

BELARUS: A BORDERLAND CIVILIZATION OR CIVILIZATION OUTSKIRTS? SOCIOLOGICAL REFLECTION

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The concept of civilizations plays an important role in the current scientific literature. Some authors select a particular number of civilizations. For other authors it is an open question how many civilizations exist: the answer depends on the criteria applied. The paper discusses the concept of the borderland civilization that relates to the countries (space) and people (cultural communities living in this space), situated “between” the two “key cultural groupings” (in Samuel Huntington’s sense) and inevitably combines some features from both of them. The author argues that, firstly, the population on today’s Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian border constitutes a particular borderland civilization where the local identity dominates over national or ethnic identities. Although other identities might be in use here, the population of this borderland region primarily considers itself as “local” where multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious communities have existed for centuries.

Secondly, the current Belarus itself can be viewed as a case of a borderland sub-civilization: throughout its history it has been constantly influenced by Latin (Western) and Byzantine (Eastern) civilizations that resulted in Belarusian cultural pluralism, high level of religious and ethnic tolerance, and local self-identification of the population. Therefore, there is no “choice” for Belarus to belong to one “pure” civilization: it is destined to exist in the borderland. From this approach, current Belarus is not “civilization outskirts”: it is a sub-civilization with all the attributes such as culture, values, ideas of history, and supra-national socio-cultural community of people.

Keywords: Belarus, borderland civilization, civilization outskirts, national identity.

DOI: 10.3846/2029-0187.2009.1.64-81

Introduction

The goal of this paper is to analyze the concept of the borderland civilization as a special type of a cultural community living in a territorial space and united by common cultural values, common myths of their history and meanings of life (Липкин 2008: 113). This view on civilization differs from Huntington’s view, according to which civilization is “the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity”, where the cultural lines strongly divide the eight major civilizations (Хантингтон 1994: 34). Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian borderland civilization locates

“in between” the Latin (Catholic) and Eastern (Orthodox) civilizations and combines some of their features in a tolerant way. From the perspective of Huntington’s concept, a borderland civilization contains some contradictory features: several languages, cultures and religions. However, in the case of the discussed concept of a borderland civilization, these values do not confront each other; cultural pluralism prevails among the people who populate the territory of a borderland.

There are many borderland civilizations in the world that have emerged on the edge of the “key civilizations” that encounter each other in the same space. Thus, a borderland civilization can emerge as a result of an assimilation of some features of the dominant “foreign” culture by the “local” culture (the case of Northern American culture, influencing Mexican culture and resulting in a new borderland civilization in Latin America). In many other cases it is a voluntary acceptance of some features from both sides of those ethnic communities (or other big social-cultural groups) living on the “frontiers” of two bigger civilizations, that are destined to act under some historical conditions (this is the case of Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian civilization). The formation of such “borderland cultural localities” can take place through several forced processes of assimilation of foreign culture (primarily, its religion) under the pressure of military actions, wars, historical events (influence of the Ottoman Empire on the Balkans), etc. Historically speaking, these forms can differ, but – under the current conditions of globalization – all forms of the construction of borderland cultures take place as a complexity (Ганчев 2007: 5). In most cases, the territorial borders of contemporary states do not coincide with the borders of their civilizations (Кузьмин 2008); therefore the population identifies itself as a cultural community (*versus* national or ethnic) and share some common vital values and meanings.

I would like to discuss to what extent the current Belarus can be viewed as a borderland civilization, and whether this concept can be applicable to Belarus throughout its long history or only for a particular period of time.

The major object of research is Belarus as a model of the borderland civilization and, at the same time, a part of a broader Eastern European borderland civilization: Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian one. From this point of view we can name the former a sub-civilization and the latter – civilization; however, this difference is quantitative rather than qualitative, in Arkady Lipkin’s terms (Липкин 2008: 113). We assume that this concept can be a potentially useful theoretical frame for a better understanding of contradictory nature of current Belarusian culture and Belarusian nation. It does not mean that other approaches and concepts are not applicable to Belarus: if they provide a better knowledge of social, cultural and political development of Belarus, they are legitimate as well.

Our approach is not directly related to the sociology of borderland and/or limology developed by some Belarusian and Polish scholars (e.g. Andrzej Sadowski 1995, Tadeusz Popławski 1996; Mikalai Biaspamiatnych (Беспамятных 2008)); rather, it belongs to the inter-disciplinary field related to social theory, social geography, regional and cultural studies. This approach takes into account civilization borders, but not in Huntington’s meaning of this concept (Хантингтон 1994); within our approach

a borderland civilization unites some “local” ethnicities and smaller cultural communities (Barth 1996); it does not relate to the state borders (Wilson, Donnan 1998); however, it allows to discuss ethno-social, ethno-cultural and nation demarcation lines within the “new frontiers” (Kowalska 2007), as well as “feeling of distance” within a particular social space (Бурдые 2005).

