of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, the Regional Development Agency "Varuta" and others.

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## THE HARODNYA REGIONAL SOCIAL ASSOCIATION "RATUSHA"

The Harodnya Regional Social Association "Ratusha" was established in May 1996 by 15 prominent figures from the fields of culture, education, science, politics, journalism, and business. The association is a non-profit, independent, non-governmental organisation.



The mission of "Ratusha" is to assist in the establishment of a civil society in Belarus through supporting social initiatives.

■ **Goals:**

- Simulating the process of establishing new public initiatives
- Strengthening the network of already existing non-governmental organisations
- Developing humanitarian education, culture, independent mass media, international relations and co-operation

■ **Tasks:**

- to co-ordinate, support, and promote the activity of social organisations in the region;
- to instil professionalism in NGO activity;
- to maintain dialogue among various social groups, and among Belarus and other countries;
- to promote the development of culture as well as national and historical consciousness;
- to support independent regional and local periodicals;
- to defend human rights and freedom.

■ **Achievements:**

- Providing services to 76 non-governmental organisations in the region;
- Establishing the Co-ordinating Committee "Initiative of Harodnya" (Haradzenskaya Initsyatyva) — an association of 32 democratic parties, social organisations and trade unions in Harodnya;
- Hosting two Assemblies of Democratic Non-Governmental Organisations of the Harodnya region (oblast);
- Initiating human rights defence in the Harodnya region (oblast);
- Supporting 32 regional independent periodicals in Western Belarus;
- Providing free Internet access to third sector activists.

**Structure of "Ratusha"**

■ **Public Initiatives Support Centre**

- Informational, technical, fundraising, and legal service for non-governmental organisations and independent newspapers in the region, searching for partners;
- Conducting training courses and seminars for third sector activists;
- Conducting social polls;
- Sponsoring children and youth contests and festivals;
- Hosting scientific conferences.

■ **Regional Human Rights Defence Centre**

- Managing the Regional Human Rights Defence Chamber;
- Publishing a monthly bulletin "I Have a Right" (Mayu prava);

- Monitoring human rights in prisons, the rights of journalists and minority groups;
- Human Rights School.

■ **Publishing Centre**

- Publishing fiction as well as literature on law and regional studies;
- Technical and financial support of local and regional independent newspapers.

■ **Internet Club**

- Teaching activists from social organisations how to use the World Wide Web and how to create Web-pages;
- Internet access for non-governmental organisations;
- Computer School.

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## THE CO-ORDINATING COUNCIL "REGIONAL BELARUS"

The Co-ordinating Council "Regional Belarus" was founded in May 2000. The basic goal of the council is to co-ordinate the activity of democratic regional NGOs.

**Activity:**

- analysing and developing common approaches to reacting to events in Belarus;
- co-ordinating the activities of regional political and social associations in regard to elections.

The Chairman is Syamyon Domash.

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## LIDA LITERARY ASSOCIATION "RUN"

"Run" is a creative association of literati of Lida and the region. The association was established on the basis of the educational cultural group with the same name, which was founded in 1998. The basic objective of the newly established literary association is to publish a regional literary and artistic magazine. The first issue of the magazine, titled "From the Walls of Lida" ("Ad Lidskikh murou"), appeared in the summer of 2000. In November 2000 the magazine was officially registered in the Belarusian Press Committee as a literary, artistic and cultural journal. The association receives support for its publishing activity from the Harodnya Oblast Social Association

"Ratusha" and the Information and Education Centre "Heneratsiya."

The association has more than forty members and is registered with the National Social Association "Supolnast."

In addition to the association's publishing activity, members of the association conduct various cultural, educational, literary and artistic activities, hold meetings with writers and poets in schools and enterprises, give lectures and conduct excursions to places of historical and literary interest in Belarus (in conjunction with the Sport and Tourism Centre "Vitaut" and the local branch of the F. Skaryna Belarusian Language Society).

"Ad Lidzkich murou" journal:  
<http://www.angelfire.com/jazz/lavrech>

## THE VITSEBSK BRANCH OF THE SOCIAL ASSOCIATION "THE LEV SAPIEHA FOUNDATION"

The Vitsebsk Branch of the Social Association "The Lev Sapieha Foundation" (VBSA "The Lev Sapieha Foundation") was founded in December 1993.

VBSA "The Lev Sapieha Foundation" is a regional branch of the Lev Sapieha Foundation. The governing body is the Regional Council is comprised of 9 people. The Chairman is Christafor Zhelapau.

