

National Consciousness and Civic Education*

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On December, 15th, 2006 in frames of the Week of non-formal education organized by a network of the Organizations of Civic Education in Grodno, a round table on a topic "The place of Belarusian national consciousness in formation of socially active Belarusian citizens" took place. This theme was offered for consideration in a context of the purposes of civic education in formation of Belarusian citizens.

In work of a round table took part representatives of Grodno public associations, participants of Evenings of non-formal education in Grodno (non-engaged youth) and the invited visitors: professor Alexander Ostrovsky, the leader of PA "Pahodnya" Mikola Taranda, intellectual Yury Patsyupa, the priest of Greco-catholic church in Grodno father Andrey, constant author of the magazine "Arhae" Danila Zhukovsky and others.

The problem caused the discussion about a place of national consciousness in formation of social activity of Belarusian citizens and a place of civic education in this process, has risen in a result of the undertaken discussion as in official (academician A. Rubinov), and in oppositional (liberal and national-democratic) circles. In oppositional part discussion about national consciousness and its role has sharply raised in connection to discussion of language of broadcasting of German radio station on the territory of Belarus. Discussion in opposition circle has revealed two essentially different approaches to understanding of a role and value of Belarusian language, Belarusian national values, and Belarusian consciousness in formations of modern Belarusian society.

Official position, in A. Rubinov's interpretation and so called liberal part of opposition, in some parts are relative. The essence of their position is that there is no necessity to recreate Belarusian language, even more, it is impossible to recreate it in modern conditions, and modern Belarusian culture and nation are to be built on the basis of Russian culture which has a dominating position. The formal divergence between an official position and a position of "Russian" parts of opposition can be reduced to different understanding of a basis of Russian-speaking culture: one see the Soviet heritage as a basis,

and others do not see any heritage at all. They suggest building new Belarusian community from a pure page, filling and introducing virtual values which would correspond to the democratic state with market economy.

National focused part of opposition and Belarussian-speaking intellectual circles ("Nasha Niva", "Arhae" etc.) see opportunity of construction of modern Belarusian nation and the democratic state being based only on Belarusian language, Belarusian national culture, and national traditions. From their point of view, only Belarusian language and national values are capable of gathering the nation and making its competitive among other nations. Belarussian-speaking part of the opposition thinks that there is no need to borrow values artificially and to impose them to the society as their own. It is necessary to turn to the own historical heritage and to take as a basis those values and traditions which were checked up by time and which correspond to Belarusian national character.

In frames of a round table the following questions were discussed:

- 1) What do we understand by national consciousness?
- 2) Could any other idea, for example, religious, become a basis for unification of Belorussians as one community? What could it be?
- 3) Does national consciousness influence formation of social activity of the person? What place does national consciousness take in formation of the citizen?

Work of the round table was constructed in the following way: first the report by Ales Ostrovsky was heard (see Addition), questions on it were asked. Professor focused on interpretation of reasons why he considers national values — including Belarusian national values — a basis for building the nation. From his point of view, the vital issue which demands the decision and is acute for each person as the representative of national community is a direction of activity, a direction of development. Finding direction of activity of the person is always closely connected with national values. The person cannot be developed outside the national values. Belarusian

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citizen, Belarusian society cannot be developed on other values, as soon as being based on Belarusian language and values of Belarusian national culture.

Later on the report by Jury Patsyupy was heard and discussed. In continuation of the questions raised by Alexander Ostrovsky, he stated that personally for him the discussion on what is possible to consider Belarusian values, whether Belarusian nation can be developed basing on Russian language which today has a dominant position in our society – is a dispute between national and so called “Creole” projects. The main difference between these two projects is that the first sees the future of the nation, descending from own historical heritage and cultural properties, and “Creole” is based on appropriation of another’s language and another’s traditions as own, and building new cultural tradition based on the borrowed language and values. Examples of “Creole” projects can be Ireland or countries of Latin America. From the point of view of Jury, “Creole” project is not long-ranged in Belarus, at least, by two reasons: 1) Russian language and culture have no base, and, the main thing, no infrastructures for existence on the territory of Belarus; 2) “Creole” project is unprofitable as the history of development of nations which have chosen the given way shows, that on a world scene they came out only in 500 year of adaptation, after full assimilation of another language and culture as their own.

