The process of the formation of the Belarusian national identity was complicated and multidimensional phenomenon. It is almost impossible to identify accurately self-identification of the population, which lived within the modern borders of Belarus on the early stages of the development of statehood, as authentic local folklore, narrative sources, legal acts and the rest of it are unknown for us nowadays. It is even difficult to say, what language the local population used while speaking. It can be just stated for sure that the main criteria of the identification of the population was the presence of common ancestors and habitation in a particular area.

**Keywords**: Belarus, ethnos, ethnical identity, statehood, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Rzeczpospolita, the Belarusian People’s Republic, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic.
identification of the population was the presence of common ancestors and habitation in a particular area.

Primarily the formation of the Belarusian ethnos proceeded on the Balts basis. Toponyms which are extant, primarily the names of rivers (Besed', Bobruika, Vilia, Volma, Gaina, Drazhnia, Isloch, Losha, Naroch, Narovlia, Pina, Usha, etc.) tell us about the influence of the Balts. In the 6th century the Slavs were involved in ethnogenesis of the Belarusians. In the period between the 7th and 9th centuries as a result of synthesis of the Baltic and Slavic cultures new ethnical communities were formed – the Krivichs, the Dregovichs and the Radzimichs (Belarusian predecessors). Between the 10th and 12th centuries the first forms of the state emerged, which were uniting the population not according to the tribal criteria but on the basis of joint settlement on the territories, which were close to urban settlements. Polotsk and Turov-Pinsk lands-principalities were the examples of such forms of state.

In the 9th-10th centuries the pre-Belarusian population was involved in the process of the formation of a large empire with the center in Kiev (Kievan Rus’). The Krivichs-Polochans took the most active part in this process. The accession to Kievan Rus’ led to the combination of local (territorial) self-identification with general imperial one (“Russian”). Respectively, ethnonym “Rus’” (rusy, rusiny, rusichi) was also used to indicate Belarusian lands.

An important component of an imperial ideology was the adoption and spread of Christianity in Eastern (Orthodox) customs on the territories of Kievan Rus’. The start for the process of Christianization of Belarus was given by the establishment of Eparchy (or Episcopate) by the Great Kievan Prince Vladimir in Polotsk in 992. In 1005 Christian Episcopate was also created in Turov. In the 12th century Orthodoxy became dominant on the Belarusian territories, though the elements of pagan cults still existed here till the beginning of the 20th century.

Christianization contributed to the consolidation of the elements of Slavic culture in the pre-Belarusian society, since the South-Bulgarian (Solun) dialect was taken as a basis for the Church Slavonic
language, in which religious sermons were read. At the same time it is Orthodox Church, which acted as a real integrator of the Russian lands, substituting local cults with the common imperial ideology, which was based on the idea about inviolability of the canonic territory of the Russian Orthodox Church with its center in Kiev.

At the beginning of the 13th century most part of the population of the Belarusian territories considered Orthodoxy as their natural faith. In particular, Roman Pope Honorius III in his message to judges in Livonia from February 8, 1222, paid attention to the fact that some Rutheni, settled in Livonia, preserved adherence to the “Greek schism masqueraded under the guise of ancient customs”.1 It is not noted in the message, who actually adhered to the “Greek schism”, however, it can be assumed that they were natives of Polotsk principality.

Equally important component of the identification was a social status of a person, his place in the social hierarchy (whether he was free or a slave, a representative of aristocracy or an ordinary man, etc.).

In the 12th century large lands-principalities on the territory of Belarus began to divide into smaller fiefdoms. In this relation the significance of separate towns (such as Minsk, Vitebsk, Orsha, Drutsk, Logoyask, Zaslavl', Slutsk, Kletsk, Grodno, Pinsk, Brest, etc.) increased. Respectively, local toponyms (polochiane, pinchiuki, turovci, beresteici, orshanci, sluchiane, etc.), which were used by the local population together with previous ethnonyms, came into existence.

The next stage in the formation of the Belarusian statehood was the accession of the Belarusian lands into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) in the 13th-14th centuries. The lands of the Upper Pome-manne (the Black Rus’) constituted the core of the Duchy, and very soon the term “Litva” spread among them. Belarusian town Navagrudok became the first center of the new state. Under the rule of great Lithuanian princes the territories of Western Belarus became independent from the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia and could preserve the independence from Western European Knights Crusaders and the Golden Horde khans.

