

BELARUSIANS' SELF-IDENTIFICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CIVILIZATIONAL BORDERLAND

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Introduction

Relentlessly intensifying inter-state dynamics and solidifying the overall interconnectedness, globalization implies an imminent dilution of national consciousness and at the same time highlights the need to preserve diverse cultural and national identities. Fundamentally, “the idea of globalization refers to an undetermined, unmanageable, and auto-propulsive nature of world affairs”, which might ultimately engender a “new world disorder”¹. In this increasingly globalized reality, “national governments coexist with forces that have at least as much impact on the everyday lives of their citizens as they have, but are to varying extents beyond their control”. Hence in these “liquid times,” to use Z. Bauman’s famous metaphor, national elites are confronted with the necessity to explicitly adhere to one of the civilizations, i.e., face the dilemma of whether to be dissolved in a global project or maintain a relative autonomy in shaping the geopolitical canvas.

Belarusians’ national identity derives from (and is continuously built on the platform of) a specific historic and cultural legacy determined by the geopolitical/civilizational borderland, local political elite’s distinct form of nationalism—characteristic for its sophisticated East-West maneuvering without merging with any of the poles — and, most importantly, a rather weak ethno-cultural nucleus. It was not until the momentous collapse of the Soviet Union that a “new-born” state had to launch a quest for an adequate consolidating idea for a Belarusian nation-state. It is worth mentioning that under a profound Soviet identity crisis², an utterly Sovietized and de facto de-nationalized population assisted at an ideological struggle — driven, of course, by purely political aspirations — for conducting state and nation-

building in the sovereign Republic of Belarus. The confrontation resulted into a clear fiasco of the national democratic movement Belarus National Front³ (BNF) in the first presidential election of 1994, which paved the way for imposing an authoritarian regime⁴ of Belarus’ strongman Alexander Lukashenko.

Since then, political experts from various Western think-tanks have been thoroughly “diagnosing” the phenomenon of “the last European dictatorship” seeking to comprehend the sources of its relative stability as well as its overall potential in the long-term perspective. Interestingly, one of the most deep-rooted hypotheses — generally accepted by the Western academia, Belarusian intellectuals, and, it seems, by the EU and U.S. political circles—associates the persistence of the Belarusian non-democratic regime with the “immaturity”⁵ of the nation and with its unclear national identity. The Belarusian author A. Pershai stresses that “the majority of cases define the Belarusian national idea and identity as ‘underdeveloped,’ ‘weak,’ or even ‘non-existent’”⁶. The most discussed causes are: the traditional geopolitical cleavage, the post-soviet transformation impact on the social fabric, a rather ambiguous reading of the ethno-cultural identification code, and, of course, civilizational borderlandness. By and large, Belarusianism and Belarusian identity have become a traditional issue for both Belarusian pro-democracy oriented intellectuals and numerous international scholars and researchers studying the post-Soviet area⁷. It is, however, noteworthy that despite its solid theoretical and methodological basis, the Western political science has so far failed to explain the local national identity and the enduring authoritarianism, as well as provide grounds for an efficient EU policy⁸ vis-à-vis Belarus. This statement was echoed by Erzy

Buzek, the former president of the European Parliament and one of the protagonists of the EU-Belarus negotiation process, in January 2012⁹.

This paper will touch on Belarusians' self-identification under the prism of the civilizational borderland as it renders the geopolitical factor essential in the region and affects identification patterns and state-building mechanisms. Also, the role of the "Russian world" concept and identity-building under authoritarianism will be addressed. It needs to be underlined that this case study is concentrated on the political component of identification, i.e., the impact of major actors of the politics of identity in the country. The importance of the issue is given by the ambivalent "state-without-a-nation" phenomenon that emerged in the early 1990s, when the post-Soviet republic was challenged by the "sword of identity" and had to re-discover its cultural heritage, re-invent its traditions and re-interpret its collective memory.

From a geopolitical standpoint, the Belarusian question is of considerable relevance, given the country's strategic position between the East and the West, its military, political, and economic potential. Russian authorities have traditionally viewed Belarus as a military springboard that can be "re-activated" in case of Russia-NATO confrontation. Moreover, Belarus is expected to serve as a model of the post-Soviet area reanimation within a new political paradigm comprising: the Union State of Russia and Belarus, the Putin-backed Eurasian Union¹⁰, the Common Economic Space¹¹, the Customs Union¹², CSTO¹³, Joint Regional Air Defense System¹⁴, common infrastructure, deeper integration, closer regional cooperation and increased interdependence. Most importantly, the main geopolitical lines and transit routes of the vital energy commodities pass through Belarus. G. Ioffe and V. Yarashevich suggest that given the long history of particularly close ties between Russia and Belarus, the latter's "taking advantage of this relationship...

can hardly be viewed as opportunism"¹⁵. So V. Putin's visit to Belarus in May 2012, as his first foreign destination after his return to the Kremlin this year, was no accident¹⁶: while discussing further economic integration, both presidents reaffirmed that the Eurasian Union remained a top priority for both countries. Also, V. Putin emphasized Russia's intention to resist any form of external political and economic pressure on the Common Economic Space member states. In other words, Putin implicitly redrew the boundaries of the Russian natural sphere of influence. During the Russian leader's visit, Belarus' President declared that "in the whole post-Soviet area, there was no more advanced integration project than the Union State"¹⁷.

Theoretical Framework

For the purposes of the analysis, S. Huntington's civilizational approach is used as a methodological stepping stone, though with certain reservations regarding the regional specificity. Samuel Huntington, a prominent representative of the third generation of civilizational scholarly tradition¹⁸, argues that global politics is configured primarily along the fundamental cultural lines. This assertion drew substantial criticism mainly due to the alleged simplicity, all-encompassing pessimism, ambiguity in defining civilizations' pillars, and the fuzziness of civilizations' borders, to name a few. Generally, within the current civilizational analysis framework, civilizations are conceived as "the largest comprehensible and theoretically identifiable units"¹⁹; "an amalgam of social forces and ideas that has achieved a certain coherence, but is continuously changing and developing in response to challenges both from within and from without"²⁰; "the broadest type of ethnos which can be characterized by a long *duree* and the resistance to change under the influence of the external factors"²¹; "distinct societal-cultural units which share some very important, above all cultural, characteristics"²²; and, finally, as "the highest cultural grouping of people and

the broadest level of cultural identity...defined by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people”²³.

According to Huntington’s civilizations model, civilizational identity markers, not ideology or economics, are crucial, whereas it is the “clash of civilizations” — with potential battlefields, i.e., zones of conflict located along the civilizations’ fault lines (contact zones or edges) — that dictates the post-Cold War international order and dominates world politics. In this regard, civilizational identity becomes particularly important as a framing and differentiating principle that creates civilizational boundaries between the cultural “us” and “the other,” introduces the dichotomization of “the other” as a stranger. Also, for Huntington, “political boundaries are increasingly redrawn to coincide with cultural ones: ethnic, religious, and civilizational”²⁴. I will allow myself to make a few remarks on these points. Assuming that the fulcrum of the author’s concept is acceptable, it needs to be pointed out that the content of the civilizational factor unavoidably juxtaposes with the geopolitical interests or, to put it more precisely, is realized by certain political groupings, i.e., centres of power, to pursue their political ends. It means that Huntington’s thesis indicates the form, the “flag” that covers up political, economic, territorial, military, media, scientific dominance of the civilizations’ political elites. This suggests that belonging to a civilization serves as a form of identification, an ideological form introduced to mobilize collective consciousness for an economic, political, territorial, cultural, religious “redivision” of the world. Moreover, the core of each and every civilizational unit is the state which is not necessarily guided by the civilization’s supremacy. In other words, “the dynamo of world politics remains the competition for power amongst states and states do not always define their interests in accordance with their civilizational identity”²⁵. This assumption reveals the contradiction of the civilizational

approach — the coexistence of civilizations, “umbrella” structures, and states that associate themselves with the civilizations, though their vital interests may differ.