The two methods mainly used in this paper are: (1) cultural historical analysis: to describe the history of Belarus that was always full of contradictions and turns “from East to West” and *vice versa*; these shifts and different influences contributed to the construction of the borderland socio-cultural nature of Belarus, and (2) sociological survey: the survey data illustrate some theoretical statements and ideas (the author took the available representative data collected by other scholars; this is a secondary source of information; however, as the selected surveys are representative and trustful, we believe, that these empirical data will be substantially supportive for our theoretical analysis making it functional).

The critical approach to the concepts of Belarusian nation constructed by the current Belarusian ideologists is used. I will follow the concept partly elaborated by those Belarusian scholars, especially Adam Maldis who argues that Belarusians constitute a borderland nation conceived as a cultural and/or civil community.

The analysis of a specific nature of Belarusians has been done by many authors that represent the official social science and political practice in Belarus (Eugeny Babosov, Olga Abramova, Vsevolod Yantchevski), the pollsters (Andrey Vardamatsky, Oleg Manaev), the nationalist “counter-elite” (Vital Silitski, Stanislav Shushkievich) and the nationalist-oriented scholars (Valyantsin Akudovich, Igar Babkou, Irina Bugrova). Overall, the paper follows the concept of Belarus as a borderland civilization partly supported by Polish sociologist Włodzimierz Pawluczuk (Pawluczuk 2007) and Belarusian philosopher Valery Yevarouski (2007), and the concept of Belarusian civilization developed by Maldis (Мальдис 2006; Мальдзіс 2003).

The paper combines the theoretical frame to analyze the sociological data with the critical approach to the concepts of Belarusian nation-state and Belarusian identity that dominates among the current nationalist “counter-elite”.

The concept of a borderland civilization

According to the common scientific view, civilizations are among the major historical actors that currently are more important than nation-states. They are born, develop, fight each other and die. This idea was clearly elaborated by many authors, among them Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Huntington. If we take for granted the statement that all civilizations differ greatly by their history, languages, culture, traditions and, especially, religion, then we have to accept the inevitable “clash of civilizations” (Хантингтон 1994: 35). From Huntington’s point of view, religion is the most important distinguishing characteristics of particular civilizations. Huntington distinguished Western European (Catholic or Protestant) and Eastern European (Orthodox-Slavic) civilizations that differ in other aspects as well. Huntington’s con-

cept is the last macro-social concept of the universalistic kind. However, other than cultural approaches to the classification of civilizations exist as well. For example, in the 20th century the global world was politically divided into the so-called “three worlds” – first (capitalist), second (socialist) and third (developing). To some extent, we may consider these worlds as types of civilizations. Some Russian authors used this term when they contrasted the so-called “soviet” (or “socialist”) and the capitalist (Western) civilizations (Шахназаров 1998). In order to show the differences between these two civilizations and reflect their complexity, the whole set of criteria was used, including the political one.

For the purpose of this paper we use Huntington’s cultural approach as a starting point for the further analysis, taking into account that his definition of a civilization (as a “highest cultural grouping of people”) is more a metaphor than a strong social concept. However, Huntington’s approach allows us to view the European Union (EU) as a kind of civilization community of people contrasting, for example, with the American civilization (Липкин 2004: 310). The last enlargement of the EU that converted several post-communist Orthodox countries to the EU members, as well as the inclusion of some relatively poor states that fitted only the political criteria of the EU (such as Romania), have reshaped the previous concepts and views on the “core civilizations”. Indeed, if we take for granted that a special European civilization that unites the EU members exists, then immediately a question arises whether Slavic-Orthodox countries (Bulgaria and Romania) are effectively a part of this civilization or not. If there are two different civilizations represented in contemporary Europe, Western and Orthodox-Slavic, we have to agree that both civilizations are represented in the EU (and therefore that Orthodox countries can fit the EU criteria as well as Catholic or Protestant countries). This fact (acceptance of some Orthodox countries to the western club called the “EU”) contradicts the Huntington’s statement about religion as a major cultural criterion of civilization (Хантингтон 1994: 34).

Additionally, another question arises: is the European civilization equal to the EU? Some politicians (including those in Belarus) say that the concept of “Europe” is not geographical, it is a political construction, so the USA and Australia can also be viewed as parts of the European civilization because they accept the so called “European values” (Беларусь ... 2007). From this view, as long as Belarus and Ukraine are not the EU members, they are not a part of Europe. At the same time, in case Turkey was accepted to the EU, it would immediately become a part of Europe, regardless of the dominant religion and geography (not even to mention the economic criteria).

The false nature of Huntington’s concept of civilization is also backed by the sociological data. According to some research, made by the EU countries on the issue of self-identification of the population as “European” (or, precisely, “belonging to the EU”), people in both old and new EU member-states gave more or less similar answers. They can feel to be European or reject this identity regardless of a particular country of citizenship. In some countries more people accept European identity (like in Italy), while in other countries more people identify themselves *via* their national

identity (like in France). This EU research showed that the more educated and mobile a person is, the more positive she/he is about European identity in both old and new member-states (National and European Identities Are Compatible 2004). Hence, even the new member-states can fit the criteria of European identity, and *vice versa*: the old European countries can not satisfy them.

