

ТМ	Г. XXXIV	Бр. 1	Стр. 107-130	Ниш	јануар - март	2010.
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УДК 314.74:2(476) 94(476)''1989/...''

Оригинални научни рад

Примљено: 17. 1. 2009

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## RELIGION IN BELARUS

### Summary

The paper discusses the pre-soviet history of Belarus as a background for the analysis of the current religious situation in this post-soviet country. The author shows that the population of the lands that currently represent Republic of Belarus was an ethnic mixture: ancestors of contemporary Belarusians, Russians, Lithuanians, Tatars, Jews, Poles and some other nations have been living here for centuries. They tolerated each other and the religious beliefs of each ethnicity. Therefore, there were Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant Christians, Muslims, and Jews living side by side here.

The Soviet power made Belarus a part of the atheistic country, Soviet Union. Religion was separated from the state, but it did not disappear. That is why after the Soviet collapse there was a religious revival here, with some specific features that can be considered as a proof of differences between the Eastern and Western religiosity.

The first part of the paper describes the major contemporary features of religiosity in Belarus, focusing on its mosaic character and domination of Orthodox religion that is viewed both as a religious and a cultural identity of the population. The second part of the paper analyses the relationship between the church and the state in Belarus.

**Key words:** post-Soviet Belarus, Orthodox religion, revival, mixed religiosity, Slavic religion

### *INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL PAST OF BELARUS*

Republic of Belarus gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Situated between current Russia and Poland, Belarus has historically been cultural borderland. Baptised into Orthodoxy in the 10<sup>th</sup> c. (Polatsk eparchy est. 992), the territory later became part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and partly adopted Roman Catholicism, esp.

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after Lublin Union with Poland (1569). After Brest Church Union (1596) Uniate Church (subordinated to the Pope but with Orthodox ceremonies) was established. Other religions were represented by Jewish (since 14<sup>th</sup> c.), Muslim (since 14<sup>th</sup> c.), Old Believers (since mid-17<sup>th</sup> c.) and Protestant (Calvinist, Lutheran, and Anti-Trinitarian, in mid-16<sup>th</sup> c.) communities. In 1795 Belarus was annexed to Russian Empire and the population was by force converted into Russian Orthodoxy (Uniate Church was prohibited in 1839). Since 1795, Belarus became a Northern-Western Kray of Russian Empire, Uniate churches were soon closed, and the population often converted into Russian Orthodox believers. During the 19<sup>th</sup> c. Belarusian lands have become mainly Orthodox, while the urban population remained mainly Jewish and/or Russian.

After the 1917 October revolution, as a part of the Soviet Union, Soviet Belarus has become officially atheistic, while some groups kept their religiosity anyway. In 1922, following the 1917 October revolution, the Church was separated from the state, and the church lands withdrawn. During the Soviet period, Belarus was declared atheistic, religious practices were severely prosecuted. In 1941-1945, much of the Jewish population perished in the Nazi ghettos. As a result, after this war the ethnic composition of the population has changed: it has become more Slavic and especially more Belarusian, although representatives of other (non-Slavic) Soviet nations also lived here.

During the 'Khrushchev thaw' of 1953 – 1964, religious activities temporarily revived. Perestroika (1985) allowed the people to declare their beliefs freely. Perestroika in mid-1980s allowed the people to declare their beliefs. Since then to be religious became easy and even prestigious among the population.

Since 1991, when Republic of Belarus became independent, religious revival became visible: a lot of new communities were organized, new religious buildings were constructed, and new religious groups appeared. By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Belarus represents the same level of religiosity as Russia or Ukraine.

#### *IMPORTANCE OF THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOSITY FOR BELARUS*

Systemic post-Communist transformation has made it possible to discuss issues related to the revival and even increase of the role of religion in post-Communist regions and in Belarus in particular. In a relatively short period of time – slightly more than 20 years from the end of the Communist system and a bit more counting from Gorbachev's *Perestroika* – the whole social-political system along with its Marxist ideology has dissolved, and religion has successfully arisen. It happened so quickly that many scholars within this region and beyond are still struggling to understand whether the population had always kept religious

feelings and beliefs and simply hid them for decades from the official Marxist ideologues, or whether the majority of the people have easily lost their previous (seemingly strong) Communist beliefs and exchanged them for some religious ideas.