Another category to be applied here is the concept of borderland, which, as an analytical tool, is supposed to cover a wide range of inter-cultural and inter-communities contacts in the borderland area. The term was originally implemented in the field of geography and anthropology but gradually assumed a clearly cultural connotation. Normally, the sociology of borderland studies the borderland in three dimensions: territorial, socio-cultural, and post-modern²⁶. To put it in G. Minjenkov’s terms, the idea of borderland can be interpreted as “an attempt to categorize the identities that do not correlate with the prevailing identity, race, and nation discourses”²⁷. According to the Belarusian author I. Bobkov, the term is supposed to define the space along the border, whereas the border per se symbolizes an essential consolidating and “organizing principle.” Thus borderland “is being integrated by means of the separation”²⁸. Significantly, the in-betweenness indicates “a return to the present to re-describe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; *to touch the future* on its hither side”²⁹.

L. Titarenko, a Belarusian scholar, claims that the zone across today’s Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian borders corresponds exactly to what she defines as civilizational borderland, i.e., “a special type of a cultural community living in a territorial space and united by common cultural values, common myths...and meanings of life”³⁰. Therefore, borderland civilization, even strictly semantically, is considered to be located between the two dominant (antagonistic) civilizations as a locus of socio-cultural interaction where “the national identity and loyalties of the people often become blurred”³¹ and “a specific form of social order (shaped by the borderlandness)” emerges³². Also, the key distinguishing marks of the borderland feature a prevailing local type of identity, the union of the contiguous civilizations’ axio-

logical backgrounds, cultural, religious plurality as well as a multiethnic composition. In F. Barth's view, "interaction in such social system does not lead to its liquidation through change and acculturation; cultural differences can persist despite...contact and interdependence"³³. Titarenko appropriately claims that Belarus is an illustrative example of civilizational borderland. The expert goes further to conclude that — being an innate part of the Eastern-Orthodox civilization — it constitutes the so-called sub-civilization that is characterized by coinciding borders of borderland civilization with those of the nation-state. Hence the existence of the border as well as being located in the borderland zone represent the Belarusian nation's reality that inevitably shapes a "specific Belarusian mentality"³⁴. "This kind of 'border-aligned' and 'border-grounded identity' emerges from a complicated dynamic of division, collision, and transition of native and alien, of self and the other"³⁵.

One can agree with the statement, but we ought to remember that Belarusians' civilizational identity had no historical continuity: it was interrupted by Polish and Russian "colonialism," to say nothing of the Soviet era. "Situated between Poland and Russia both geographically and linguistically, the promoters of the Belarusian national idea identified themselves in opposition to one or the other of Belarus' expansionist neighbours"³⁶. It was not until the establishment of the Republic of Belarus that the community itself had to cope with the "Who are we?" dilemma and shape its identity in the nation-state framework, for, historically, it was the local elite — Polonized or Russified, Catholic or Orthodox — to define its kindred civilization. I'd like to underline that the identification was twofold: while the ruling class' identity code was subject to constant change, the majority of the population became "withdrawn" and developed a local/regional identity³⁷. Without this combination of circumstances, I suggest, the evolution of the Belarusian community might have followed the trajectory of the 19th century ethno-cultural na-

tionalism in Europe. Instead, the local population entered the nation-states epoch as an inchoate nation. In her analysis of the Belarusian nation's evolution under the prism of M. Hroch's theory of small nations' revival in Eastern and Central Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century, N. Bekus stresses that "Belarusian nation-formation had stopped at the moment of Bolshevik revolution, which abolished the capitalist system on the territory of the Russian Empire"³⁸. Moreover, all future attempts to implement the classic nationalist paradigm in the pre-nation-state period failed. So Lukashenko's authoritarianism, as a consequence of Belarusian nationalists' exaggerated Belarusification in the early 1990s, seems to be strong evidence that there are still no solid grounds for constituting a nation-state in its classic meaning. Let me remind the words of I. Bobkov who is convinced that "a complex and rich Belarusian culture can be implemented only as the culture of borderland, the culture of internal separation..."³⁹.

Religion and the "Russian world" concept

Throughout history, Huntington insists, states fulfill their vital interests in different ways, but tend to "cooperate with and ally themselves with states with similar or common culture and are more often in conflict with countries of different culture"⁴⁰. This idea inspired some politicians and theorists arguing that Belarus' "geopolitical habitat" is in the East and that the Belarusian nation is an integral part of the "Russian world." To follow A. Dugin's logic, Belarus, just as the Eastern and Central parts of the Ukraine⁴¹, is linked to the Orthodox civilization culturally and to Russia, Eurasia's dominant power, geopolitically. Accordingly, "if there are any cultural differences between Belarus and Russia, they can be easily reduced to minor details, which implies neither the transition...from the Eastern geopolitical bloc to the Central European one, nor the formation of the Baltic-Black Sea alliance as a cordon sanitaire"⁴².

At first glance, Belarus' positioning itself in geopolitical terms does not appear to

be complicated: the head of the most “Soviet” republic repeatedly declared its ethnic, cultural, historic and linguistic proximity to the neighboring Russian Federation, which hence explains the country’s clearly pro-Russian orientation. In one of the interviews, President Lukashenko announced: “There is a saying that a Belarusian is a Russian with a quality mark...So I grew up as such a Russian. Thus Russians are also Belarusians, we share the same ideas”⁴³. Suffice it to say that statements of this kind are confirmed by the revelations of the opinion poll realized in December 2009 by IISEPS⁴⁴, the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies. The survey results demonstrate that 66.5% of respondents identify themselves with one of the three branches of one people⁴⁵ (Belarusians, Ukrainians, Russians). By contrast, only 30.6% renounce this bond by stressing the authenticity of each of the three distinct peoples, which is a truly frustrating fact for the Western values’ advocates⁴⁶. Nevertheless, this explicitly pro-Eastern leaning neither implies nor accepts any form of political unification. For many Belarusians, according to the Belarusian analyst Drakohrust, “Belarus is a ‘true’ Russia, since the other one, with Moscow as its capital, betrayed its ideals”⁴⁷.

In case of Belarusians’ self-identification, religion, as a key source of civilizational and geopolitical influence upon the national identity, cannot be omitted. Polling data indicate that an overwhelming majority of Belarusians identify themselves with the Orthodox Christianity: in March 2003, they amounted to 74.5%, while in September 2010 the number reached 78.8%⁴⁸. Belarusian Catholics⁴⁹ made up 12.7% in 2003 and 11.1% in 2010⁵⁰. Data provided by Belarusian institutions in 2011 generate the following constellation: 82% Orthodox versus 12% Catholic Christians⁵¹. For N. Vasilevich, the adjective “Orthodox” appears to be “a registered trademark, joint ownership” of the Belarusian Orthodox Church whereas as an analytical category, it covers and specifies not exclusively the choice of religion but

“a cultural, quasi-religious belonging”⁵². The official position of the Russian Orthodox Church can be aptly epitomized in Patriarch Kirill’s⁵³ regarding Belarus as a crucial spiritual element of Orthodox Russia⁵⁴. However, when it comes to the Belarusian authoritarian leader, the Church as an institution, not its lofty ideals, seems to be a much higher priority. Thus Lukashenko’s paradoxical “I am an atheist, but an Orthodox one!”⁵⁵ has become quite a buzz-phrase. But, interestingly enough, this contradictory statement bears a clearly political connotation.