The European identity is one of the core European values that also include liberty, human rights, solidarity, social justice, civil society and personal responsibility (Grant 2007: 1). It is absolutely clear that not only EU countries can share these values. As journalist Charles Grant explained, some EU countries are stronger supporters of these values, while some other countries are not. Additionally, some non-EU countries can stick to the same values – at least in part. Actually, certain European values (such as ecological balance or gender equality) can be practically implemented only if the whole global community would support them. Methodologically, the European values are ideal models to follow. Practically speaking, even within the EU some countries are far ahead than others in the implementation of these values. If we apply this conclusion to our topic, it will mean that the European civilization as a new cultural community is in the state of construction and reconstruction. Current Europe is a building site for the future Europe that can be safer and socially more responsible than now. That is why the exclusion of some countries from the process of European building is not productive: it goes against the very spirit of European values. The whole idea of “Europe as a common home” is not bound up with the EU and therefore with any particular civilization: it presumes that all the countries in Europe and even beyond its geographical borders would feel inner solidarity to each other and mutual responsibility for sustainable development and stability in the world, and act accordingly.

If we take the concept of European civilization as a metaphor rather than a strong scholar definition, then within the European civilization we may distinguish Western-European and Eastern-European patterns. These two are not based on the religion: they combine many criteria, including the development of civil society and democracy, market economy and social responsibility; however, all these criteria can be used only within a particular historical context. Thus, the same country may belong to the Western-European civilization during a particular historical period of time and to the Eastern-European during the other period (like Hungary).

However, there are some countries that are considered as laying “between” these two civilizations because they have always partly belonged to both. This is not because of geography: such situation has been constructed historically. Therefore, from our view, not only Belarus but also Lithuania and Poland (at least its eastern territory) belong to the Eastern European borderland civilization. What is typical for a borderland from the cultural approach?

Firstly, such countries and nations combine several features from both (“opposite”) cultures. Thus, Belarus has several religious denominations as its “native”: Orthodox, Roman-Catholic and Greek-Catholic (Uniats), to name some. Currently people can freely choose their religion (without the state involvement). In the past the local population here also differed in their beliefs, even when the authorities supported one

Church and did not support others. As for Lithuania, currently it is mostly a Catholic country; however, only two centuries ago Uniats were popular there as well as in Belarus, while during the period of Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) more people belonged to the Orthodox Church. Secondly, people of the Eastern European borderland civilization are generally tolerant to many different religions, cultures and languages. According to some estimation, in the period of GDL there were seven functional languages in this region (among them five were regional), five religious confessions, and several ethnic groups whose identities did not coincide with the linguistic and religious borders being regional by nature (Гісторыя ... 2008: 36–37). The pluralistic social and cultural environment determined the inter-cultural and inter-ethnic tolerance (or conformism) as the necessary condition for a peaceful life in the same geographical space. These features were typical for the population of GDL – common motherland of current Belarusians, Lithuanians, as well as partly Poles and Ukrainians. So, thirdly, the common feature of this regional community was cultural pluralism. The cultural pluralism derived from the multi-ethnic nature of the GDL population and became a feature of this Eastern European borderland civilization.

Last but not least feature was a prevailing local identity of the population: local (“people from here”) identity was common for all people of this region because multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious communities have existed for centuries (Гісторыя ... 2008: 81). This type of identity dominates over national or ethnic identities among the local population until now (Holm-Hansen 2000: 95). Although other identities might be in use as well, the population of the borderland region primarily considers itself as “local”. According to some data, these features are still real among the population of the Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian borderland – centuries after the destruction of GDL! This fact proves that borders of civilization can differ from the borders of a state or the territory of a nation, so that nation and civilization can coincide as well as differ from each other.

The current European borderland countries clearly demonstrate that the so-called “civilization divisions” are contextual: they have to be explained and understood within a particular historical framework. Because the nations of the borderland civilizations have some contradictory features derived from their past, the scholars sometimes view such nations as representatives of “civilization outskirts”. This concept makes sense: the nations living on the civilization outskirts can be considered as borderland nations of the borderland civilizations. However, the very term “outskirts” is ideologically colored: it sounds like “periphery” while in reality the people living in the so-called outskirts were not necessary “peripheral people”. They often developed their unique culture and languages. We agree that the concept of “periphery” is a construction based on the ideological criteria of values (Popławski 1996: 44).

That is why the concept of borderland civilization fits the objective analysis more than the concept of civilization outskirts: it has no ideological aspect and therefore does not *exclude* some nations/countries. This concept simply means that nations living on the borderland territories are not typical in comparison of the “pure patterns” of civilizations selected by the Western authors, i.e. the “dominant civilizations” (like

Western, Orthodox, or Muslim). For example, Polish nation cannot be considered as “typical pattern” of a nation that belongs to the Western civilization even after the inclusion of Poland into the EU. The reasons are not economical or political (Poland met the threshold criteria). The major reasons are cultural and historical, i.e. contextual: they are connected with Polish history. The Polish language contains a lot of words that are common with Belarusian and Ukrainian: they are Slavic. Polish culture shares similarities with neighbouring cultures, especially folklore. Therefore, if civilizations are measured by their culture, Poland has to be measured in the same way as Belarus or Lithuania, or Ukraine. People living here have been mixed for centuries. Unlike political leaders or regimes, cultures cannot be changed within a few years, or even decades.