As the growth of the role of religion in post-Communist countries is a significant issue, several concepts are required for its explanation. In order to analyze this problem (growth of religiosity, the quick shift from Marxist ideology to religious beliefs) and understand the reasons for this change it is possible to apply some appropriate theoretical concepts. Such concepts, I believe, can help explain the data and understand the situation within a broader framework than post-Communist transformation. Grace Davie stated (2004) that the sociology of religion in Western countries needs the 'conceptual tools that are necessary for a proper understanding of the modern world and of the place of religion within'. This statement is fully applicable to the post-Communist region which is still under-researched in comparison to the West. It seems reasonable to use P. Sztompka's theory of cultural trauma (2001) that provides some cultural explanations for several phenomena within the post-Communist world including the issue of why the post-Communist societies so quickly replaced Marxist ideology with some religious ideas and/or some kind of the civil religion. Additionally, I also agree with M. Tomka (2006) who clearly stressed the need of a special methodology for studying and understanding Eastern Christianity, because this kind of Christianity differs from the Western versions and therefore demands some special knowledge.

### *POST-SOVIET RELIGIOUS REVIVAL*

The religious revival started under the Gorbachev time when this Communist party leader made a decision to celebrate officially the millennium of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1988. This date can be viewed as the official beginning of the religious renaissance. This process has become even faster after the Soviet collapse. However, the real post-Soviet practice was too complicated to be explained by one statement of the religious revival. On the one hand, religion was restored as an important social institution of a society, on the other, the pre-revolutionary status of the Orthodox religion as a dominant state one was not restored. The post-Soviet state remained to be secular (at least, religion is still separated from the state), so that atheism remained its status as a human right equal to the right of an individual to be religious.

Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Belarus (1991) coincided with the massive religious revival: The Church was restored as an important social institution, lots of new communities arose, including Protestant ones, new temples were built. As a result, in the 1990s the proportion

of believers in Belarus rose significantly and now comprises about 50 per cent, which is comparable to that of Russia or Ukraine.

What are the reasons for the fast religious revival?

First, the religious renaissance reflected a significant shift in the mind of the public regarding the role of religion, the reemergence of religion as an important factor of societal life under post-Communist conditions. Step by step, religion returned into the spheres of education, media, social services, medicine, philanthropic activity, art and even political life (Kotlyarov and Zamlyakov 2004, 164).

Second, the social consequences of religious renaissance were heterogeneous and mixed: religion was restored both in its traditional forms (churches) and in the form of new cults and sects that undermined traditional beliefs and depleted the ranks of the traditional churches. The mass consciousness became pluralistic: it combined different religious beliefs with superstitions and non-religious prejudices.

There were several indicators to verify the existence of religious revival in Belarus:

1. Relations between the church and the state have greatly improved as the interests of these institutions in strengthening their respective power coincided.
2. Academic theology has blossomed in post-Soviet states: faculties of theology have been opened at some universities; theologians take part in radio and TV talk-shows. The high-ranking officials have started to recruit priests as personal advisers. Religious literature is openly published and disseminated (however, under the general state control that exists in Belarus for all printed matters).
3. The number of the newly registered religious denominations and communities of all kinds increased. Unlike believers, who can't be required to register, the law demands all the religious communities to officially register. For example, during the first ten post-communist years (from 1991 to 2001) the number of religious communities in Belarus grew from 800 to 2748, among them the number of Orthodox communities grew 2.5 times, Roman Catholic communities grew 2 times, and different Protestant communities – 3.5 times (Danilov and Martinovich 2002, 10; Hulap 2002, 20).
4. The number of believers greatly increased as well. According to the European value study (EVS) surveys made in Belarus in 2000, 52 per cent of the respondents belonged to a religious denomination, and the majority of these respondents clearly declared their denominations (Halman 2001, 74-75). This is a great change in the number of religious communities and believers compared with the previous communist period when only a small number of people openly declared their religious beliefs.
5. The number of those who identify themselves as atheists greatly decreased. Thus, in Belarus this number decreased more than 3-fold

