

The concept of the «Russian world» in the assessments of Belarusian researchers

A characteristic trend of the contemporary information space of Belarus is the promotion of narratives of the «Russian world». In parallel with the penetration and dissemination of relevant ideas in the Belarusian media, studies devoted to the study of the concept of the «Russian world» are beginning to appear in Belarusian historiography. Some Belarusian researchers try to adapt the ideas of the Russian world to the contemporary political realities of Belarus. This is manifested in the use of theses about a common history, the imposition of beliefs that Belarusians and Russians are one people, and Russian is the native language for Belarusians. Such theses take place in the context of the Belarusian academic humanities, which often, following the Soviet tradition, ideologically serves the political slogans of contemporary pro-Russian (including pro-government) circles in Belarus through a peculiar interpretation of historical facts and their adaptation to nowadays socio-political processes. At the same time, it is also worth noting the presence of different, more academic views, interpretations and approaches that take place when Belarusian researchers try to study and comprehend this phenomenon.

Keywords: «Russian world», Belarus, Russia, pro-Russian narratives, scientific discourse.

Koncepcja «Ruskiego miru» w ocenach badaczy białoruskich

Charakterystycznym nurtem współczesnej przestrzeni informacyjnej Białorusi jest propaganda narracji «Ruskiego miru». Równoległe z przenikaniem i rozpowszechnianiem odpowiednich idei w białoruskich mediach, w białoruskiej historiografii zaczynają pojawiać się badania nad badaniem pojęcia «Ruskiego miru». Niektórzy białoruscy badacze próbują dostosować idee rosyjskiego świata do współczesnych realiów politycznych Białorusi. Przejawia się to w posługiwaniu się tezami o wspólnej historii, narzucaniu przekonań, że Białorusini i Rosjanie to jeden naród, a język rosyjski jest językiem ojczystym Białorusinów. Takie tezy pojawiają się w kontekście białoruskiej humanistyki akademickiej, która często podąża za tradycją sowiecką i ideologicznie służy politycznym hasłom nowoczesnych środowisk prorosyjskich (w tym prorządowych) na Białorusi poprzez unikalną interpretację faktów historycznych i ich adaptację do współczesnych procesów społeczno-politycznych. Jednocześnie warto zauważyć, że pojawiają się różne, bardziej akademickie poglądy, interpretacje i podejścia, które mają miejsce, gdy białoruscy badacze próbują badać i zrozumieć to zjawisko.

Słowa kluczowe: «Ruski mir», Białoruś, Rosja, narracje prorosyjskie, dyskurs naukowy.

Концепт «русского мира» в оцінках білоруських дослідників

Характерною тенденцією сучасного інформаційного простору Білорусі є пропаганда нарративів «русского мира». Паралельно з проникненням і поширенням відповідних ідей у білоруських медіа в білоруській історіографії починають з'являтися дослідження, присвячені вивченню концепції «русского мира». Деякі білоруські дослідники намагаються адаптувати ідеї російського світу до сучасних політичних реалій Білорусі. Це проявляється у використанні тез про спільну історію, нав'язуванні переконань, що білоруси і росіяни – один народ, а російська мова – рідна для білорусів. Такі тези з'являються в контексті білоруської академічної гуманітарної науки, яка часто, дотримуючись радянської традиції, ідеологічно обслуговує політичні гасла сучасних проросійських (у тому числі провладних) кіл Білорусі через своєрідну інтерпретацію історичних фактів та їх адаптацію до сучасних суспільно-політичних процесів. Водночас варто також відзначити наявність різних, більш академічних поглядів, інтерпретацій та підходів, які мають місце, коли білоруські дослідники намагаються вивчити та осмислити цей феномен.

Ключові слова: «русский мир», Білорусь, Росія, проросійські нарративи, науковий дискурс.

Introduction

Over the past few years, the promotion of the idea of the «Russian world» has become the main activity of Russian propaganda both in Russia itself and abroad.

«Russian world» today is partly interpreted in Russian and pro-Russian circles as a «cultural and historical idea of the international, interstate and intercontinental community, aimed at uniting disparate Russian-speaking compatriots»¹. Being ideologically formed among Russian intellectuals-contributors to the collection «Other. A Reader of the New Russian Self-Consciousness», published in 1992–1995, the concept of «Russian World» came directly into Russian scientific discourse after the publication in 1999 of Peter Shchedrovitsky's work «Russian World and Transnational Russian». In it, the author noted that «Russian world» should be understood as «the network structure of large and small communities that think and speak in Russian». At the same time, P. Shchedrovitsky clearly emphasized that in the territory delineated by the administrative borders of the Russian Federation lived only half of the population that belonged to the «Russian world». Therefore, Russia's primary task in this direction, according to the analyst, was to be comprehensive support (including information) of Russian «human capital» living outside Russia².

¹ S. Alejnikova, «*Russkij mir*»: *belorusskij vzgljad*. Minsk, RIVSh 2017, s.6.

