

# EIR National Economy

## Paradoxes of Belarus in the post-Soviet era

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*The author recently returned from a visit to Belarus, where he was part of a delegation representing the Schiller Institute and EIR.*

On May 14, the people of Belarus Republic answered the four questions of the referendum held under the order of President Alexander Lukashenko. Over 75% of the population said "yes" to the state symbol resembling (but not equal to) the symbol of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic: the flag with a wider red and a narrow green stripe, the latter decorated with a traditional Belorussian ornament, but without a gold hammer-and-sickle and star, and the heraldic with rye ears filled with grain on both sides. The armed horseman with a Greek Catholic cross on his shield, and the vertical red-white-red stripes of the flag adopted three years ago appeared to be quite unpopular. The overwhelming majority (83%) of the population also supported the idea that the Russian language, along with Belorussian, should become an official language of the republic. Third, by a margin of 82.4%, voters supported the actions of the President of Belarus aimed at economic integration with the Russian Federation. Finally, the people of Belarus expressed their support for the President's right to dissolve the Parliament, in case of systematic or grave violation of the Constitution. The last question was approved by 77.6% of the voters.

The elections to the Belorussian Parliament, conducted simultaneously with the referendum, were not completed because of a high requirement of voter participation for the results to be considered legitimate (50%, and not 25% as in other post-U.S.S.R. states including Russia). The second round of elections will be held in December. But in 48% of the districts where the elections were completed, they

demonstrated the popularity of the Agrarian Party candidates, as well as other representatives of the productive sector of the economy. At the same time, not a single representative of the Belorussian People's Front, the vanguard of the liberal nationalists, was elected to the new Parliament. Even were the threshold 25%, BPF leader Zenon Pazniak would be second, and not first in his district.

The elections were conducted according to the majoritarian principle, that is, no party slates were used. Parties could declare their support to those whom they put forward, but all the candidates had to win a majority of voters in their districts. This system was introduced by President Lukashenko, together with a high minimum number of voters, as "the better way to ensure that the new parliamentarians are real representatives of the people." One may like such a system or not, but still nobody can doubt that it offers more equal possibilities for candidates than any other.

The liberal press, both in Belarus and Russia, prefers to regard the results of the elections as a "backlash of Communist and Pan-Slavist forces." This is not true, as any really independent observer can easily verify: First, in July 1994 the candidate of the Belorussian Communist Party (PKB) Anatoli Novikov won only 4% of the voters, even less than Pazniak, and President Alexander Lukashenko, recently accused by the international speculator and geopolitical meddler George Soros of "transforming Belarus into a national park of Communism," has *never* been a CPSU apparatchik, in contrast to Yeltsin, Shevardnadze, Nazarbayev, or Karimov. Furthermore, in the 1995 parliamentary elections, the Agrarian Party proved to be more popular than the Communists. The Pan-Slavist Slaviansky Sobor Party, though more influential here than corresponding structures in Russia and

Ukraine, was unable to promote any of its own candidates into the new Parliament.

Paradoxically, in Russia, where the economy has suffered more profound liberal “free market” changes, the Communist Party became the only real popular party, with its candidates winning a majority in most of the local elections. So, it becomes clear that economic shock therapy is more likely to return the population to communist views, based largely on nostalgia for the stable and relatively prosperous 1970s. Belarus is lucky to avoid the sweeping social disaster of 1992, and economic disorder produced by total and uncontrolled privatization. In Russia, this disorder, enhanced by an immense social stratification, and by criminalization of all spheres of life, is causing more and more people to embrace the idea of dictatorship as the only means for saving the economy and nationhood, and even liberals are seeking a general’s figure for the presidential elections. In Belarus, you see nothing of that sort: None of the Army representatives is popular or even well known. Citizens usually even don’t remember the name of their defense minister; there have been three chiefs of the military in four years, and none was popular. Nor do former KGB generals, comparable to Sterligov and Bobkov in Russia, seem to seriously influence Belorussian political life.

You have to walk along the streets of the capital, Minsk, and along the roads of its suburbs, and you will probably understand the reason for this difference with Russia. The suburbs of Moscow and St. Petersburg project a striking contrast between the luxurious mansions of the “new Russians” resembling medieval castles and surrounded with high fences, and the shabby wooden huts of those who haven’t got used to the new way of life and the new “morality.” In major Russian towns, underground passages are crowded with beggars and vagabonds who sold their apartments or were driven out of them by criminals, and in the main streets you see hundreds of imported cars of the best designs, their owners spending time in luxurious restaurants and casinos.