From the point of view of father Andrey, the church has been developing together with the community and the society, and in this development acquires the most successful ways of the organization of the society, tries to get adapted to them. Today the church recognizes existence of nations and do not see an opportunity of development religious aspects without or outside of national.

Mikola Taranda gave examples from work of “Pahodnya”, its members, and also numerous examples from life of well-known today cultural, public, political

leaders in Belarus and from Belarusian circles in Poland, Kazakhstan and Russia when through formation of national consciousness of the person they became socially active and this activity was shown in public, political or religious life. From his point of view, there is a direct link between comprehension of the national identity and the further civic activity.

Danila Zhukovsky appealed to the public to be attentive to made statements as the topic appears extremely important, and this means the discussion should be made on the high level.

Participants of a round table agreed to the following conclusions made in a result of the discussion.

1) In frames of the round table national consciousness was understood as a set of historical facts, feelings, attitudes, values, and ways of activity united by the national language, culture and general history which people admit as national and which are directed to establishment of spiritual links between carriers and unite them.

2) There is no more effective mechanism of unity in borders of community, as unity on the basis of national values in condition of economic, social, and cultural development during the postindustrial period. There are different variants of construction of national values. National and “Creola” projects were examined more detailed. The last was recognized by a round table as inefficient.

3) In modern political, social, cultural and economic conditions comprehension of a national identity, as a rule, influences necessity to take an active civic position. There is a direct link between perception of national values and public activity.

In Additions it is suggested to learn the theses prepared for a basic discussion on a round table.



ADDITION to the ROUND TABLE "The Place of national consciousness in formation of socially active citizens".
 Submitted theses by A.Ostrovsky, A.Kravtsevich, I.Kuzminich.

National Consciousness and Democracy

Ales Astrouski

Any national consciousness, not tended to chauvinism or weakened to total absence, appears a constructive factor of public existence. It is necessary for the full-value human life, the organization of each concrete society and all mankind – for their integration, harmonious arrangement and progressive development.

It's obvious from scientific positions that a healthy society is a system of citizens, instead of their simple sum. That means that in society citizens and their groups should be connected by natural mutually beneficial links. Basis of such links lays in national values (language, culture, symbols, history, a gene pool, world view, the ethnic territory, overall aims) which all the nations have and develop. Each society has other natural links – between fathers and children, women and men – but they unite not all the society, but only its separate parts.

Natural national links function due to interaction of two components. The first is **general information-educational environment** (from national traditions to educational system and mass-media) where national values are remembered and are propagandized. Such an environment plays a role of original national glue. The second component is each concrete citizen who perceives itself an integral part of the nation, the country-state and, in a result, the **legal owner of the land of his ancestors**. Such a citizen-owner is capable of including in the list of his own values objective values of the nation (in this case his world view will execute function of a receptor for linkage with mentioned "glue") and so to be an element of corresponding national society.

It is necessary to ascertain, that only described citizen and the society have those properties which provide becoming the most progressive form of the state

arrangement – **substantial democracy** (when authorities compelled to realize **objective interests of the society**). The highest public value directed to the future, which is maximal disclosing of creative potential of all the society, can be full realized only in these borders.

It's evident that the healthy society, united by national links is obvious, is necessary not only to oneself. It is necessary also to each separate person for realization of his most important vital need (disclosing of own vital creative potential), for a life high-grade, filled by pleasure and senses. It is necessary also for all the mankind for rather not crisis natural unlimited progressive development. To provide the mankind the specified features of its own existence, it is necessary to consist of a plenty of separate discrete parts – nationally painted societies, the nations-states.

Partial **cosmopolitan destruction** of system of national values, including destruction of people's attributes of national consciousness in their world view, prevents people from realizing their vital purposes and leads to their sad, senseless, necrophilous existence, to impossibility to provide natural unity in a society and existence of a mode of substantial democracy, impossibility to realize public potential, delay of humanistic progress of a mankind etc. Thus, such destruction **is a crime**. The analysis shows, that such a destructive influence on a society, as a rule, is necessary to different socially-parasitic forces. For example, the most obvious parasitic forces on Belarusian political field are: local bureaucracy, the Russian imperial bureaucracy, the international financial oligarchy. As their influence appears exclusively destructive and criminal, it should be stopped first last and all the time, and its initiators and executors must be condemned and punished.

