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# ***The Ideology of the “Russkiy Mir” and Belarus***

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## Abstract

*“Russkiy Mir” has been expanding its infrastructure of “soft-power” institutions particularly actively in Belarus. There is also an internal network of supporters of “Russkiy Mir”, including top officials, military, intelligence and police officers, and Russian Orthodox Church clergy. However, even despite the synchronization of the Russian and official Belarusian propaganda narratives, the national Belarusian ideological discourse remains distant from “Russkiy Mir”. According to various sociological surveys, a major portion of Belarusians do not support the ultimate purposes of the “Russkiy Mir” ideology. At the same time, a substantial portion of Belarusians have been prone to sharing widely spread “Russkiy Mir” notions such as belonging to the “triune” of Belarusian, Ukrainian and Russian people.*

“Russkiy Mir” is a conventional term that denotes the ideology of the modern Russian state in a broad sense, and its policy of soft power in a narrow sense. It is an aggressive ideology aimed at establishing a new international order that would provide Russia with a dominant position in the world. “Russkiy Mir” belongs to the category of so-called “blurred” concepts, which are substantially different from the classic authoritarian ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, it plays an enormous role in the mass political mobilization of support for the Kremlin’s politics in Russia and abroad.

Lukashenka’s regime has been creating broad opportunities for the dissemination of “Russkiy Mir” ideology in Belarus by providing Russian media with almost unlimited access to the national media space, as well as by synchronizing the propaganda narratives in the Belarusian media with the Russian ones. At the same time, a number of sociological surveys show that Belarusian public opinion remains different from Russian public opinion, including in their attitudes towards the “hottest” questions of the current political agenda – Russia’s intervention in Ukraine and Belarus’s participation in it.

The activity of “Russkiy Mir” soft power institutions in Belarus, such as “Rossotrudnichestvo”, reached an unprecedented scale in recent years. Usually, the number of branches of this organization does not exceed two – in Belarus there are five<sup>i</sup>. In Belarus, “Rossotrudnichestvo” is focused on providing scholarships for studying at Russian universities, covering the full tuition of a BA level course. Since 2019, the number of scholarships increased 18 times and reached 1,300 per year<sup>ii</sup>. The Minsk branch of “Rossotrudnichestvo” is used as a headquarters for “Organizations of Russian compatriots in the Republic of Belarus”, which has an openly toxic anti-Belarusian website<sup>iii</sup>. The “Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Support Fund” opened a branch in Minsk in 2020 and provides a number of scholarships for Belarusian researchers. The “Russkiy Mir Foundation” also operates at the university and high-school levels.

There are a lot people and institutions that show advanced activity in support of the “Russkiy Mir” ideology. Among the VIPs are Natalia Kachanova, the Speaker of the Council of Republic of Belarus, who is known for the large-scale replacement of university rectors with adherents of “Russkiy Mir” ideology, converting Belarusian schools in rural areas into Russian ones. Natalia Kachanova was directly engaged in the realization of Russian soft power projects organized by the “Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Support Fund”<sup>iv</sup>.

The number of adherents of the “Russkiy Mir” ideology is evidently higher in the military forces, intelligence and police. A particular toxic role is played by the “Gubopik” – a special political police force which is known for open hostility towards Belarusian-speaking prisoners<sup>v</sup>. The victims of Gubopik testified that they saw portraits of Putin, Russian flags, and symbols of Russian aggression in Ukraine there on the walls.

Another social group particularly active in the promotion of the “Russkiy Mir” ideology is the Russian Orthodox Church clergy. In particular, the role of St. Elisabeth Monastery in Minsk should be stressed<sup>vi</sup>. The Russian Orthodox Church institution has become the assemblage point of the “Russkiy Mir” ideology in Belarus.