I did not manage to find a single casino in Minsk. Maybe there are some, but their advertisements are not constantly in your face, as in Moscow. The “new Belorussian” is hard to pick out, and when you occasionally see a stout person with hair cut short, dressed in fashionable imported clothes, this figure is not surrounded by a flock of bodyguards looking like professional gangsters. The city is as clean as it was 10 or 20 years ago, and no hundreds of billboards distort its image.

This “mystery” of Belarus can’t be explained by clinging to Soviet traditions, or by a lack of western influence. After 1991, the republic was in the same situation as the other post-Soviet states. Still, the crash of Communist power was not followed by the same social breakdown and moral degradation as in Russia. Does this mean that the people are more passive, or rigid here, or even “blunt,” as one national radical said about his own Belorussian fellow citizens? Do the results

## Belarus and its neighbor-countries



of the referendum really mean that this people does not recognize its own identity, or is ready to give up its own culture?

To answer these questions, to analyze the reasons for such a striking lack of popularity of liberal nationalists, and to understand the difference between the Belorussians and the other post-Soviet peoples, we have to look into the history of this country at the crossroads of different cultures, traditions, and trade routes.

### At the crossroads of cultures

Minsk was first mentioned in the chronicles in 1063, and is not the oldest city in this region. Polotsk, Turov, and Vitebsk are older, and it is remarkable that these old towns have not been turned into ruins by the centuries, but are still important industrial and trading centers. The memory of the past still lives, despite the tragedies and destruction brought here in the incessant struggle of the eastern and western superpowers.

On medieval maps, White Rus was a huge territory from the Baltic Sea to the Volga River, including the ancient Novgorod town (Great Novgorod) on the Volkhov. To the east came Great Russia, to the south Red Russia and Black Russia (names no longer used). These were names of historical regions, not of States. The first great Russian State, Kiev Rus, already included most of the territory of the modern Republic of Belarus; at this time Minsk (Minsk) was first mentioned in connection with one of the drives of Vladimir the Baptist. The name Minsk was derived from either the word “mena” (exchange), being a trade center for centuries, or more likely

from the Mena River that later disappeared (many other towns, like Vitebsk or Slutsk, were called after rivers). Since the 12th century, in the period of disintegration and the ensuing Mongol invasion, this region was divided among several Russian knights who waged wars against each other, often with assistance from the Mongol khans. The strongest of those was the Polotsk knighthood. Knight Vseslav had a strong army that even once occupied Novgorod. After his death, the territory became a battlefield for the feudal troops of the Polish, Swedish, German (Teutonic), and Lithuanian oligarchies. In the 14th century it was dominated by Lithuania, at that time partly pagan, partly Orthodox. In 1389 the Lithuanian Orthodox knight Jagiello married the Polish Catholic princess Jadwiga, but this event did not lead to peace between the Christian churches.

The situation became more complicated after the late 16th-century Union of Brest, when the Greek Catholic or Uniate Church emerged (professing the Eastern Rite and discipline, but submitting to papal authority); later, part of the elite converted to Calvinism. Paradoxically, it was the Greek Catholics who most provoked polarization between the major Christian confessions. One of their bishops, Josaphat Kuntsevich, is remembered for his cruelty. Peter the Great of Russia, who also conducted wars against the Swedes on this territory, was so furious when he saw a fresco with his portrait, that he killed several Greek Catholics on the spot.

The Russian Empire regained the region at the end of the 18th century. Soviet historiography regarded this event as the liberation of the Belorussian population from the power of the Polish oligarchy (*Szlachta*). Actually, the Rzeczpospolita (the commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania formed in 1569) was a period of a tense clash between the Catholics and the Orthodox which involved the whole society (part of the local *Szlachta* were also Orthodox believers, and financed the erection of the now existing cathedral, in 1613). This confrontation between the two confessions and churches, often taking brutal forms, tore the national intelligentsia in two directions. Tadeusz Kosciuszko (1746-1817), Belorussian-born, became a leader of the anti-Russian revolution in Poland, in which the later famous Polish poet, Belorussia-born Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) also participated. [Mickiewicz called Lithuania his fatherland, although his birthplace is now in Belarus—ed.] On the other hand, 17th-century poet and scientist Simeon Polotsky, a scion of the Orthodox Christian aristocracy, greeted the reunification of Belorussia with the Russian Empire, and left for Moscow, becoming a tutor for the children of Czar Aleksei Mikhailovich, Olga and Peter. The most radically Orthodox of all the Russian classics of literature, Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-81), was a son of a *Szlachcic* of Belorussian origin.