Therefore we may assume that Polish civilization also belongs to the Eastern European borderland civilization (however, from the other side of this border in comparison with Belarus). However, as the concept of borderland civilization is a methodological instrument, or an ideal type, current Polish scholars and the Polish nation itself has the right to decide whether their country and their nation belongs to this particular borderland civilization, or not. This decision is not a totally voluntary choice, of course: under certain conditions each borderland nation may decide to identify itself as not a borderland, but Western or Eastern – depending on the political (and sometimes economical) conditions that would favor such a rational choice (that probably happened with current Poland). Anyway, as Ambassador of Poland to Belarus Henryk Litwin explained in his interview, “Poles share common history and have common cultural roots with Belarusians, as well as with Ukrainians and Lithuanians” (Литвин 2008: 8). This statement can be viewed as an acknowledgement that the above-mentioned nations have much in common and – therefore – can be viewed (at least in the past) as nations belonging to the Eastern European borderland civilization.

The acknowledgement of the borderland nature of a country is a political issue where political interests play a more important role than culture and history of a nation. Belarus is a good example of such political game. On the one hand, the current political regime has some obligations and commitments to Russian political power; on the other, for some years it has been politically isolated in Europe and “punished” for non-democratic actions (according to the EU criteria). Therefore, to be “pro-Russian” (or at least to call itself “pro-Russian”) has become politically profitable for Belarusian powerful structures, while there were no grounds to identify themselves as “pro-Western”. Being politically and especially economically highly dependent on Russia, Belarusian system always has to take into account the “rules of the game” and follow them having in mind every small change of political environment – regional and global. When the EU expresses a sign of interest to dialogue with the Belarusian authorities, this system was also ready to discuss its advantages and disadvantages (Оргиш 2008: 3).

An additional example: since the time of the political changes of “Orange revolution”, the ruling elite in Ukraine has been showing its closeness to the EU, expressing

its interest to join North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and share European values. However, for the simple economic and other pragmatic reasons, Ukraine is still a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). With one president in the office or another, the whole country could not change its nature overnight: it is still a Slavic, (mainly) Orthodox and post-Soviet nation. This duality of power reflects the borderland position of Ukrainian civilization and its dual interests: it cannot belong only to the West, as it is also a cultural part of the East.

The nations of a borderland civilization always have to share some important common features – historical, cultural, and mental (probably, similarity is not apparent in each case, but countries must demonstrate some similar trends). If we compare Russians (the dominant nation of the Orthodox civilization) with Belarusians or Ukrainians, the first noticeable difference is the Russian passionarity (*“passionarnost”*) – a vital energy, an ability to make extra efforts to achieve some goals that were important for the process of ethno-genesis. This concept of passionarity was developed by Russian scholar Leo Gumilev (Гумилев 1989). Both Belarusians and Ukrainians are tied to their lands more than Russians; they are less mobile, and more “home-oriented” rather than “going beyond the borders – oriented”. Therefore, as some scholars admit, they have not demonstrated passionarity throughout their history (Ганчев 2007: 10). Probably, Americans are the nation with the highest degree of passionarity within the period of modernity: they are always ready to change the society, to compete with others and conquer the world far beyond the borders of the USA. The core feature of an American nation was explained by a famous political scholar Martin Lipset as “an exceptionist nation” (Lipset 1996): Americans always feel they are in the centre of the world and have to distribute their own values to the rest of the globe. They take it as their “mission”.

In the ancient times Greeks had a passionarity; otherwise, they would have never traveled so far and learn the *oikumene*. They combined enthusiasm with the readiness for a high risk while the typical borderland nations stayed calm and stable trying to adapt to a situation. The latter are more tolerant to other cultures because they always live on the edge of cultures and have to adjust themselves to “others”. Belarusians demonstrate a model of such tolerance to their neighbours (e.g. Jews, Tatars). However, for the same historical reasons, under different circumstances, the borderland nations can be more rigorous: this is the case with Catholic Poles and Lithuanians (they are more demanding to themselves regarding their religion and traditions while being less demanding to foreigners and “others” in general).

If we ignore the existence of the borderland civilizations, then we have to place all of them into some “pure” civilization frameworks (Western, Muslim etc.). By doing so, scholars would play a role of the famous mythological figure Procrustes who placed all individuals on the same bed to measure and – when they did not fit the bed – cut them either from one side or another.