² P. Shchedrovickij, *Russkij mir i transnacional'noe russkoe*, URL: <https://shchedrovitskiy.com/russkiy-mir/> [4.04.2022]

The concept of «Russian world» entered the official political field in the mid-2000s. This marked the beginning of the Russian government's implementation of a new global project, which would be a «Russian alternative» to Western geopolitical projects. At that time, Russian President Vladimir Putin was particularly active in promoting it. The latter increasingly began to address issues related to Russian compatriots living abroad in terms of their linguistic, cultural, and civilizational unity. Finally, in the same year, a decree of the President of the Russian Federation established the Russian World Foundation, which aimed to promote the study and use of Russian language and culture both in Russia and abroad (including in Belarus and Ukraine)³.

At the same time, the same rhetoric appeared in the religious community of Russia. Thus, when Kirill Gundayaev became the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in 2009, he became one of the most active promoters of the idea of «Russian world», claiming in his speeches that in addition to Russia its «core» is at least Belarus and Ukraine⁴.

In general, in the 2000s, the concept of the «Russian world» became the ideological basis of the Putin regime and the general line of Russia's foreign policy in the post-Soviet space and in the context of restoring spheres of influence actual for the Soviet era. Relevant messages with the help of Russian and local pro-Russian media were actively rebroadcast in the Republic of Belarus – an important, from the Russian point of view, part of the «Russian world» and in general a strategic partner of Russia on the contemporary geopolitical chessboard⁵.

However, the dissemination of these about the «Russian world» is not limited to the media sphere only. Similar messages gradually began to appear on the pages of scientific publications of Belarusian authors – researchers in the humanitarian sphere. The latter, imitating the Soviet tradition, with the help of scientific tools often created an ideological basis, and at the same time, exculpation of the pro-Russian vector of foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus, which has remained a stable priority during the last 28 years of Alexander Lukashenko's presidency.

The purpose of this publication is to analyze the scientific publications available in Belarusian historiography regarding the concept of the «Russian world». As of today, in contrast to Russian historiography, where the concept has already been the subject of numerous studies, including dissertations⁶, there is no significant interest in this issue in the Belarusian scientific

³ P. Artymyshyn, «My vse russkie, a ne rossijane»: snovni svitohliadni vizii rosijskoi hromady zakhidnoukrainskoho regionu (za materialamy hazety «Russkyi vestnyk»). *Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zbirnyk* 2017, nr. 19, s. 306-307.

⁴ Vystuplenie Svjatejshego Patriarha Kirilla na torzhestvennom otkrytii III Assamblei Russkogo mira. 2009. 3 nojabrja. URL: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/928446.html> [1.04.2022]

⁵ P. Artymyshyn, T. Polovyi, Koncept «russkogo mira» v informacionnom prostranstve Belarusi. *Sprawy Międzynarodowe* 2021, nr. 74(2), s. 181–201. <https://doi.org/10.35757/SM.2021.74.2.01>

⁶ A. Andreev, Russkij mir kak faktor rossijskoj politiki. *Mir i politika* 2011, 10 janvarja, s. 94-102; O. Batanova, Russkij mir i problemy ego formirovanija: avtořef. diss. ... kand. polit. nauk: 23.00.04, Rossijskaja akad. gos. sluzhby pri Prezidente Rossijskoj Federacii, Moskva 2009, 24 s.; D. Garaev, The Methodology of the «Russian World» and «Russian Islam»: New Ideologies of the Post-Socialist Context. *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 2021, nr. 48(3). URL: https://brill.com/view/journals/spstr/48/3/article-p367_7.xml?ebody=abstract%2Fexcerpt [20.04.2022]; N. Narochnickaja, *Russkij mir*: SPb, Aletejja 2007, 320 s.; M. Nejmark, Russkij mir i geopolitika. *Problemy postsovetskogo prostranstva* 2015, nr. 2(4), s. 78-100; E. Pen'kova, Russkij mir kak faktor social'noj identifikacii rossijskoj molodezhi: avtořef. diss. ... kand. soc. nauk: 22.00.04, FGBOU VPO «Rossijskij gos. social'nyj un-t, Moskva 2012, 25 s.; V. Petuhov, Russkie i «Russkij mir»: istoričeskij kontekst i sovremennoe pročtenie. *Polis. Politicheskie issledovanija* 2014, nr. 6, s. 83-101; V. Rastorguev, «Russkij mir» i civilizacionnaja identičnost'. *Vestnik Pravoslavnogo Sviato-Tihonovskogo gumanitarnogo uni-ta. Serija 1: Bogoslovie. Filosofija* 2015, nr. 59, s. 152-158.

community. Despite this, several different kinds of publications can be distinguished, in which this phenomenon is considered and evaluated from different angles. In particular, the Belarusian scientific discourse contains several articles by Belarusian researchers: Vsevolod Shimov, Lev Kryshtapovich, Fiodor Prikhodko and Vasily Ivchik, as well as a scientific monograph by Svetlana Aleinikova dedicated to the topic of the «Russian world».