According to the 1953 Soviet Encyclopedia, the Belorussian literary language began with Georgi Skorina, a scientist and enlightener who adopted a Polish name, Francisk Litwin, in order to enter Warsaw University. This version of history

was accepted by the first leadership of the new Belarus Republic, which renamed Lenin Prospect, the main street of Minsk, for Francisk Skorina. Actually, Skorina wrote in the Russian language with some additions from Polish, and issued a popular version of the Orthodox Bible, calling it the Russian Bible, being also the author of a *Grammar for Russian Children*.

So, the first paradox we face in Belorussian history is the fact that this people generated statesmen and writers who expressed national ideals for neighboring countries and cultures. This paradox gave an unexpected result in the second half of the 19th century, when St. Petersburg, founded by Peter I (the Great), became a cradle for both Belorussian and Ukrainian nationalism.

Kastus Kalinowsky, leader of the Belorussian peasants' insurrection in 1863, regarded as a "revolutionary democrat" by Soviet historians, and a popular hero by modern Belorussian liberal nationalists, was Polish-born, and his activity was mainly concentrated near Vilno (Vilnius—now in Lithuania). But he got his education at St. Petersburg University, which played, in the 19th century, the role of the Sorbonne in Paris. At the same university a young and talented poet, one of the first authors in literary Belorussian, Maxim Bogdanovich, became a poet of Belorussian independence. He died prematurely, before Belorussia became a Soviet Socialist Republic, and therefore the Soviet power also recognized him as a "revolutionary democrat." Still, his best poems in Belorussian were not revolutionary but lyric poems, dedicated to a Russian girl whom he loved. Now Gorky Street in Minsk is called Bogdanovich Street, and is decorated by a monument to the poet, erected . . . in 1986. Two contemporaries of Maxim Bogdanovich, the poets Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas, lived until their death in Soviet Belorussia, and wrote in the literary Belorussian language. Although they contributed much to the national culture, the Popular Front could not regard them as national heroes: They both were Communists, and members of the U.S.S.R. Writers' Union.

On Aug. 8, 1995, another patriarch of the Soviet Belorussian literature, 82-year old Maxim Tank, died. He had also written most of his poems in Belorussian, but was not eager to join the nationalist movement of the 1990s. Still it is remarkable that his funeral tribute was signed by all the prominent representatives of today's Belorussian culture, including nationalists Nil Gilevich and Vasil Bykov, along with those who consider the Belorussian statehood and culture as part of the Russian. Maybe this sudden accord was a more telling sign of national recognition than the Popular Front's attempts to counterpose everything Belorussian to everything Russian—attempts that ended in a complete failure; as shown by the results of the elections and the referendum.

Such an accord of political opponents is not to be imagined in post-Soviet Russia. The Russian intelligentsia is torn

into “democratic,” actually liberal-cosmopolitan, “patriotic,” actually blood-and-soil, and “socialist,” and each of them is also divided into groups hating each other. Sooner or later, the real national intelligentsia will identify itself and emerge as a creative force, but this period has not come yet.

The death of Maxim Tank, a real people’s poet, underlined the struggle inside the Belorussian creative intelligentsia, between its pro-Russian and anti-Russian representatives. It is clear now that the memory of the people recognizes the real value of creative work, and that those who build and defend, not destroy and spoil, will be remembered by posterity. Fortunately for Belorussian culture, its internal struggle has not destroyed its very foundation, as happened with the Russian culture in the fight between neo-slavophiles and neo-westernists. I am sure that in 50 years the name of 20-year-old Natalia Divina, who writes wonderful lyrics both in Belorussian and in Russian, one language enriching and developing the other, will stay in the memory of the people, unlike the New Age-Pagan, sexually troubled verses of the “national revolutionary” Slavomir Adamovich, who covered the walls of his apartment with photos of naked girls, placing his own photo, also naked, in the middle.

Of course, the grotesque figure of Adamovich does not represent the whole circle of isolationists and westernizers of Belorussian culture, but it portrays their spiritual inconsistency and historical failure. It is remarkable that war veteran and formerly respected Soviet writer Vasil Bykov, who joined the national liberal crowd in late 1980s, now speaks of his fellow citizens with the same contempt as the neo-Nietzschean Adamovich, admirer of the pro-Nazi Armiya Krayova. Is he a better patriot of his country than the Pan-Slavist painter Mikhail Savitsky, whose pictures of the Chernobyl tragedy are able to melt the iciest heart?

Centuries of clashes of empires and cultures on the territory of today’s Belarus left a heritage in the people’s memory, as in western Ukraine. Yet this heritage has not made the population politically high-strung and prone to unrest. On the contrary, this part of the Russian Empire, and later of the Soviet Union, was the quietest place. It seemed that this people has worked out a certain historical wisdom, protecting it from being manipulated and torn into parts confronting each other—actually, an immunity from being drawn into oligarchic clashes. For the liberal wave of the late 1980s, the Belorussian was the toughest material. The attempt to revive the conflicts of the bygone past turned into failure.

