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THE IDENTITY OF THE BELARUSIANS: DECONSTRUCTIVIST AND CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACHES

Baltarusių tapatybė: dekonstruktyvistinis ir konstruktyvistinis aspektai

SUMMARY

The necessity of an adequate understanding of the Belarusian identity, which is vividly contradictory and imperceptible, reveals the scantiness of the positivist approach to it as a primordial and constant phenomenon. Derrida's metaphor of the Tower of Babel as a constantly constructed and deconstructed event being applied to the Belarusian identity provides an opportunity for an alternate vision of it as pluralistic, relational, fluid and not final. Three models of construction of the Belarusian identity are put forward against this background: the traditional and ethnic one; and the model of national identity; and the state identity.

SANTRAUKA

Siekiant deramai suprasti itin prieštaringą ir sunkiai analizuojamą baltarusių tapatybę, išryškėja pozityvistinio požiūrio į tautinę tapatybę kaip į tam tikrą nuo amžių egzistuojančią konstantą nepakankamumas. Baltarusių tapatybei taikoma Derrida pateikta Babelio bokšto kaip nuolatos konstruojamo ir dekonstruojamo statinio metafora duoda progą pažvelgti į ją pliuralistiškai, įvairiapusiškai, dinamiškai. Šios metaforos fone išryškėja trys baltarusių tapatybės konstravimo modeliai: etninis, tautinis ir valstybinis.

The problem of ethnic identity of the Belarusians seems to be important from various points of view, both domestic and international. First, it is essential for the domestic situation in Belarus. It is quite clear that the very existence of the Belarusian state to a great extent depends on the identity of

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its people. Belarus was the last Soviet Republic which proclaimed its independence. And that historical event occurred not as the result of the political will of the Belarusians, but as the coincidence of the political circumstances. Belarus had no other choice but to be an independent country. Almost 15 years have passed since the break-up of the Soviet Union, and the political will of the Belarusians is still questioned. Second, Belarus is a multiethnic society, and its internal peace depends on the relations of the Belarusians, as the majority, with the Poles, the Russians and other minority groups. Needless to say, majority-minority relations are influenced by the identity of the Belarusians as well. Third, nowadays we witness the process of construction of the so-called ideology of Belarusian statehood by its ruling elite implying the identity as well. And besides that, being abroad and representing Belarus, the author of this article always comes across an undoubted interest about this nation, both in academic circles and among ordinary people: what kind of nation are the Belarusians, what are their peculiarities, what distinguishes them from other nations, what do they think about themselves, about their past and future? In other words, all these questions are relevant to the identity.

The questions concerning the nature of Belarusian identity arise from its explicit controversy. On the one hand, Belarusian literature, created in the national language, is well known and acknowledged. The name of Vasil Bykau

is enough to be mentioned in connection with this. On the other hand, the real language of public life, education and everyday communication in Belarus is Russian; while Russians constitute only 11.4 per cent of the population. It is enough to refer to the official data of the National Census (1999), according to which only 41.3 per cent of the total number of Belarusians use their native tongue at home. This percentage decreases among urban Belarusians (23 %) and among the citizens of Minsk, the capital of the state (15.4 %) [1]. On the one hand, Belarusian nationalism is a rather strong social phenomenon, based on a well-developed ideology. On the other, one can come across a national nihilism among the Belarusians who doubt the very existence of their nation and are eager to identify themselves with the Russians. Such indifference and nihilism is to a great extent the soil for the integration process with Russia.

One remark should be made in this connection. Ethnically, the Belarusians are very close to the Russians, due to the common origin (both belong to the Eastern-Slavonic branch) and to assimilation and Russification, which destroyed essential elements of the ethnicity and traditional way of life of the Belarusians. That is the reason why often an observer will not distinguish between persons of Belarusian and Russian origin. Ethnic similarities between both peoples brought to life as idea which was shared by Russian nationalists since the 19th century and is shared

by their ideological ancestors today, according to which the Belarusians are not a nation but just a local variety of the Great Russian nation. This idea constitutes the basis for the intentions of the political swallowing of Belarus by Russia under the umbrella of Slavonic unity, Orthodoxy, integration, etc. As we shall be able to see later, this idea is not alien to certain circles of Belarusians as well. Such an idea has always been opposed by Belarusian nationalists, whose models of Belarusian identity are constructed on an anti-Russian foundation and to a great extent constitute a response to the challenge of Russian nationalism. So, any kind of analysis of the Belarusian identity should consider the Russian factor.

