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“Mind must be painted uniformly”: Teaching History in Belarusian Schoolsⁱ

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On 8 August 2023, the Lithuanian edition of Delfi published an article reporting that the day before, in a night bar in Vilnius, a Belarusian molested Lithuanians, saying that “Vilnius belongs to Belarus” and “the entire eastern part of Lithuania belongs to Belarus”. Lithuanian historian Tomas Baranauskas explained the phrases as a pseudo-scientific theory that is popular in Belarus. Belarusian historians developed the so-called “theory of Litvinism”. According to this theory, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a Belarusian state, the real Litvins are Belarusians, and therefore Vilnius belongs to them. It claims that Lithuanians are Samogitians, and when the revival began, they allegedly stole the name “Lithuania” from the Belarusiansⁱⁱ.

The article on Delfi appeared at a time when the Lithuanian Presidential Service was calling for a halt to the issuance of visas and residence permits to Belarusians, as well as unifying the restrictions that apply to Russians and Belarusians. It follows from the article that this is not at all about the followers of the Lukashenka regime, but about those who are forced to leave Belarus.

It is impossible to assert that professional historians are behind this theory in Belarus. At the same time, the theory of Litvinism which was identified by Baranauskas (that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a Belarusian state and that real Litvins are Belarusians) still has some popularity among some history enthusiasts. However, for a large part of the population, the main translator of knowledge about the past, which determines our understanding of the present, is still school textbooksⁱⁱⁱ. Of course, those who are engaged or interested in the topic come to other sources of information, but for the great part of the population, it is this knowledge (or fragments thereof) that forms their picture of the world.

Let's try to see what and how they teach history lessons in Belarusian schools.

School education in the Republic of Belarus lasts 11 years. There are two separate courses: “the history of Belarus” and “world history”. History is taught in schools in grades 5-11. There is a concentric system of teaching the courses. Schoolchildren study history chronologically up to grade 9, and in grades 10-11, they return to it again at a qualitatively different level (here, the chronological approach is combined with a thematic approach).

The best pupils can participate in “Olympiads in History” (the first three places give the right to enter universities without exams), and every year they have a place in scientific conferences on history. On graduation, only students who are going into the humanitarian departments of universities have the Centralized History Test. Thus, it is generally not necessary to explain what, why and how something happened, you just need to memorize the correct answers. In the early 1990s, the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences proposed the “National Concept for the Study and Teaching of History”^{iv}. The main idea: “A feature of the historiography of Belarus is the long-term domination of two anti-Belarusian concepts – Great Poland and Great Russia, which ultimately led to the denial of the very existence of the Belarusian ethnic group, language and culture, the recognition of Belarus as part of Poland or Russia, and [viewing] Belarusians as offshoots of Polish or Russian ‘tribes’, respectively”. A modernized “Great Russia” concept, combined with the dogmas of Bolshevism, dominated Belarusian Soviet historiography in the 1930s through 1980s. The result of this situation was the degradation of historical memory, and with it the national self-awareness of the Belarusian people. In such conditions, the primary task of Belarusian historians – both in terms of research and in the development of history education in the republic – is the revival of the national concept of the history of Belarus^v.

In 1991, a new flag and coat of arms for an independent Belarus were approved. The design of new textbooks was in the national colors. These books were very poor quality, without any pictures, and they were prepared and published urgently. They also were sometimes very difficult to read and understand for pupils; they were written by scientists from the Academy of Science. But from these textbooks, we learned a completely new history – not the history of Russia and the USSR, but the history of Belarus, and the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were told through a Belarusian prism. The first capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was called Navagrudak, which is now a Belarusian city. Our European-ness was emphasized: our cities had the Magdeburg Law, the constitution was in effect with the Statutes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, we had a reformation, and so on – and Russia had none of this. At the same time, the civilizing mission of the “Belarusians” towards the “Lithuanians” (during the creation of the Grand Duchy) was also emphasized (they were still pagans, they did not have cities, the official language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was Belarusian, etc.). Naturally, all this

was simplified into understandable categories – for example, the language of the Grand Duchy became the Belarusian language, without any stipulation. For the first time, many historical figures were introduced, and naturally, many of them were presented as national Belarusian heroes. Russia was shown not as an eternal friend and elder brother, but as an eternal enemy.

It was a very important stage. There was a lot of national romanticism. After all, a serious study of most of these issues was yet to come. Of course, many of the formulations were later reviewed. But a whole generation of historians had grown up on with this concept as their foundation, and they later wrote new textbooks.

In 1995, Lukashenka returned to the use of slightly modified Soviet symbols. And textbooks no longer used the white-red-white national colors. The content also began to change. There have been four generations of textbooks since 1991. There is no need to compare all of them here.

In the early 2000s, Belarus attempted to implement a project dubbed the “Ideology of Belarusian statehood”, which essentially consisted of propaganda on the achievements of the authoritarian regime after 1994. Through school and university education (including history education), the state media constructed an image of Belarus as a prosperous, peaceful and united country^{vi}. A course titled the “Ideology of Belarusian Statehood” was introduced in all higher educational institutions as part of a political science curriculum^{vii}. There is a lot of material in this course about historically close ties with Russia, about the brotherhood of the Slavs, and about the Orthodox-Slavic civilization. It is emphasized that “Belarus never ethnoculturally belonged to Western Europe; it was formed as an ethnocultural community and country in the bosom of the Eastern Christian Orthodox civilization and in the Eurasian geopolitical space”^{viii}. Thus, the main message of the course and of textbooks was that Belarusians had belonged and still belong to the Slavic-Russian Orthodox civilization (which at the present stage is manifested in the form of the Union State with Russia), and trying to resist this is making a fatal mistake^{ix}.