In the 14th century the great princes’ of Lithuania rule spread all
over Belarus within its modern borders. Unlike Western Belarus, the
principalities of Eastern, Central and Southern Belarus preserved poli-
tical autonomy and previous (Russian) identification. At the end of the
14th-the beginning of the 15th centuries term “Lithuania” (“Litva”) was
used to describe Troksk and Vilnia lands, Black Rus', Podliashie and
Brest lands, Polesie, Pinsk, Minsk lands, districts on Berezina, Middle
Dnepr and Sozh, Western part of Polotsk lands with Braslav; the term
“Rus'” was used to describe in its turn Polotsk, Vitebsk, Smolensk,
Kievan lands, principalities of Chernigov-Northern lands, Volyn’ and
Podolye.2

The absence of severe hierarchical power system in the Grand
Duchy led to the use of many ethnonyms in respect of the population
of the Belarusian lands (“the Russians”, “the Ruthenians”, “the Litvins”,
“the Litvins-Russians”, etc.). Previous local terms were also used in
daily life.

In the middle of the 13th century Western European chroniclers
started using the term “White Rus’”, but this usage was fragmen-
tary and did not have an actual geographic or ethnical connection.
Undoubtedly, the term “Whiter Rus’” was used in respect of the lands
which were not under the canonical power of the Roman Pope.3

In the early years of the existence of the Grand Duchy, Slavic
(“Russian”) elements dominated in its culture. A diplomat of the Teu-
tonic Order Konrad Kyburg having visited the Duchy in 1397 noted
that the Litvins were obtaining primarily education predominantly in
Russian schools under the auspices of Orthodox Church.4 In the 14th
century great Lithuanian princes considered the Orthodox Church
as an important tool to consolidate their influence on the “Russian”
lands and endeavored to create a separate Orthodox metropolis with
the centre in Kiev directly dependent on Constantinople patriarch.

An important factor of the consolidation of Belarusian ethnos was
the ancient Belarusian language (“Russian mova”) which was formed
on the basis of the Church Slavic language and local dialects (primar-
ily, northern part of Poprypiat and southern part of Podvinsk-Dniepr
region), and till the end of the 17th century functioned as state langu-
age of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.
At the same time the presence of a significant “Russian” component in the GDL was not an obstacle to its rulers to widen links with the countries of Western and Central Europe. At first their actions in western direction were aimed at the perseverance of state sovereignty of the GDL, but from the second half of the 14th century western vector of the foreign policy of the Grand Duchy obtained more ambitious goal – an integration of the state in the European system of the international relations.

Expansion of ties with the countries of Western and Central Europe was accompanied by the penetration of Western branch of Christianity (Catholicism) in Belarus. In 1251 Great Prince Mindaug turned to the Catholic faith and established Catholic Episcopate in his belongings with the help of Dominican Order (bishop’s residence was located in Lubchia near Navagrudok). However, in the beginning spread of Catholicism in the Duchy went with difficulties, as the local population did not want to accept it. Mindaug himself was not stable in his choice. In 1260 he once more turned from Catholicism to Paganism. But failures did not stop catholic missionaries. In the 14th century monks – Franciscans were actively engaged in missionary activities.5

In the second half of the 14th century the Grand Duchy of Lithuania got closer with Poland on the basis of the dynastic Union of Krewo (1385-1386). The Union contributed to the expansion of the impact of Catholicism in Belarus. In 1387-1388 the Polish king and the Great Lithuanian Prince Jogaila created Catholic Episcopate in the capital of the GDL Vilnia. Till 1500 about 90 catholic parishes were created on the Belarusian territory.6

In the Charter issued by Jogaila on February 20, 1387, it was emphasized that only the Catholics can have rights and privileges in terms of propriety, private freedoms and state obligations.7 Jogaila’s Charter from October 2, 1413, said that state offices of the GDL can be covered only by persons of Catholic confession.8

However, it is not necessary to speak about persecution of the Orthodox of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania after the conclusion of the Union of Krewo. After consolidating his position on the throne in
1392, Vitaut instructed not to force the “Rusins” to change the faith.\(^9\)

In 1415-1419 he offered to unite Catholic and Orthodox Churches, though in practice this proposal was not implemented.