These authors are key representatives of the discourse of «Russian world» in the context of Belarusian science. Vsevolod Shimov – Candidate of Political Science, Associate Professor of Political Science at the Belarusian State University – one of the most influential institutions of higher education in the Republic of Belarus. Lev Kryshtapovich is a Doctor of Philosophy who has worked for many years at the Academy of Management under the President of the Republic of Belarus and the Operational and Analytical Center under the President of the Republic of Belarus. Fiodor Prikhodko and Vasily Ivchik are lecturers of the humanities at the Belarusian State Agrarian Academy. Finally, Svitlana Aleinikova – Candidate of Sociological Sciences, analyst of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, founded by the President of the Republic of Belarus in 2019 to «provide information and analytical support to government agencies and officials in strategic areas of domestic and foreign policy»⁷.

The humanities, especially those related to contemporary socio-political processes, in the authoritarian conditions of contemporary Belarus are mostly extremely conjunctural, and from the point of view of the academic level – partly marginal. Scholars with opposition views in recent years, especially after August 2020, have mostly left the territory of the Republic of Belarus, or at least were «removed» from public space within the country. Instead, the researchers considered in the article took an almost monopoly position in the niche of analysis of the «Russian world», at the same time forming «ideological canons» and approaches to the concept for their successors, which, however, in modern Belarus, is almost non-existent. And, in fact, the full list of Belarusian researchers of the «Russian world» consists of the mentioned authors.

Given the above, the purpose of our article is to highlight and analyze the work of Belarusian scientists who in their research raised the issue of manifestations of the «Russian world» in Belarus. In the course of the research we used, in particular, methods of comparison, discourse analysis, content analysis, etc., which allowed us to identify key postulates formulated by individual authors and reflect the approaches and general interest of Belarusian researchers to this problem.

From the views of Vsevolod Shimov

Vsevolod Shimov devoted his scientific intelligence to «Russia and Russians as a factor of Belarusian identity»⁸. He argued that in Belarusian society, regarding the influence of the Russian side on Belarus, both in historical retrospect and at the present stage, thoughts varied between «radical followers of nationalism», who focused on the presence of an irreconcilable

⁷ O BISI, URL: <https://bisi.gov.by/o-bisi> [30.03.2022]

⁸ V. Shimov, *Rossija i russkie kak faktor belorusskoj identichnosti. Sociologija*, nr. 4, s.76-84.

national-cultural antagonism between Belarus and Russia throughout history their relations, and supporters of «Western Russianism», who considered Belarusians «an integral part of the triune Russian people on a level with the Great and Little Russians (Ukrainians)»⁹. And although at the beginning of the article the researcher tries to stay away from two extremes, especially since V. Shimov himself was convinced that in both cases we are talking about «ideal types» that do not exist in a real context, however, revealing more and more the origins and transformations of both directions, the author «succumbed to temptation», and became rather on the side of «Western Russianism» than remained a neutral observer of these processes.

Consequently, Belarus for a scientist is to a large extent a common cultural, linguistic and informational space with Russia, both in the historical dimension and today. Accordingly, assuming that the separation of Belarusians (and other Eastern Slavs) into independent ethnopolitical groups took place already in the 14th–15th centuries, the researcher claims that a complete ethnopolitical separation could not be achieved even in the 19th century, when in the future the idea of the Eastern Slavs as a single «Russian people» remained stable, based on the cultural, linguistic, religious and state heritage of Kyivan Rus (for the researcher, according to the Soviet-Russian tradition, it is «Ancient»), the «center of gravity» of which at first became Tsardom of Muscovy, and then – the Russian Empire¹⁰.

Moreover, according to V. Shimov, in the event that Rus would develop steadily according to the same scenario as the Holy Roman Empire, then gradually the «Russian» ethno-political community, as in the case of Germany and Italy, would be transformed into a single nation. Thus, the Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians would never have formed as separate peoples, although under the existing circumstances, according to the researcher, it was impossible to talk about the final national demarcation between them even in the 2000s. Moreover, as the scientist convinced, between Russia, Ukraine and Belarus there is still a cultural and informational space based on the literary «all-Russian» language that developed in the 18th–19th centuries from the «Great Russian dialect basis of the noble intellectual elite of Moscow and St. Petersburg». In this configuration, the Belarusian and «Little Russian» (Ukrainian) languages were only dialects with certain regional folklore and ethnographic specifics, which only organically complemented the «high all-Russian culture»¹¹.

At the same time, the political scientist admitted that in the 19th century, oppositional views appeared among Belarusians and Ukrainians to this approach - the Ukrainian national movement «grew» from the «Little Russian» regional patriotism, and a significant part of the «personnel reserve» of the movement in Belarus was small the Catholic gentry and the Uniates (Greek Catholics), who, being under Polish cultural influence, retained close ties with the peasantry and gradually became supporters of the idea of national economic liberation of

⁹ V. Shimov, *Rossija i russkie kak faktor belorusskoj identichnosti. Sociologija*, nr. 4, s.76.

¹⁰ V. Shimov, *Rossija i russkie kak faktor belorusskoj identichnosti. Sociologija*, nr. 4, s.76-79.