The textbooks were rewritten based on the fact that Belarus and Russia are in an alliance. Terrible textbooks were written (the authors of these were Jakou Trashchanok – Lukashenka’s school teacher^x – and Jaugen Novik^{xi}). However, these books were soon

replaced, too^{xii}. At the same time, schools continued to use textbooks on the history of Belarus that were written on the basis of the national concept (except for 20th-century history).

The period of “liberalization”, or the so-called period of “soft Belarusization”, began after Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the events in eastern Ukraine in 2013–14. All textbooks, except for those used for grade 11, were written and published during this period (since 2016)^{xiii}. The narrative “since ancient times until 1917” is written on the basis of the ideas of the previous period (the so-called national concept), but in a more academic form (without the self-affirmation of comparisons with Lithuania). At the same time, they “cut out” the history of Belarus from its historical contexts – there is no understanding of the scale of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania or the Commonwealth, there is no “visibility” of the centers of these formations except as they relate to “Belarusian” issues. But here you can read that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was formed as a multinational state. East Slavic lands made up 90% of the territory, and 80% of its population were Slavs. On the one hand, contemporary Belarusian historians consider the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to be a Belarusian-Lithuanian state. On the other hand, the context of the “European-ness” of Belarus disappeared from new textbooks. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth period is presented in a very positive way, as an integral part of Belarusian history, and it gradually introduced historical figures such as Tadeusz Kościuszko into the Belarusian national pantheon^{xiv}.

The textbook for grade 9 is about the 19th–21st centuries^{xv}. The presentation of this material is very “traditional” – all material is structured in paragraphs as follows: political life (this includes, for example, the proclamation of the BSSR as the first form of statehood, the Belarusianization policy of the 1920s, etc.), then economic development (for example, examining the enterprises erected during the years of industrialization), followed by one section on Stalinist repressions (comprising less than a chapter), and then the development of culture (the eradication of illiteracy, the opening of universities, theaters, etc.). Thus, political repressions are wedged between information about victories and accomplishments, and they are reduced to a special case, a single episode, such as “at the same time, there were some negative aspects”. There is not even a mention of the essence of totalitarianism, nor a word about the Gulag.

In state ideology, the Soviet period is still presented as constructive for the development of Belarus. This results in censorship and a lack of developments in studies in this field. The textbooks are filled with an almost Soviet narrative, with a detailed description of the functions of trade unions or workers' and peasants' councils, and a retelling of the articles of the constitution of 1937 (which had no relevance for real life). In the textbook for the 9th grade, there are 8 chapters devoted to the Great Patriotic war (the official name for World War II), while there is one sentence about collectivization and one paragraph about repressions (and the figures are greatly underestimated). Euphemisms such as “command-administrative methods” and “cult of personality” are used for Stalinism and totalitarianism. World War II is still called the Great Patriotic War, which indicates a continuity with the Soviet approach to its study, as well as a conscious disregard of the fact that at the beginning of World War II, almost half of the territory of modern Belarus was part of Poland, and the war here started early. The presentation of the history of the war is built on two pillars: the heroism and the suffering of the Belarusian people. Nazis are still called fascists in the textbook. Lukashenka's period is shown as a period of struggle for the strengthening of sovereignty (and even integration with Russia is presented in that way). All changes in laws, including the constitution of 1994, are justified by the fact that Lukashenka asked the people and they strongly supported him. The history of minorities and other groups within and outside Belarus has gradually been removed from this historical narrative.

Special courses titled “Pride for Belarus”^{xvi} and “The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people (in the context of World War II)”^{xvii} are being introduced in schools.

The Russian “Historical Memory Society” (the head of which is Alexander Dyukov) has appeared in the arena. This society is the conductor of Russia's official policy on history. Cooperation agreements were signed with the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences, with the Belarusian National Archive, and the “Znanie Society” (translated as “Knowledge”, it is a holdover of Soviet times). Work is underway to undermine the national narrative and form a common narrative with Russia, and materials for the substantiation of the concept of the “genocide of the Belarusian people during World War II” are being prepared^{xviii}. Since 2010, the Belarusian National Archives has been compiling a database of burned Belarusian villages. This archiving project in the last year acquired a political

dimension, as it is being used as a justification for the concept of the genocide of the Belarusian people.

In August 2019, the journal of the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus, *Belarusian Thought*, (*Belaruskaja Dumka*) published an article “On historical politics” – in fact, this was a policy document. The authors of the article are the “generals” of science management and the guardians of its “purity” (including professional historians Aliaksandar Kavalenia and Viachaslau Danilovich, respectively the former and current heads of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Belarus, as well as two representatives of power structures, the Deputy State Secretary of the Security Council of the Republic of Belarus Major General Uladzimir Archakau and Head of the Information and Analytical Department of the State Secretariat of the Security Council of the Republic of Belarus Aliaksei Ban’kouski)^{xix}.