In the second half of the 15\(^{th}\)-at the beginning of the 16\(^{th}\) century GDL rulers expressed indifference in the questions of confession, though they privately worshipped Catholicism and encouraged activities of Catholic Orders (primarily, the *Ordo Sancti Benedici*). Their position in regard of other religious confessions determined not only ideological views, but also political thoughts. So, the Great Lithuanian Prince Casimir IV, who ruled in 1440-1492, admitted that during his reign the number of “schismatics” (i.e. the orthodox) in the GDL not diminished but increased.\(^10\) In 1447 in a juridical way he equalized social rights of the “Russian” gentry, princes and pans of the GDL with those of the Lithuanian gentry and aristocracy of Catholic confession.

During the reign of the Great Prince Zhigimont II (1506-1548) Orthodox adherents held high official positions: they headed embassies, state treasuries, voivodeships and troops. In that period orthodox churches and monasteries were actively constructed in the GDL. An Austrian diplomat Siegmund von Herberstein being in the GDL in 1517 noted that in Vilnia there are “much more Russian temples than churches of Roman confession”.\(^11\)

In 1563 the son and successor of Zhigimont II Zhigimont III August allowed the orthodox to take high offices in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and equalized them in rights and privileges with the catholics. Once again this decision was confirmed in 1568.

The expansion of political, economic and cultural ties with the countries of Western and Central Europe contributed to the dissemination of the elements of Europeanization in political and military spheres of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The spread of the ideas of humanism and individualism, codification of legal norms of the GDL (Statutes), agrarian reform with the introduction of homestead land (Wallach reform of 1557), establishment of class-representative bodies (Sejm) and new elements of local self-government (Magdeburg law), printing, opening of the University in Vilno can be attributed to these
elements. Primarily European influence spread among privileged classes of the GDL, but in the 16th century it reached citizens of the Belarusian towns (merchants, craftsmen).

Expansion of European values and modes on the Belarusian lands destructed previous way of living and was accompanied by exacerbation of social, interreligious and interethnic contradictions. An intensification of these contradictions eventually led to decline of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, despite the efforts of the part of Lithuanian-Russian gentry to preserve its subjectivity (one of the last efforts to preserve subjectivity of the GDL was the publication of the Statut of 1588, where there were no references to the fact of conclusion of a real Union with Poland, but provisions on the state sovereignty were confirmed).

The Union of Lublin of 1569 strengthened the links between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Poland in the framework of Rzeczpospolita. Respectively, Polish influence also increased on the Belarusian lands, which spread among elitist layers of the GDL as it was before. In the 17th century Polish language was taken as a basis for the language of business correspondence of Rzeczpospolita and GDL, accompanied by translation of writing from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet (officially this practice was consolidated in 1696). In some cases Western influence generated specific traits in minds of elitist layers of GDL. In particular, in the 17th century the “Sarmats” ideology got popularity here. It was based on the idea of exceptionalism of the privileged class. However, the “Sarmats” ideology cannot be regarded as the demonstration of Europeanization, as its adherents were inclined to oppose “old” gentry’s traditions to the “spoilt European mores”.

Between the 16th and 17th centuries European Reformation and military clashes between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Rzeczpospolita with the Grand Duchy of Moscow influenced greatly the formation of the Belarusian identity. Reformation teachings spread in the first half of the 16th century among ruling elite and urban population of the Duchy, however, in the second half of the 16th century their significance on the Belarusian lands decreased due to Counterreformation and the increase in catholic influence.
Clashes between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Grand Duchy of Moscow in the 16th-17th centuries decreased the impact of the “Russian” component on the Belarusian lands. Partially it was related with the loss of “Russian” territories on the East of the GDL and partially became the result of the policy of the ruling elite in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Rzeczpospolita, aimed at limitation of the impact of the Orthodoxy in the state. The main forms of adherents of orthodox opposition on the Belarusian lands were the establishment of organizations (brotherhoods) and publication of polemical works, and also appeals to the king or a great prince. Orthodox population (first of all saint priests and urban citizens) often appealed for the assistance to the Grand Duchy of Moscow, which claimed to be a defender of orthodoxy in Belarus since the 16th century. In the 17th century Orthodox citizens began to identify themselves as the “Russians” in the Grand Duchy of Moscow (the Great Russians). By the way, exactly in this period the ethnonym “White Rus” stuck for the lands of Western Belarus.

In the 17th-18th centuries an impact of Orthodox Church decreased in Belarus. Ruling layers of the GDL gave preference to Catholicism, and “ordinary” people became inclined to the Uniatism, introduced in Rzeczpospolita on the basis of decisions of the Brest Church Council of 1595 (the Uniatists preserved orthodox sermons, but acknowledged the superiority of the Roman Pope).