¹¹ V. Shimov, *Rossija i russkie kak faktor belorusskoj identichnosti. Sociologija*, nr. 4, s.79-80.

the Belarusians. And although the last, national direction at the decline of the Russian Empire was embodied in the creation of the Belarusian and Ukrainian People's Republics, and throughout the 1920s. it was adopted by the Bolsheviks, introducing a policy of «indigenization» («korenizatsiya»), from the 1930s. the policy of stimulating national identities was replaced by measures aimed at the formation of a supranational community – the Soviet people, and in the context of Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians, the doctrine of «three fraternal peoples» was also added, which showed the introduction of the tools of «Western Russianism» into the Soviet discourse, and such a situation cases was relevant until the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

At the same time, speaking about Belarus in 1991–1994, V. Shilov noted that at that time the country was dominated by the political and ideological «national» forces, which aimed to spread their political, ideological and national cultural views to the entire Belarusian society. But after 1994 and up to the present time – with the presidency of Alexander Lukashenko – the «pro-Russian» trend again took over, associated with an orientation towards a political and economic union with Russia and the reproduction of the cultural and linguistic balance characteristic of the BSSR, which was characterized by the dominance of the Russian language in most spheres of society, since the Belarusian-speaking tradition allegedly «could not develop forms of high culture capable of competing with Russian culture». At the same time, in the late 2000s the scientist stated that in the «nationally oriented» environment, «revanchist» moods were brewing, due to dissatisfaction with the political, cultural and linguistic situation in Belarus, and this at some point could lead to a new round of political and ideological confrontation in the state¹².

V. Shimov considered the language issue as a factor of potential political instability in Belarus and 10 years later - in 2020 – an article appeared specifically dedicated to this problem¹³. It is symptomatic that the researcher V. Shimov was alarmed by the fact that the Russian language, which, according to the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, had an equal status with Belarusian, did not receive even in the country headed by A. Lukashenko, at the state level, that symbolic priority of the title and national language, like Belarusian. In particular, in his opinion, this was manifested in the absolute predominance of the Belarusian language on street signs and road signs, the Latin transliteration of names and surnames in passports by default from Belarusian and the absence of the Russian language on the national currency. At the same time, he was not embarrassed that if during the national census in Belarus in 1999 only 41.3% of the Belarusians surveyed said that they speak Belarusian at home (Russian - 58.6%), and in 2009 there were even fewer such - 26% (against 69.7% of Russian speakers)¹⁴.

However, this state of affairs seems unsurprising, given that for V. Shimov, the Belarusian (like Ukrainian) language is only a derivative of local dialects isolated from the «all-Russian»

¹² V. Shimov, Rossija i russkie kak faktor belorusskoj identichnosti. *Sociologija*, nr. 4, s.76-83.

¹³ V. Shimov, Jazykovej vopros kak faktor potencial'noj politicheskoj nestabil'nosti v Belarusi. *Zhurnal Belorusskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Sociologija* 2020, nr.1, s. 67-70.

¹⁴ V. Shimov, Jazykovej vopros kak faktor potencial'noj politicheskoj nestabil'nosti v Belarusi. *Zhurnal Belorusskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Sociologija* 2020, nr.1, s. 68-70.

context, which, along with the Russian literary language, came out of the common cultural tradition of Rus. Under such circumstances, the opposition of the Russian language with Belarusian and Ukrainian, which, according to the researcher, was done by the «nationalists» in Ukraine and Belarus, contradicted any logic of historical processes, and was ineffective: if even in Ukraine the Russian language and identity were almost completely replaced by Ukrainian, mainly in the western and central regions, then in Belarus the Belarusian language «did not go beyond the narrow layer of the humanitarian intelligentsia, and the population, migrating to the cities, spontaneously rebuilt from rural dialects into Russian literary language»¹⁵. However, the contemporary national policy of the Republic of Belarus, which did not take into account such specifics, and continued to use the Soviet ethno-linguistic scheme, could, according to the scientist's forecasts, threaten with a serious aggravation and politicization of the national-language issue up to the complete destabilization of the socio-political situation in the country¹⁶.

Lev Krishtapovich: between science and politics

In 2014, against the backdrop of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, an article by Lev Krishtapovich appeared in the scientific journal «Problems of National Strategy» of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, with title «Our Russian Faith»¹⁷.

It is noteworthy that the author begins his exploration with the assertion that the Baptism of Rus, the 1025th anniversary of which in 2013 was just celebrated by «the peoples of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine», was not only an important religious and church event, but also became the «final a stage in the formation of a «common Russian» ethnic identity, which was expressed in a single «all-Russian» literacy, a single art and architecture, a single way of life, a «all-Russian» people and a «all-Russian» state, the borders of which stretched from the Black and Azov Seas in the south to the White Sea in the north, from Red Rus in the west to the banks of the Volga in the east. As a result, as L. Krishtapovich assured, a single «all-Russian» civilization of the «Rusichi» was formed with its own spatial, temporal and mental parameters. And in a religious context, the scientist emphasizes that since that time in Rus, not just the Orthodox, but the Russian Orthodox Church began to exist, where the concept of Rus was decisive. Therefore, in the historical and scientific dimension, there is neither a Belarusian nor a Ukrainian Orthodox Church, but only a common Russian Church, where «all-Russianness is a mental characteristic», a civilizational code of the Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian, which determined all further processes - national, religious, political, cultural - on the territory of the entire «Russian land» until today¹⁸.