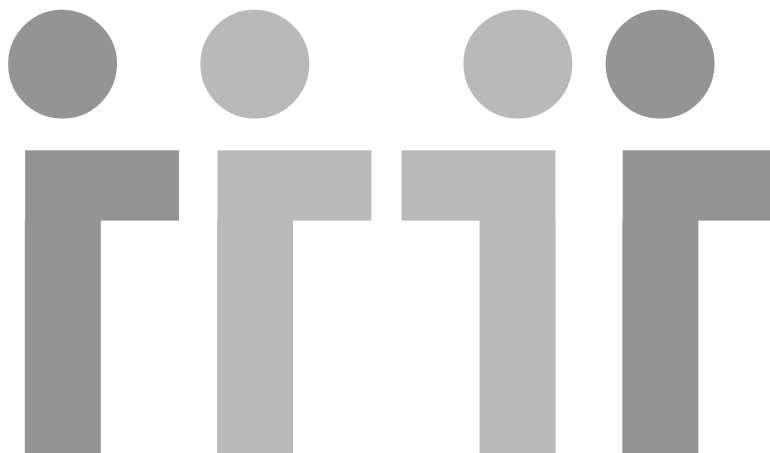


Image of Modern Belarusian Man

Alyaksandar Kraucevich

What is modern Belarusian man? This question today can be answered in sometimes inconsistent ways. My answer is the following: "This is a person who not only considers himself Belarusian, but also uses Belarusian language in a private life". At conference in Poland from the inhabitant of Mogilov (the philologist, candidate of sciences) I heard, that she is "classical Belarusian, because does not know Belarusian language and speaks Russian". I have declared this Mogilov lady, that she is rather not "classical", but pathological Belarusian.

Sometimes it's possible to hear even from highly scientific foreign experts, that Belarusians are special nation, because in fact they do not wish to feel themselves nation. As a matter of fact, it is an erroneous conclusion, because Belarusians are typical people of the Middle-East Europe, who have got to atypical enough and extremely adverse historical situation. Last two hundred years without its own statehood, these people experienced extremely strong assimilative pressure as from the East, and from the West. The most harmful blow in the newest history was a physical destruction of hundreds thousand people from national intelligence during time of Stalin reprisals and the World War II. I am convinced that if these people would remain alive, today we would not have Lukashenko. These hundred thousand educated people would be everywhere – in administration, education, armies, polices. Very possibly, Sasha Lukashenko would be educated not by Trashanok, but by one from those Belarusians killed by Stalin, and the

pupil would have a name not Sasha, but Ales, and never would become a dictator. But the place of victims was borrowed by visitors from Russia who educated our fathers and us. Now we have what we have.

I consider that for definition of Belarusian man it is necessary to use the same criteria, as for representatives of other "normal" nations. The main attribute of modern Belarusian, as well as the Lithuanian, the Polish, the Ukrainian or Russian man is native language. Therefore Russian-speaking Belarusians are not normal Belarusians. However, it is necessary to distinguish also those who feel, sometimes unconsciously, this abnormality. They are not against the national revival, they are ready to give children in Belarusian schools, but they have no strength to resist aggressive anti-Belarusian reality. These people should be cooperated with. Similar examples are known in history: the Czech German-speaking aristocrats financed Czech schools in XIX century.

Normal Belarusians are in minority in the country and it makes it more difficult to remain Belarusians. It needs great daily and almost every-minute strength to resist a Russian-speaking environment and to remain in Belarusian cultural space. We are in minority, but the truth is on our side. Russian-speaking Belarusians are Soviet people with double consciousness – as if patriots, but do not know the native. Many of them are tired of this bifurcation and wish to be oneself everywhere. I am sure the time will come, and we shall give them such an opportunity.

Notes on Definition of Our Position

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Activities in official political circles, ideas which are mentioned by academician A.Rubinov, activity of youth structure BRVU, as well as activity of oppositional political parties and pro-democratic public associations show the evidence of interest in forming social activity among youth. In other words, both authorities and independent public associations understand need in socially-active citizens and even act in the given direction, using educational institutions, public associations, and public initiatives as institutes of civic education. But valuable filling of each position, as well as understanding of the purpose of social activity, are essentially different. Today at least three positions in education of socially-active citizen which are realized through formal and non-formal civic education were outlined. We'll try to examine these positions.