In the 18th century efforts were made in Rzeczpospolita in order to overcome interreligious, interclasses and interethnic contradictions and to form general civilian and national ideology (the ideology of the “civil nation”). But these efforts ended with failure and predetermined an ignominious final of Rzeczpospolita during its three divisions, implemented by Russia, Prussia and Austria. As the result the Grand Duchy of Lithuania finally ceased to exist, and the Belarusian lands became parts of the Russian empire (annexation in the empire led to the transformation of the ethnonym “White Rus” to the term “Belorussia”).

In the 19th century the lands of Belarus were the object of an ideological and political struggle between the Russians and Poles. Despite
the fact that according to the administrative criteria they belonged to Russia, Polish cultural influence was prevalent here by the beginning of the 1830s. After the disappearance of Rzeczpospolita corresponding ideological guidelines spread among the Belarusian gentry – the main driving force of anti-Russian resistance – with the help of educational system and Roman Catholic sermons. But the specificity of historical development and economic situation of Belarus encouraged local gentry to preserve traditions of political, social and economic structure of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This specificity was very successfully reflected by B. Limanovsky, who noted at the end of the 1850s: “For us, Litvins, that is Polish young people from the historical Lithuania, the talk was about uniting of Lithuanian movements with the movements of Congressional Poland above all (Kingdom of Poland, which became part of the Russian empire in 1815 – here)... We really wished Poland’s return to its old borders, but according to our beliefs we were federalist republicans, and not only wished to ensure the rights for all nationalities, which were its part, but being adherents of the people, supported the feeling of national independence, arousing among the Lithuanian-Belarusian population”.13 In general the “Litvinism” on the Belarusian lands in the 19th century presented itself like a peculiar “Regionalism” in line with Polish culture and Polish influence in Belarus.

After the revolt of 1830-1831 the Russian government began to introduce the policy of real incorporation of the Belarusian lands in the Russian state. An effort to bring the Belarusian lands from the Russian influence during the revolt of 1863-1864 was a failure and encouraged the Russian government to further actions in the policy of “strengthening of the Russian roots”. The result of such policy of the Russian government was the elimination of higher educational institutions in Belarus (in 1832 Vilno University was closed, in 1864 Gorki agricultural institute was also closed) and translation of the official business correspondence from Polish into Russian. In 1840 Statute’s 1588 validity in Lithuanian-Belarusian provinces was completely terminated. Important components of the policy of “strengthening of the Russian roots” were the preferences for the Orthodox adherents (in
this regard elimination of the Uniatism on the basis of decisions of the Polotsk Church Council of 1839 with a forced transition of the Uniatists to the Orthodoxy has great significance) and handover of the local primarily school under the control of the Orthodox Church. In 1864 Russian authorities banned to publish local literature in Roman letters (this ban was removed only in 1905). Efforts were taken to recruit managing staff for Belarus from internal Russian provinces and to substitute terms “Belorussia” and “Litva” with the terms “Western region” or “North-West region”.

In the second half of the 19th century Belarusian “Russophiles” worked out the concept of “Western Russianness”, which regarded Belarusians as a subethnos, separate “branch” of the one Russian people together with the Great Russians and Small Russians. Orthodox component was taken as a major criterion for the identification of “Western Russian” subethnos.

Russian and Polish impact impeded the formation of the Belarusian national identification, dividing local population according to a confessional criterion. In addition to this, it was not an irresistible obstacle on the way of the formation of the Belarusian nationality. One of significant components of the formation of the national identity of the Belarusians became an appearance of the Belarusian literary language in the 19th century.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century a new ideology began to shape in Belarus. It was based on the principles of ethnic nationalism. The founders of nationalist ideas were trying to attract the masses (firstly, peasantry) and to instill in them the idea of identity of the Belarusian culture and the need for self-organization on the national (ethnic) grounds. The social component was present in their proposed ideology, though the resolve of social problems was linked with the change of political status of Belarus in the result of a national liberation struggle.

Formation of the ideology of ethnical nationalism was accompanied by enrooting of the ethnonym “Belarus” (“Belaya Rus”, “Belorussia”) as a self-name for the Belarusian nation. At the same time efforts were made to define ethnical territory of the Belarusians.
Belarusian intellectuals accepted as such the area of Vilnia, Vitebsk, Grodno, Minsk, Mogilev and Smolensk provinces with attached to them parts of Suwałki, Kownia, Kurlandia, Pskov, Tver’, Kaluga, Oriel, Kursk, Chernigov provinces. Ideologists of the Belarusian nationalism regarded the language used by the local population during conversation as the main criteria of the Belarusian identity.