At the same time, major components of the “Russkiy Mir” ideology, like Eurasianism, are neither popular and nor even widely known in Belarus. Russian geopolitics has a bit wider impact because of its incorporation into universities’ curricula. The course “Modern Political Economy” in 2022 became compulsory for all higher educational institutions in Belarus. It contains a special chapter on geopolitics, with the compulsory reading of *The Foundations of Geopolitics*, a flagship publication by Alexander Dugin<sup>vii</sup>. An official and exclusive meeting between Lukashenka and Dugin (who has never officially met Putin) in November 2022 did not change a lot in the dissemination of Eurasianism ideas in Belarus<sup>viii</sup>.

There is an opinion within the camp of official ideologists (at least among some of them) that the “Russkiy Mir” ideology does not correspond to the traditional values and views of the Belarusian people<sup>ix</sup>. Ihar Marzaliuk, Head of the Commission for Education in the Belarusian Parliament, denied that Belarus belongs to Eurasia, and noted, “we are Europeans, we are not Eurasians at all – neither Russians, nor Ukrainians, nor Belarusians, this is all delusion”<sup>x</sup>. The latest events show that Minsk prefers to keep some silent distance from the “Russkiy Mir” ideology and to limit the activities of its most odious representatives<sup>xi</sup>.

Sociological surveys conducted by number of independent sociological teams (including the “Belarusian Analytical Workroom” and the “Belarusian Chatham House Initiative”) show a controversial picture of the influence of the “Russkiy Mir” ideology on Belarusian public opinion. The survey of geopolitical orientations conducted by the Belarusian Analytical Workroom shows three big social groups<sup>xii</sup>.

- “Pro-Europeans” (21%) have a consolidated position on social and political developments, a fully formed national identity, strong orientations toward the Western countries and European values, and negative attitudes of Lukashenka’s regime, Russian aggression in Ukraine, and their Soviet past.
- “Pro-Russians” (31%) also have consolidated social and political views, a peripheral empire identity (“Belarusians are Russians with some peculiarities”), and positive attitudes of Lukashenka’s regime, Russian aggression in Ukraine, and their Soviet past.

- “Unsettled” (48%) have a rather superficial understanding of social and political life, a “blurred” identity, avoid taking a clear position towards regime, are rather negative towards Russian aggression, and have neutral or positive attitudes of their Soviet past.

This and a number of other surveys show that the ultimate goal of the “Russkiy Mir” ideology toward Belarus – the incorporation of it into the Russian state – does not have a significant number of adherents even among the “pro-Russian” group (at 4-5%). There is also a strong consensus against the direct participation of Belarus in the Russian intervention to Ukraine (80-85%). The situation regarding appreciation of the Russian intervention in Ukraine is much different<sup>xiii</sup>. There are two almost equal groups (about 29% each), one of which supports Russia and one of which prefers a neutral position. And up to 24% would rather back Ukraine.

There is also no single position on the question of whether the West is considered an enemy (which is typical for the “Russkiy Mir” ideology). Only “pro-Russians” support this view, while “pro-European” and “unsettled” think the opposite. The attitude towards Poland, the largest neighboring Western country, is rather positive (with people seeing it as a “brotherhood country”).

Otherwise, on the question of “Who are the main allies of Belarus?”, the “pro-Russian” and “unsettled” groups have for the most part a joint answer – Russia. The idea of some kind of alliance with Russia is supported by 41% to 51% respondents. A substantial portion of respondents when asked about would-be geopolitical alliances would prefer to be at the same time in a union with Russia and the EU (46% and 26% in 2021–2023).

The crucial factor regarding national identification is the appreciation of the key “Russkiy Mir” notion of the so-called “triune of Russian people”. Only “pro-Europeans” disagree with this notion, while “unsettled” tend to agree or have no definite view on this topic. A similar situation is seen with regards to an appreciation of differences between Belarusian and Russian cultures. Both “pro-Russians” and “unsettled” do not see substantial differences, while “pro-Europeans” believe that Belarusian culture is closer to the cultures of European peoples.