¹⁵ V. Shimov, Jazykovej vopros kak faktor potencial'noj politicheskoj nestabil'nosti v Belarusi. *Zhurnal Belorusskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Sociologija* 2020, nr.1, s. 70.

¹⁶ V. Shimov, Jazykovej vopros kak faktor potencial'noj politicheskoj nestabil'nosti v Belarusi. *Zhurnal Belorusskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Sociologija* 2020, nr.1, s. 69-70.

¹⁷ L. Krishtapovich, Nasha russkaja vera. *Problemy nacional'noj strategii* 2014, nr. 5, s. 104-120.

¹⁸ L. Krishtapovich, Nasha russkaja vera. *Problemy nacional'noj strategii* 2014, nr. 5, s. 104-120.

From this point of view, L. Krishtapovich also considered the historical path of Belarus as a component of the «all-Russian» civilization and its people – Belarusians, for whom Russians and Ukrainians are fraternal peoples with the same «all-Russian» identity. Consequently, the scientist rejects as such that they have nothing to do with reality, the approaches of some Belarusian colleagues on the withdrawal of the Belarusian identity from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL). The latter, according to L. Krishtapovich, was actually an antithesis to the «all-Russian» character of the Belarusian nationality, which began its formation just in the 14th–15th centuries. Moreover, the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, according to the philosopher, was alien to Belarus, and which, as the scientist stated, began to be «created in Polish-gentry» circles after the lands of White Ruthenia were first part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and later – the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Then, allegedly, the process of denationalization began through the Polonization of the Belarusian «all-Russian» elite. Under such conditions, only Belarusian peasants and philistines remained «Russians» in their mentality. However, according to L. Krishtapovich, this did not prevent the formation of the Belarusian national revival during the 18th–19th centuries – and not least in this context, the scientist credits the assistance of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Russian Geographical Society, which from the middle of the 19th century began a detailed study and publication of ancient written monuments and «all-Russian» literature in Belarus, and then they returned to life in the Belarusian expanses the traditions and values of historical Russia, to which the Belarusians, according to the philosopher, are devoted to this day. Any attempts by colleagues to «impose» a view of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth as determining factors for the formation of Belarus and Belarusians, and then to justify the exclusively European character of the latter, L. Krishtapovich calls «pushing through the Polish culture, whose apologists do this in order to emphasize the incorrectness of the path of development chosen by Belarusians, to try to impose values alien to the Belarusian people, which means radically reconsider the policy of the Belarusian state». The ultimate goal of such efforts, according to the researcher, was to be «the rejection of Belarusian self-consciousness from ancient Ruthenian roots, and with it from an alliance with fraternal Russia, and more broadly from participation in any integration processes in the post-Soviet space, which could lead to a change geopolitical orientation of Belarus»¹⁹. The scientist emphasized that such a scenario would be disastrous, since, in his opinion, Belarus itself as a state was formed exclusively in the conditions of the «East Slavic civilizational time and space» and would not fully exist without an alliance with the Russian people, then in the context of the Russian Empire, or the USSR or contemporary Russian Federation.

He also perceives the issue of the status of the Russian language in Belarus – claims that for Belarusians Russian is the same native language as Belarusian. From this, the scientist concludes that in fact there has never been any (sic!) Russification of Belarusians either in the past or at the present stage. The attempts of the «Belarusianizers» (as L. Krishtapovich calls the supporters of the preservation of the Belarusian language in society) to dispute this fact, the doctor of sciences considers nothing

¹⁹ L. Krishtapovich, *Nasha russkaja vera. Problemy nacional'noj strategii* 2014, nr 5, s. 104–111.

more than their desire «under the pretext of reviving the native language, to oppose the Belarusian language to Russian, to include the latter in the list of foreign ones like English or German, and thus oppose Belarusians and Russians to each other as completely different peoples that have nothing in common with each other». Hence the conclusion of the scientist that the Russian language is the main guarantor of the preservation and strengthening of the Belarusian identity, and its opposition to the Belarusian language will only lead to the loss of the ethnic identity of the Belarusians²⁰.

Finally, the «all-Russian» factor, according to the scientist, should also play a key role in contemporary integration processes in the post-Soviet space, the most complete embodiment of which took place in the form of the Union State of Russia and Belarus and the creation of the Eurasian Union as an antithesis to the European integration of Belarusian neighbors in the region. An alternative, according to L. Krishtapovich's forecasts, for the post-Soviet countries, including Ukraine, could only be their non-realization as states, or transfer to the status of «puppets» of the West²¹.

In his other publication «All-Russian history is our everything», L. Krishtapovich noted that the mentioned «Eurasian» integration was guaranteed success only when it was based on the principle of «all-Russian», that is, the Russian language, Russian history and Russian culture as a condition realization of political sovereignty and unity of the people. At the same time, such integration should concern not only the economy or politics, but also the «civilizational unity», destroyed with the collapse of the USSR²². And at the same time, as the scientist notes in another scientific article devoted to the historiosophical foundations of the Union State of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus, if the unification with the EU in line with globalization was supposedly focused on consolidating the privileged position of Western states in the system of international relations and creating a unipolar world in led by the USA, then the pro-Russian integration projects were based on the strategy of multipolar integration and the establishment of fair relations between all its participants, and in the case of the East Slavic peoples, also on the same social and moral system of values and worldview and political beliefs, a common history, starting from the time of Kyivan Rus²³.