### The goals of the Lev Sapieha Foundation are:

- Assisting in the reform of local self-government
- Developing civic community structures
- Promoting democracy

**VBSA "The Lev Sapieha Foundation" works in the following areas:**

#### ■ Local Self-Government

Deputies of local councils, officials and active politicians study the systems of local self-government in European countries at seminars, participate in joint projects with partners from Sweden, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Ukraine. The organisation has also started implementing the development program for bodies of local self-government.

#### ■ Development of Non-Governmental Organisations

VBSA "The Lev Sapieha Foundation" is a resource centre for the Regional Assembly of Democratic Non-Governmental Organisations. More than 120 NGOs receive information, counselling and technical assistance. NGO leaders participate in training sessions in management, fundraising, and leadership.

#### ■ Information

An Internet Club for NGOs has been established.

VBSA "The Lev Sapieha Foundation" published 3 bulletins "NGO Herald" (Viesnik NDA), "Vitsebsk Union" (Vitsebski zviaz), "Free Word" (Svobodnaye slova).

VBSA "The Lev Sapieha Foundation" supports, through technical assistance, the publication of 26 non-governmental organisations' bulletins.

Dozens of distributors receive free informational materials from Vitsebsk NGOs for distribution to towns and villages in Vitsebsk region.

#### ■ Support for Democratic Structures

The Co-ordinating Council of Democratic Organisations in Vitsebsk realises its activity on the basis of VBSA "The Lev Sapieha Foundation."

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## RECHYTSA MUNICIPAL SOCIAL ASSOCIATION "SLAVUTSICH"

The Rechytsa Municipal Social Association "Slavutsich" was founded in May 1998. Among the organisation's achievements are:

- organising three rallies in Rechytsa (environmental, 14<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Chernobyl Tragedy, March for Freedom on October 8);
- organising free legal counselling for the residents of Rechytsa region;
- conducting activities for disabled children and other social groups;
- election monitoring;

The organisation co-operates actively with other social organisations in Homel region (the Homel Regional Social Association "Public Initiatives" and its branch in Rechytsa, as well as Rechytsa branches of the Belarusian Organisation of Working Women and the Belarusian Popular Front "Revival").

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## SMARHON SOCIETY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The Smarhon Society for Human Rights (SSHR) is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, founded in 1996.

The society's interests are focused on teaching, promoting and protecting human rights within 33 primary and secondary schools and in the curriculum as well. The goal of the society is to promote and co-ordinate human rights education in the youth sector.

- The major guiding principles of SSHR's education policy are as follows:
  - the international dimension and global perspectives in education in all its forms;
  - understanding and respect for all nations, their cultures and values, way of life;
  - ability to communicate with others;
  - understanding for International solidarity and co-operation;
  - readiness to participate in solving community, country and global problems.
- Major activities:
  - Conducting annual competitions among 10000 students in drawings, posters and essays in the field of human rights (in conjunction with UNICEF).
  - Seminar for teachers, social workers on teaching and protecting children's rights (in conjunction with the "Human Rights in the Curriculum" UK).
  - Workshop for youth leaders in human rights education, social activities, campaigns, using participatory and interactive methodology.
  - Roundtable discussion for local officials and teachers on human rights issues (in conjunction with OSCE mission in Belarus).
  - Relevant youth-oriented materials on human rights, issues of justice, local and global co-operation and solidarity with NGOs from all over the world.
- Recent events organised by SSHR:
  - One year experiment in human rights education, democratic values, and International Humanitarian Law (in conjunction with the Ministry of Education in the Republic of Belarus);
  - Radio and TV broadcast concerning education in human rights;
  - Roundtable discussion on the protection of human and children's rights (in conjunction with local police officers);
  - Manual for social workers and teachers in human rights education, pedagogical innovations, and new methodologies.
  - International project connecting students and youth leaders from Smarhon region with students from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary in order to establish a community for human rights.
  - Organising exhibitions, peer education in human rights issues, Human Rights Day, concerts, quizzes about children and human rights.

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## BABRUYSK SOCIAL ASSOCIATION "OWN BUSINESS"

The Babruysk social association "Own Business" ("Svaya sprava") is a non-governmental social organisation founded in January 2000. The activity of the association is concentrated on educational problems and disseminating information among various social groups (mostly youth, handicapped, and members of other social organisations).