The selected approach to a borderland civilization does not coincide with the borderland studies approach, according to which borderland people feel as if they belonged to the outskirts and constructed a “conflict zone”. As far as I am concerned,

borderland people can live within the same nation-state (not necessarily in two countries near their state borders). A borderland civilization differs from a borderland region as it is described in some borderland studies. Thus, Odilia Martinez selected such features of borderland population as their peripheral culture, sense of “being different”, and increased level of conflicts. These people allegedly feel differently from their fellows living in the centre of the country (Martinez 1994: 304). In this research on the U.S.-Mexican border the object was not a “borderland civilization”, but rather a zone “near the border” of two quite different states; a “borderland region”, but not a “borderland civilization”. Under such context the borderland space most probably generates conflicts and makes people feel “being different”. However, in the case of a borderland civilization we assume that a whole country (or countries) exists on the edge of different “core civilizations” (instead of small regions near the state borders). For this reason our approach differs from the borderland studies as described by Биспамятных (Биспамятных 2008): this scholar also discusses regions near the border and not a whole country that itself is a symbolic “border of civilizations”.

It would be a topic of additional research to define all characteristics of a borderland civilization. For the purpose of this paper we named its most important characteristics. Therefore, on the basis of the analysis of a borderland civilization as an ideal type, or methodological instrument, now we can move to Belarus as a representative of such civilization.

Belarus as a borderland civilization

The key elements of a civilization include its culture, history, the spiritual core as well as a spatial location that distinguishes one civilization from others (Липкин 2004). Each civilization has to construct its clear self-identity. In the case of Belarusian civilization, it means that the population of Belarus has to distinguish itself from other neighbouring civilizations and feel its own specificity – mental, cultural, religious or any other.

In case of analysis of a borderland civilization that coincides with one state we use the term “sub-civilization” to show the quantitative differences between a borderland civilization that embraces several countries and nations, on the one hand, and its part represented by one country and one nation, on the other. That is why we name Belarus a borderland sub-civilization as a part of the Eastern European borderland civilization.

Generally speaking, a civilization corresponds to a cultural community of a higher level than a nation united around some core values and goals. Thus, Eastern European civilization is connected with a broad community of people that share the values of tolerance, plurality and multi-culturalism. Current European civilization relates to the population of the EU countries that generally share values of human rights, democracy, legal equality, mutual responsibility and the like. In case of Belarusian sub-civilization the situation is a bit different: it corresponds to the

Belarusian nation viewed as a civil nation that consists of several cultural groups of people regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, native language and religion. We can talk about the Belarusian sub-civilization to the same extent as we can talk about the civil nature of current citizens of Belarus consolidated into a civil nation. Although such a civil nation is currently more a theoretical model than an empirical phenomenon, the processes of the development of Belarusian nation and Belarusian civilization currently coincide. Therefore, we can talk about Belarusian nation as a national community and a cultural or civilization community as well. In what follows we will discuss the national identity of Belarusians within the social-political discourses represented by different Belarusian intellectual elite.

The national identity is a modern constructed phenomenon; its perception among the others depends on the prevailing images. Special efforts are needed to build a positive image of a nation and mobilize the masses to accept this image as their own self-identity.

The most important issue is the following: who (which agent) is responsible for the construction of such positive image of Belarusian nation? This agent (or social actor) must construct the image of Belarusian nation that should be useful for any national movements (in case of the struggle for national liberation) or consolidate and strengthen the nation (in case of its independent development in the global world).

According to the concept of British scholar of nationalism John Breuilly, the well-educated national elites (intellectuals) are primarily responsible for the construction of the inspiring ideas that will consolidate the masses (Breuilly 2001: 49). In our case, a positive self-image is necessary for Belarusians both to feel as independent (civil) nation and to feel as a unique Belarusian civilization (i.e. a huge cultural community).

The social sciences and Belarusian public represent different approaches to the issue of who is playing the role of the major actor responsible for the construction of Belarusian identity. Accordingly, different elites interpret the results of the process of the nation-construction in a different way.

First, the nationalist-oriented authors (politicians and scholars) always assume that Belarusian national consciousness has been much less developed in comparison to the neighbouring nations (Акудович 1999: 90). Therefore, as a result, as Irina Bugrova stated, the process of construction of Belarusian nation is still under way (Беларусь ... 2007). These authors describe the process of the construction of Belarusian nation primarily in “negative terms” (Silitki’s expression): thus, Bugrova described the differences between Belarusians and other nations by simply saying: “We do not name ourselves Europeans...” Of course, this answer is acceptable, but it is only one aspect of the problem; the second aspect demands positive definitions: who are we? What are our positive characteristics? This aspect is almost absent from the papers of nationalist-oriented elite. In general, they conclude that there is still no Belarusian nation: in the best-case scenario it will be constructed in the future; in the worst case – never.

It seems that the major reason why the nationalist elite does not recognize the existence of Belarusian nation and does not accept the fact of its construction since – at least – the early 20th century (and then its reconstruction in the soviet period – late mid-20th century) is the fear to lose some symbolic power over the masses. As Silitski clearly writes, “any form of self-definition as the state or nation (or rejection of such self-definition) necessarily leads to the redistribution of power, status, and influence among the political, social and intellectual actors” (Силицкий 2007). Thereafter Silitski openly explains, that it is the very particular national group of intellectuals that is capable of constructing the attractive image of Belarusian national identity: this group can make a civilization self-definition for the country that will be awarded with the recognition of “a real national elite” (Силицкий 2007).