The article declared that it is impossible to talk about the Soviet past. The article begins with a reference to the National Security Concept of the Republic of Belarus, where it is emphasized that attempts at a biased revision of history are classified as the main potential and actual threats to national security. Furthermore, it said that it is unacceptable to belittle the role of the BSSR as the real form of the Belarusian state, to cover up the achievements of Belarus in the Soviet period, to highlight shortcomings in order to create a negative image of the Soviet past, to artificially inflate the theme of the tragedy of the political repressions of the 1920s-1930s in order to generally denigrate the Soviet past of Belarus, etc. “Memory wars” are labeled as absolutely unacceptable.

I should say that at that time, we Belarusian historians did not attach much importance to this fact- it seemed to confirm the position that existed in the official science narrative. Since the late 1990s, the science of history in Belarus existed in two dimensions: official and unofficial. What could not be done within the framework of official science could always be done outside of it. Official science had institutional support and funding, while unofficial science existed in conditions of self-survival, which, of course, affected its level. Each of these “sciences” had its own journals and its own conferences. Ideas circulated quite freely through these conditional barriers. However, this did not concern the history of the 20th century at all. For example, the problem of Stalinism and what was called the “denigration

of Soviet reality” has long been impossible within the framework of official science. For example, for my publications, I was fired from the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences in 2012. Eventually, not many people dealt with this period. It should be noted that I was not the first historian and not the last one who was fired because of his or her works. For example, at Grodno University, about 10 people were fired for their book on the history of Grodno, and at the Institute of History there were periodic dismissals.

In the unofficial field there were organizations such as the Society of Belarusian Schools, which, through donations and foreign grant support formed a network of teachers, conducted methodological seminars, etc. They united a community of teachers and influenced their work, and they created a history workshop (this was a Belarusian-German project promoted by the Dortmund International Educational Center, the Minsk International Educational Center named after J. Rau, and the Union of Belarusian Jewish Public Associations and Communities). Among the tasks of the workshop is the study of the history of the occupation and the study of military history. But above all, the workshop works with the theme of the Holocaust. The staff of the workshop has done a lot to educate teachers on how to work with some topics related to World War II. They persuaded the Ministry of Education to approve a manual for schools to help them work with the themes of the Holocaust, as this concept is practically absent in textbooks. However, the work of these structures in Belarus today is practically impossible. Following the 2020 mass protests in Belarus and the attempts by the political regime of Aliaksandar Lukashenka to suppress them, a new situation in the field of memory culture and memory politics has emerged^{xx}. Some historians who took part in the protest movement have been dismissed from academic and educational institutions, while censorship and propaganda relying on certain interpretations of the past have increased significantly. The political instrumentalization of history and manipulation using the theme of World War II has reached a maximum. One example of this is the construction of a link between protesting opponents of the regime and the legacy of World War II collaboration, as well as the political promotion of the discourse of a “genocide of the Belarusian people” carried out during World War II and planned by the “collective West” today.

A textbook for 11th grade was published in 2021 (covering the late-18th century to the 21st century)^{xxi}. Here, we can see the response to the 2020 protests. In this textbook, you can see

that the 9 August 2020 election ended with 80.1% support for Aliaksandar Lukashenka. The main symbol of the protesters in 2020 was the white-red-white flag (this was a symbol of the BPR in 1918, the Belarusian People Front in 1990-1991, and state symbol in 1991-95). The main thesis of the propaganda was a comparison of the 2020 protesters with the collaborators of the Nazi regime during World War II. In the new textbook an insert appeared that indicated that the white-red-white flag belonged to a brand of policemen and collaborators with Nazis and that “Жыве Беларусь” (“Long live Belarus”) is an analogue of the greeting “Heil Hitler”.

It is interesting to note that there is no mention of the first leader of an independent Belarus Stanislau Shushkevich, there is no mention of Nobel prize winner Sviatlana Aleksievich, and there are no other contemporary Belarusian writers – since they were all on the wrong side of the confrontation in 2020. The founder and the head of CheKa (the state security police) Dzerzhinsky is honored with the most prominent picture. It must be understood that here he is presented as the most outstanding native person of our land. There are not many pictures in the book, but Lukashenka has three photos. In general, this is not a history of the people, as there are almost none of them there. This is the history of the state, or rather its apparatus and its personal incarnation at the highest position.

About Stalin’s repressions, the textbook says that: “The unfolding struggle against the opponents of the political course of the Communist Party and the Soviet state is known in historiography as “political repressions”. Among the repressed were those who carried out specific actions directed against the existing system: they conducted counter-revolutionary agitation, engaged in sabotage on collective farms and enterprises, and participated in anti-Soviet and insurgent organizations”. This justified not only the repressions of the Stalinist period, but also those going on in Belarus now. This is followed by figures of the repressed and the rehabilitated – the difference between these is 65,000 people, who, according to the above definition, are clearly enemies of the state.