### Activity is realised through:

- publishing the bulletin "My Town" ("Moy horad") and supplements for the newspapers "Worker" ("Rabochy") and "Worker of Babruysk" ("Rabochy Babruyska");
- conducting the educational project "My Belarus — Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow";
- education activity conducted interactively;
- organising a youth summer camp (in conjunction with the young social democrats of Babruysk);
- technical and informational assistance for local social organisations.

The organisation actively co-operates with other social associations both in the region and on the national level.

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## CREATIVE ASSOCIATION "SVYATLITSA"

The Social Organisation "Creative Association Svyatlitsa" (SOCA "Svyatlitsa") is a non-governmental organisation associating creative people from Baranavichy. It was founded in August 1996, registered in February 1997 and re-registered in November 1999.

The organisation provides all possible assistance to artists in order to help them in developing their creative potential as well as assists in the development of culture and art and popularises them among people.

- The goals of the organisation include:
  - bringing together the people of the arts in order to assist them in developing their creative potential as well as organising their spare time activities according to their interests;
  - cultural and educational activities directed to children, youth and adults for the purpose of developing a taste for art and all-human values.
- Activity:
  - Holding weekly creative discussions with "Svyatlitsa" members;

- Regular appearance of "Svyatlitsa" members at educational and cultural establishments, concerts, festivals, competitions as well as on local radio and TV;
- Publishing literary works and articles about culture and art in newspapers and magazines;
- Exhibitions of works by local artists;
- Providing artists with informational and organisational assistance;
- Participating in seminars for non-governmental organisations;
- 1997 — publishing the first edition of the Baranavichy literary collection "Svyatlitsa";
- 1998 — publishing a volume of selected Belarusian 1980–1995 poetry, "Ahledziny," and distributing it in Belarusian libraries in all towns, as well as in schools of higher learning and vocational arts establishments;
- 2000 — publishing the second edition of the Baranovichy literary collection "Svyatlitsa" and the book of poetry "Razluki vyrayovyya" by Ivan Lahvinovich.

■ Plans:

- Publishing further editions of the literary collection "Svyatlitsa";
- Publishing books by local poets and writers;
- Editing a local cultural newspaper;
- Organising exhibitions of works by local artists both in Belarus and abroad as well as exhibitions of works by foreign artists in Belarus;
- Publishing a catalogue of artists from Baranavichy;
- Producing souvenirs and publications that promote Belarusian culture, patriotism and democracy: souvenirs, posters, calendars, booklets, badges, etc.;
- Releasing audio tapes of local musicians, rock groups, folklore bands and minstrels;
- Establishing a music studio, organising music performances;
- Establishing a photo studio and a slide studio for the purpose of creating photo chronicles on the lives of artists and on different cultural events;
- Establishing an amateur drama company, organising theatre festivals and performance tours;
- Establishing a non-governmental independent cultural centre in Baranavichy; collecting and disseminating information on culture and art; conducting "round table" meetings and cultural events; rendering technical and informational counselling as well as legal assistance;
- Conducting the "Belarusian Style" project — production of clothes using elements of Belarusian national dress, ornaments and symbols, adapted to the modern fashion.

- Making films about the local art and cultural life, historical and national heritage; creating a video database and disseminating information contained in it;
- Conducting seminars entitled "People of Art and Society," "People of Art and the Arts";
- Co-operation with creative people and organisations, NGOs and foundations in Belarus and abroad, cultural exchange.

"Svyatlitsa" actively co-operates with other social organisations and takes an active part in the public movement.

The President of SOCA "Svyatlitsa" is Ales Bokach.

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## HOMEL YOUTH SOCIAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL STUDIES "TALAKA"

The Homel Youth Social Association of Regional Studies "Talaka" was founded in April 1986 during the wave of democratic changes in the mid-1980s. The association was registered in 1994 and re-registered in 1998 and 1999.

■ The goals of activity are:

- studying, preserving, and promoting Belarusian national culture and history among youth;
- regional studies as one of the factors in the national Renaissance in Belarus and establishing a democratic society.

■ Tasks:

- collecting and systematising materials in regional studies and traditional culture of Homel region;
- developing educational programs and introducing them to the education system.

"Talaka" members include graduates, students from Homel and young teachers. At its weekly meetings members of the organisation study history, folklore and the ethnic heritage of the Belarusian people, learn folk songs, dances, and games, prepare theatre performances for ethnic and national holidays.