### **The failure of the national-liberals**

Some liberal journalists belonging to the Popular Front crowd express their profound sorrow at the fact that their fellow citizens “don’t want” to speak their “mother tongue,” *matchina mova*. But the fact is that you don’t hear literary Belorussian in popular speech. Even the activists of the Popu-

lar Front usually communicate in Russian, if they are not at an open meeting. Pazniak himself changed the spelling of his name twice to make it look more national: Pozdniak-Pazniak-Paz’niak. But in the streets of Minsk you never hear people speak the language that is spoken on TV and in the Parliament.

The argument that the Soviet power, allegedly, had done its best to oust the Belorussian language, does not ring true to anybody who knows the history of the last two centuries. Actually, the language was formed, and became a part of the country, no later than the second half of the 19th century on the basis of East Russian dialects and some expressions from Polish and German. The introduction of the language into the population was an initiative of a relatively narrow circle of the intelligentsia. If this language had really been suppressed by the Communist power, it would have certainly disappeared. Most written Belorussian belongs to the culture of the Soviet period, when newspapers were legally printed in the newly minted language, and Russian poets were translated into Belorussian by the same Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas who can be recognized as the real founders of the national culture.

This language was also used during the Nazi occupation, as the Hitlerites wanted to use it for counterposing Russian and Belorussian culture. But the Belorussian Soviet Republic suffered most during the Nazi occupation: Every fourth Belorussian died in 1941-45. It was not very clever of the Belorussian People’s Front to introduce the same national flag, red-white-red, that decorated the building of the Nazi commandant’s headquarters in Minsk during the occupation.

Another thing that was quite stupid was the attempt of Zenon Pazniak and his mates to counterpose Catholic believers to Orthodox believers. With such methods as he used, Catholicism could become even less popular than it is already (about one-fourth of the believers in 1991). He tried to combine religious revival with pragmatic political actions, and too actively tried to use the new Poland’s influence for it. His Catholicism meant Polish flags on Catholic churches, often in tandem with portraits of Polish leader Lech Walesa. Moreover, in order to be popular with youth, the BPF organized rock concerts and avant-garde art exhibitions. When this did not bring political results, the BPF dropped the religious facade and traded it for propaganda about “European” (meaning liberal) “values.” It is remarkable that this shift coincided with the peak of “cultural” activity of the Soros Foundation, which financed several joint meetings of the Belorussian liberal parties, and even founded a “New Age”-style liberal youth organization.

Remarkably, the liberal nationalists, who were seeking to base themselves on some traditions of the people, were more often trying to exploit not the Christian religion, but paganism. In 1991, they published a sort of “catechesis of a Belorussian” written in 1918 by Vatslav Lastovsky. This small booklet is of specific interest for researchers into neo-

paganism.

Vatslav Lastovsky had also spent two years at St. Petersburg University in 1890s, but not as a student: He failed the examinations and attended lectures as a “volunteer,” and later worked as an apprentice in a shop. In 1918 he became one of the founders of the Belorussian People’s Republic that was summoned after the Treaty of Brest was signed [between Russia and Germany], on the territory occupied by German troops. Lastovsky’s booklet is something like a “short course” of history and morality, containing grotesque historical lies together with a list of “obligations” all Belorussians should follow.

Lastovsky starts his mythology with a notion that the Belorussians belong to the “Slavonic tribe of the Aryan nation” (!). He denounces all the contributions of the Belorussians to the culture of the Christian nations, being hostile both to Russia and Poland, to both Orthodox and Catholic traditions. He emphasizes that the “original” Belorussian culture was based upon the cult of Yarilo, the pagan god of the Sun. He insists that “a true Belorussian has to wear clothes that his wife weaves, not manufactured cloth.” A Belorussian man, he writes, can marry only a Belorussian woman.

The founder of the 1918 Ukrainian Republic, Professor Grushevsky, had a different approach to the same question. He even wrote a polemical article, “Is Ukraine only for Ukrainians?” insisting that Russians should take active part in the management of the independent republic. Lastovsky’s “catechesis” brings to mind modern “national park” British-made environmentalist-paganist projects.

Lastovsky writes that “the true Belorussian territory” includes the Smolensk region of Russia, and among the other nations he “figures out” Germans as the most numerous nation. Now let us recollect the period of time when these ethnic “calculations” were conducted. The booklet was written at the time of the discussion of the Treaty of Brest in the Soviet leadership, in which Leon Trotsky supported the “zero variant” that brought chaos on the whole western front, and prolonged the Russian-German war under the pretext of some “obligations to the German proletariat.” As we know, Trotsky’s partner in the “German proletariat” was a mastermind for “Greater Turkey,” “Greater Germany” and other British war propaganda projects, Alexander Helphand (Parvus).