- between 1990 and 2000. However, former atheists usually do not become believers: they supplemented the intermediate groups of people who had doubts with regard to both religious faith and atheism, so that these groups grew faster than the groups of believers. It is necessary to mention, as Zemlyakov (2001, 57) insists, that a so-called indifferent type of mass consciousness is growing. People of this type are not interested in any verifications of God's existence or non-existence, although they might hold some superstitions.
6. The variety of religious denominations has increased from eight to 25 (as of 01.01.2009). The population has started to practice freedom of religion in earnest. This freedom is in total contrast to the previous necessity for persons to be (or at least to declare themselves) atheists. According to survey data, almost 75 per cent of respondents identified themselves as Belarusian Orthodox in 2004, including even half of those who did not believe in God (Shelest, 2004, 114). However, the overall picture includes a much greater variety of religious denominations. Like elsewhere in Europe one can find in Belarus all the traditional religions as well as many new religious movements. For example, by 2002 there were 89 new religious movements of Oriental (Krishnaites), Christian (Church of Christ), mystical (School of Arkans), Christian offshoot (Mormons) and other orientations (Martinovich, 2002, 54). In this respect, the situation in Belarus is not exceptional: it demonstrates the same tendencies (growth of religious pluralism, as well as growth of new religious movements) that are currently typical for many Western European countries (Halman, 2001). It means that Belarus experiences the influence of some global religious processes as well as other countries.

During post-Soviet time, the state-church relationships were also reestablished that helped all religions, especially those of them that have been recognized as “traditional” for Belarus: the Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran Church, Muslim, and Jewish religious organizations. However, only the Belarusian Orthodox Church was awarded the title of the “dominant church” in the Law on Religion (2002).

If we look at the religious revival within the political framework of Belarus, we may notice that this growth indicates not only a popular desire to “make the bridges” with the historical past of Belarusian nation (for example, Grand Duchy of Lithuania or Russia), to restore the historical memory and develop the historical traditional heritage (both spiritual and practical). This approach is correct, but it does not reflect some important political reasons for religious revival. For the dominant group of political elites, Orthodox religious revival in Belarus is a means to incorporate traditional ideology into the state ideology and mentality of people, to spread religious moral principles in post-Soviet society and to find additional support for the idea of strong political power, social order and stability.

*MAJOR RELIGIOUS TENDENCIES IN CONTEMPORARY BELARUS*

The new features in the development of religion have been developed since the time of Gorbachev's perestroika and the end of the communist regimes (i.e. since the early 1990<sup>th</sup>).

First, it is the growth of interest to the religion among the population and therefore the process of the religious revival. This process can be proved by the growing number of the newly registered religious communities of all kinds in these countries (unlike the number of believers that can't be statistically registered, the number of religious communities has to be registered according to the law in these countries). For example, only in Belarus during the first post-communist decade (1991-2001), the number of all religious communities grew from 800 to 2748, among them the number of the Orthodox communities grew 2,5 times, Roman Catholic communities grew 2 times, and different Protestant communities - 3,5 times (Danilov and Martinovich, 2002; Hulap, 2002).

As for the number of believers, according to the EVS (1999-2000) data, 52% of respondents in Belarus said they belonged to religious denominations (Halman, 2001), and the majority of these respondents clearly declared their denomination. There was a great change in number of religious communities and believers compared with the previous period of the communist regime when only a small number of people openly declared their religious beliefs. This feature can be interpreted within the theoretical framework of transformation as a search of the former Soviet people for a new (or renewed) cultural identity beyond the previous (ideologically biased) one, Soviet identity.

The second new important feature of the current religious situation is the officially declared human right to follow freely any religion or to be non-religious. This right (now being a law, according to the Constitution) is in total contrast to the previous necessity for persons to be (or at least to declare themselves) atheists. However, the whole picture of religiosity in Belarus includes a variety of religious denominations. Like elsewhere in Europe one can find here all the traditional religions as well as many new religious movements (such as the New Age communities). For example, by 2002, in Belarus there were 89 new religious movements of Oriental (Krishnaites), Christian (Church of Christ), mystical (School of Arkans), pseudo-Christian (Mormons) and other orientations (Martinovich, 2002).

From this point of analysis, the situation in Belarus is not a unique one: it demonstrates the same tendencies that are generally typical for the period of Post-Modernity. The global religious processes include post-soviet countries as well (at least to some extent). Currently post-soviet countries experience the same shift "from obligation to consumption" of religion, as Davie (2004) explained: religion has become more and more a private matter of a person, his or her "free choice" in lifestyle.