Being very strong and weak, explicit and elusive at the same time, Belarusian identity cannot be measured on one scale and estimated in one analysis. This is why the very idea of deconstruction seems to be appropriate to this simultaneously certain and uncertain phenomenon. Speaking metaphorically about the deconstruction method, Derrida used the mythical image of the Tower of Babel as constantly constructed and deconstructed event [2]. Being applied to the Belarusian identity, Derrida's metaphor may involve in the discussion numerous aspects of this phenomenon and strategies for its analysis. Here we shall point out the question concerning the very name of this nation. Indeed, the very process of ethnic or national identification starts with the designation by the name of the people, which is either ac-

quired or formally labeled or even denied. In any case, it has some meaning or even a variety of meanings, which constitutes the identity. In the frame of deconstructivist analysis of the name, two interrelated levels of the identity problem may be pointed out. The first one concerns the name as a trace or a trace of traces which are significant to the name's bearer. What is beyond the name? What kind of psychological associations are connected with the ethnic name? Indeed, the range of such associations is broad and different, and may include space, people, faith, blood, state, language, folk culture, history, historical artifacts and heritage, the political regime and leadership, symbols, traditional food, landscape, the shape of towns and villages, and so on. At the same time, such associations expressed in the way of negation present another range of characteristics. To be Belarusian is to be non-Pole, non-Russian, non-Catholic, non-immigrant, etc. These associations constitute various, and often controversial, combinations. The second level of deconstructivist analysis may be expressed in Derrida's words as "responsibility for the name". Indeed, every person is responsible for the name of his or her ethnicity. Speaking about the response, we mean the attitude, emotional and practical, of a person towards his ethnic name. The other thing is that such a response is flexible and depends on the interiorization of the name. It may be perceived as a wide range of attitudes towards one's nationality, which varies from negative to positive, from mimicry

of the identity to explicit forms of nationalism. For one, his Belarushood is the reason for his pride and sense of life; for a second it is just a label received at birth. So these two levels of comprehension of identity from the point of view of its name show the variety of its explications, an unlimited multitude of feelings, notions, associations and actions, very often controversial and mutually exclusive. In other words, deconstruction provides an opportunity of vision of the identity as pluralistic, relational, fluid and not final, and splits into pieces its traditional vision. Now the bricks of the Tower of Babel of identities of the Belarusians may be rearranged and organized according to certain principles, and such a procedure constitutes a constructivist approach towards identity.

Taking into consideration the above, we shall try to analyze three models of identity of the Belarusians. The first one may be characterized as the traditional and ethnic one. The second model includes the ideas of Belarusian national oriented elite and constitutes the essential element of the ideology of Belarusian nationalism. The third model, which is in the process of construction, is a product of the present-day ruling elite. Their analysis includes both methodological and empirical aspects, and is based on a representative volume of data.

The general approach to this study is based on the following assumptions concerning the very concept of identity. As a philosophical concept, identity has

been used in two fundamentally opposed ways. Stefany Ortmann points out that, in the more mainstream philosophical definition, "identity" indicates self-sameness, or what makes an object (a person, a group) unique. This categorization of identity involves a judgement about stability over time – an object is assumed to have a stable, unchangeable "core" resistant to change. Opposed to this is the post-structuralist concept of identity, or rather identities, as being fundamentally fragmented and fluid, constantly transformed and by their very nature not given to endure over time.

The first concept is usually identified as a positivist one, and very often the positivist idea of identity loses its understanding on a primordial phenomenon. In the framework of this approach, the two main physical characteristics constitute the sense of identity: the body itself and the distinctive marks on its surface, and the land to which the group is attached by birth [3]. In this context, the very group is perceived by its members as a "big family", with a deep feeling of belonging to it as its main feature. Because of the natural origin of these characteristics, they are regarded as personal property unchanged over time. Often they are interrelated with specific personal names, which mark the groups belonging. Being sub-rational and traditional, these characteristics are often based on a mythological perception of ethnic reality and are beyond social discourse.