The leadership of the Belorussian Popular Front paid their tribute to the pagan traditions, organizing, in 1990, a mass public rally at a place where (according to his version) victims of Stalinism were buried, on the day of a pagan holiday, Dziady (Grandfathers’ Day). Later the front seems to have forgotten this date, and the remains of victims, possibly of both Stalin’s tyranny and the Nazi invasion, are robbed by criminals. But in 1994 Mr. Pazniak (or Paz’niak? ask a Minsk citizen—you’ll get no definite answer) turned to Waclaw Lastowski’s heritage once again, claiming that Russia should “return” the Bryansk and Smolensk regions to Belarus! After such a declaration he lost popularity even in the Russian

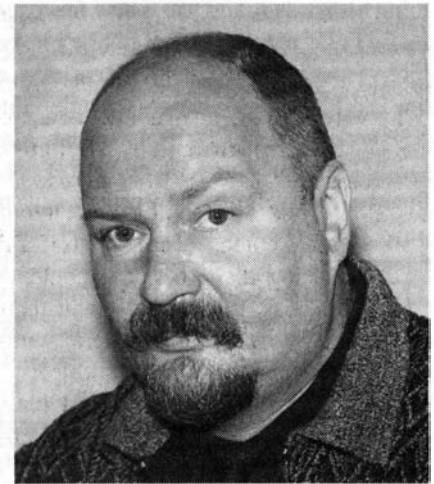
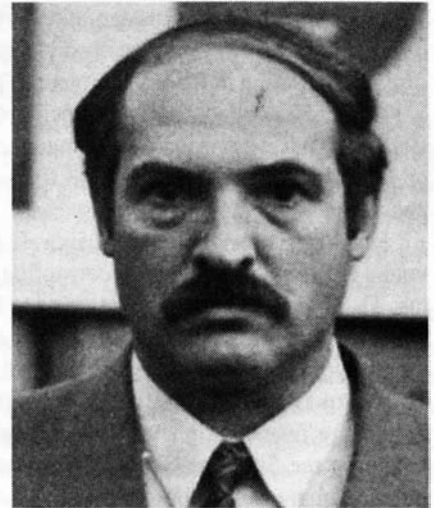
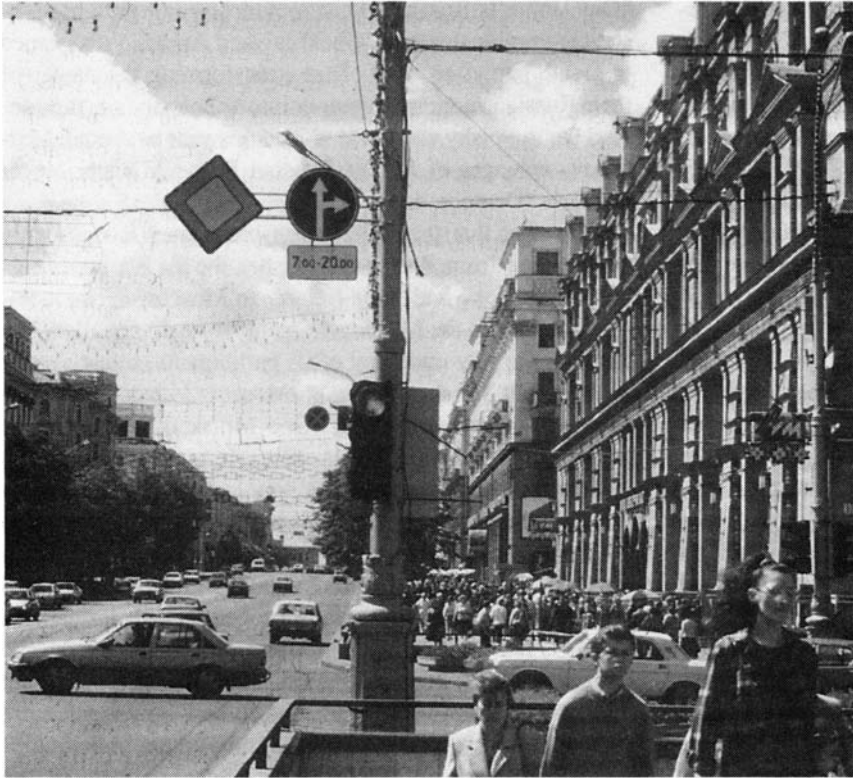
liberal circles, being considered “not a serious politician.”