Collectivization and dispossession are falsely described. Of course, there is nothing about the Gulag, but there are a lot of details about prisons in Western Belarus (which was a part of Poland). Why this is the case is obvious. Firstly, Poland is among the country’s main enemies today, and secondly, it is necessary to accustom everyone to a new holiday –

National Unity Day on 17 September. This holiday was introduced in 2021 in memory of the day when the Red Army entered Poland according to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Western Belarus was included in the BSSR, and in textbooks this is called the reunification of the Belarusian people. It then reproduced the completely Soviet narrative that under the rule of Poland, the Belarusians suffered, and they awaited being annexed into the BSSR. And again, the Soviet period is shown as constructive for national and cultural development. The collapse of the USSR is called the largest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century.

According to the authors, the following question should develop the analytical skills of schoolchildren: “Formulate the reasons that necessitate the economic integration of the Republic of Belarus with the Russian Federation”. The next exercise is probably not so much about analysis as about the creative abilities of the pupils: “Make a political portrait of the first president of the Republic of Belarus, A. R. Lukashenka”. The language used in this book is very impressive – it is the language of our Soviet childhood, although the authors of the textbook are quite young people.

Graduates take tests on the basis of these textbooks, which means they must definitely get the right answer. In any case, teaching any “other” history in Belarus today is dangerous. A teacher from Smorgon, Andrey Piatrousky, was sentenced to 1.5 years in prison for showing a video clip about the constitution and for telling the story of the white-red-white flag. One of his pupils reported him. All private schools have been closed (as strongholds of the revolution). Around 200 historians have been fired.

At the same time, schools emphasize “patriotic education” – this involved the creation of military-patriotic clubs as military units for schoolchildren, and 146 military-patriotic camps were opened during the school holidays. A large number of events are held at the school in this regard: there is the “Day of Unity of the Peoples of Belarus and Russia” (3 April 2023); employees of the prosecutor’s office, police, and OMON conduct conversations with students; representatives of the armed forces arrange special shows for schoolchildren, etc.

Prosecutor General Andrei Shved has become one of the main spokespersons and actors of the securitized politics of memory. He was appointed to this position in September 2020, when the protest movement was still active in the public space. With Shved’s participation, in April 2021, a criminal case “On the genocide of the Belarusian people during the Great

Patriotic War” was started, and the large-scale questioning of witnesses began^{xxii}. The result of this investigation will likely be an appeal to international organizations to make them recognize the genocide of the Belarusian people. It is important to note that, again in line with Soviet rhetoric, the authorities are talking not about murdered Jews, but about civilians – about the genocide of the Belarusian people. The very promotion of the discourse of the “genocide of the Belarusian people” was meant to create imaginary enemies inside and outside the country. The internal enemies were the protesters in 2020; the external enemies were the “collective West” that is imposing sanctions^{xxiii}. Lukashenka and the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Belarus Shved in their speeches draw direct parallels between the genocide during the war years and modern EU sanctions against Belarus.

Putin began his third presidential term after unprecedented democratic protests, and the first year of his new presidency was declared the “Year of Russian History” (2012). Lukashenka began his next term with massive and prolonged protests in 2020, and 2022 has already been declared the “Year of Historical Memory in Belarus”^{xxiv}. We can also see other parallels with Russia (for example, the law against the glorification of Nazism [Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, adopted in May 2014 after the annexation of Crimea by Russia] and the law “On counteracting the rehabilitation of Nazism, the glorification of Nazi criminals and their accomplices” [2021, Belarus]). Both regimes emphasize their only positive historical achievement – their victory over Nazi Germany – and they use the laws themselves to persecute political dissent.

In 2022, the book *Genocide of the Belarusian People: Informational and Analytical Materials and Documents* was published (edited by Prosecutor General Andrei Shved). An abstract from this manual states that “the book includes referential/analytical and documentary materials on the genocide of the Belarusian people during the Great Patriotic War, the post-war period, and the use of Nazi ideology by the participants in the coup attempt in Belarus in 2020”^{xxv}.

In this situation, each school is expected to organize a special event about the genocide, as well as to prepare stands and preferably school exhibitions (under the general title “Without a Statute of Limitations” or “The Genocide of Belarusian people”) and museums.

During competitions of school projects at scientific conferences, papers on the history of the Great Patriotic War have preferential treatment as the most relevant.

On the first day of the school year in the “Year of Historical Memory” – 1 September 2022 – Lukashenka personally held an open lesson for all students and pupils. The lesson was called “Historical memory is the road to the future”. The best pupils and students were invited to the Palace of Independence, and all the rest had to watch it on TV. The lesson lasted four hours, and the children were not allowed to leave early. There was a lot about values, spirituality, patriotism, service to Belarus, and our Glorious Past. Lukashenka personally took the role of a teacher, and he called ministers, scientists, a priest (all of them propagandists), etc. to the board. Among those “called to the board” were Doctor of Historical Sciences and Chief Lukashenka Ideologist Ihar Marzalyuk and Orthodox priest Fedor Povny. Marzalyuk said “we are a country of heroes, not traitors” (a reference to the 2020 protests). Priest Fedor Povny said “education has always been created to translate values, the authorities always decided which values there should be”; “there is not and has never been a neutral entity that develops outside the interests of the state”; and “there was and is no society without an ideology”. Lukashenka has stated several times that all wars, starting from the Middle Ages, were brought to Belarus by the West^{xxvi}.