Belarus’ President constantly manifests his personal and government support to the Belarusian Orthodox hierarchs⁵⁶ who, in their turn, reaffirm their solidarity, reciprocity, and gratitude. For Metropolitan Filarct, the current Metropolitan of Minsk and Slutsk, the Patriarchal Exarch of All Belarus and the head of the Belarusian Orthodox Church⁵⁷, A. Lukashenko embodies the nation’s hope in an efficient social system and “further state-building in cooperation with other nations”⁵⁸. Let me emphasize that the 2002 Law on religion reform cemented and codified “the recognition of the Orthodox Church’s defining role in both national history and in shaping spiritual, cultural, and state traditions”⁵⁹. Also, despite the proclaimed implementation of the secular state principle, the state is granted the right to cooperate with religious organizations within a bilateral agreement format. Furthermore, it did not take the authorities long to bring the innovations into effect: on June 12, 2003 a concordat-style Cooperation Agreement between the Republic of Belarus and the Belarusian Orthodox Church was signed⁶⁰.

A. Lukashenko’s special relationship with the Russian Patriarch (who enjoys the Kremlin’s fundamental a priori confidence) is worth highlighting, since it proved to be a significant advantage in Russia-Belarus gas, oil, and other economic disputes. Belarusian President demonstrated remarkable generosity by reassuring His Holiness of his unconditioned loyalty, because, from his perspective, “Orthodoxy is a spiritual ground for the

unity of the Russian and Belarusian people,” and “Belarus will faithfully follow Orthodox traditions, an essential part of its historic destiny”⁶¹. All in all, religion plays growing role in Belarus, both as one of the key national identity elements and a vital reference point in the civilizational space. I reckon that the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) used to consider the Belarusian head of state fit for putting the “Russian world” geopolitical project into practice and, driven by that ambition, ignored the sad Belarusian political reality (human rights violation, democratic deficit etc.).

Numerous experts agree that Patriarch Kirill’s enthronement boosted the institution’s political influence, “an increasing coordination in the policies of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ROC’s outreach to its parishes outside Russian borders”⁶², Russian Orthodoxy’s focus on the “Holy Russia” and the indivisible Russian Orthodox civilization. S. Druzhenko points out that in the speech delivered at the III Russian World Congress, Kirill formulates a clearly geopolitical project of the Russian state, leaves almost no room for the spiritual component and accentuates the Church’s key role in reuniting the Slav peoples that are historically associated with the Russian civilization. Let me briefly summarize the main propositions/aspirations of the concept of the Slav-Orthodox civilization’s revival. For the “Russian world” advocates, despite the acquired sovereignty and clear state borders between Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, the three remain one people and represent the core of the Russian world—the Holy Russia. Cultural traditions, the Russian language, and Orthodoxy are the guidelines for the national identity. However, “this phenomenon is not a prerogative of one state or ethnos... and the “Russian world”⁶³ is not an instrument⁶⁴ of the Russian Federation’s political domination”⁶⁵. Furthermore, common historical memory, defending the common Motherland and belonging to the Orthodox civilization are strong factors speaking for further integration in the region. For Pa-

triarch Kirill, the success of the project depends to a large extent on collaborating with the national elites, putting together multiple interests, since in the globalized world, “even the biggest countries of the Russian world will not be able to stand up for their spiritual, cultural, civilizational interests on their own”⁶⁶. One can notice that these ideas concur with those expressed by the Belarusian head of state. So it was no surprise that the Russian Orthodox Church leader was among the first high-profile figures to extend congratulations on Lukashenko’s presidential victory in 2010.

Speaking about the role of Orthodoxy in the Belarusian context, it needs to be stressed that confessional issues are no more Moscow’s exclusive geopolitical domain, for the potential of Belarus should not be underestimated. On the other hand, Belarus’ President has never abandoned his ambition to build up a constructive relationship with the Vatican. Essentially, there have been several attempts to strengthen and improve Lukashenko’s reputation among Catholic hierarchs. So shortly after Belarus’ joining the “Eastern Partnership”⁶⁷ program and the EU visa sanctions suspension in 2009, Lukashenko was honored to have an audience⁶⁸ with Pope Benedict XVI. In Vatican City, Belarus strongman, on his own initiative, proposed his mediation in starting the inter-confessional dialogue and, most importantly, to organize a meeting with the head of the Russian Orthodox Church⁶⁹. Characteristically, the Holy See appreciated the alluring proposal as well as Lukashenko’s noble impulse⁷⁰. However, the perfect scenario was cancelled by a decisive “no” and general misunderstanding of the Russian Orthodox Church announced by the Moscow Patriarchate international affairs department in May 2009.

There is no doubt that A. Lukashenko is aware of the real price of such globalist services, given the Catholic Church’s authority in the Western hemisphere and especially its political implications. He is also aware of Vatican’s expectations — gradual territorial expansion, i.e., Catholicism’s penetration

in the East, in the “heart” of Russian Orthodoxy. It needs to be stressed that Belarus’ authorities aim at a more intensive dialogue with the Catholic Church, which can be easily proven by more frequent meetings with its representatives. On the eve of the 2010 presidential election, Lukashenko declared that a concordat between the Belarusian state and Catholic Church was to be signed in the nearest future. During the meeting with the Ambassador of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to Belarus in April 2012, the President voiced an appeal to the Catholic Church in order to encourage its leadership to assist at improving the Belarus-EU relations⁷¹.

As a result of the strategy, many devoted Orthodox Christians hold, the authentic spirit of the Belarusian nation will be jeopardized by a soft “religious Polonization,” which — along with the probable establishment of the autocephalous Belarusian Orthodox Church — might lead to “the fragmentation of the triune people”⁷². To my mind, the concerns of the “Russian world” committed supporters are not unfounded and are directly related to the authorities’ identification politics; geopolitical centres’ strategy of penetrating into (and getting control over) Belarusian spiritual sphere; religious and state institutions’ overall credibility. Obviously, there are no explicitly pro-Russian political forces in Belarus today, even though the pro-Russian movement here used to be considerably stronger than in Russia itself. The Belarusian regime concentrated its forces on undermining and eliminating every single allusion to the political presence of the Kremlin elite, viewed as a primary threat to Lukashenko’s power. Paradoxically, Belarusian “anti-nationalist” Lukashenko succeeded in conducting a latent “Belarusification”⁷³ of the Russian minority: the 2009 census data indicate the reduction of the ethnic Russian population by 30%, because a vast majority of Russians identified themselves as Belarusians⁷⁴. It must be underlined that the presence of both Russian and European (Western) elements in the media, political and economic dimension is strictly con-

trolled and regulated by the local authorities in accordance with the current political conjuncture.

Lukashenko’s Belarus

The underlying trend in the official discourse is to “imagine” Belarus as a bilingual, poly-confessional, and multicultural community guided by the maxim of “social justice.” Its future is to be built by nourishing “authentic cultural traditions,” which means a positive reading of the national history, a patent “sacralization” of the Soviet past and of the Belarusian present, such top-priority values as order, discipline, social stability, no critical economic disparity, unemployment-, corruption-, crime-free zone. At the same time, hostility towards “alien values” and axiological paradigms — capable of “destroying the foundations of the original civilization” — is cultivated. To put it in Lukashenko’s terms, “Belarusians will not be lured by an exquisite liberal values demagogy”⁷⁵.