## Conclusion

“Russkiy Mir” in Belarus operates through an increasing infrastructure of “soft-power” institutions and an internal network of supporters. Despite official propaganda discourses, Belarusian national thought keeps a distance from “Russkiy Mir”. According to sociological surveys, the majority of Belarusians do not support the ultimate purposes of the “Russkiy Mir” ideology, including the would-be annexation of Belarus. At the same time, a substantial portion of Belarusians has no fully set up national identity and remains prone to sharing some “Russkiy Mir” notions, such as belonging to “the triune of Russian people”.



## ENDNOTES

- <sup>i</sup> Tereshkovich, Pavel. Current trends in the development of the education sector in the Republic of Belarus: <https://belarusnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Analytical-Article-no.-10.pdf>
- <sup>ii</sup> Kakoye obrazovaniye belorusy mogut poluchit' po kvotam? (What kind of education can Belarusians receive under quotas?) (<https://sputnik.by/20231226/makushin-kakoe-obrazovanie-belorusy-mogut-poluchit-po-kvotam-v-vuzakh-rf-1082354248.html>).
- <sup>iii</sup> Website of public organizations of Russian compatriots in the Republic of Belarus. <https://ross-bel.ru/>
- <sup>iv</sup> Studenty: shkola molodykh liderov Soyuznogo gosudarstva mozhet pomoch' integratsii. (Students: the School of Young Leaders of the Union State can help integration). <https://sputnik.by/20230526/studenty-shkola-molodykh-liderov-soyuznogo-gosudarstva-mozhet-pomoch-integratsii-1075952845.html>).
- <sup>v</sup> Closing speech of Zmitser Dashkevich at the trial. <https://reform.by/321434-zmiter-dashkevich-v-zakljuchitelnom-slove-gubopa-cy-smjajalisja-zhonka-budze-naradzha-u-turme/>
- <sup>vi</sup> A visiting meeting of the Presidium of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus on the topic "Public-state partnership in preserving the spiritual and moral values of modern society" was held at the "Ark" ("Kovcheg") center. <http://church.by/news/v-centre-kovcheg-sostojalos-vyezdnoe-zasedanie-prezidiuma-soveta-respubliki-nacionalnogo-sobranija-respubliki-belarus-na-temu-obshestvenno-gosudarstvennoe-partnerstvo-v-sohranenii-duhovno-nravstvennyh-cennostej-sovremennogo-obshestva>
- <sup>vii</sup> Modern political economy: Curriculum of higher education institutions in the academic discipline for all specialties of the first stage of higher education. <https://elib.bsu.by/handle/123456789/290069>
- <sup>viii</sup> Meeting with Russian philosopher and public figure Alexander Dugin. <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/vstrecha-s-rossiyskim-filosofom-i-obshchestvennym-deyatelem-aleksandrom-duginym>
- <sup>ix</sup> Aleynikova S. M. «Russkiy mir»: belorusskiy vzglyad. Minsk: RIVSH, 2017. (Aleynikova S. M. "Russian World": Belarusian view. Minsk: RIVSH, 2017.)
- <sup>x</sup> Marzaliuk: My jeŭrapiejcy. Jeŭrazijstva — heta tryzniennie (Marzaliuk: We are Europeans. Eurasianism is a delusion) <https://nashaniva.com/334497>
- <sup>xi</sup> Prabelaruskija lukašysty jadrnjucca suprač prarasijskich (Pro-Belarusian archers unite against pro-Russian ones) <https://nashaniva.com/353128>
- <sup>xii</sup> Segmentatsiya belaruskogo obshchestva na osnove geopoliticheskikh oriyentatsiy, osobennostey pravosoznaniya, otsenok kul'turnykh fenomenov i mneniy po povodu istoricheskikh sobytii i natsional'nogo yazyka (Segmentation of Belarusian society based on geopolitical orientations, peculiarities of legal consciousness, assessments of cultural phenomena and opinions about historical events and the national language) [https://www.bawlab.eu/BAW\\_Social\\_Structure.html](https://www.bawlab.eu/BAW_Social_Structure.html)
- <sup>xiii</sup> Indikatory. Voyna v Ukraine. (Indicators. War in Ukraine). <https://belaruspolls.org/indicators>