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## HARODNYA SOCIAL ASSOCIATION OF LITHUANIANS "TEVINE"

The activity of the Harodnya Social Association of Lithuanians "Tevine" (Motherland) includes:

- establishing Lithuanian social associations and Lithuanian Sunday schools in Radun and Lida;
- organising and conducting celebrations and holidays, celebrating historical events from Belarusian, Lithuanian, and Polish history;
- filming historical and cultural monuments;
- conducting excursions for visitors to the town, region and 'oblast'.

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## THE THIRD SECTOR CENTRE

The social association Informational Support Centre for Public Initiatives "The Third Sector" is a non-governmental, non-profit social organisation, which was established in February 1997 by a group of journalists and public figures from Harodnya. The association was registered in September 1997 and re-registered in September 1999.

The basic objective of the Centre is to assist in the creation of the necessary conditions for establishing a civic community and open society.

The activity of the organisation is concentrated in the following spheres: informational support for non-governmental social organisations and initiatives in the Harodnya region and educational activity in the field of journalism.

- Since its establishment, the Third Sector Centre has achieved the following results:
  - The Centre has published 20 issues of the informational bulletin for social organisations "The Third Sector." In 1999 the bulletin was transformed into a magazine. The magazine contains information about the activity of regional NGOs as well as the useful information for social organisations.
  - The Centre has participated in organising and conducting training seminars for public leaders in Berastsye, Harodnya, Pinsk, and Navahradak (1997), Minsk, Harodnya, Lida (1999), Babrujsk and Barysau (2000).
  - The Centre has participated in organising the Young Journalist School in Harodnya. The school has provided an education for more than 70 people in the past three years. YJS graduates are now working for all non-governmental newspapers in Harodnya.

- The Centre granted assistance in publishing the first issue of the Belarusian — Polish cultural revue "Apostrophes" ("Apostrafy"), 1997.

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## THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY "VARUTA"

The Regional Development Agency "Varuta" is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, which operates in the region of Baranavichy. Its main goal is to assist in strengthening and developing democratic ideas as well as to establish a civic community in Belarus and particularly in the Baranavichy region.

The Regional Development Agency "Varuta" was founded in Baranavichy in 1998 and registered on 28 October 1999 as a local public organisation. Among the founders of the organisation are people who have vast experience in working for the third sector, education, journalism, science as well as business and politics.

- The activity of the organisation includes:
  - Supporting NGO activity in the Baranavichy region.

This part of activity consists in training NGO leaders and activists, providing legal assistance to active and newly established organisations and groups, providing informational and counselling support for these organisations and groups and developing a program of technical assistance for public initiatives.

- The Program of Co-operation with Mass Media.

Activity in this field includes training programs for journalists, providing assistance in searching for partners for the mass media as well as creating a wide network for the purpose of collecting information about the activity of the regional NGOs. "Varuta" develops joint projects with independent newspapers, which are directed at developing a civil society, studying historical heritage and propagating the eternal values of the region's inhabitants.

- Modern history researches in the Baranavichy region.

This part of the organisation's activity involves collecting information about the life of public activists, events in national life and the activity of national organisations in the Baranavichy region during the 20th century as well as publishing a series of brochures about the historical events and prominent individuals in the national movement in the Baranavichy region.

- Compiling a development plan for the Baranavichy region.

Activity in this area includes conducting scientific research in the fields of economics, politics and sociology as well as developing procedures aimed at the more effective economic development of the Baranavichy region and at developing the cultural and political systems.

- Co-ordinating the activity of NGOs, mass media and trade unions in the Baranavichy region.

This part of activity involves collecting information about the activity of NGOs, mass media and trade unions, their needs, plans and ideas. In addition, activity in this field includes: arranging regular meetings and round tables to discuss issues regarding expansion of activity, mutual aid, working out joint programs and programs of "cross-sector co-operation"; organising educational and counselling programs involving inter-organisational co-operation; assisting as mediator during negotiations.

- During last year the Regional Development Agency "Varuta":

- Held more than 14 training seminars for 238 activists from 42 organisations from the Baranavichy region;
- Arranged and held 116 consultations for 179 representatives from 140 organisations on the topics of NGO activity as well as inter-organisational and inter-sector co-operation;
- Held more than 23 meetings for activists engaged in public initiatives from the Baranavichy region with NGO representatives from other regions and countries of Central and Eastern Europe;
- Arranged 7 meetings between NGOs and representatives of foundations, which conduct programs in Belarus;
- Granted technical support to NGOs;
- In conjunction with other organisations, held 9 internships for NGO public leaders and educational establishments in Minsk, Kiev, Ivano-Frankivsk, Prague, and Warsaw.
- Began publishing the "Region" magazine — an informational and analytical publication for regional Belarusian NGOs;
- Organised and assisted in conducting a round table meeting of NGOs, trade unions and the mass media — a unique structure of inter-sector co-operation between pro-democratic organisations.