By the beginning of the First World War the Belarusian ethnic nationalism remained marginal phenomenon due to an opposition from the side of the Russian administration and Polish organizations and an absence of mass public demand for nationalist ideology. The First World War destroyed previous system of intergovernmental relations and let transfer the idea of establishment of the Belarusian state into practice. The process of the Belarusian statehood building was accelerated by the German occupation of Western Belarus in 1915-1917 (German occupational bodies contributed to the formation of the numerous Belarusian cultural and educational institutions and expansion of the usage sphere of the Belarusian language expecting to weaken Russian and Polish impact on the conquered lands), revolutionary events in Russia in 1917 and the formal withdrawal of Russia from the First World War according to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of 1918. In March, 1918, the independence of Belarus from Russia was proclaimed in Minsk, and the work on the creation of democratic Belarusian People’s Republic (the BPR) began.

The BPR’s figures were spiritually more close to Europe, taking the systems of developed countries of Western Europe (first of all, France) as an example of governmental, social and cultural structure of the Belarusian state. At the same time they did not reject socialist ideas, considering Belarus as a state of working people.

Weak public demand for the creation of the Belarusian national state and the lack of support from the side of other countries of the world did not let realize declared ideals of the BPR fully. The Republic did not manage to gain the status of a complete state.

The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (the BSSR) became a political alternative to the BPR. Its formation began in December, 1918, and ended in January, 1919. Unlike the BPR, the BSSR was an
effort of governmental construction on the basis of the social (class) component and the ideology of proletarian internationalism. Ethnic component took secondary part in its creation. The founders of the BSSR were striving for preserving close relationships with the Soviet Russia. They disliked “bourgeois” Europe and fundamentally rejected the possibility of borrowing any elements of political structure from there. A major component of the BSSR ideology was a “militant” atheism.

In February, 1919 the Soviet Russia authorities changed its approach to the Belarusian statehood, having remade the borders of the BSSR and united the remained part of Belarus with the Soviet Lithuania. In the summer of 1919 in Moscow the issue of total elimination of the Belarusian statehood was considered. But the Soviet authorities decided not to take such a serious risk. The war with Poland, which authorities were trying to establish control over the Belarusian lands, in particular over their western part with a predominance of Catholicism adherents, played a substantial role in the preservation of the Republic.

In 1920 the BSSR was recreated as an independent state. This time ethnic component began to play more important role in its creation, but, the same as it was before, recreation of the Soviet Belarus firstly was caused by the factors of international politics.

In March, 1921, the territory of Belarus fell under division according to Treaty of Riga of 1921, concluded between Poland, Soviet Russia and Soviet Ukraine. In the 1920s the spirit of divided nation made a great impact on the identification of the Belarusians, living on the both sides of the border. However, attempts to reunite divided parts of Belarus failed by 1939.

In the 1920s the ideology of the Belarusian “national communism” was a real alternative to the Belarusian ethnic nationalism. In 1921-1922 BSSR legally confirmed the status of an independent country and got acknowledgment from the side of Poland and Germany. In 1924 15 counties of Vitebsk, Gomel and Smolensk provinces were accepted into the Soviet Belarus, in 1926 Rechitsa and Gomel counties settled mostly by the Belarusians were included. As a result of these
“enlargements” the territory of the BSSR increased from 52.3 thousand to 126.3 thousand square kilometres.15

The policy of Belarusization, which was presented from Moscow’s permission, contributed to the strengthening of the BSSR positions. Important components of this policy were the establishment of higher educational institutions and scientific institutions in the Republic, expansion of books and other printings in Belarusian, translation of official business correspondence in civil and military spheres in the Belarusian language, development of the standards of the Belarusian writing. Implemented events contributed to the expansion of the sphere of usage of the Belarusian language and enrichment of the Belarusian professional culture, however, Belarusization policy in the BSSR was combined with communist ideology and practice and was implemented inconsistently, because Soviet authorities were apprehended of the Belarusian nationalists’ impact strengthening. Thereby, a significant Russian influence, buttressed by the active usage of the Russian language, was preserved in the Republic. Dependence of the BSSR from the Soviet Russia strengthened after the creation of the USSR in December, 1922.