The official “version”⁷⁶ of the national identity maintains that collectivism, sympathy, high spirituality are the principal characteristics distinguishing the nation from “the Other” — Western societies guided by individualism and aggressive liberalism, driven by the maxim of social darwinism. Interestingly enough, the rhetoric of the current political establishment tends to idealize the Belarusian community by regularly underlying the nation’s exceptionality and hence broadcasting a distorted image of the people. In their analysis of 2000, St. Eke and T. Kuzio defined Little Russianism and World War II historical myths as the primary pillar of the Belarusian national identity. Clearly, the political leadership will not abandon exploiting the Slav Orthodox vector to guarantee the national unity and social stability. This geopolitical scheming entails the current self-identification paradigm conceiving Belarusians as Russia’s outpost, immune to the Western civilization’s expansionism. Nonetheless, this doesn’t exclude Lukashenko’s other contradictory declarations on the country’s goal to become “a de-

veloped European state”. In other words, this pattern appears to be a mixture of “Western Russianism” and national Sovietism, contain references to the European standards, albeit with certain reservations, whereas the leitmotif of the president’s rhetoric remains the same: an independent Belarusian state and intensive “Belarusianism”.

**Belarus as civilizational/
geopolitical borderland and Lukashenko
as the key “identifier”**

The country’s being situated on the border of two civilizations and between the Western and Russian spheres of influence has long-term repercussions on the local identification: society turns out to be imminently divided and is subject to constant oscillations of the national identity and geopolitical status. It seems that little has changed since the 1920s, when a prominent philosopher Ignat Abdziralovich treated the issue of “the cordial non-allying with any of the two alternatives”⁷⁷ and reflected on the absence of a clear choice between the East and the West. Significantly, December 2010 opinion poll findings reflect this assumption⁷⁸:

Do you consider parallel integration with Russia and the EU possible?	%
NO	41
YES	40.4

In all probability, in case there are geopolitical tensions or disputes, Belarusians will be inevitably put under pressure to define its principal geopolitical ally. Historically, this territory has never been unilingual, mono-ethnic, mono-cultural or mono-religious. That is why, according to the Belarusian philosopher V. Akudovich, Belarus “will never be only Belarusian; under no circumstances will it be only Russian or Polish... Hardly ever will it be only Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant... It will never be only pro-Western as well as it will never be only pro-Eastern...”⁷⁹. In the context of the Belarusian

ideological and identification narrative, the civilizational borderland pattern conceives Europe and Russia — given no other power centres are expected to emerge here in the foreseeable future — as “imagined communities”, since both, in fact, lack political unity, homogeneity, and a pronounced identity. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, both Russia and Belarus had to deal with an overwhelming crisis of identity, which even today resembles an “archipelago”, to use I. Bobkov’s terminology⁸⁰. Accordingly, a minor part of the population conserved the homo sovieticus mentality, whereas the rest identified themselves either with Europe or with the original ethno-cultural background, Orthodox Christianity and Pan-Slavism (Eurasianism). Europe, in its turn, has been challenged by similar collective identity issues: the need to surmount enduring nationalism as an obstacle for negotiating a European identity, the inefficiency of traditional identity politics and the failure of multiculturalism concept. For G. Minjenkov, “European identity represents a discursive formation hosting the dialogue of different European discourse models”⁸¹.

Lately, in the light of intensified Eurasian integration and Belarus’ growing dependence on Russia (serious economic recession, social tensions, social network activism, sanctions, Belarus-EU diplomatic conflict, regime’s damaged credibility), we have witnessed the strengthening of the Eastern political bond, Russia’s preponderance⁸² in the cultural, civilizational and identification space. As illustrated in the table providing a comparative estimate of geopolitical sympathies, Belarusians still tend to associate themselves with Russians rather than Europeans⁸³.

**“Who do you consider yourself
to be closer related to?”**

Answer	03’ 2010	12’ 2010	12’ 2011	06’ 2012
The Russians, %	74.5	69.9	68.0	68.2
The Europeans, %	19.4	29.6	25.8	31.2
Don’t know, %	6.1	0.5	6.2	0.6

Fundamentally, the gap between the vital national interests and those of the ruling top can be interpreted both as an indicator of the society's condition and, under particular circumstances, as an impulse for identities redistribution or "switching". While inside Belarus the "Us-and-Them" dichotomy impedes the national identity homogenization, in case of inter-state relations (with an independent "Other") in the borderland zone, it is likely to lead to the sides' consolidation. It means that an external conflict of interests is supposed to stimulate the Belarusian national and, as a consequence, state identification. So by means of the regime's fervent opposing itself to other states-protagonists of the geopolitical process, it enforces its specificity and protects its interests which can (but do not necessarily) coincide with the national interests. For H. Tajfel, "only the most extreme social situations...temporarily eliminate all group identities but one, the most important"⁸⁴. Traditionally, Belarusian President skillfully uses his propagandistic appeals to mobilize the national consciousness when there is a presumed peril of being subdued by Russia. As a result of his anti-Russian surge of 2010, opinion polls captured the decline of the pro-Union State sentiments by 3.1% (from 25.7% to 22.6%)⁸⁵. It cannot be ignored that similar tactics are employed vis-à-vis Western states, when an "external enemy" is "picked out" in accordance with the current foreign policy imperatives. It is logical that this patriotic "call to arms" unites all the political forces and appeals to various social strata. So far, this method of support consolidation, i.e., broadcasting the "endangered Motherland" message, has not let the Belarusian leader down.

Overall, on the basis of the Soviet historiography, Slav culture, Orthodox system of values, and local ethnic heritage, Lukashenko's strategy impelled the people to situate themselves in the post-Soviet identification narrative and to identify themselves in terms of nation. From this perspective, devoted nationalists' sharp criticism⁸⁶ against his antinationalism and alleged intention to "sell off"

the country to the Russian "imperialists" appears to be quite misleading. Such assumptions, coupled with the president's cliché label of a clearly pro-Russian politician, are inadequate to characterize the regime's real strategies, given the charismatic leader's sophisticated geopolitical game. Over the course of his political career, A. Lukashenko could be hardly labeled as an openly pro-Russian (pro-Kremlin) or pro-European (pro-Western) leader. Also, national identity does not necessarily correlate with the existing political regime, but with the state and its ethno-cultural pillars. That is why the two opposites — democracy and authoritarianism — may affect the organizational level of the society, not the national consciousness or the identification process: "the differences between democracy and dictatorship are less than between those countries whose politics embodies consensus, community, legitimacy, organization, effectiveness, stability, and those countries whose politics is deficient in these qualities"⁸⁷.