Power structures play an active role in controlling the public sphere. At the same time, independent social and political media within the country have all been destroyed, independent publishing projects are being closed, and “purges” in academic institutions continue. In 2022, for the first time, we faced the fact that a historian’s works could be recognized as extremist, removed from sales, and banned. Thus, in 2022, a work that was defended as a doctoral thesis in the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences in 2006 and published three years ago by Svetlana Kozlova, *Nazis’ Agrarian Politics in Western Belarus* was recognized as extremist. The journals *Nasha Gistoriya* (“Our History”) and *Arche* were recognized as extremist too. Bookstores removed my book about Stalinism from sales in advance.

Historian Aleksey Bratochkin describes the situation in the field of memory politics in Belarus in terms of securitization^{xxvii}: in the propaganda discourse and speeches of regime representatives, the theme of “history” has always been linked to the notion of “security”^{xxviii}.

He writes: “One of the consequences of the securitization of memory politics is the transfer of the right of expertise and creating interpretations of history from the academic community for representatives of the power structures [...] Also, these interpretations only take the form of historical discourse, being outright propaganda”^{xxix}. The securitization of memory politics has led to a kind of “state of emergency” – a combination of censorship and repression in the sphere of cultural memory instead of creating conditions for a public and democratic dialogue about the past^{xxx}.

In the 2023-2024 academic year, “three textbooks on the history of Belarus for grades 9 and 10 and geography for grade 8 will be adjusted”. Together with the prosecutor’s office, three specialized publications on the topic of the genocide of the Belarusian people during the Great Patriotic War have already been prepared. They are intended for three categories of schoolchildren: grades 1-4, grades 5-9 and grades 10-11.

In 2022, a new “textbook of textbooks” appeared: *The History of Belarusian Statehood* (edited by the main ideologist of Lukashenka, Ihar Marzalyuk)^{xxxi}. This is the first textbook approved by the Republican Council for Historical Policy under the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus. This is not a textbook for schools; however, it is likely that school textbooks will again be rewritten to bring them into line with the postulates of this book.

On 6 January 2022, Lukashenka announced: “It has been suggested that the GDL should be considered as a state that was dominated by the Belarusian/Russian/Slavic element. Take the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Modern Lithuanians have actually privatized the legacy of this state formation. But what was Lithuanian there? The language was ours, and the constitution – the statute – was written in it. The predominant faith was Orthodoxy. The territory consisted of mainly Belarusian, Ukrainian, and partially Russian lands. 80% of the people were ours. Slavs. And these are the basic attributes and signs of statehood. Moreover, when the Principality of Polatsk and the Principality of Turau thundered throughout Europe as centers of spirituality and enlightenment, the ancestors of the Lithuanians were still living in the darkness of paganism and had a primitive economy.”

Thus, the authorities have “appropriated” the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. At the same time, the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth is described in terms of

national oppression and the struggle for reunification with Russia, while the period within the Russian Empire is shown as important for national formation, the period within the USSR as very constructive, and the first half of the 1990s not as the formation of independence, but as a period of economic decline and degradation, and the period since 1994 is described as the beginning of stability, the creation of a socially oriented state, etc.

Now there is a big discussion on social networks about a new textbook for high school students on the history of Russia. For many specialists, it is obvious that the replacement of some interpretations with others can last indefinitely, and the whole question is who formulates the problems that this textbook should solve – is it the education of patriotism? Nationalism? Political loyalty? Obviously, a history textbook still has to solve other problems, and in this case it is not the interpretation that requires revision, but the fundamental approach to constructing a history course. The main task of the textbook (and the history course) is to use various sources to teach pupils to compare different kind of sources, to distinguish facts from opinion, and to learn how to handle information (including reading newspapers). The contemporary science of history is extremely useful for civil society because it teaches criticism of sources (Nikita Sokolov).

I cannot agree with those who believe that in the information age, the influence of textbooks on children is not so serious^{xxxii}. Education is not only about the knowledge that students will or will not receive. The issue is much more complex. Imagine a lesson in which schoolchildren have unlimited access to a large amount of any information. This information and the general level of development of young people is presented, on the one hand, by an incredibly obscure and amazingly boring textbook, which you have to use to learn the answers to the exam, and on the other, by a teacher. To preach what is written there is hypocritical, but telling a different story is dangerous in the reality of Belarus. Thus, the use of such a textbook takes hypocrisy in schools to a new level. The science of history itself is discredited (is it a science? Or a continuation of propaganda? Is there, in principle, such a science as history?). An ideological textbook created under conditions of repression becomes part of the repressive organism.

And there is one more important aspect. The well-known researcher of Soviet propaganda Peter Kenez wrote that it is difficult to say how much propaganda in the 1920s had an

impact on “small” people, but the fact that it educated the propagandists themselves, and made them believe what they preach, is an undoubted fact. And more propagandists means more adherents.^{xxxiii} Again, it’s hard for us to say how many students are imbued with the ideology of the Belarusian statehood, but there are already quite a few who have mastered the necessary language and are able to conduct propaganda in it – to write textbooks, etc. – this is an undoubted fact.