Belarusian emigrants, having declared their adherence to the BPR’s ideals, in the interwar period acted in Lithuania (Kaunas) and Czech Republic (Prague). In the first part of the 1920s they strived to act as an alternative to the BSSR and attempted to draw attention of the international community to the Belarusian topic deprecating the policy of Russification and Polonization of Belarus and acting for its unification and democratization on the principles of parliamentary republic. As a rule, these demands were claimed at different international conferences and in the League of Nations. However, the variants of the state government of Belarus offered by emigrants were not interesting neither for the Belarusian population nor for the foreign states authorities. It is necessary to pay attention to the fact that emigrants’ ideological tenets lacked clarity and sequence. Some of the figures (for example, Vaclau Lastouski) proposed to refuse from the usage of the term “Belarus”, substituting it with the term “Kryvija”. Significant part of emigrants considered Poland as the main enemy of the Belarusians
and benevolently perceived separate elements of the communist ideology and practice. Crisis among emigrants, which was accompanied by the elimination of the BPR’s government in exile in 1925 and comeback of the part of political emigrants in Minsk, became the consequence of such an approach.

At the end of the 1920s the USSR authorities went from the concessions in favor of the Soviet republics to the strengthening of the centralized governance and became closed from the outside world. The result of such a policy was the cutback of Belarusization policy and strengthening of the Russification of the BSSR. Stalinist repressions in respect of Belarusian peasantry (during collectivization) and Belarusian intelligentsia were a serious blow for the Belarusian national ideology.

The cutback of Belarusization policy in the BSSR also weakened the Belarusian impact primarily in Western Belarus, which in 1921-1939 was a part of Poland. Polish authorities by all means rejected the possibility to grant territorial and political autonomy to the Belarusians. Primarily they allowed for the possibility to satisfy ethnical and cultural demands of the Belarusian population, but soon refused from these guidelines and began to introduce a forced Polonization policy of the Belarusian population. Main components of the Polish authorities’ policy were creation of obstacles in the formation of the Belarusian system of education; limitation of the issuance of the Belarusian literature and periodicals; complication of the activities of political parties and public movements acting as indicators of the Belarusian national interests; stimulating the process of emigration of the Belarusian working population abroad and resettlement of the Poles on the Belarusian lands. It is noteworthy that Polish authorities preferred to use the term “Kresy Wschodnie” (i.e. “Eastern territories”) in regard with the Belarusian lands being part of Poland, avoiding references to the ethnical specific of relevant lands.

The Belarusian population, in particular intelligentsia, was trying to oppose this policy of Polonization, but the opportunities of opposition were limited. Part of representatives of the Belarusian national movement in Poland sympathized with the USSR and communist
ideology (for example, one of the most prominent figures of the Belarusian national liberation movement in Poland Branislau Tarashkevich switched to pro-Soviet and pro-communist positions). In the late 1920s Polish authorities actually undermined the basis of the Belarusian system of education on the “Kresy”, which accelerated the process of assimilation of the Belarusian population. In the late 1930s most Belarusian public organizations and also scientific, cultural and educational institutions were eliminated in Western Belarus.

The Second World War once again drastically changed political destiny of Belarus. In the autumn of 1939 Western Belarus was included in the USSR and reunited with the BSSR. Next “enlargement” of the BSSR was accompanied by annexation of Wilensky district to Lithuania and of Western Polesia to the Soviet Belarus. In 1940 BSSR transmitted Sventiany district and “parts of the territories with predominant Lithuanian population of Vidzav, Gadutishki, Ostrovets, Voronovo and Radun’ districts to the Lithuanian SSR” (so about 2 thousand square kilometres of the BSSR were included in the Lithuanian SSR.16 Attached territories fell under the policy of Sovietization with all ensuing consequences. During the period between September, 1939, and June, 1941, in Western parts of the BSSR 4 special operations aimed against those having Belarusian and Polish consciousness were held. The number of persons repressed during these operations amounted to about 150 thousand.17 Events held objectively contributed to the strengthening of Russian influence on attached territories, despite their formal belonging to the Soviet Belarus.

In 1941-1944 Belarus appeared under the German occupation. On the first stage of the occupation the Germans did not plan to establish the Belarusian state and considered Belarus only as an object of colonization, although objectively their policy was aimed at decommunization and derussification on the conquered territories. In conditions of military failures in 1942-1943 the tactics of the occupation authorities changed. The Belarusians were allowed to form the basis of the national system of education and to start creating national armed forces. In December, 1943, Belarusian Central Rada, which members considered themselves as a temporary
government of independent Belarus, was created in Minsk. Together with it, Belarusian collaborators, to a great extent, were oriented towards Nazis Germany, which reflected on their ideological tenets (propaganda of the superiority of the European, firstly, German culture, racial superiority of the Aryans (including the Belarusians) and necessity of struggle against Bolshevism, rejection of parliamentary democracy, justification of the genocide policy in regard to European population, etc.).