Of course, the nationalist-oriented intellectuals would like to play this role. However, under the current political regime they cannot perform it – i.e. they do not want to participate in any national construction together with the regime – while the latter, as Babosov perfectly expresses, actively tries to build positive images of Belarusians and Belarusian nation-state (Беларусь ... 2007).

If the nationalist-oriented elite recognized the current Belarusian state as a “real Belarusian independent nation-state”, then it would have to admit that the role of a “real national elite” had been taken by the group of the official ideologists. It is this official group of intellectual elite that positively defines Belarusian nation as a “reality”, and not a “dream”. Actually, Silitski worries exactly about this clear conclusion when he comments the positive statements about Belarusian nation made by the official ideologists (Babosov and Yantchevski).

The second elite group that is close to the current political system works only in the positive. These official elite have constructed an image of Belarusian nation that has both “we” – aspect (Slavs, Christians, post-Soviet, Easterners) and “they” – aspect (not Westerners, not Americans, and sometimes even not Europeans).

If we compare the role of these two groups of intellectuals (the nationalist-oriented and the official, state-oriented), it is necessary to admit that the first group views itself only in negative terms: they are “nobody nowhere” (Акудович 1999: 89). On the contrary, the group of official ideologists has constructed a positive image of Belarusian nation that exists on the real post-Soviet space. Supporters of the latter regard themselves as a part of this nation.

It is interesting to add, that the official ideologists are not categorical when defining the civilization to which Belarus would belong. For example, Babosov admitted, that Belarus would join the EU in case other neighbouring post-soviet nations (like Russia and Ukraine) would do it first (Беларусь ... 2007). It means that the official ideologists agree that current Belarus does not constitute “a part of Russian civilization”; on the contrary, they even consider Russia itself as “a borderland” that might change its core principles and join the EU: otherwise (if Russia is a “pure civilization”) it cannot move quickly from one type of civilization to another type: only the borderland civilizations can do that.

This uncertainty regarding the place of Belarus within the current “borders of civilizations” (primarily, the political borders, as we have shown earlier) is not an argument to support the statement that Belarus is a “homeless nation” in Europe (Екадумов 1998). There is no country with the same “home” forever in its long history. Under the extremely complex historical conditions of the last two centuries Belarus has changed its “home” several times, but, however, it has kept its major characteristics: mental (good-nature, kindness), behavioral (tolerance, diligence, peacefulness). Political regimes also influenced this nature: many authors mentioned conformism of Belarusians and their high level of adaptation to any circumstances. These features helped people survive in the previous centuries. Probably, they will also help survive the hardships under any future political regime on the borderland.

The above-mentioned features of Belarusian nation are well-known among the population; some of them are probably overestimated, but in any case they are the part of an image of a Belarusian. They are known from the folklore as well as from the public opinion polls in Belarus and Russia. Thus, Russian sociologist Zinaida Sikevich analyzes sociological data that describe the modal images of three Slavic nations – Russian, Ukrainians and Belarusians. According to these data (Сикевич 2007: 26), Belarusians have only positive characteristics in their modal images constructed by all three nations. Among their major characteristics she named kindness, openness and tolerance. The other two nations have some negative features – both in their evaluations by others and self-evaluations.

From Silitski’s point of view, it does not make sense to pay attention to the polls: whatever the masses can say about their self-definition is not true, as “masses are manipulated” by the regime. To some extent, he is right. However, we cannot ignore public opinion polls because democracy also assumes public opinion – if not as a basis of decision-making, then at least as an important indicator of mass consciousness. Also, we cannot ignore the objectivity of Russian sociological data because there is no need for Russian media or Russian political regime to depict Belarusians in a positive way.

Let us analyze the data of the current Belarusian public opinion polls made by independent scholars. We can find the proof that Belarus is “neither East nor West” (i.e. the proof of its borderland nature). Thus, according to the data of Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS) representative national surveys, when being asked whether they would rather join the EU or Russian Federation, almost one third of Belarusians expressed the preference to join the EU, and slightly less than 50% – Russia (Национальные опросы 2008). Among those who participated in this survey, only 18% said they are “in opposition” to the current regime; more than two thirds of respondents said “no”. It means that at least a part of the population that is loyal to the regime also considers Belarus as a potential EU member-state. When being asked how they would vote in the referendum regarding the unification with Russia, almost equal number of respondents supported unification and rejected it (see Table 1).

Table 1. If today the referendum regarding the unification of Belarus and Russia would take place, how would you vote? (per cent)

Answers	06.2008	12.2008
Against the unification	42.2	38.8
For the unification	38.7	35.7
Would not take part in the voting	10.4	14.5
Do not know / No answer	8.7	11.0

These polls' data clearly prove the "borderland" situation – both in the real political space and in the mentality of Belarusians. However, this mixture is not a sign that Belarusians are still in the process of formation of their nation consciousness. This is a sign that the very national consciousness of this nation, Belarusians, reflects the dual conditions of a borderland civilization.