In the end, in 2017, another scientific work by L. Krishtapovich appeared, in which the author directly set the goal of «revealing the historical significance of the «Russian world» in the preservation and development of the Belarusian and Ukrainian identity»²⁴. According to him, despite the fact that after the collapse of Kyivan Rus, its territories ended up in different state formations, from the national-religious point of view, the population of these lands remained part of the «all-Russian civilization». However, it is characteristic that the researcher interpreted the formation of the Belarusian (and Ukrainian) people as part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania not as an evolutionary

²⁰ L. Krishtapovich, *Nasha russkaja vera. Problemy nacional'noj strategii* 2014, nr. 5, s. 111-114.

²¹ L. Krishtapovich, *Nasha russkaja vera. Problemy nacional'noj strategii* 2014, nr. 5, s. 114-120.

²² L. Krishtapovich, *Obshherusskaja istorija – nashe vse. Belaruskaja dumka* 2014, nr. 2, s. 66-67.

²³ L. Krishtapovich, *Istoriosofskoe edinstvo belorusov i russkih kak osnova stroitelstva Sojuznogo gosudarstva. «NOMOTHETIKA: Filosofija. Sociologija. Pravo»* 2011, nr. 8(16). URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/istoriosofskoe-edinstvo-belorusov-i-russkih-kak-osnova-stroitelstva-soyuznogo-gosudarstva> [8.04.2022]

²⁴ L. Krishtapovich, *Russkij mir kak osnova belorusskogo i ukrainskogo samosoznaniya. «Kul'tura v evrazijskom prostranstve: tradicii i novacii»* 2017, nr. 1, s. 66-74.

process, but, on the contrary, as a regression – they appeared as a result of «stagnation of the ancient Rus' people on the territory of present-day Belarus and Ukraine and harmful influences from the Polish-Latin and Jesuit factors». Therefore, both Belarusian and Ukrainian languages for L. Krishtapovich are nothing more than «Old Rus' language spoiled by Polonisms and Latinisms». At the same time, favorable conditions arose in the Moscow state for the transformation of the Old Rus' (passed into the status of Great Russian) language into the «great and mighty». From this logic, it followed that there could be no «Russification» of Ukrainians and Belarusians, and it was only about their liberation from the «Polish yoke» and «return» to the linguistic and generally cultural «all-Russian» bosom with the development of the Russian language²⁵.

It is noteworthy that L. Krishtapovich also projects the events of the past on contemporary geopolitics – support for the «Russian world» in the Republic of Belarus, that is, maintaining the country's course towards a geopolitical and generally «civilizational» union with Russia, for a scientist is the fuse that even today protects against «Polish-gentry campaign», the goal of which is to turn Belarus (and Ukraine) into the eastern «kresy» of Poland. Allegedly, according to the researcher, this is the ultimate goal of the EU Eastern Partnership program, which consists in «orienting Belarus and other post-Soviet members of this project to the so-called European values, and, accordingly, to the rejection of their identity, their national history and replacing it with the «Euro-NATO» one». For example, he was convinced that a policy was being pursued with regard to Belarus and Ukraine that was supposed to encourage Belarusians and Ukrainians to discard their «all-Russian history» and replace it with «the history of the Polish-gentry and Bandera-fascist», and most importantly, to take an anti-Russian geopolitical position. The researcher claims that «under the guise of hypocritical verbiage about democracy, European security, existential European values, the Western military and plutocracy is trying to carry out invasions of Russia in their geopolitical interests, which have nothing common with the interests of the Belarusian and Ukrainian peoples». Hence the conclusion of the author - Belarus needs to stand next to the Russian Federation against such projects of a hostile environment, and Ukraine needs to reject the attempts of «the United States and the European Union to create a pro-fascist state here – a NATO foothold against Russia» and return to the «native all-Russian family»²⁶.

Therefore, only in the «Russian world» – the cultural-historical and spiritual-mental community of ethnic groups, nations, people who recognize their belonging to the «Russian» civilization and consider Russian as their native language – L. Krishtapovich sees a guarantee for the further existence of the Belarusian statehood and nation²⁷.

²⁵ L. Krishtapovich, *Russkij mir kak osnova belorusskogo i ukrainskogo samosoznaniya*. «*Kul'tura v evrazijskom prostranstve: tradicii i novacii*» 2017, nr. 1, s. 66-68.

²⁶ L. Krishtapovich, *Russkij mir kak osnova belorusskogo i ukrainskogo samosoznaniya*. «*Kul'tura v evrazijskom prostranstve: tradicii i novacii*» 2017, nr. 1, s. 69-71.

²⁷ L. Krishtapovich, *Russkij mir kak osnova belorusskogo i ukrainskogo samosoznaniya*. «*Kul'tura v evrazijskom prostranstve: tradicii i novacii*» 2017, nr. 1, s. 71-72.