ENDNOTES

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ⁱⁱ Delfi.lt. “Военный запаса в баре вступил в полемику с белорусом: тот уверял, что Вильнюс принадлежит Беларуси [A military reserve officer got into a polemic with a Belarusian in a bar: the latter assured that Vilnius belonged to Belarus].” August 9, 2023. <http://www.delfi.lt/a/94152609>

ⁱⁱⁱ A number of articles have already been devoted to how history is taught and what is taught in Belarusian schools, for example: Anna Zadora. “Textbook Narratives and Patriotism in Belarus.” In *History Education and Conflict Transformation Social Psychological Theories, History Teaching and Reconciliation*, eds. Ch. Psaltis, M. Carretero and S. Čehajić-Clancy, 261-264. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. ; Tatsiana Astrouskaya. In Schoolbooks and on Telegram What Is the Place of Ukraine and Ukrainians in the Memory Politics of Post-Soviet Belarus? In *Journal of Applied History* 4 (2022): 9–27; Tatsiana Astrouskaya. “Genealogiia istoricheskoi pamiati belorusov i obrazovatel’nye praktiki [The Genealogy of the Historical memory of Belarusians and Educational Practices].” October 20, 2010. <https://belinstitute.com/be/article/genealogiya-istoricheskoy-pamyati-belorusov-v-kontekste-obrazovatelnykh-praktik>; Аляксей Lastoŭski. “Return of the Long Genealogy to Schoolbooks on the History of Belarus. In: *Ideology and Politics* 13, no.2 (2019): 185–197.

^{iv} For more about this, see: Rainer Lindner. “Historiker und Herrschaft: Nationsbildung und Geschichtspolitik in Weißrussland im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert [Historians and Power: Nation-building and History Politics in Belarus in the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Century]” München: R. Oldenbourg, 1999, 388–399; Hienadź Sahanovič. “Dziesiat hadoŭ belaruskaj historyiahrafii [Ten Years of Belarusian Historiography].” *Belaruski Histarychny Ahliad* 8, no. 1–2 (2001): 215–229; Natalia Leshchenko. “The National Ideology and the Basis of the Lukashenka Regime in Belarus.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 8 (2008), Aena Marková” Institutional Historical Memory and History in Post-Soviet Belarus.” *Journal of Belarusian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2020): 51–73; Алексей Браточкин . “Культура памяти в Беларуси (1988–2016): от раскола к консервативному консенсусу? [Culture of Memory in Belarus (1988–2016). From Divide to a Conservative Consensus?].” November 25, 2016. <http://gefter.ru/archive/20174>

^v Біч Міхась. “Аб нацыянальнай канцэпцыі гісторыі і гістарычнай адукацыі ў Рэспубліцы Беларусь [M.Bich. About national concept of History and national education in the Republic of Belarus].” *Беларускі гістарычны часопіс*. № 1-1993 (2014): 15-24.

^{vi} Аляксей Lastoŭski. “Vobrazy ŭlady, narodu i ‘chuzhykh’ u publichnykh vystupakh vysheishykh dziazhaŭnykh asobaŭ Belarusi peryiadu ‘liberalizatsyi’ (2008–2010 hady) [The Image of the Power, the People and the ‘Others’ in the Public Speeches of Belarusian Statesmen during the Period of ‘Liberalization’ (2008–2010)].” *Palitychnaia Sfera* 16–17. no. 1–2 (2011): 66–69.

^{vii} Станіслаў Князев et al. *Основы идеологии белорусского государства: Учебное пособие для вузов / [Fundamentals of the ideology of the Belarusian state: Textbook for universities]*. Edited by Станіслаў Князев and Сергей Решетников. Мн.: Academy of Management under the President of the Republic of Belarus, 2004; Владимир Мельник. *Основы идеологии белорусского государства [Fundamentals of the ideology of the Belarusian state]*. Минск «Вышэйшая школа», 2010; Алег Слука. *Ідэалогія беларускай дзяржаўнасці (метадалогія фарміравання) [Ideology of Belarusian state (methodology of formation)]*. Мінск, 2007, 233 с..

^{viii} Станіслаў Князев et al. *Основы идеологии белорусского государства: Учебное пособие для вузов / [Fundamentals of the ideology of the Belarusian state: Textbook for universities]*. Edited by Станіслаў Князев and Сергей Решетников, 30. Мн.: Academy of Management under the President of the Republic of Belarus, 2004.

^{ix} See analyses here: Tatsiana Astrouskaya. “Ideologiia beloruskogo gosudarstva kak obrazovatel’nyi proekt [The Ideology of the Belarusian state as an educational project].” In *Belarus’ v evropeiskom kontekste: aktual’nye diskussii o natsiestroitel’stve [Belarus in European Conext: Actual Discussion on Nation building]*, edited by . Olga Shparaga and Aleksey Smolenchuk, 53-59. Vilnius: EHU Press, 2014; Per Ander Rudling. “‘Unhappy is the Person who has no Motherland’: National Ideology and History Writing in Lukashenka’s Belarus.” In *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus*, edited by Julie Fedor, Markku Kangaspuro, Jussi Lassila, & Tatiana Zhurzhenko, 77. Switzerland: Springer, 2017.