Belarus as a constructed civilization

It is worth discussing the concept of Belarusian civilization developed by Maldis, a famous scholar in the field of Belarusian Studies. According to his view, the Belarusian civilization has its origins in the 14th century when nations did not exist (Мальдзіс 2003). It means that Belarusian civilization has always been based on the cultural criteria rather than ethnic or national ones; it was always characterized by religious and ethnic plurality and tolerance. Some other Belarusian scholars support this view (Yevarouski 2007: 148).

Belarusian nation as a cultural community with its own "cultural code" was formed in the late 19th-early 20th century (Гісторыя ... 2008: 69). The major problem is that Belarusian elite did not support this concept and did not distribute it among the masses; sometimes the elites even betrayed the nation. That is why regardless of the fact that Belarusians have their unique culture, unique language, strong traditions, and a long history, according to Maldis, they still have complex of inferiority (Мальдзіс 2006). Maldis worries that, unfortunately, the Belarusian national elite supports this complex instead of helping the masses to overcome it and consider themselves as a nation. Maldis recommends Belarusian intellectuals to actively contribute to the process of enlightenment of the masses. Thus, he suggests making the names of Belarusian artists, politicians and writers to be well-known as the representatives of Belarusian nation (currently these names are known as Polish, Russian, or American). From Maldis' view, these people should become inseparable parts of Belarusian historical memory: any nation needs its own heroes. Unlike passionary nations, which have military commanders and kings as their major heroes, most of Belarusian heroes are peace-loving civilians: poets, painters, architects and priests. This is an additional criterion to distinguish the nature of Belarusian civilization as non-military and non-conflicted one.

Maldis developed a whole program how to find the "lost pages of history" and promote them among the masses. When a journalist asked Maldis whether Belarus

is a unique civilization, like, for example, Russia, he answered extremely positively. For many years Maldis has actively disseminated the achievements of Belarusian culture and history among the masses – first, in the Soviet Union, then in Belarus and the neighbouring countries. Actually, Maldis himself can be viewed as an outstanding proof that Belarusian civilization really exists. However, a theoretical concept of Belarusian civilization developed by Maldis (as well as other concepts: Belarusian nation, borderland civilization) must be practically recognized. Before the popular recognition of Belarusian civilization, this concept would exist as an “empty form” related to a virtual phenomenon. Until Belarusian nation itself (the majority of the population) recognizes the reality of Belarusian civilization as a special cultural community of pluralistic groups, the concept of Belarusian civilization would remain only a topic of elite’s scientific discussion. As long as Belarusians are not proud of being a borderland civilization with a long history, nobody in the world would help them to respect their history, culture and themselves. Currently, the historical memory of Belarusians does not keep many achievements and contributions of Belarusian people. For this reason, according to Maldis, Belarusian intellectuals must reconstitute the “lost events” into the history of this civilization, i.e. to increase the historical memory of Belarusians. This is the civilization mission of any national elite. As soon as this mission is fulfilled, there will be no more space for national complexes: Belarusians would become aware of their civilization.

The fulfillment of this task will probably demand some new historical books to be written, new movies to be made, as well as new songs, poems, paintings, etc. The goal is to revive and brighten up the historical knowledge among the masses: the higher the level of public interest the quicker the people would connect their history with their present-day life. The historical memory helps Belarusians to keep their past alive, involve the past into the present life, and learn some historical lessons from rethinking it. Belarusians have to be proud of their history as well as they are proud of their sport results at the Olympic Games or their contemporary pop stars (popular singers, showmen). The dominant mass culture keeps these figures on the top of mass interests, so that is why the scholars cannot ignore the mass culture as well as historical memory.

Some intellectuals would probably disagree with this project. However, Maldis has well argued his ideas providing them with popularity. Belarusians have indeed all the features of the borderland civilization. They only need to recognize it.

It is a cultural and historical paradox, perhaps, that some EU scholars have already recognized the existence of Belarusian civilization as an integral part of the Slavic and European world; these scholars also explained the dual character of this civilization (Ганчев 2007; Pawluczuk 2008). Unfortunately, some Belarusian intellectuals that often pretend to represent the nation on the EU level still argue against. Thus, according to Pawluczuk (2008: 50), the current major idea of Belarus should be “to unite the elements of two civilizations”, Western and Russian, within a single borderland geopolitical space. In the view of the Bulgarian Ambassador to Belarus, a historian and philosopher Petko Ganchev, Belarus represents a synthesis of Western-European and Eastern-European values and principles in political, cultural, economic and social life

that makes this country “the most European among former soviet republics” (Ганчев 2007: 15).