The Regional Development Agency "Varuta" actively co-operates with those who, in the future, want Belarus to become a highly developed European country — an economical, political and cultural centre of Eastern Europe. Partner organisations include NGOs from Belarus and Europe, educational establishments, mass media from the Baranavichy region and Belarus as well as other organisations.

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## VITSEBSK YOUTH GROUP "VIERAS"

The Vitsebsk Youth Group «Vieras» was founded in 1999. The organisation's activity is primarily conducted in Vitsebsk, Belarus, where it attracts nationally conscious youth, promotes Belarusian culture and the development of a democratic society by actively working in several areas.

**Cultural activity:** through the efforts of members of the youth group 6 computer programs have been belarusified; a booklet of collected poems of young Vitsebsk poets has been published; programmers created a computer Belarusian-Russian and Russian-Belarusian dictionary and are working at its Internet-version; VYG «Vieras» was an informational sponsor of an important cultural event, the publication of the first video-collection of Belarusian feature and historical films;

**Publishing activity:** since the beginning of 2000 the organisation has been publishing "Vieras," a monthly public and political bulletin, which is distributed free of charge;

**Educational activity:** the seminar «A Look Into the Belarusian Past» for Vitsebsk is scheduled to be conducted in the near future and a newly-established discussion club, «Vieras,» is to soon launch activity;

**Public and political activity:** members of the organisation participate in the political activities of democratic organisations and parties; the youth group promotes Belarusian culture and the development of a democratic society by printing its own newspaper;

**Informational activity:** in addition to the newspaper (its electronic version can be found on the organisation's web-site), VYG «Vieras» maintains its own news e-mail-list.

VYG «Vieras» is a member of the Belarusian Assembly of Democratic Non-Governmental Organisations.

The Vitsebsk Youth Group «Vieras» assists in organising various activities in Vitsebsk and Navapolatsk, the principal aim of which is establishing democracy in the republic and developing Belarusian culture through:

- providing interpreters (Belarusian, Russian, English, Polish, German, Esperanto);
- providing local organisers' service;
- designing and placing official web-sites on the Internet;
- advertising;
- others.

The Vitsebsk Youth Group "Vieras" always all forms of co-operation.

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## BERASTSYE REGIONAL CENTRE FOR PUBLIC INITIATIVES "VEZHA"

The Berastseye Regional Centre for Public Initiatives "Vezha" (Tower) was founded in November 1997 and registered in January 1998. The organisation has 23 members, which include students, young specialists and leaders of social associations from the Berastseye region.

The Centre is part of the Assembly of Democratic Non-Governmental Organisations in Belarus. It is also the founder of the Belarusian Association of Resource Centres (BARC).

The main goal of the Berastseye Regional Centre for Public Initiatives "Vezha" is to establish a civic community in independent Belarus through mobilising residents of the Berastseye region using the principles of humanism, freedom, and democracy.

### ■ Goals:

- to increase the intellectual potential in the region and the civic activity of its residents;
- to support dialogue between different social groups as well as between Belarus and foreign countries;
- to establish cultural and national consciousness;
- to support society on its road to market economy;
- to support initiatives, which assist in protecting human rights and freedoms.

The Centre "Vezha" co-operates with registered social organisations, non-formal groups, citizen initiatives and independent publishers.

### The activity of the Centre is aimed at:

#### ■ Informational support

- publishing the bulletin "Kaliva";
- granting consultations concerning registration issues and legal spheres of NGO activity, fundraising and public relations;
- library, newspaper subscription;
- information about new programs and contests run by various foundations and organisations;
- Internet;
- database on partnership contacts between NGOs in Belarus and abroad.

#### ■ Technical support

- providing access to computers;
- publishing centre: type-setting, bread-boarding, copying, providing facilities for publishing activity;

#### ■ Educational support

- seminars and training courses;
- language courses;
- computer courses;
- courses for Internet users.

The Centre conducts the "Legal Clinic" program. The goal of this program is providing practical education for students through granting free legal assistance to citizens without social security as well as people from other social groups. Between April 1999 and May 2000, 92 people received assistance from the Legal Clinic.