The second approach is closely connected to phenomenology and is based

upon several principal ideas stated by Husserl and Schutz, according to which social reality is the product of social construction. This assumption leads to the following conclusions. The first one points out the interpretation as the main method of social reality research. The second underlines the relative character of social truth, which depends to a great extent on values and the changing interrelations of the object [4]. The constructivist understanding of identity is conceived as being fundamentally relational, at its core is a process of identification and differentiation with

the "significant other". As soon as the significance of the "other" is flexible, the very fluidity of identity seems reasonable enough. We would add that identity is also a question of choice.

All three existing models of identity of the Belarusians are to be analyzed from these positions. None of these models exists in a clear explicit form. It exists either as a phenomenon of mentality, or scattered among texts of a political and social character. So the very object of study has to be reconstructed on the basis of methods of sociology and narrative criticism.

THE ETHNIC IDENTITY OF THE BELARUSIANS

The first model may be characterized as the ethnic model of identity of the Belarusians. The aim of the analysis of this model is to find out the features which constitute the Belarusian ethnicity in two ways, external and internal. The first way is based on a procedure of comparison of the Belarusians with what is called a "significant other". Its aim is to find out features which are conceived as distinguishing the Belarusians from other ethnic groups. The internal way aims at analyzing features identifying the Belarusians among themselves.

Such an approach has to take into consideration the notion of ethnic borders. The idea of the linkage of ethnic borders and identity, developed three decades ago by Barth, has not lost its productiveness [5]. Following Barth de Vos stated that "boundaries are basi-

cally psychological in nature, not territorial. These boundaries are maintained by ascription from within as well as from external sources which designate membership according to evaluate characteristics which differ in content depending on the history of contact of the groups involved" [6]. The following hypothetical characteristics of ethnicity are reasonable to be involved in the discussion: territoriality, religion, language, a subjective sense of continuity of belonging [7].

The next step on the way to the construction of the identity of the Belarusians is to find "a significant other". For many centuries the Belarusians have had interrelations with four nations, with the Poles, the Russians, the Lithuanians, and the Ukrainians, with whom they have had external borders. The fifth ethnic groups were the Jews, who lived among

the Belarusians in small towns. But historically interrelations with the Poles and the Russians were of greater significance than with the others, first of all for social, cultural and political reasons. Since the 16th century, after the united Polish-Lithuanian state was created, and till the middle of the 19th century, the Polish influence upon the Belarusians constantly increased. In fact, the Poles constituted the dominant group in the multiethnic Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and that resulted over centuries in at least three ways essential for an understanding of the formation of the identity of the Belarusians. First, the Belarusians lost their nobility, who step by step converted to Catholicism, and in that way became Poles. Second, by the end of the 17th century, the so-called Russian language (in Belarus the language is usually called Old Belarusian), as the official language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, was expelled by the Polish and prohibited. Third, in the times of serfdom, the Belarusians experienced social oppression from the Polish nobility. So the division between the Belarusians and the Poles was marked by the differences a religious (Catholicism – Orthodoxy, replaced for three centuries by Greek-Catholicism), linguistic (Polish – Belarusian, or so called “*prosty*”, or “common” language) and social (nobility – peasantry) character.

As a result of the partition of the Commonwealth at the end of the 18th century, the territory inhabited by the Belarusians became part of the Russian Empire. The Russians as the dominant nation became the next “significant

other” for the Belarusians. *Zapadnorusism* (“West-Rusicim”), as the official ideology of Russia, denied Belarusian ethnicity and regarded Belarusians as a western polonized variety of Russians, and the language of the Belarusians as a “spoiled” dialect of Russian. In 1839 the Belarusians were reconverted to Orthodoxy. The events of 1863 led to the prohibition of the Belarusian language, and the very name of Belarus was replaced by the North-West District. The Belarusian peasantry continued speaking their language, which in fact marked their ethnic border with the Russians. But due to the common religion – Orthodoxy – and to the similarity of languages the eastern border of the Belarusians has never been as strict and as determined as the western one.

Such a brief historical survey of the interrelations of the Belarusians with their western and eastern neighbors proves our presupposition concerning the Poles and the Russians as the “significant others” in the process of the formation of the Belarusian identity. This presupposition is verified by the present-day historical memory of the Belarusians, reflecting the dominance of the Poles and the Russians over them in the past.