The BPF’s foreign supporters were obviously of a different opinion. In February, Pazniak was invited to London. On his return, he was green as a crocodile. Reminding the fellow citizens of the Chernobyl catastrophe that had seriously affected the Belorussian S.S.R. in 1986, he tried to organize them against some military targets belonging to Russia. For some reason, his backers seem to know these targets in detail. The next month, former nuclear research worker Vladimir Linyov, now editor of a British ecological journal, summoned a conference called “Geopolitics, Science, and Progress,” and declared his intention to unite, once again, all the democratic forces of the country. Pazniak’s liberal rival, United Democratic Party chairman Alexander Dobrovolsky, disliked Pazniak and even voiced a suspicion that he was a KGB agent (Pazniak responded in the same vein, and even snubbed conferences where Dobrovolsky was present).

In March, the liberal members of the Belorussian Supreme Soviet tried to sabotage the referendum proposed by the President, and organized a hunger strike, but after a night of staying in the House of the Government, these 20 persons were driven out by the police. Not a thousand, or even a hundred people turned out the next day to show their support for the “defenders of the nation.” The liberals’ attempt to prolong the rule of the old Supreme Soviet (they expected they would not be reelected) played a bad joke on them: The election originally scheduled in March was delayed till May, due to their own efforts, and almost coincided with Victory Day. So, the result of the elections and the referendum could be predicted. Still, the liberals, having support from abroad, did not expect such a complete fiasco.

Alexander Dobrovolsky now distances himself from Pazniak, and is trying to form a union with a small, though rich, centrist Civilian Party. At the same time, the Social Democratic Assembly, formerly Pazniak’s ally, is “marrying” the newly formed nomenklatura-run Social Democratic Union. To proclaim its concern for working people, the new alliance celebrated its founding in the memorial museum of the First Congress of the RSDRP, the forerunner of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The festivity was spoiled by several Communist activists angry at the political chameleons’ attempt to defile their holy place. The liberal paper *Free News* commented that one of these Communists “had a specific shape of eyes.”

We don’t know what the paper meant. Maybe the fellow was of Central Asian, Tatar, or Jewish origin. The fact is that the liberal mass media are acquiring a racist hue, and this is characteristic not only for Belarus, as we know. The “conservative revolution” climate influences Zenon Pazniak, too. In late July, Russian and Belorussian liberal papers reported that Pazniak, 51, married for the first time in his life. The Moscow *Sevodnya*, which previously mocked Pazniak’s “annexing” plans, adds that “now there will be less ground for suspicions.” The version that Pazniak is a homosexual is



Skorina Prospect in Minsk, in contrast to the major Russian cities, is still as clean and neat as it was decades ago. Scientist Francisk Skorina, for whom the main street of the Belarusian capital is named, wrote in the Russian language. Insets: above, President Alexander Lukashenko; below, economist and political candidate Alexander Yegorov (see interview on p. 61).

widespread in Belorussian political circles. But previously this rumor apparently did not trouble the self-identification of this “Catholic.” Ironically, Mr. Pazniak’s spouse appeared to be a teacher of his most hated Russian language.

### No trust in chameleons

In Belarus, our delegation had meetings with several members of the President’s administration, as well as many specialists and creative workers, representing the intelligentsia of this country, ranging from sociologists to economists, historians, philologists, painters, theologians, actors, and cinema makers. These people are not of the same thinking, and their views of the future of Belarus are all different. But they have one thing in common, their understanding of the central, tragic paradox of the Belorussian nationhood and economy.

On the one hand, it is clear for them, including the liberal-thinking economist Yegorov (see interview), that the future of the country will be, as it has been, associated with the Russian Federation. At the same time, there is no distinct

political force, clan, or group of leaders in Russia that is really interested in productive cooperation with the Belorussian leadership, despite its clear pro-Russian orientation.

The Moscow *Sevodnya* paper that now mocks Zenon Pazniak, was very serious after the presidential elections in Belarus in 1994. When it was clear that Alexander Lukashenko, a modest *sovkhos* (state farm) director from Gomel Province, had defeated the former prime minister, Vladislav Kebich, the paper was furious. Its political observer, Mikhail Leontyev, an oil lobby mouthpiece, sneered that “one should not let mental patients elect the hospital’s director.”

The rage of the oil exporters’ lobby was easily explained. Vladislav Kebich was its man, with an image of an “integrationist” for the population of Belarus, but totally dependent on the “fuel elite,” like Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma. With Lukashenko, some unexpected things could happen. And they were right. When Lukashenko suggested to Yeltsin that the tariffs should be lifted, that move primarily affected the interests of oil companies who profited from the price differences. Lukashenko evidently upset the plans of some

western partners of the Russian elite. When the tariffs were lifted, the necessity of purchasing oil from Turkey, and therefore, participation in British Petroleum's project of the Black Sea-Baltic Sea collector oil pipeline proved unnecessary for Belarus. That was probably the main reason for the attack on Lukashenko that began in both Russian and Belorussian "business" mass media.

