



More than just a language*

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There are different approaches to understanding of purposes and methods of civic education in Belarus among engaged people. However, there is one more principle question – question of language of education.

It is impossible to avoid this question talking about civic education, about forming civil position. Language is one of those factors that unite people and integrate societies. Not in vain in many countries of the world the clause of getting citizenship is speaking the state language. In Belarus that is divided strongly ideologically and by confessions, language gets an extreme value, including the sphere of civic education.

Sometimes it happens to hear from participants of trainings reproaches for “why haven’t you warned, that training will be in Belarusian language”? What have we come to! In Belarus people are offended not by not-knowing Belarusian languages, but by using it by others! Do we bring up such “citizens”? It’s they who will carry Belarusian people with them in all spheres of life tomorrow? When yes, I’ll think whether to follow them.

In 2001 on pages of the magazine “The third sector”, I wrote, that time has come to think once again of the language policy in sphere of civic education. If we wish to have as an output educated people with an active civil position, we should offer them such an educational level both of us wouldn’t be shamed of. If we wish to have as an output citizens who will live and work for this country, civic education probably should be based on the national base, on Belarusian language in particular.

We shouldn’t forget that except knowledge and skills we transmit to people certain values. The feeling of belonging to this nation, respect for its history, independence, and the native language – the attitude towards these concepts from the side of people we educate often directly depends on our attitude. Two days of training in Belarusian language sometimes does what incendiary speeches in Belarusian on meetings or from pages of newspapers can’t do: allow people to throw off complexes, to become sure that Belarusian language brings light of new knowledge.

The language question has also a big moral aspect. Not once it happened to hear, that trainer’s work in

Russian (in sense of language of training) is more effective: it’s used by the majority of people while Belarusian language many people even do not understand well. Such an approach, however, from my point of view, only charms immortal spirits of those who during last century have diligently annihilated Belarusian language, culture, intelligence. Annihilate for Belarusians never become Belarusians, and Belarussia not to become Belarus. To understand logic of those who did it is easy – lenins, stalins, chruschevs, brezhnevs together with the helpers and the followers were building the society, “a new community of the Soviet people without kin”.

Integral tools of all these “builders” were total russification shameful consequences of which can’t be noticed only by blind and deaf persons. It is possible to take a simplest way by carrying out educational programs, giving out manuals and other educational literature in Russian and to explain it in a way that it is more convenient for people, that they will understand it better etc. But isn’t it a moral betray to repressed and neglected Belarusian language, to its best carriers which were shot and hanged, compelled to live in fear for itself and the relatives only because they wrote and spoke Belarusian and cared for Belarus? Leaving everything the same, as more convenient, don’t we take the side of those chastisers of Belarus of all times? Isn’t it a case of honor for Belarusian educators to be in the first row of those who cares for Belarusian rebirth?

I do not hope, that all our educators (from ACA and not only) tomorrow will start trainings in Belarusian. But what prevents from starting to send notifications, to make new publications in Belarusian (or in two language versions)? Ignorance of language? Shame for educators... Or is it easier?

Totalitarian and non-Belarusian inherently system of official education should create alternative in the form of nationally directed, democratic in contents and high in system level of civic education. Time will come, and lifelength in this direction will lie in the base of new Belarusian educational system, which will be built and developed by us and those whom we educate today.

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