At the same time, even in conditions of German occupation the influence of the USSR and Poland still preserved in Belarus. It was demonstrated in a form of armed resistance. A typical feature of the Soviet underground and partisan movement was the presence of “Russofile” slogans. Polish armed underground movement strived for restoration of independent Poland in the borders, in which it had existed by the beginning of the Second World War.

At the end of 1943-1944 the Soviet system was reconstructed in Belarus. In 1945 the world community finally recognized the fact of inclusion of Western Belarus in the USSR and BSSR. Polish authorities, satisfied with transition of 17 districts of Belostok region with Belostok and of 3 districts of Brest region (total area territories attached to Poland amounted to 14.3 square kilometres), refused the claims for revision of borders with Belarus. Resettlement of Poles beyond the borders of the USSR in the second half of the 1940s-1950s led to diminishment of Polish impact in Belarus.

In 1944 the Belarusian SSR with a USSR authorities’ special expanded its foreign policy powers and in 1945 acted as a founder of the UNO, although later its foreign policy activities were extremely formal and in general reduced to the fulfilling of the USSR interests.

The fixation of the Soviet system and communist ideology in the BSSR after the end of the Second World War was accompanied by the closure of the borders of Republic again and strengthening of its Russification. Components of the ideology of the “Soviet patriotism” in post-war years included revisions about inviolability of historical destinies of the Belarusian and Russian people, and also about the necessity of struggle against Western (“capitalist”) influence and
“bourgeois” (in fact ethnical) nationalism. Soviet ideologists absolutely rejected the fact of the presence of statehood in Belarus in pre-Soviet period and negatively assessed the results of the Belarusian lands being a part of the GDL and Rzeczpospolita (for the Kievan Rus’ it was an exception in this meaning, as in the USSR the concept of “ancient Russian nation” was taken on arms).

Urbanization, construction of big industrial enterprises and increase in education of the Belarusian population had a significant impact on the ideological and political processes taking place in the Soviet Belarus. In the second part of the 1960s-the beginning of the 1980s BSSR turned into an industrial republic with predominance of urban population. More quickly this process proceeded in Vitebsk, Mogilev and Gomel regions, where preponderance of urban population on rural one was felt already at the beginning of the 1970s, more slowly – in Brest and Grodno regions, where urban population dominated on rural population just at the beginning of the 1980s. In 1985 62 % of the BSSR population lived in cities.19

Development of industrial capacity of the Republic strengthened its ties with other republics of the USSR. In the scale of the USSR Belarus functioned as an “assembly shop”, getting raw materials and sending prepared production to other Soviet republics. Main partner of the BSSR was the RSFSR. To a great extent, dependence on other republics was typical for Minsk and Eastern regions of the BSSR, where most of industrial enterprises were located.

A peculiarity of the urbanization process of the BSSR in a period considered was the fact that growth of urban population was predominantly at the expense of influx of ethnical Belarusians in cities. In 1959 they amounted to 67 % of urban population of the BSSR, in 1970 – 69.3 %, in 1979 – 68 %.20 However, increase in the number of Belarusians in cities was not accompanied by the growth of Belarusian cultural influence. The sphere of usage of the Belarusian language steadily narrowed, firstly due to the Russification of the system of education (in particular, basic and higher links of this system). Predominantly party-state and economic apparatus of the republic functioned in the Russian language (an attempt to return
to the policy of “Belarusization” made in the summer of 1953, ended without result).