«Russian world» and Belarus: interpretation of Fyodor Prikhodko and Vasily Ivchik

In 2018, an article by two Belarusian researchers-philosophers F. Prikhodko and V. Ivchik was published on the pages of the scientific publication of the Ural Federal University, which also substantiates the close historical, socio-cultural, and mental connection of Belarus with the «Russian world»²⁸.

According to researchers, the «all-Russian idea», having formed in the «Old Rus' period», did not disappear with the political decline of Rus, but continued to fulfill a unifying mission for the Eastern Slavs at the spiritual, ideological and cultural levels. This, in particular, was manifested in the appearance in the 19th – early 20th centuries of the concept of «Western Russianism», the supporters of which substantiated the opinion that historically and culturally Belarus is alien to the heritage of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, but constitutes the western part of Russia, and Belarusians are an organic element of «Russian people»²⁹.

At the present stage, the «Russian world» is considered by researchers as a «special cultural and civilizational community», united by the Russian language, culture, awareness of a common origin, norms and values, which cannot be reduced to one thing at a time - to the territory (it shrinks, then expands), to the state or cultural-genetic code, mentality, language, although these are its most important components. The real physical and spiritual center of this cultural and civilizational community, which does not fit within the boundaries of one country, scientists define contemporary Russia. Given this, Belarus is not seen as a separate entity, but only in close relationship with Russian state³⁰. At the same time, the authors do not pay attention to the fact that the «Russian world», as a more applied phenomenon, is a tool for promoting Russian interests, which often call into question the sovereignty and national interests of Belarus outside of Russian influence. On the contrary, any criticism of the concept in the article is perceived solely as a manifestation of «Russophobia», «American intrigues», the negative impacts of «Maidan Ukraine», etc. - those forces that were afraid of Russia turning into a self-sufficient, independent from the West, center of world development and influence, but wishing to once again weaken and break the «Russian world» (in particular, as it was at the time of the collapse of the USSR), first of all, by «quarreling» between Russia, Belarus and Ukraine – the «heart» of the heritage of Holy Rus. According to the same perspective, F. Prikhodko and V. Ivchik also assessed the events in Ukraine after 2014 in the Crimea and Donbas, which, in their opinion, were not the result of Russian aggression against the Ukrainian state, but the intervention of Western countries in the «internal Russian» context, allegedly in order to prevent the strengthening of Russian influence in the region³¹.

²⁸ F. Prikhod'ko, V. Ivchik, Russkij mir i Belarus': obshhee i osobennoe. URL: <https://elar.urfu.ru/handle/10995/58947> [15.04.2022]

²⁹ F. Prikhod'ko, V. Ivchik, Russkij mir i Belarus': obshhee i osobennoe. URL: <https://elar.urfu.ru/handle/10995/58947> [15.04.2022]

³⁰ F. Prikhod'ko, V. Ivchik, Russkij mir i Belarus': obshhee i osobennoe. URL: <https://elar.urfu.ru/handle/10995/58947> [15.04.2022]

³¹ F. Prikhod'ko, V. Ivchik, Russkij mir i Belarus': obshhee i osobennoe. URL: <https://elar.urfu.ru/handle/10995/58947> [15.04.2022]

Belarusian view of the «Russian world»: the case of Svetlana Aleinikova

A higher level of academicism is noted in the monograph by Svetlana Aleinikova «The Russian World»: a Belarusian view», which, having appeared in 2017, became one of the first attempts to comprehensively study the concept of the «Russian world» in Belarusian political science³². At the same time, the author tried to conduct research without expressed ideological obsession. In the work, the ideologeme of the «Russian world» is considered in three aspects: in scientific discourse, as a model of political development and as a factor in integration processes.

According to the definition of S. Aleinikova, the «Russian world» is a global Russian cultural, civilizational and geopolitical project, the purpose of which is the «gathering of lands and peoples», that is, the reintegration of the post-Soviet countries and the Russian-speaking diaspora of the far abroad on the basis of common traditions and values: the Russian language and culture, historical past, Orthodox faith. According to the scientist, the key features of belonging to the «Russian world» are: from a cultural and civilizational point of view, the concept of «community» - the unity of peoples and ethnic groups based on common civilizational traditions and spiritual values, the Russian language and culture, ideas about the historical past; in a religious context - Orthodoxy and the Russian Orthodox Church as basic values and factors in the formation and development of Russian civilization; in the geopolitical approach - linguistic affiliation and identification with a common historical homeland (Russian Empire, USSR, Russia)³³.

According to the researcher, attempts to implement the ideas of the «Russian world» at the present stage are carried out mainly through the tools of «soft power» - non-political institutions (religion, culture, education, etc.). A special role in this context is played by the ROC, which quite consciously distinguishes between the concepts of the «Russian world» and Russia, interpreting the latter as only one of the components of «Holy Rus» next to Belarus and Ukraine.