^x Яков Трещенок. “Досоветский период [Pre-Soviet period].” In: *История Беларуси. Том 1 [History of Belarus. Vol.1]*. Могилев : МГУ имени А. Кулешова, 2004, р. 294; Яков Трещенок et al. *История Беларуси. Том 2 [History of Belarus. Vol.2]*. Могилев : МГУ имени А. Кулешова, 2005, р. 310 с.; Яков Трещенок. “С древнейших времен до 1917 г. [From ancient times to 1917].” In *Хрестоматия по истории Беларуси [A textbook on the history of Belarus]*, edited by Константин Бондаренко, Александр Воробьев, Наталья Пурешева, 623. Минск : Издательский центр БГУ, 2008; Валерий Волженков, Яков Трещенок, Александр Воробьев. *История Беларуси с древнейших времён до октября 1917 года. Учебное пособие для 10-го класса общеобразовательных школ с русским языком обучения [History of Belarus from ancient times to October 1917. Textbook for 10th grade of general education schools with Russian language of instruction]*, 255. Минск : Адукацыя і выхаванне, 2008; Валерий Волженков, Яков Трещенок, Александр Воробьев. *История Беларуси (октябрь 1917 — начало XXI в.) Учебное пособие для 10-го класса общеобразовательных школ с русским языком обучения [History of Belarus (October 1917 - early XXI c.) Textbook for 10th grade of general education schools with Russian language of instruction]*. Минск : Народная асвета, 2009, 181.

^{xi} Яўгеній Новік. *Гісторыя Беларусі, 1917-1945 гг.: вучэбны дапаможн. [History of Belarus, 1917-1945: study guide.]*. Мінск: Нар. Асвета, 2012, р.182; Евгений Новик, Игорь Качалов. *История Беларуси. С древнейших времён до 2012 г. : учеб. пособие [History of Belarus. From Ancient Times to 2012: textbook]*. Минск: Выш. шк., 2012, р. 542.

^{xii} About textbook of J.Novik see: Ирина Романова. “Манипуляция историей в актуальном школьном учебном курсе Беларуси [Manipulation of history in the current school curriculum in Belarus].” In *POSTСОВЕТСКОЕ: дискурс и практики: Сборник статей [POST-SOVIET: Discourse and Practice: A Collection of Articles]*. Фонд Конрада Аденауэра; Армянский центр гуманитарных исследований [Konrad Adenauer Foundation; Armenian Centre for Humanitarian Studies], 2019, р. 68-87.; Ірына Раманава. “Рэпрэзентацыя бальшавіцкага тэрору ў школьных навучальных курсах [Representation of Bolshevik terror in school curricula].” In *Масавыя рэпрэсіі ў СССР у гістарычных даследаваннях [Mass repressions in the USSR in historical studies]*, edited by Александр Смалянчук, А.Кандрацюк, 488-502. Мінск: Зміцер Колас, 2018.

^{xiii} All of them can be found here: <https://uchebniiki.by/>

^{xiv} Aliaksei Lastouski. “Recoding the Nation: Historical Politics in Belarus after the 2020 Protests.” In *Constructing Memory: Central and Eastern Europe in the New Geopolitical Reality*, edited by Hanna Bazhenova. Instytut Europy Środkowej, 2022, р. 184.

^{xv} Сергей Панов, Владимир Сидорцов, Василий Фомин. *История Беларуси, 1917 г. — начало XXI в. учеб. пособие для 3-го кл. учреждений общ. сред. образования с рус. яз. обучения [History of Belarus, 1917. - beginning of the XXI century: textbook for the 3rd grade of general secondary education institutions with the Russian language of instruction]*. Минск: Изд. Центр БГУ, 2019.

^{xvi} Сергей Мусиенко. *Гордость за Беларусь. События. Факты [Pride for Belarus. Events. Facts]*. Минск: Адукацыя і выхаванне, 2022. . <https://uchebniiki.by/rus/katalog/10-11-klassy/id02007>

^{xvii} Александр Коваленя et al. *Великая Отечественная война советского народа (в контексте Второй мировой войны). 9, класс*. Минск: ИЦ БГУ, 2022. <https://uchebniiki.by/rus/katalog/5-9-klassy/id02326>

^{xviii} Also, for example, the collection of documents: Игорь Валаханович et al. Убийцы Хатыни. 118-й украинский батальон охранной полиции в Белоруссии, 1943-1944 гг. [The slaughterers of Khatyn: 118 Ukrainian battalions of the security police in Belarus]. Нац. архив Республики Беларусь [National Archive of the Republic of Belarus]. Москва: Пятый Рим, 2018., which focuses on the fact that it was the Ukrainians who burned the Belarusian village. During public presentations, which are consecrated by the media, it sounds like Ukrainians will have to admit their complicity.

^{xix} Владимир Арчаков, Алексей Баньковский, Вячеслав Данилович and Александр Коваленя. “К вопросу об исторической политике [On the question of historical politics].” *Беларуская думка*, № 8 (2019).