Belarusian nationalists were forced to leave either underground, or in emigration. They did not manage to stay for a long underground and by the beginning of the 1950s were forced to stop their activity. In the 1960s-beginning of the 1980s anticommunist movement in the BSSR existed only in a form of dissidence among the Belarusian humanitariant intelligentsia. As for the emigration, in the 1950s-1980s the Belarusians were acting in the FRG (Munich), the USA (New York, Chicago, South River, Cleveland, Brunswick), Great Britain (London, Manchester, Bradford), Canada (Toronto, Montreal), Australia (Sydney, Melbourne). Belarusian emigrants preserved adherence to the idea of ethnical nationalism, criticized communist ideology and practice (in this regard they were more sequential in comparison with emigrants of an interwar period), acted against Russification of Belarus and policy of militant atheism, strived to preserve Belarusian cultural heritage in the countries of stay. Some representatives of emigration were trying to update ethnical terminology used in regard to the Belarusians. For example, Belarusian linguist and historian Ian Stankevich, residing in 1949-1976 in the USA, proposed to turn to the usage of the term “Velykolitva – Belarus” or “Kryvia – Belarus”. For emigrants quite natural was the usage of an argument about the superiority of Western culture and aspiration to bring Belarus closer with Western countries. However, an impact of emigrants on Belarus was extremely limited due to the presence of “iron curtain” between the USSR and other world and ideological and political inhomogeneity among emigrants (divisions according to political and religious criterion were ordinary phenomenon among the Belarusian emigrants).

The growth of crises in the USSR at the end of the 1970s-1980s contributed to the disappointment of the Belarusian society in communist ideals, though the BSSR crises of the communist ideology was not so obvious at it was in other Soviet republics. The policy of perestroika and Chernobyl catastrophe became some kind of catalysts for the protests in Belarus. In 1988, according to the example of neighboring
Baltic countries and Ukraine, Belarusian Popular Front was created in the BSSR. Its supporters presented anticommunist positions and considered BPR’s figures to be their ideological predecessors. The BPF was seeking for the way out for Belarus from the USSR and for the creation of independent Belarusian state on ethnic basis. An important component of the Front’s ideology was a demand for Belarus to reach the status of a neutral, nuclear-free country. BPF’s activists did not seek for active participation in European integration processes and gave preferences to creation of the Baltic-Black Sea Union, and, according to them, composed of Baltic Republics, Belarus and Ukraine. At the same time BPF’s supporters considered acceptable to take political systems of Western European countries as an example for the Belarusian state structure.

The elements of BPF’s ideology were reflected in the Declaration on the State Sovereignty, adopted on July 27, 1990, by the Supreme Soviet of the BSSR. This document became a compromise between the Belarusian communists, speaking from the point of the “Russophile” positions, and Belarusian nationalists, considering Russia as the major enemy to the Belarusian independence. It matched the aspiration to gain the status of nuclear-free, neutral state with the demand to preserve Belarus within the USSR. The consensus between communists and nationalists remained even in 1991, when Belarus consolidated its independent status, while engaging itself in the process of the USSR elimination and foundation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and gained a full recognition from the international community.

In general Belarusian lands’ placement at the crossroads of different civilizations (primarily, of Western and Eastern Christian world) impeded the process of formation of the Belarusian subjectivity and development of criteria of the Belarusian identity. An active aspiration of civilization centres in the West and the East of Europe to spread their values across the Belarusian lands led to the mixture of Western and Eastern impact, to borrowing of the cultural elements by the Belarusians both from the West and from the East.

The most important criteria of the Belarusians identity by the
moment of gaining independence by the Republic of Belarus and obtaining the status of an independent state in 1991 can be regarded the following:

- binding to a specific territory;
- confession in form of Christianity;
- belonging to a particular social layer;
- value orientations of people.

The most stable from the listed criteria was binding to a specific territory (connection with “soil”). It is linked with territory, which contributed to consolidation of the Belarusian ethnos, predetermining high level of conservatism of the Belarusians. Other criteria had transient meaning, though in some cases they constituted significant essential traits of the Belarusian identity. As a rule, the Belarusian lands population borrowed ideological guidelines and state and political forms from stronger in political and cultural meaning neighbors, but adapted relevant guidelines and forms to local living conditions.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

8. Ibid, p. 70.
THE MAIN STAGES OF THE FORMATION OF THE BELARUSIAN IDENTITY: HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE

10 *Unija v dokumentah*, p. 32.
19 Ibid, p. 441.

SANTRAUKA

PAGRINDINIAI BALTARUSIŲ TAPATYBĖS FORMAVIMOSI ETAPAI: ISTRORINĖ RETROSPEKTYVA


formavimuosi, tapatybės kriterijų apibūdinimui. Dažnai Baltarusijos terito-
rijoje įsitvirtindavo politiškai stipresnių ir kultūriškai įtakingesnių kaimynų
primestos valstybinio politinio gyvenimo formos, kurios buvo pritaikomos
prie vietinio gyvenimo sąlygų. Tačiau šis išorinis poveikis galutinai neištrynė
baltarusių savivokos.