The assimilation of the Belarusians in the 19th and 20th centuries has in fact ruined the linguistic border and left the Belarusian people ethnically unprotected from eastern influence. As a result, nowadays the Russian language dominates in public life, education, the mass-media, advertising, etc. This is the reason why the present-day Belarusians

usually are not eager to regard the Russian culture as foreign. In Russia they do not feel abroad. At the same time, the inner linguistic borders with the Poles changed as well. Nowadays, the majority of Belarusian citizens of Polish origin speak the same tongue as the Belarusian do, i.e. Russian in towns and Belarusian dialects in the villages. In fact, religion is the only factor which distinguishes Belarusians and Poles inside Belarus. That is why expressions like "Polish Christmas" and "Russian Christmas", "Polish Church" and "Russian Church", so unusual for foreigners, are still very common in Belarus.

One may conclude that the construction of the Belarusian identity accomplished on basis of an analysis of its ethnic borders reveals the following. The Belarusians do not identify either with Poles or with Russians. Interrelations with the Poles have formed a strong feeling of Belarusian identity based on the Orthodox religion. Orthodoxy for Belarusians is not a faith in the direct sense of the word, but a phenomenon of the cultural tradition. This conclusion is verified by sociological research, and first of all by free interviews among Belarusians in the multi-ethnic Grodno region. "We are not Poles, we are Orthodox people", "We are Belarusians, because we are not Catholics", are typical reports by Belarusians. The Poles are the significant other for the Belarusians, because they belong to another religious tradition.

The Belarusians do not identify with the Russians either, though the ethnic similarities between both peoples exceed

the differences. The common religion and language make the very problem of Russian-Belarusian differentiation questionable. Who are the Russians from the point of view of the Belarusians? Our observations, confirmed by interviews, show that they are newcomers, arrivals. The Russians are those who came from Russia. They, or their ancestors, arrived in Belarus from another land. The interrelations of the Belarusians over the eastern ethnic border shows the phenomenon of their "locality" (the equivalent of the Belarusian "*tuteishast*") versus Russians as migrants. The Belarusians were born in this land, which is their homeland, their motherland. A strong feeling of adherence to the land of birth constitutes the main feature of the present-day ethnic identity of the Belarusians. A feeling of belonging to the Belarusian people as a "big family" is rather typical too: "I am Belarusian. When I return home I am so happy and feel every Belarusian is my relative" (from an interview with a person who works outside Belarus). In this respect, the Belarusians' perception of the Russians as "the other" differs from their perception of the Poles. The Russians are "the significant others" who are regarded as the continuation of "us" as "our elder brother".

So Orthodoxy and strong feelings of adherence to the native land and people may be regarded as traditional features of the ethnic identity of the Belarusians. They were created over long process of coexistence by the Belarusians with their neighbors, and they constitute the individual feeling of self.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NATIONAL IDENTITY OF THE BELARUSIANS

The next question concerns the changing of the ethnic identity of the Belarusians caused by the independence of the Belarusian state. Belarus received its sovereignty in 1991, and that core event in its history influenced its ethnic identity, which is now gradually transforming into a national identity. The transformation of identity of the Belarusians under the political circumstances reveals its structural and heterogeneous character. As a result, we can now speak about a plurality of Belarusian identities, each reflecting its divergent attitudes towards Russia as the "significant other".

The construction of the present-day Belarusian national identity is based on a theoretical linkage between identities, interests and actions. Two principal assumptions shape its background: it is focused on the national state and culture (a), and it may be represented as continuum including a variety of types (positive, negative and neutral) and ways of expression (conformity and non-conformity) (b). Both assumptions are essential for the further existence of Belarus as an independent state, and for its internal sustainability as a multiethnic and culturally pluralistic society.

Four types of identity of the Belarusians may be characterized on the basis of the assumptions stated above. First, the positive non-conformists. They identify themselves as "conscious Belarusians". Their identity is of a rational character and may be estimated productively in the categories of a constructive

approach. The mainstream values associated with the first type of identity are the unconditional sovereignty of the Belarusian state and the rebirth and expansion of the Belarusian language. Statehood and language are the main values which have to unite and consolidate the Belarusians as a nation and differentiate them from "others", i.e. primarily from the Russians.

The values characterized above are closely interconnected with the tradition of Belarusian nationalism which originated in the second half of the 19th century. Without going into the details of its evolution, we would point out some of its crucial aspects regarding identity. Such an analysis seems to be essential from a research perspective, because it demonstrates one of the possible ways of the construction of identity.