Being aware of the general identification dynamic in the country, Belarus' regime can be undoubtedly regarded as the main "identifier" and the predominant force of the identity politics, its centre, subject, and "broadcaster". Nonetheless, the state-promoted nation and identity-building patterns have been traditionally questioned by the bearers of the "antagonist" identities, especially by those advocating for ethno-cultural and pro-European alternatives. Modern Belarusian identity was consolidated under Lukashenko, "both because of his longevity in office since 1994 and because of his construction of an eclectic identity closer to the median Belarusian than the purist project of the opposition"⁸⁸. Taras Kuzio, a contemporary Ukraine scholar, suggests the Belarusian head of state be defined as "a Soviet Belarusian nationalist" and Belarus as "a nationalising ethnic state"⁸⁹, because it partially explains the state-sponsored Russification of the education sector⁹⁰. Normally, the dominant (not necessarily official) language of a nation is the one of the governing class. Rus-

sian has traditionally been the language of the Belarusian authorities, one of the attributes of the political sphere, while the role of the Belarusian language, the nucleus of ethno-cultural identity, remains largely symbolic. Even if not widely spoken, Belarusian⁹¹ is considered to be an important symbol, the backbone of the national identity. “There is a clear paradox: more people identify as ‘Belarusian’ than speak the language”⁹². It needs to be pointed out that official statistics turn out to be quite deceptive at times. According to the 2009 national census data, 53.2% of Belarusians (9, 503, 807) indicate Belarusian as their mother tongue and 41.2% — Russian⁹³. The figures give an atypical interpretation of the Belarusian linguistic space that is known to be largely dominated by the Russian language. Significantly, inserting the “language of the household” category into the questionnaire modified the results greatly: 70.2% Russian-speakers and 23.4% Belarusian-speakers. Certain measures⁹⁴ have been taken by the government to ensure Belarusian’s popularization, to lend it greater importance, to boost its appeal as a social communication means. However, the efforts seem to have been rather ineffective, as in 2011 the popularity of the Belarusian language as a means of every-day (household) communication reached the dramatic level of 1.9%, which appears to be the lowest in the past 16 years (3.2% in 2010; 7.1% in 2004)⁹⁵. Most of the observers maintain that “there is a minority, composed largely of intellectuals, who view the preservation of the Belarusian language as essential to Belarus’ future as a sovereign state”⁹⁶. I’d like to emphasize that Lukashenko’s presumed aversion to the Belarusian language has nothing to do with his personal linguistic tastes but is determined by the fact that Belarusian has been the exclusive domain of the nationalist camp, his principal political rivals in the mid-1990s. Importantly, there is obviously no automatic correlation between one’s language of communication and national identity. Therefore, in the case of Belarus, the following consideration seems to be valid: “Today.. many

fewer people speak Belarusian, but not too many would doubt that Belarus is a separate nation — their nation — and should remain independent”⁹⁷.

It is particularly noteworthy that in the pre-Putin period of his political career — when Belarusian President “aspired to be Putin before Putin took the job”⁹⁸ — A. Lukashenko not only styled himself as a national leader, but also voiced far more ambitious intentions to be at the forefront of the Eastern Orthodox area⁹⁹. The heart of the politician’s Pan-Slavism was the assertion that Belarus was meant to assume the “role of the Eastern European civilization spiritual leader,” which was determined by the fact that Belarus was “the only state in the region to foster traditional values,” and was viewed by a vast majority of Russians and Ukrainians as “a model of consistent politics”¹⁰⁰. This unifying centre was seeking to “attract patriotic forces from the common post-Soviet Motherland”¹⁰¹. Interestingly, this Pan-Slavic motive of the head of state found strong resonance in Russia. Just like the Belarusian strongman, the Russian Communist Party leader G. Ziuganov argued that “Russians are Great Russians, Little Russians¹⁰², and White Russians”¹⁰³; and only together will they become “protagonists of the world history”¹⁰⁴. By his ideology, Belarusian President tried to transmit an identification concept of international importance. For Lukashenko, the geopolitical status of Belarus should not be misinterpreted, since “it is not a province: neither the Eastern outskirts of Europe, nor the Western outskirts of Russia”¹⁰⁵. Belarus is considered to be a geopolitical actor. So March 2010 polling data trace the nation’s favorable reaction, a “perceptible” national consciousness, a growing pride in belonging to a distinct ethno-cultural community: 78% of respondents declared that they were proud of being Belarusians¹⁰⁶.

Are You proud to be a Belarusian? %	
YES	78.0
NO	20.9
DON'T KNOW	1.1

It is worth mentioning that 43.5% of the 2006 poll respondents — who were asked to rate Russia, USA and Belarus as having a positive or negative influence on global affairs — evaluate the influence of Belarus as mainly positive, while 38.3% believe the country’s impact on world politics is fairly irrelevant¹⁰⁷.

STATES	Mainly positive	Mainly negative	No particular influence	Don’t know
BELARUS	43.5	11.4	38.3	6.8
RUSSIA	68.3	9.5	11.7	10.5
USA	26.1	52.0	8.3	13.6.

The country’s geopolitical (and civilizational) location has become a valuable political and economic “commodity” for the regime. President Lukashenko’s intelligent political maneuvering — by taking advantage of the borderland reality and exploiting the West against the East and vice versa-, his unprecedented political flexibility, unusual rhetorical adaptability, and effective populist blackmail techniques rendered Belarus an important player on the geopolitical chessboard. Hence it is the swing of Lukashenko’s foreign policy pendulum to define the national identification key points and to state its either pro-Russian or pro-Western leaning. And it is no surprise that the utterly personified political factor appears to be decisive for Belarusians’ geopolitical preferences. The table below tracks the nation’s geopolitical choice over time¹⁰⁸.

Fundamentally, pro-Europe/pro-Russia moods’ indicators are dictated by shifts in regime’s foreign policy. In this regard, December 2010—the post-presidential election period — served as a landmark when the Eastern and Western vectors seemed to have evened the score. However, having reached the climax of popularity, the support for the EU has been gradually declining. The current balance of geopolitical preferences speaks unequivocally in Russia’s favor. However, the map of the East-West geopolitical preferences has been rather changeable in the past two years. After a clear parity in December 2010 (38% for both pro-EU and pro-Russian options), public opinion polls have signaled the Russian vector’s superiority. So in March 2012, 47% of respondents declared that they would opt for union with the Russian Federation, while the supporters of joining the European Union made up 37.3%¹⁰⁹. The current situation reflects the continuing decline of the pro-EU sentiment in Belarus, points out the tendency of stunted “Europeanization” and an overall marginalization of the pro-European political and intellectual camp. Here are some of the reasons:

No significant European investments or substantial financial aid;

Sanctions, imposed by the EU and the U.S., were effectively exploited by the regime to explain the nature of the grave financial crisis of 2011 and were perceived quite negatively by a majority of Belarusians.

Schengen visa costs for Belarusian citizens remain the highest in the region (let alone a rather discriminating procedure).

“If you had to choose between the union with the Russian Federation and joining the EU, what would you prefer?”

OPTION	06/2006	10/2010	12/2010	03/2011	06/2011	09/2011	12/2011	03/2012
Union with <u>RUSSIA</u> %	56.5	35.4	38.1	31.5	35.3	41.5	41.4	47
Join the <u>EU</u> %	29.3	42.2	38.0	50.5	44.5	42.0	39.1	37.3

Numerous Realpolitik episodes: Belarusian pro-democracy opposition and civil society representatives “betrayed” by the EU bureaucrats (the case of human rights activist Ales’ Bieljatsky), EU politicians’ alleged backstage¹¹⁰ talks with the Belarusian regime aimed at promoting the European business and civilizational interests.

Lukashenko’s “return home” (?) in the context of the Russia-Belarus peripetias

The intensive cooperation of the two countries dates back to the early 1990s. Then, by implementing the “utopian” Russia-Belarus economic and political “brotherhood” scenario, Belarusian President ensured his power pyramid’s relative stability. Owing to significant pro-Lukashenko lobbying¹¹¹ in the heart of Russian politics, the leader traditionally enjoyed (and still does) an overall support—notably, during his electoral campaigns—of both the Kremlin and other post-Soviet counterparts. Also, until the grave crisis of 2011, Belarusians were provided a relatively high living standard, mainly due to Russia’s generous sponsorship that in some periods reached up to 20% of Belarus’ GDP. Importantly, this combination of circumstances reduced the gravity of the U.S. and EU restrictive measures, the real effect of sanctions imposed as a protest against systematic electoral fraud, repressing the pro-democracy opposition and civil society activists. Moreover, the Russia-Belarus Union State’s institutional framework served to Lukashenko as a platform for broadcasting the image of a reliable partner, an indispensable connecting link between the West and the East. After V. Putin’s election in 2000, however, Lukashenko’s mid-1990s integration enthusiasm began to wane, as his political ambitions clashed with the pragmatism of the Kremlin’s new ruler.