During his presidential campaign, Lukashenko promised voters he would struggle with corruption in the state apparatus. The first thing his opponents tried to do was to prove that the President is also corrupt. A special report was prepared on this occasion, containing facts that had to be proved by court. Lukashenko did not allow the report to be published before the investigation was over. Several liberal papers, including the Supreme Soviet's *Narodnaya Gazeta*, joined the campaign against him, yelling about civil rights. A probe showed that the report was based on complete fraud; the only thing his rivals found was a new fence around Lukashenko's house in his native village built by his own wife, and still no hint of corruption. Later, after a new series of attacks on the President, *Narodnaya Gazeta's* editor, Josip Seredzic, resigned under the President's order. Maybe this member of the Belorussian Soros Foundation is not corrupt, but he has finances for issuing his new private newspaper, called *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will). Under this name—echoing the name of the terrorist organization that killed Russian Czar Alexander II—Mr. Seredzic publishes admiring materials about Dr. Sigmund Freud, and other "useful" things.

New offensives born in Moscow shot out from the liberal *Izvestia*, a retranslation of the London *Financial Times*, and the Gorbachovist *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. After the last insulting article in early August, Lukashenko declared that he would be forced to stop the distribution of some Russian mass media in Belarus. (I am sure that many Russians regret that he can't do the same with the liberal press in Russia itself, which constantly ruins morality and undermines Russian nationhood.)

The same *Izvestia*, in late 1994, published secret documents from the President's staff that exposed the struggle to prevent Russia from yielding to International Monetary Fund conditionalities. It should be noted that the Belorussian President resisted IMF pressure for over a year, whereas Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin "surrendered" in two months.

Only after the Russian ruble more or less stabilized with respect to the dollar, did President Lukashenko agree to fulfill the IMF's demand to liberalize utility and transport rates. But as soon as he agreed, the same liberal press which was pushing him into the IMF embrace started a "leftist" attack on behalf of retired people who will not be able to afford the new fares. The nomenklatura's new "social-democratic" project is also apparently designed for the same purpose.

One of the partners of the newly formed "leftist" alliance is called "Our Home Is Belorussia," resembling the name of Chernomyrdin's "party-of-power" (cf. "The Cracks in the

House that Chernomyrdin Built," in *EIR* of Sept. 2, 1995), "Our Home Is Russia." This is evidently not pure happenstance: Previously Sergei Shakhray and Arkadi Volsky tried to create parties as assets here, transforming the names of their Russian mother structures into a Belorussian fashion. And Dobrovolsky was twice visited this year by Arkadi Murashov, manager of former Russian Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar's "Democratic Choice."

The fact that the Belorussian presidency is constantly undermined from Russia demolishes the BPF's arguments that Lukashenko had "sold Belarus to Moscow." The incessant conflicts in the Moscow nomenklatura do not allow Lukashenko to rely upon any of its participants, though many of them visit Minsk. On Aug. 4, Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov was a guest in Belarus. One Minsk official gave the following explanation of his visit: "It seems that Russian leaders are trying to gain more popularity in Russia by visiting Belarus. So, we are used as a card in a big game."

The geographical situation of Belarus makes it a site, a target, and a possible victim of many political games played by the post-Soviet nomenklatura together with its western masters. This is understood in Minsk, and therefore, despite declarations of friendship, the republic is trying to work out a foreign policy of its own. In August, new agreements were signed with representatives of Iran and Turkey. In February, Lukashenko visited China, bringing new contracts for the industrial enterprises. It is especially important to save State sector industry, and the President understands this well.

The decline of industry has gone on for three years, and the State leadership has not managed to stop it, despite declarations and sincere intentions. The situation is especially severe in the machine tool industry, where the collapse reached 75% for the last year. The 1994 figures show an increase, ironically, only in the production of vodka. Liberals blame Lukashenko for not privatizing heavy industry, insisting that the enterprises should "find their way out" themselves, without any support from the State budget, and also for not attracting foreign investment. But it is no wonder that foreign companies are not very eager to invest, because of the myth of "communist dictator Lukashenko," spread by the same liberals.

Actually, the economic decline is the result not of the lack of shock therapy, but of the destructive processes in the Russian economy, with which Belorussian industry had been closely tied for decades. For example, over 20 Russian factories supplied the Minsk Tractor Plant. The tariffs at the Russian-Belorussian border tore up numerous links of economic cooperation, and now, when the tariffs have finally been lifted, it will be very difficult to restore what was ruined.