As for Belarusian scholars, Maldis is the major propagandist of the idea of Belarusian civilization among them. He described the features of Belarusian civilization that make it twofold: popular local identity (the so-called *tuteyshye*) versus developed civic or ethnic identity; bilingualism and polylingualism of the population versus single language; tolerance and religious pluralism versus religious fanaticism. According to Maldis, three borderland nations (Lithuanian, Polish and Belarusian) are close to each other because they belong to the same cultural space and have common history. He refers to the concept of borderlandness: a cultural space where people prefer to identify themselves as “local” rather than define themselves by ethnic belonging. Maldis also refers to the fact that people of borderland civilizations speak several local languages: they must know all of them to successfully communicate under different circumstances (in trade, in urban everyday life, in the country, etc.). These borderland civilizations are open to neighbours; their nations desire to live in peace and successfully communicate with each other. It is worth mentioning here some other authors that confirm the dominance of “local” identity (as typical for the borderland population) and “local” language that might be a mixture of several national languages being in use in the region. For example, Polish scholar Joanna Getka in her research of Russian-Belarusian borderland confirmed the existence of the “local language” that was usually identified as “ours”, “prosty” and “tuteyshy” (Гэтка 2004:10). This situation is similar to Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian borderland (in particular, to Grodno region) as described by Maldis (Мальдзіс 2003: 3).

The case of Belarus as a contemporary part of the Eastern European borderland civilization, on the one hand, and a smaller borderland sub-civilization within the current Belarusian nation constructed on the criteria of shared common values rather than ethno-national features, on the other, can be viewed as an example of the current social-cultural complexity and global-national entanglement (Therborn 2001: 476).

Conclusions

In our analysis we have been trying to show that borderland civilizations really exist. That is why social sciences need this concept to be well elaborated and used for research goals. Unlike the “classical” (“pure”) types of civilizations, borderland civilizations may contain contradictory features that coincide with each other quite peacefully. In the contemporary global world the number of borderland civilizations is growing: for example, the current U.S. president Barack Obama represents an African-American borderland civilization within a bigger American civilization where white men dominate. A black president with some Muslim roots as a political leader of the U.S., – a super-power of the globe and a leader of western civilization, – what can be more exciting? This fact clearly proves that socio-cultural groups living on the edge of big cultures construct their own world outlook, own culture and own civilizations.

Belarus is a part of the Eastern European borderland civilization that combines features of East and West, being close to both of them. At the same time Belarus can be

considered as a sub-civilization with its own cultural code. For many historical and political reasons, this Belarusian sub-civilization has not been well developed. Therefore, potentially, Belarus is a unique borderland sub-civilization with all necessary attributes. However, in order to affirm its right to exist as a reality, the idea of Belarusian sub-civilization has to become a part of the national idea, Belarusian historical memory and national consciousness. It is a task of the national elites to help the population recognize their history and their cultural heritage as a part of Eastern-European borderland civilization and at the same time as a smaller Belarusian sub-civilization with a unique cultural code. Perhaps, that will support the process of a new reconstruction of Belarusian nation in order to find its place in the globalized world.

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BALTARUSIJA – PARIBIO CIVILIZACIJA AR CIVILIZACIJOS PAKRAŠČIAI? SOCIOLOGINĖ REFLEKSIJA

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Santrauka

Civilizacijų samprata atlieka svarbų vaidmenį dabartinėje mokslinėje literatūroje. Vieni autoriai teigia esant tam tikrą civilizacijų skaičių. Kitiems autoriams lieka atviras klausimas – kiek yra civilizacijų. Atsakymas priklauso nuo taikomo kriterijaus. Straipsnyje apmąstoma paribio civilizacijos samprata, kuri yra susijusi tiek su šalimis (erdve), tiek su žmonėmis (kultūrinėmis bendruomenėmis, gyvenančiomis toje erdveje), išsikūrusiais tarp dviejų pagrindinių kultūrinių grupių (remiantis Samuelio Huntingtono požiūriu), kurios neišvengiamai derina abiejų bruožus. Straipsnio autorė įrodinėja, kad, pirma, nūdienė lenkų, lietuvių ir baltarusių paribio populiacija kuria ypatingą paribio civilizaciją, kurios sąlygomis vietinis tapatumas („mes čionykščiai“) dominuoja tautinio arba etninio tapatumų atžvilgiu. Nors čia gali koegzistuoti ir kiti tapatumai, tačiau ši paribio populiacija iš esmės save suvokia kaip „vietinę“, kurioje šimtmečiais egzistavo daugiaetninės, daugiakultūrės ir daugiareligės bendruomenės. Antra, pasak autorės, dabartinė Baltarusija gali būti vertinama kaip paribio subcivilizacijos atvejis. Jos istorijai daug įtakos turėjo lotyniškoji (Vakarų) ir bizantiškoji (Rytų) civilizacijos, o tai lėmė baltarusių kultūrinį pliuralizmą, didelę religinę ir etninę toleranciją bei vietinės populiacijos tapatumo formavimąsi. Todėl Baltarusija neturi alternatyvos priklausyti vienai „grynai“ civilizacijai – jai lemta egzistuoti paribyje. Iš šio požiūrio išplaukia, kad dabartinė Baltarusija nėra „civilizacijos pakraščiai“. Ji yra subcivilizacija su visomis jai būdingomis savybėmis, tokiomis kaip kultūra, vertybės, istorijos idėjos, ir viršnationaline sociokultūrine žmonių bendruomene.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Baltarusija, paribio civilizacija, civilizacijos pakraščiai, tautinis tapatumas.

Received 12 February 2009, accepted 30 March 2009