The growing disillusionment of Belarusian President led to the Russian vector’s political reassessment and marked the dawn of a complex geopolitical game by taking advantage of Russia-EU contradictions. Renewing the dialogue with the European Union,

joining the Eastern Partnership in 2009, an explicitly anti-Russian rhetoric, Lukashenko’s ambiguous position on the status of the separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia were some of the regime’s principal geopolitical maneuvers until 2010. On the eve of the 2010 presidential election, European leaders tried hard to “democratize” and “Europeanize” the Belarusian strongman by promising him the critically important loans. Also, the West seemed to perceive the president’s tactical pseudo-liberalization as a positive signal of his intention to follow the road of democratic reforms. This geopolitical game, however, culminated in signing the Common Economic Space Treaty in December 2010, which actually marked Lukashenko’s “return home”¹¹². In his State of the Nation address in May 2012, the head of state summarized his views on foreign policy and global affairs by saying that “two vectors of the East-West axis were not enough to maintain long-term stability of the state.” Also, to Lukashenko’s mind, “reasonable politicians understand: there are no “swings.” There are objective interests of the country, dictated by the present and the future”¹¹³. According to some analysts, V. Putin’s re-election implies new strict rules in Russia-Belarus relations and hence harder times for A. Lukashenko.

Here it needs to be added that in 2011, the Kremlin rescued the “drowning” Belarusian counterpart during the regime’s systemic crisis. As a consequence, Lukashenko fell into the Russian “trap” and was thus compelled to give up his geopolitical pendulum methods by manifesting his unconditional loyalty to the Eastern civilization, i.e., to Eurasianism and the “Russian world.” Earlier this year, the head of state declared that the country’s role is that of the “Gateway to Eurasia”¹¹⁴, not the outskirts of Europe, as sometimes claimed. In this declaration, Lukashenko stresses the importance of Belarus in the geopolitical borderland and reaffirms his “final decision” in favor of the Eastern vector. Moreover, in his above-mentioned “State of the Nation” address, Lukashenko emphasized that the Russia-Belarus co-

operation would remain his priority even after V. Putin's inauguration: "I would like to disappoint those who hope that the next day after Putin assumed power, he will start stifling us; our relations will be growing stronger..."¹¹⁵. I'd like to stress that even if Lukashenko's "return home" is being widely presented as definitive, there is still little certainty that another geopolitical U-turn is totally excluded.

When it comes to the future of Belarus, a complex geopolitical antagonism that strongly affects the Belarusian society and nation-state should be taken into consideration. To be more precise, a unidirectional geopolitical pattern will inevitably lead to social polarization as well as destabilize the national identity. In his famous essay "Belarus — the Eastern Europe", Z. Paznjak, a co-founder of the Conservative Christian Party-Belarusian National Front, contests the idea that Belarus should ally itself with one of the two poles, because to both Belarus is a stranger. The author argues that Belarusians are "Europeans who have not lost their spirit"¹¹⁶. Assuming that Europe is viewed as a mere value model, Lukashenko's defining Belarus as "our Russia" represents another alternative. Most importantly, the authoritarian ruling class is guided by "its" nationalism and mobilizes its forces when their "Motherland," i.e., their power pyramid is imperiled. Hence the Belarusian national identity is still being modeled and remade, "governed by political circumstances"¹¹⁷. And despite the current dominance of the East-West identification dichotomy, the search for new national identity references is still under way.

Conclusions

Given Belarus' location on the border of two civilizations, between the Western and Russian spheres of influence, its society appears to be divided and subject to constant oscillations of the national identity and geopolitical status. President Lukash-

enko and, most importantly, his political activities appear to be the key "identifier" of the Belarusian nation in the geopolitical and civilizational dimension. The leader's pendulum-like foreign policy highlights the national identity reference points and defines its either pro-Russian or pro-Western orientation. In the context of regime's relentless maneuvering between Moscow and Brussels, pro-Russia and pro-West orientations reached parity at the end of 2010. It might imply that the country's identification code can be modified in accordance with the ruling elite's foreign policy imperatives and the current political conjuncture.

Despite the fact that the elements of European identity are present in the Belarusian identity code, notably as a symbol of better living standards, its role is far from relevant. Instead, the strong bonds with the Russian Orthodox culture, nurtured within the Pan-Slavic "Russian world" paradigm, will remain dominant for Belarusians' identification in the long-term perspective. Numerous sociological surveys and opinion polls confirm the preponderant position of the Eastern integration projects (with Russia as a core power). Nevertheless, any form of political incorporation into the Russian Federation has been continually rejected. The concept of the Belarusian nation as a self-sufficient subject of international relations and the necessity to abandon the "peripheral" identity are broadcasted by the authoritarian regime.

In these "liquid times," the civilizational borderland can be characterized as a specific habitat of the Belarusian community as well as one of the pillars of its identity. The search for new identification reference points within the East-West dichotomy is still under way. As D. Marani, an Italian linguist, pointed out, we ought to remember that "there are transition zones between cultures" and "different identities do exclude, but rather support each other"¹¹⁸.

¹ Bauman Z. Dentro la globalizzazione: le conseguenze sulle persone. Traduzione di Oliviero Pesce. Roma-Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 2001. P. 67.