The official position is based on the necessity to prepare the socially-active citizen, which, being based on the adapted Soviet values, would become an active actualizer of policy of the ruling circles.

The opposition, from our point of view, has at least two basic approaches. The first states that to come to a ruling power, it is necessary to create wider front, to attach a maximum quantity of socially active citizens, to involve them in the given process. That's why the basic tendency is in transferring ways of the activity based on values, not connected with the concrete Belarusian national consciousness. The given approach aims to gain freedom, and only later to understanding, how to build Belarusian society.

The second approach states that it is impossible to gain freedom, not being united around Belarusian national values, Belarusian language, and thus not having created base for support of political changes. From this point of view, it is impossible to gain freedom not knowing what for and for whom it is necessary. Without answers to these questions freedom will lead to new dictatorship. Freedom is necessary for building modern Belarusian state, and it is possible only through creation of the high-grade nation, united by national language and values.

Divergences in approaches of opposition concern the term "Belarusian". From the point of view of the first part which is based on so called civic concept of forming the nation, the term "Belarusian" means any phenomenon which occurs in territory of Belarus. New Belarusian culture and new Belarusian language can be built on the base of Russian language (Creola variant). The second part of opposition is based on the ethnic concept of forming the nation. It means that Belarusian considered being only Belarusian language and culture.

Each of three mentioned positions notices necessity of creation of the new culture, the new consciousness, and new values. Each position not only encloses a different meaning in a concept of Belarusian values, but sees the process of creation of Belarusian society in different ways. Depending on a choice of a concrete position there will be defined and programmed a special strategy of the further development of Belarusian community.

In a case of realization of an official position, Belarusian community can collide with inability to adapt traditions, values, world view of the Soviet period to needs of modern market relations and principles of the democratic state that will lead to the new ideological crisis.

The choice offered by so called Russian-speaking wing of opposition, is based on necessity to borrow values and traditions and to introduce them to Belarusian ground, using as the basic those language and culture that have objectively developed in our territory. Transferring and sticking to new values and their development in Russian language will fix a complex of national deficiency for ever and will lead to division of Belarusian society. Each new generation will produce part of young people who will look back to Belarusian-speaking tradition as it is authentic Belarusian, and will struggle for its revival. Besides the community, constructed on the borrowed values, on the borrowed ways of activity and cultural traditions, will always be forced to be in vector of developments of those nations whose ways of activity were adopted.

The approach of Belarusian-speaking part of opposition calls not to simple and literal revival-reconstruction of values which were typical for Belarusian society in the past, but their creative understanding and introduction to Belarusian national consciousness, based on modern conditions and considering history of development of these values in the past.



Assimilation of new values is an original revolution in consciousness of the person. Transition to Belarusian language is a double Revolution. Transition to Belarusian language means also simultaneous acceptance of standard for Belarusian-speaking environment values, ideals, and ways of activity. Transition to Belarusian language is not just assimilation of new values, but it is daily demonstration of the acquired values in usual environment (in society, family, with colleagues). It is a qualitative change of a person, and its behavior. Transition to Belarusian language is an evidence of the fact that a person chooses a complex way with the outlined civic position as a way of life. This transition is hard for the person, but passed it once, the person burns the bridges. There is no way back, there is only way forward. The way back is treason first of all to oneself.

On the other hand, Belarusian language can become the reason which will really unite people, help to broaden principles of solidarity and mutual support typical for Belarusian-speaking environment even in today's conditions.

Divergences in approaches to nation-and state formation pull behind itself divergences in wanted results. Authorities through civic education try to capture all the youth. Choosing such a wide target group in combinations with primary formalization in education system, training, as a rule, is reduced to transferring elementary public competencies with use of ideological stamps and can be effective mainly in relation to apolitical part of youth. One part of pro-democratic organizations stakes on quantity of socially-active. But in this aspiration it forced to struggle with political authority for the sector of apolitical youth, competing with the more effective for this target group state system of civic education. Belarusian-speaking part of the pro-democratic organizations tends to quality of those who has an active civic position.

Translated by Alena Lugovtsova