Kastus Kalinouski was one of the first heralds of the social and national aspirations of the Belarusians. He was a leader of the uprising of 1863 and condemned to death and executed here in Vilnius. His "Letters from beneath the Gallows" and "Peasants' Truth" express the maturity of his vision of the Belarusian identity. The Belarusians are neither Poles nor Russians; they are a people living between neighboring nations. But their national existence and development are prevented by the Russians ("the Moscovites"). Russia, in present-day terms, is regarded by Kalinouski as the "significant other" to the Belarusians. Moreover, the significance of the Russians is evaluated by the au-

thor in a very negative way, as a nation which dominates the Belarusians and which is very distant to the Belarusians mentally. This is why liberation from Russia was the chief goal of Kalinouski's activity. It is clear that the differentiation of the Belarusians from this eastern neighbor has no vitality without the idea of the internal integration of the nation. Another question concerns the identity platform for such an integrity. We do not find a direct answer to the question in Kalinouski's writings, but the supposition, that he saw such a platform in the Greek-Catholic (Uniate) religion seems to be reasonable. The following passage proves such a supposition: "Since the times of our ancestors we have had the Uniate faith; that means that we, being of the Greek faith, acknowledged the Holy Fathers of Rome as governors". The Tsar of Moscow suppressed the Greek faith and replaced it with the Tsar's faith, called Orthodoxy. "Thus we were separated from the true God", "We lost our spiritual merit – our Uniate faith" [8].

Further steps in that direction were made by Yanka Kupala, a famous Belarusian poet. Being young, he started writing in Polish, but later he chose Belarusian. Being one of the creators of the modern Belarusian literary language, Kupala sought the identity namely in the language. The philosophical core of his poetry at the beginning of the 20th century lies in the recognition of the fact that the Belarusians are deprived of their national culture, which is to be revived.

He acknowledged with sadness that the Belarusians confuse "our" and "other", they accept "other" as if it were "our". He would be happy to hear the Belarusians speaking their language, singing their songs, etc. Further developments made Kupala rather pessimistic about his dreams of the improvement of the Belarusian identity.

Vaclau Lastouski and some other prominent Belarusian historians were eager to maintain the identity of the Belarusian people on the basis of its unique historic heritage. In that direction, well-known concepts of the Baltic sublevel of the Belarusians, the Grand Duchy of Lithuanian as the medieval Belarusian state, appeared. Moreover, to avoid the common "rus" in the names of both nations, attempts to replace the very name of the Belarusians by other ethnic names, e.g. "the Krivs", "the Litvins" were made. At the same time the Russians were often called "the Raseicy", "the Moscovites", etc. It is worth adding that the texts in which the national Belarusian idea is expressed can easily be recognized by a specific norm of spelling, usually called "the tarashkevitsa", differing them orthographically from the spelling officially adopted in Belarus. The last is considered by nationalists as Russified, and inadequate to the Belarusian language.

These are the bricks which were put into the wall of the Belarusian national identity. That wall aimed at unifying the Belarusians on the basis of faith, language and history, and at separating them from the Russians. The type of

identity constructed by nationally oriented thinkers constituted the foundations of the national rebirth in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In fact, in 1991 – 1994, the mainstream features of this type of Belarusian identity were legitimized. They circulated openly in society and were reproduced by the new national educational system.

Today, the bearers of this type of identity constitute a relatively small part of society, but the majority of them are intellectuals or creative people. They openly explicate their identity by speaking the Belarusian language. Due to their efforts, the process of the Belarusianization of education and public life in the early 1990s was initiated. Some of them are politically oriented and participate in actions for statehood and against integration with Russia. Their most vivid symbols are the red-white-red banner, the Pahonia coat-of-arms, and 25 March as Liberty Day, prohibited by the present ruling regime.

The reverse side of the first type of identity is the negative position towards Russia and the Russian language. The Russian state is perceived by bearers of this view as a potential threat to Belarusian statehood and a source of neo-colonialist expansion. Russia and the Russians are accused of all the difficulties and problems in Belarusian history and present-day developments. This is why the most extreme motto of this type is “Belarus for the Belarusians”.