- ² See Abbott (Abbot P. Cultural Trauma and Social Quality in Post-Soviet Moldova and Belarus. *East European Politics and Societies*. 2007. Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 219-258) for more on Moldovans' and Belarusians' traumatic socio-economic and political experience after 1991.
- ³ The leading nationalist force in the country. For more on BNF see Bohdan (Bohdan S. The National Democratic Project in Belarusian Politics in 1980s-1990s: Zianon Pazniak's Version. *Belarusian Political Science Review*. 2011. Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 87-110).
- ⁴ The evolution of the Lukashenko regime has been analyzed in the following publications: Marples (Marples D. The Roots and Perspectives of Authoritarianism in «White Russia». *Europe-Asia Studies*. 2005. Vol. 57, No. 6, pp. 895-908), Parker (Parker S. *The Last Soviet Republic*. Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2007), Korosteleva et al. (*Contemporary Belarus: Between democracy and dictatorship*. Ed. by E.A. Korosteleva, C.W. Lawson, R.J. Marsh. London: Routledge Curzon, 2003).
- ⁵ These assumptions represent the so-called "weakness theory" (Babkou I. Genealjegija belaruskaj ideji: z lekcyjau dlja Belaruskaja Kalgijumu. *Arche Pachatak*, 2005 n. 3, pp. 136-164. Minsk: Redakcija zhurnala „Arche Pachatak“).
- ⁶ Pershai, Alexander. Minor Nations: the Alternative Modes of Belarusian Nationalism. // *East European Politics and Societies*. 2010. Vol. 24. No. 3. P. 381.
- ⁷ The most relevant essays and monographs on Belarus' history and national consciousness have been elaborated by a plethora of contemporary Belarusian authors including V. Akudovich, I. Bobkov, J. Chernjavskaja, T. Volodazhskaja, V. Abushenko, J. Shevtsov, G. Minjenkov, A. Kazakievich, V. Silitskij, P. Rudkovskij, O. Shparaga, V. Bulgakov, V. Karbalevich, V. Chernov, E. Korosteleva, N. Leshchenko, A. Potupa, L. Titarenko, A. Pikulik, P. Rudkovskij, A. Jegorov, E. Gapova, N. Bekus, V. Mackievich, O. Manajev, A. Pershai, V. Rouda, J. Chausov, P. Usov, A. Lastovskij, M. Balmaceda, N. Vasilievich. The international "branch" of the Belarusian studies has been developed owing to the valuable contribution of G. Ioffe, D. Marples, A. Wilson, T. Kuzio, St. White, R. Clem and many others.
- ⁸ For EU policy vis- -vis Belarus see: Bosse (Bosse G. Challenges for EU governance through Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership: the values/security nexus in EU-Belarus relations. *Contemporary Politics*. 2009. Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 215-227), Gromadzki (Gromadzki G. A Difficult Case: Belarus as Part of the European Neighbourhood Policy. *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*. Vol. XV, No. 2/2006, pp. 37-45), Bulhakau; Komorowska (Belarus: Neither Europe, Nor Russia. *Opinions of Belarusian Elites*. Ed. by V. Bulhakau, A. Komorowska. Warsaw: Stefan Batory Foundation. 238 p.), Vysotskaya Guedes Vieira; Bosse (Vysotskaya Guedes Vieira A.; Bosse G. ENPI Implementation: the case of Belarus. European Parliament. Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union. Policy Department. Available online: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/belaruspe388964/BelarusPE388964en.pdf> [10-08-2012]), Jahorau (Jahorau A. Who Has Benefited from the Implementation of the Neighbourhood Policy in Belarus? *Belarusian Political Science Review*. 2011. Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 213-226), Korosteleva (Korosteleva E. The European Union and its Eastern Neighbours: Towards a more ambitious partnership? L.: Routledge, 2012.).
- ⁹ Buzek: Situation in Belarus intolerable. 16.01.2012. URL: <http://telegraf.by/en/2012/01/buzek-situaciyu-v-belarusi-terpet-nelzya> [10-08-2012].
- ¹⁰ The Eurasian Union (EAU) of former Soviet republics is an integration project proposed by V. Putin in 2011. The EAU is supposed to be the culmination of the existing integration mechanisms. The original idea, however, belongs to Kazakhstan President N. Nazarbayev and dates back to the mid-1990s.
- ¹¹ Common Economic Space represents a new level of integration of the EurAsEC Customs Union members (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia). EurAsEC (Eurasian Economic Community) was established in 2000 by Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan.
- ¹² EurAsEC Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia.
- ¹³ Collective Security Treaty Organization is an intergovernmental military alliance established in 1992.
- ¹⁴ The Joint Regional Air Defense system's main objective is to control and protect Belarus and Russia air boundaries, the common air space. More on the military dimension of Russia-Belarus integration in Jasutis (2006).
- ¹⁵ Ioffe G. Yarashnevich V. Debating Belarus: An Economy in Comparative Perspective // *Eurasian Geography and Economics*. 2011. Vol. 52. No. 6. P. 771.
- ¹⁶ Putin Heads to Belarus, EU Partners in First Official Visit. 31.05.2012. URL: <http://www.rferl.org/content/putin-visiting-belarus-germany-france/24599007.html> [10-08-2012].
- ¹⁷ Lukashenko: Bjelarus — samyj vjernyj sojuznik Rossiji. 31.05.2012. URL: <http://www.belaruspartizan.org/politic/212222/> [10-08-2012].
- ¹⁸ *Civilizational Identity*. Ed. by M. Hall, P.Th. Jackson. N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

- ¹⁹ Donskis L. *Loyalty, Dissent, and Betrayal: Modern Lithuania and East-Central European Moral Imagination*. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2005.
- ²⁰ *Civilizational Identity*. Ed. by M. Hall, P.Th. Jackson. N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. P. 5.
- ²¹ Sadowski A. The Borderland Civilizations as a Research Category in the Sociology of Borderland. // *Limes: Cultural Regionalistics*. 2009. Issue 1. P. 87.
- ²² Eisenstadt Sh. N. *Civilizations/Sh.N. Eisenstadt// International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Ed. by N.J. Smelser, P.B. Baltes. Oxford: Pergamon, 2001.
- ²³ Huntington S.P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1996. P. 43.
- ²⁴ Op. cit. P.125.
- ²⁵ *Civilizational Identity*. Ed. by M. Hall, P.Th. Jackson. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. P. 18.
- ²⁶ Biaspamiatnykh M. *Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian Borderlands: Phenomenological Analysis // Limes: Cultural Regionalistics*. 2008. Issue 2. P. 99-107.
- ²⁷ Minjenkov G. *Evropejskaja identichnost kak gorizont belorusskogo vobrazhenija/ G. Minjenkov// Evropejskaja pjerspektiva Belarusi: intellektualnye modeli*. Ed. by O. Shparaga. Vilnius: EGU, 2007. P. 89.
- ²⁸ Bobkov I. *Etika Pogranichja: transkulturnost kak belorusskij opyt*. // *Pjerkjrestki*. 2005. P. 129.
- ²⁹ Bhabha H. K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 2004. P. 1.
- ³⁰ Titarenko L. *Belarus: A Borderland Civilization or Civilization Outskirts? Sociological Reflection*. // *Limes: Cultural Regionalistics*. 2009. Issue 1. P. 64.
- ³¹ Augelli J. P. *Nationalization of Dominican Borderlands // Geographical Review*. 1980. Vol.70. No. 1. P. 19.
- ³² Sadowski A. *The Borderland Civilizations as a Research Category in the Sociology of Borderland*. // *Limes: Cultural Regionalistics*. 2009. Issue 1. P. 83.
- ³³ Barth F. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Middleton: Waveland Press, 1998. P. 10.
- ³⁴ Bekus N. *European Belarus Versus State Ideology: Construction of the Nation in the Belarusian Political Discourses // Polish Sociological Review*. 2008. Vol. 163. No. 3. P. 27.
- ³⁵ Pershai A. *Minor Nations: the Alternative Modes of Belarusian Nationalism*. // *East European Politics and Societies*. 2010. Vol. 24. No. 3. P. 381.
- ³⁶ Ioffe G. *Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity // Europe-Asia Studies*. 2003a Vol. 55. No. 8. P. 1247
- ³⁷ “Tuteishasc” is a Belarusian term to indicate a local (regional) type of identity with Belarusian historic and ethno-cultural specificities. It implies identifying oneself with a certain location, a birthplace, a native land etc. G. Ioffe mentions that the term “tuteishasc” “means locals, but because Jews, Poles, and Russians living in Belarus never identified as tuteishiya, this nickname applies to the nationally indifferent, that is, to local Slavs without clear national identity” [Ioffe G. *Culture Wars, Soul-Searching, and Belarusian Identity*. *East European Politics and Societies*. 2007. Vol. 21, No. 2. P. 350]. For more on “tuteishasc” see Ioffe (Ioffe G. *Nation-Building in Belarus: A Rebuttal*. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*. 2007. Vol. 48, No. 1, pp. 68-72), Pershai (Pershai A. *Localness and Mobility in Belarusian Nationalism: the Tactic of Tuteisha*. *Nationalities Papers*. 2008. Vol. 36, No. 1. P. 85-1).
- ³⁸ Bekus N. *Nationalism and Socialism: “Phase D” in the Belarusian Nation-Building // Nationalities Papers*. 2010. Vol. 38. No. 6. P. 841.
- ³⁹ Minjenkov G. Op.cit. P. 92.
- ⁴⁰ Op. cit. P. 34.
- ⁴¹ S. Plokhly introduces the term “New Eastern Europe” to indicate the region comprising modern Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldavia [Plokhly S. *The «New Eastern Europe»: What to Do with the Histories of Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova? East European Politics and Societies*. 2011. Vol. 24, No. 4. P. 763-769].
- ⁴² Dugin A. *Osnovy geopolitiki. Geopoliticheskoje buduscheje Rossiji*. Moskva: Arktogeja-centr, 2000. P. 424.
- ⁴³ Gusman M. *Alexandr Lukashenko: Moji vybory byli falsificirovany*. *Izvestia.ru*. 27.08.2009. URL: <http://www.izvestia.ru/politic/article3132313/> [10-08-2012].
- ⁴⁴ The Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS), based in Lithuania since 2005 (when its functioning in Belarus was suspended by the Supreme Court decision), was one of the first non-governmental analytical centres in the country in the early 1990s. IISEPS is widely known and appreciated abroad for its impartial coverage of principal social trends. Importantly, most of the solid analyses are conducted with references to the IISEPS polling data (G. Ioffe, D. Marples, N. Bekus, A. Wilson, St. White, E. Korosteleva).
- ⁴⁵ Belarusians tend to associate themselves with certain nations on the basis of similar culture (39.9%) and common history (49.5%) [IISEPS (NISEPI): *Nezavisimyj institut socialno-ekonomicheskich i*