In order to consolidate different groups of society in Berastseye, the Centre holds "round table" meetings with NGOs regarding the most important directions of their activity. As a result of these meetings, new organisations and Co-ordinating Councils were established. The Council for National Organisations operates on the basis of regular meetings of minority group representatives.

In order to support dialogue between third sector representatives and foreign countries/organisations, special meetings are held with members of foundations and organisations from Poland, the US, Slovakia, Sweden, Germany, and Denmark.

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## SOCIAL ASSOCIATION OF YOUNG SCIENTISTS "VIT"

The Harodnya regional social association of young scientists "VIT" is a non-governmental youth organisation. The association was founded in November 1995 by a group of young scientists. The activity conducted by "VIT" primarily has an educational character.

### The basic objectives of the association are as follows:

- Granting assistance in the scientific research of young scientists in the spheres of law, history, culture, sociology, political science and education;
- Analysing and solving problems connected with establishing a civic community and the place and role of youth in post-totalitarian countries;
- Granting assistance in the process of reforming the educational system in Belarus;
- Establishing contacts and exchanging information with youth and other social organisations in Central and Eastern European countries.

**The social association "VIT" is currently engaged in the following projects:**

■ **Civic Education**

Since 1997, the association has conducted several seminars and training courses for youth organisations, aimed at finding and supporting youth initiatives. Since 1998, "VIT" has established an exclusive long-term educational course for youth in social management — "Democratic Leadership School." The school curriculum comprises theoretical and practical elements. The latter includes the participation of academic trainees in youth social organisations in order to bolster theoretical knowledge. More than 40 young people completed the course since it was first conducted and are now members of democratic youth social organisations.

■ **Legal Education**

The association has conducted a number of educational seminars on fundamentals of the law for the representatives of youth social organisations. As a result, a manual of methodological assistance entitled "Individual, Society, State: Game Directive" was published. Since 1998, "VIT" has conducted the "Street Law" program in Belarus. This program has also resulted in the publication of the "Street Law" textbook for secondary schools. Since 1999, "VIT" has co-ordinated the "Street Law" educational clinic for law students in Harodnya State University. The program has expanded into other regions of Belarus through conducting training courses and seminars for non-governmental organisations and representatives of educational establishments. Since 1999, "VIT" has conducted a long-term educational course for youth in the fundamentals of the law — "Legal Education School." Every year 30 students obtain theoretical knowledge and practical experience in various areas of law and human rights.

■ **Global Movement for Kids**

The social association "VIT" is co-ordinating this project within the Harodnya region (oblast). The project is conducted in conjunction with the UNICEF representative office in Belarus and the Union of Children's Social Organisations "Belarusian National Youth Rada." The aim of the project is to solve the problem of inactivity and indifference children and youth in the Republic have toward social life. The Information Project Centre for the Harodnya region has been established on the basis of the association. The Centre conducts seminars and meetings for committees and operates the information exchange on the project. In November 2000 the association sent a delegation of 15 children to represent the Harodnya region in the Belarusian Children's Summit.

The social association "VIT" is a member of the Assembly of Democratic Non-Governmental Organisations in Belarus and the Association of Civic Education.

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## THE "WILL FOR DEVELOPMENT" SOCIAL ASSOCIATION

The "Will for Development" Social Association is a non-governmental, non-profit, inter-regional social association, established in 1995. The basic goal of the association is to promote the idea of an open society (i.e., a social system where the government does not oppress society and the individual has all opportunities for true self-fulfilment).

The activity of the association is concentrated in Slonim and the Slonim Region as well as in the Dzyatlau and Zelva regions.

**Activity is conducted in the following spheres:**

- local self-government;
- human rights;
- co-operation with trade unions.

Since the beginning of 2000, the association has operated as a regional resource centre. In September 2000, the youth club "Svyatlitsa" began conducting its activity on the basis of the "Will for Development" Social Association. "Svyatlitsa" unites five hobby groups.

The Chairman is Michas Varanets.

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## THE SHKLOU VOTERS' CLUB "ZYALONY AHUROK"

The Shklou Voters' Club "Zyalony Ahurok" was founded in 1993.

**Activity:**

- supporting the newspapers "Shklou News" ("Shklouskiya naviny") — AIREX and "Shklou for Youth" ("Shklouskaya maladzyovaya");
- organising demonstrations;
- establishing the Human Rights Defence Centre — support for the unemployed;
- conducting the environmental project "Clean Dniapro."

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