Needless to say, the bearers of the first type of Belarusian identity meet misunderstanding and even hostility from the Russian-speaking majority, to

say nothing of the Government and the official media. The reason for the unpopularity of the first type of Belarusian identity among the rest of the Belarusians may find its explanation in its rational and constructivist character, which has almost nothing in common with traditional identity. This is why there is a constant and mutual confrontation between the nationally oriented minority and the rest of society. The minority is perceived negatively by the majority as extreme nationalists, while the minority accuses the majority of its “unconsciousness”.

The second type of national identity of the Belarusians is represented by positive conformists, who are nationally oriented, share the values of Belarusian culture and statehood, but do not express their position in an explicit way. Potentially positive conformists are ready to join the first group.

The third are neutral conformists, indifferent towards national values and satisfied with the political and linguistic status quo (“silent majority”). Their identity is not visibly explicit and is based mainly upon the traditional ethnic values of Orthodoxy, “locality” and an attitude towards the Russians as the “elder brother”.

The fourth group representing the present-day identity are negative non-conformists, whose motto is “we and the Russians are one nation”. The identity of this group is based on a mixture of traditional ethnic values (“we”) and Russian nationalism, such as imperial Russian statehood, great power, etc. This group of Belarusians deliberately regards the

Russians which are the most “significant other” for them as an extinction of “us”. The “West”, generally taken, is perceived as the “significant other” in strictly negative terms as a threat. They seek acknowledgement for their position in Orthodoxy, Slavonic cultural and historic unity and the necessity of common protection against the “West”.

The borders between these groups are flexible. Belarus as an independent state faces two opposing future opportunities: loss of statehood as a real and dangerous perspective, and cultural revival as a rather hypothetical perspective. The development in both directions may cause conflicts on the ground of identity.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE STATE IDENTITY

The coexistence of the four rather opposing types of present-day Belarusian is the background for the construction of the so-called state identity. The state identity may be regarded as a part of the official “ideology of Belarusian statehood”, which is in the process of creation. Over the last two years dozens of publications on this issue have appeared. The academic course “The Ideology of Belarusian Statehood” is compulsory in university and college curricula. The aim of this doctrine is to legitimize the present-day ruling elite and to unite the multi-ethnic and culturally diverse society under its government. The state ideology deals with various aspects of the politics, history and culture of Belarus against the background of its interrelations with the Western world and Russia. Though the ideas concerning the Belarusian state identity are not presented in the publications in a systematic way, they are articulated in the content of the analysis and need to be reconstructed for further research.

The methodological basis for such a reconstruction can be found in Paul

Ricoeur’s theory of identity. Ricoeur theorized about three main identity features, namely, the feeling of stability, the feeling of unity and the feeling of difference [9]. These features emphasize, in his understanding, the personal aspect of identity. But it is clear that any kind of ideology as a system of values of the whole is directed to the unit as a member of the whole.

The feeling of stability is maintained politically by various means: strong political power, military protection, social and multi-ethnic peace. The idea of a strong power is an idea traditional to Russian nationalism of strong state modified and adopted on Belarusian soil. Internal peace to a great extent depends on the peaceful character of the Belarusians. “We are Belarusians, a peaceful people” as the first words of the Anthem of Belarus are not accidental in that context. The feeling of stability must be guaranteed by political integrity with Russia.

The second of Ricoeur’s features is the feeling of unity. This a feeling is derived from the integrity of society based

on the absence of internal ethnic and religious contradictions and traditional mutual tolerance. Such an ethnic feature as Orthodoxy must serve as the spiritual background for the feeling of unity.

The feeling of difference is based on the specific place of Belarus in Central Europe. It may be considered in the term of traditional Belarusian "locality" spread to the scale of the whole country. Prof. Y. Yaskevich points out that a peculiarity of the self-identity of the Belarusians is determined by the bordering position of its culture, this is why Belarus cannot identify with any single political or cultural tradition. It has to find "its own way" [10]. The concept of a peculiar way of Belarus,

underlined in ideological texts, aims at creating the feeling of uniqueness of being of its citizens.

Such a brief survey of some aspects of the state identity of Belarus under formation shows that it is based on the soil of the traditional Belarusian identity combined with elements of modified ideas of Russian nationalism. The integrative basis for such a combination is the notion of the so-called "Belarusian way".

At the end of this article, we may conclude that deconstructivist and constructivist approaches present a productive methodological opportunity to analyze and build different models of the identity of the Belarusians and their comparison.

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