^{xx} Some articles about this: Ирина Романова. “Война миров: знаки, символы, места памяти (Беларусь 2020) [War of the Worlds: signs, symbols, places of memory (Belarus 2020)].” *Ab imperio* №3 (2020): 280-309; Аляксей Lastouski. “The Politics of Memory in Belarus: Narratives and Institutions.” Stockholm: Södertörn University, 2021, 87–93; Аляксей Lastouski. “Recoding the Nation: Historical Politics in Belarus after the 2020 Protests.” In *Constructing Memory: Central and Eastern Europe in the New Geopolitical Reality*, edited by Hanna Bazhenova. Instytut Europy Środkowej, 2022; Aleksey Bratochkin. “The Politics



of Memory in Belarus after 2020: Securitisation, Memorial Laws, Instrumentalisation of History.” In *Constructing Memory: Central and Eastern Europe in the New Geopolitical Reality*, edited by Hanna Bazhenova. Instytut Europy Środkowej, 2022; Aliaksei Kazharski. “Belarus’ new political nation? 2020 anti-authoritarian protests as identity building.” *New Perspectives* 1–11 (2021). sagepub.com/journals-permissions journals.sagepub.com/home/nps

^{xxi} Александр Касович et al. *История Беларуси, XIX – начало XXI: учебное пособие для 11 класса учреждений общего среднего образования с русским языком обучения (с электронным приложением для повышенного уровня) [History of Belarus, XIX – early XXI centuries: textbook for grade 11 in general secondary education institutions with Russian as the language of instruction]*. Edited by Александр Касович and Андрей Соловьянов, 40–42, 50, 132–134. Минск: Издательский центр БГУ, 2021.

^{xxii} Закон Республики Беларусь от 5 января 2022 года № 146-З [Act No. 146-Z of the Republic of Belarus of 5 January 2022] “О геноциде белорусского народа [On the genocide of the Belarusian people].” *Pravo.by*. <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12200146&p1=1&p5=0>

^{xxiii} Aleksey Bratochkin. “The Politics of Memory in Belarus after 2020: Securitisation, Memorial Laws, Instrumentalisation of History.” In *Constructing Memory: Central and Eastern Europe in the New Geopolitical Reality*, edited by Hanna Bazhenova. Instytut Europy Środkowej, 2022, p. 199.

^{xxiv} The President of the Republic of Belarus. “Указ Президента Республики Беларусь от 1 января 2022 г. № 1 “Об объявлении 2022 года Годом исторической памяти [Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 1 of 1 January 2022 “On Declaring 2022 the Year of Historical Memory].” January 3, 2022. <https://president.gov.by/bucket/assets/uploads/documents/2022/1uk.pdf>; Council of Ministers. “От создания региональных центров патриотического воспитания до исторических реконструкций – Совмин утвердил план мероприятий в рамках Года исторической памяти [From the creation of regional patriotic education centres to historical reenactments - the Council of Ministers approved a plan of events within the framework of the Year of Historical Memory].” *Pravo.by*, January 28, 2022. <https://pravo.by/novosti/novosti-pravo-by/2022/january/68457/>

^{xxv} Александр Швед. *Геноцид белорусского народа: информационно-аналитические материалы и документы [Genocide of the Belarusian People: Informational and Analytical Materials and Documents]*. Минск: Беларусь, 2022.

^{xxvi} Прэзідэнт Рэспублікі Беларусь. “Адкрыты ўрок “Гістарычная памяць - дарога ў будучыню” [Open lesson “Historical memory - the road to the future”].” September 1, 2022. <https://president.gov.by/be/events/otkrytyy-urok-istoricheskaya-pamyat-doroga-v-budushchee-1662046892>

^{xxvii} A. Bratochkin uses this concept with reference to the work representatives of the Copenhagen School (Barry Buzan, Ole Wøever and Jaap de Wilde. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Pub., 1998, 1–21), emphasizes it means an “extreme version of politicization” in which a problem is presented as an “existential threat” that requires emergency measures and justifies going beyond usual political procedures. A series of regime “statements” formulate “threats” to the security of the existing order and propose various “emergency measures” to extinguish these threats. (Aleksey Bratochkin. “The Politics of Memory in Belarus after 2020: Securitisation, Memorial Laws, Instrumentalisation of History.” In *Constructing Memory: Central and Eastern Europe in the New Geopolitical Reality*, edited by Hanna Bazhenova. Instytut Europy Środkowej, 2022, p. 190.

^{xxviii} Aleksey Bratochkin. “The Politics of Memory in Belarus after 2020,” p. 197.

^{xxix} Aleksey Bratochkin. “The Politics of Memory in Belarus after 2020,” p. 188.

^{xxx} Aleksey Bratochkin. “The Politics of Memory in Belarus after 2020,” p. 205.

^{xxxi} Ігар Марзалюк et al. “Гісторыя беларускай дзяржаўнасці : вучэбны дапаможнік для студэнтаў устаноў вышэйшай адукацыі [History of Belarusian statehood: study guide for students of higher education institutions].” Edited by Ігар Марзалюк and Генадзь Краско. Мінск : Адукацыя і выхаванне, 2022.

^{xxxii} Наталия Зотова. “Новый учебник истории для старшеклассников. Что в нем переписали и как это повлияет на образование в России [A new history textbook for high school students. What has been rewritten in it and how it will affect education in Russia].” *BBC*, August 8, 2023. https://www.bbc.com/russian/articles/cmlxgvm7rejo?fbclid=IwAR34uy6YRxdgXQ0cxF_46ovvA23asKf9gOLVrvJ26ZcVw36EIHb-UdJ6Hpl



^{xxiii} Peter Kenez. *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.



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