The pro-Russian orientation of the majority of the Belorussian population has primarily economic grounds. It is well understood here that the economic disintegration in the former U.S.S.R. is a result of selfish interests of the corrupted bureaucracy of the Gorbachov period. A cartoon in one of



the newspapers depicts the former Soviet territory cut into a hundred pieces by a multitude of State borders. The caption under the picture is a take-off on a Nikolai Gogol story, "How Boris Nikolayevich Quarreled with Mikhail Sergeyevich," with Yeltsin and Gorbachov standing in for the original title characters (in Gogol's tale the two characters look the same, think the same, and behave the same, and quarrel about something totally irrelevant).

Former Prime Minister Vladislav Kebich had no chance of being elected President in 1994. After he supported the "sovereignization" in 1991, people did not trust his rhetoric of "reintegration" three years later. He failed, despite support from the Russian elite, and also from many influential bodies inside Belorussia, including the Exarch of the Orthodox Church!

Alexander Lukashenko was the only member of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus who voted against signing the Belaya Vezha agreement in 1991, which put an official end to the U.S.S.R. This document, signed by the Presidents of Belarus and Ukraine together with Russian President Yeltsin, was a tool of the latter's game against Soviet President Gorbachov. Belorussians have a good memory and will believe an ordinary person who behaves fairly, preferring his views to career interests, over any "nomenklaturchik" who changes his views like gloves. In 1994, the people made their own choice, ignoring the propaganda of liberal and socialist papers that both supported Kebich. In Lukashenko, they recognized a person who lives by the people's interests, not with clan instincts. This choice well characterizes the Belorussian people.

### The secret of the identity

When Yeltsin, Kravchuk, and Shushkevich were choosing a place for carrying out their conspiracy against the Gorbachov elite, the Belaya Vezha national park in Belarus appeared to be a most convenient site. Belarus was considered to be a very quiet country. True, it had been quite for ages—even in 1898, when Minsk was the site of the First Congress of the Revolutionary Social Democrats.

In 1917, Belorussians were more passive in the revolutionary movement than any other people of the Russian Empire. Among Russians, there were 11 times more revolutionaries than among Belorussians; among Jews, 55 times more; and among Latvians, this ratio reached 88. At the same time, during World War II, Belorussia had the strongest partisan (guerrilla resistance) movement, and only here the Nazi *Gauleiter* were murdered.

This people has been always grateful to those who protected them and lived with their interest, and did not tolerate those who were using them for geopolitical ends and other selfish interests. People who speak much and do nothing are not popular here, and this was maybe the main reason of the failure of the BPF. One of the main streets in Minsk is still called after Pyotr Masherov, one-time leader of the Belorus-

sian Communist Party, who was generally (in Moscow too) considered to be the only fair person in Brezhnev's Politburo. If you look at the buildings of factories and living quarters built under his rule, at the neat and comfortable (though not so magnificent as in Moscow) stations of Minsk Metro, you'll understand the words of the Minsk citizens, "This man has done a lot for us." And Belorussians wouldn't be Belorussians if they renamed Masherov Prospect into Lastovsky Prospect, for instance.

In 1960s, it was rather difficult for a fair person to make a party career. Apparently, in Belorussia it was different.

In the period of the liberal reforms, the leadership of the majority of post-Communist states was taken either by the "reformist" nomenklatura, or by dissidents like Poland's Walesa, Armenia's Ter-Petrosian, or Georgia's Gamsakhurdia. The results were more or less similar, for the dissident's dream was usually just to regain power. Again, Belarus became an exception.

The defeated liberal nationalists now accuse their own people of being too tolerant. Belorussians are indeed tolerant, but the examples of the wartime resistance and the 1994 presidential elections show that they can perhaps use their common will better than any other eastern European people.

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## Interview: Alexander Yegorov

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# We must turn around production collapse

*Alexander Yegorov is an economist, publicist, and commentator with the Teleradiocompany of Belarus. He ran, unsuccessfully, as a candidate for the Parliament of Belarus in the last elections. He is close to the opposition Agrarian Party, the second largest faction in the Belorussian Parliament, but he stressed that in this interview he is expressing his personal views. The interview was conducted for EIR and Neue Solidarität by Gabriele Liebig and Michael Vitt in Minsk on Aug. 8.*

**EIR:** As an economist and TV commentator, you observe closely the current political and economic developments in Belarus and the former Soviet Union at large. Could you give us some information about the current economic situation, particularly in Belarus?

**Yegorov:** First of all, the decrease in industrial and agricultural production has not been stopped, as the government officials try to suggest. I have the most important statistical data for the first half year of 1995. The GNP [Gross National