In general, the implementation of the functional potential of the concept with the help of «soft power» tools, as noted by S. Aleinikova, provides for such objective functions as the basis: the formation of a new identity, primarily in the countries of the former USSR, firstly, to maintain the status of the Russian language and Russian cultural influence, and, secondly, to legitimize political decisions aimed at reintegrating the countries of the post-Soviet space (cultural, humanitarian component); strengthening foreign economic, trade, financial and other intersubject ties aimed at maximizing the development of integration processes (economic component)³⁴.

Speaking about the actual Belarusian context of the perception of the concept of the «Russian world», S. Aleinikova noted that although in the works on the ideology of the Belarusian state there is no direct appeal to the «Russian world» ideologeme, however, the place and role

³² S. Aleinikova, «*Russkij mir*»: *belorusskij vzgljad*. Minsk, RIVSh 2017, 240 s.

³³ S. Aleinikova, «*Russkij mir*»: *belorusskij vzgljad*. Minsk, RIVSh 2017, s.164-165.

³⁴ S. Aleinikova, «*Russkij mir*»: *belorusskij vzgljad*. Minsk, RIVSh 2017, s. 165-166.

of such its main features as attitude to the common historical past, common traditions and values, as well as the priorities of geopolitical development, were characterized as follows (not always identical with similar processes in the same Russia): a compromise position regarding joint ideas about the historical past - in particular, the synthesis of the provisions of the tribal and «Ancient Rus» concepts that connected the genesis of the formation of the Belarusian ethnos with the settlement of tribes, and the Belarusian statehood – with the fact of the baptism of Kyivan Rus; influence on the formation of traditional Belarusian culture, both Orthodox and Catholic branches of Christianity, determined its synthetic and eclectic character; the absence of messianism traditional for the «Russian idea», the cult of civilizational confrontation «West-East», a tolerant attitude towards various axiological systems, religious and cultural traditions, states and political entities; choosing the development of the Union State of Russia and Belarus as the main foreign policy priority, while at the same time trying to establish effective and multilateral cooperation with all countries and regions.

In general, S. Aleinikova attributed to the specific features of the perception of the ideas and foundations of the «Russian world» in Belarus: the high importance of the Soviet period and the period of independence in comparison with other, earlier stages of the historical development of the Belarusian statehood; awareness, on the one hand, of the consolidating role of the common traditions and values of the Slavic peoples, on the other hand, of their own identity and independence of the development path; positive perception of both Western European liberal (constitutional-legal) and traditional values: the integrity of the axiological foundation, the absence of internal inconsistency of the national mentality, as well as tendencies of opposition of cultures and religions; goal-oriented pragmatic approach to building a system of inter-subject interaction based on the priority of the socio-economic interests of the Belarusian state and the principle of equal partnership in foreign policy integration processes³⁵.

However, so far, the seemingly scientific publication has ended with a political message - a call for Belarus to use the situation when Russia was interested in implementing the ideas of the «Russian world» in order to obtain strategic advantages in choosing the conditions for potential participation in possible promising integration projects and strengthening Belarusian positions in the world political arena. However, S. Aleinikova allowed the participation of the Republic of Belarus in the project of the «Russian world» only if the latter retained its independence, sovereignty, the right to its own development and foreign policy multi-vector. At the same time, the researcher's conclusion is interesting that in the collective consciousness of the Belarusian society itself, the idea of the «Russian world» as of 2017 was largely fragmentary, because the concept itself was not sufficiently developed in Belarus, in particular, its main target functions and strategic objectives³⁶.

³⁵ S. Aleinikova, «*Russkij mir*»: *beloruskij vzgljad*. Minsk, RIVSh 2017, s. 166-169.

³⁶ S. Aleinikova, «*Russkij mir*»: *beloruskij vzgljad*. Minsk, RIVSh 2017, s. 168-170.

Conclusions

The concept of the «Russian world» is an influential basis for the Russian ideological influence on the Belarusian society not only in the media sphere. An important information reinforcement for the promotion of the ideas of the «Russian world» among the Belarusian society became the sphere of scientific humanitarian research. Some Belarusian scientists interpret historical facts and events from the past in line with the interpretation of Belarus' belonging to the «Russian world». Within this framework, the theses of scientists are reduced to beliefs about:

- common origin of Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians;
- kinship between the Russian and Belarusian languages, which are equally native to the average Belarusian;
- a unified «all-Russian» history of the Eastern Slavs, the beginnings of which go back to the time of Kyivan Rus, and its historical-legal-state tradition supposedly «flowed» first to the Muscovite state, and then to the Russian Empire, the USSR, and, finally, the Russian Federation;
- challenging the role of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as determining factors in the civilizational, ethnogenetic and cultural development of Belarusians.

This kind of scientific intelligence of the Belarusian past and present carries very specific political and propaganda messages: to convince the Belarusian public that the pro-Western path of development of Belarus is a scenario «artificially imposed» by external forces that contradicts the logic of the historical process, and most importantly, the «natural» and almost historically undefined «pro-Russian vector» in the bosom of the «Russian world».

It is important, however, to note that in the presence of very ideologically biased interpretations of the concept of the «Russian world», the Belarusian scientific discourse also contains large academic works in which the scientific approach to the study of this phenomenon prevails.

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