- politicheskich issledovanij. (2010a). Osobjennosti bjeloruskoj identichnosti. March 2010. Available online: <<http://www.iiseps.org/03-10.html>> [cit. 10-08-2012].
- 46 IISEPS (NISEPI): Nezavisimyj institute socialno-ekonomicheskich I politicheskich issledovabij. Chto takoje byt bjelorusom? December 2009. URL: <http://www.iiseps.org/12-09-12.html> [10-08-2012].
- 47 Dw.de. Belarus i Evropa: otsustvije strategiji sderzhivajet sotrudnichestvo. 27.05.2012. URL: http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15980302,00.html?maca=rus-CB_rus_BelarusPartisan-4786-xml-mrss [10-08-2012].
- 48 Assuming that the scope of the Soviet society's systematic atheization was really impressive, these figures do not only show the incontestable preponderance of the Orthodox Church in the country, but, first and foremost, the current political establishment's being favorably disposed vis- -vis the institution.
- 49 The case of the Belarusian Greek-Catholic (Uniate) Church is far more complicated, given the contrasting figures provided by different sources. The official website of the Hierarchy of Liturgical Churches deals with the estimates of 3000-5000 Greek-Catholics in Belarus (URL: <http://www.hierarchy.religare.ru/h-uniate-64kratrus.html> [10-08-2012]). Alternative numbers reach 10.000 adherents (URL: <http://www.bygeo.ru/materialy/naselenie-belarusi/426-religioznyj-sostav-naseleniyabelarusi.html> [10-08-2012]). Historically, it is widely claimed, the majority population of the territory of the present-day Belarus identified with the Uniate Church from 1569 until the half of the 19th century. According to some scholars, the marginalization of the Uniate Church in the 19th century eliminated every precondition for developing and incorporating a sense of uniqueness by the local community.
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- ⁸⁰ Bobkov I. Etika Pogranichja: transkulturnost kak belorusskij opyt. // Pjerjerkrestki. 2005. P. 129.
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- ⁸² G. Ioffe provides an explanation of Russia’s dominance on the basis of several objective factors: 1) most Belarusians are of Orthodox background; 2) Russia has long been in the position of prime cultural donor vis- vis Belarus; 3) the statehood was achieved due to external, not internal forces; 4) the country’s apparent economic dependence on Russia.
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- ⁸⁷ Huntington S.P. Political Order In Changing Societies. New Haven and L.: Yale University Press, 1968. P. 1.
- ⁸⁸ Wilson A. Op. cit. P. 139.
- ⁸⁹ Kuzio T. «Nationalising States» or Nation-building? A Critical Review of the Theoretical Literature. // Nations and Nationalism. 2001. Vol. 7. No. 2. P. 148.
- ⁹⁰ Compared to the Soviet times, the number of Belarusian language schools today is lower. In 2011/2012 school year, only 18% of Belarusian high school students studied in the Belarusian language [Belorusskij

- partizan 2012c]. By contrast, the number of Belarusian-language students in 1993 reached 76% [Charter97.org 2009].
- ⁹¹ For more on the role of the Belarusian language in contemporary Belarus see Ioffe (2003b); Goujon (1999).
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- ⁹⁴ More on the authorities' activities on promoting the Belarusian language and culture see Leshchenko (Leshchenko N. A Fine Instrument: Two Nation-Building Strategies in Post-Soviet Belarus. Nations and Nationalism. 2004. Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 333-352.); Wilson (Wilson A. Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship. New Haven and L.: Yale University Press. P. 226).
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- ¹⁰³ Belarusians.
- ¹⁰⁴ Zjuganov prizval Lukashenko, Medvedjeva i Janukovicha srastit „uzly i sosudy“. 17.08.2010. URL: <http://www.belaruspartizan.org/bp-forte/?page=100&news=65954> [10-08-2012].
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- ¹⁰⁹ IISEPS (NISEPI): Nezavisimyj institute socialno-ekonomicheskich I politicheskich issledovabij. (2012). Vjetjer s Vostoka. March 2012. URL: <http://www.iiseps.org/03-12-05.html> [10-08-2012].
- ¹¹⁰ It seems quite natural that a good deal of international politics is negotiated and decided behind the scenes. To avoid a detailed description of numerous controversies surrounding some EU officials' approaching the issue, I will mention some of the recent facts. So in February 2012, Slovenia blocked the EU initiative to extend sanctions against the Belarusian regime by adding the name of Lukashenko's presumed key sponsor Y. Chizh on the EU travel ban list. Some EU diplomats claimed that the country's step was motivated by Slovenia's Riko Group business interests in Belarus, since the company had won a tender to build a five-star Kempinski hotel in Minsk [URL: <http://euobserver.com/foreign/115397>]. Also, despite EU and U.S. wide criticism, the International Ice Hockey Federation has repeatedly reaffirmed its decision to hold the 2014 World Cup in Minsk, Belarus' capital city.
- ¹¹¹ "By some accounts, there is a powerful Belarusian lobby in Moscow, although it was noticeably weakened when Moscow's mayor Yuriy Luzhkov was fired by President Medvedev" [Ioffe; Yarashevich Op.cit. P. 771].

- ¹¹² In this respect, the Russian Federation can be fairly considered an interim winner of the geopolitical game over the region. Serious economic concessions (Belarus' strategic assets) can serve as strong evidence. In November 2011, A. Lukashenko agreed to sell the remaining 50% of the Belarusian gas company Beltransgaz to the Russian Gazprom, which implied Russia's absolute monopoly over the Belarusian gas pipeline system. In return he could benefit from significantly lower gas prices. In June 2012, the two sides signed an agreement on the construction of a Russia-financed nuclear plant in Belarus (10 billion USD).
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- ¹¹⁷ Wilson A. Op.cit. P. 139.
- ¹¹⁸ Babickaja V. Diego Marani: „Dobivatsja chistoj rasy — prestupno, dobivatsja chistogo jazyka — absurd“ // Openspace.ru. 26.06.2009. URL: <http://www.openspace.ru/literature/names/details/10930> [10-08-2012].