The third feature of the current religious situation is the wide spread of eclectic religious beliefs, a mixture of magic, occultist and traditional Christian dogmas. Currently, both believers and some atheists have a mixture of different beliefs, in particular, they might believe in such non-religious and non-materialistic things such as telepathy (Borowik 2002, 499). Such situation is common not only for Belarus, but for many other post-soviet countries. Indeed, while only a part of those believers in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, who identified themselves as Christian (mainly Orthodox) said they shared traditional Christian beliefs in God, Sin, Hell, and Heaven, many of the respondents said they had a lucky charm, believed in telepathy and reincarnation, and used astrological forecasts on a regular basis (Halman 2001).

According to the EVS surveys (Halman 2001), a combination of Christian and non-Christian beliefs was typical for the believers in all post-soviet states, even regardless of the fact whether they were affiliated with the church or not. Recently surveys conducted by Vozmitel in some regions of Russia confirmed that beliefs are not closely connected with the church affiliation. Vozmitel investigated the correlation between two variables: existence of the “true Orthodox beliefs” and “belonging to the church”. According to his data, those who belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church, demonstrated the highest level of non-Christian beliefs: they practiced magic things, believed in talismans and astrology, kept some pagan superstitions etc. (Vozmitel 2007, 112).

We assume that the religious consciousness of the Belarusian population is getting more chaotic, eclectic. Many people do not care which dogmas they share, because it is more important for them to believe in any sacral things. What is important to stress is the radical change of atheism: in general, it is getting less “scientific” and “materialistic” than it has probably been in the Soviet period of time being an essential part of Marxist ideology. We assume that those who share any religious or astrological beliefs can't be considered as “scientific atheists” or “materialists”.

Actually, this kind of self-identification (“atheist”, “materialist”) was typical during the communist days regardless of the real attitudes and beliefs of people who used this term for identification. In fact, the number of those who identified themselves as atheists significantly dropped after the change of the political regimes in post-socialist countries, because, as Zrinscak (2004a) perfectly explained, “atheism was not a position freely chosen, but...an unavoidable part of totalitarian rule”. However, the number of non-believers grew in parallel with the decline of atheists: according to Kaariainen (2007), in 1991 35% identified themselves as atheists and 7% as non-believers in Russia, while two years later the numbers were 5% and 30% respectively. Communist propaganda did not distinguish between “atheism” and “scientific atheism”: both terms were used as the application of a Leninist-Stalinist ideology concerning religion (regardless of the fact

that this application contradicted Marx's views on religion). In general, as it is extremely difficult to distinguish between atheism and agnosticism, probably, some people who officially declared their atheism under the soviet regime have never been atheists in practice, i.e. have not fought against religion and have not followed official views concerning religion; instead, they might have doubts regarding the existence of God within the framework of so called "wol'nodumstvo" or agnosticism. Such "non-believers" could easily convert themselves to "seekers" and combine some traditional and non-traditional beliefs as soon as it became possible to express freely their attitudes to religion.

According to Table 1, 42% of people who do not have any traditional Christian beliefs selected at least one non-Christian belief; at the same time, some of them identify themselves as atheists.

*Table 1 Correlation between traditional Christian beliefs and non-traditional beliefs, in %*

		Traditional Christian beliefs		
		not chosen	all chosen	Total
Non-traditional non-Christian beliefs	not chosen	28	4	32
	at least one chosen	42	26	68
	Total	70	30	100

In Belarus the number of "true believers" for whom "religion is very important" in their lives practically has not changed during the first post-soviet decade, as well as the number of "true non-believers" for whom "religion is not important at all": for example, in Belarus this change is equal 1% from 1990 to 2000 (Titarenko 2001). Belarusian scholar Babosov (2004) also pointed out that contemporary believers have mixed (Christian and non-Christian) beliefs as – according to his research – it was typical even for pre-Soviet times when many believers were illiterate and did not read Bible to learn Christianity.

It is necessary to explain why the new believers in Belarus do not know the traditional Christian beliefs. Currently, there is no possibility for them to learn the Christian beliefs as a system while in the Soviet period the system of education was non-religious (it was a part of atheist propaganda). First, the post-soviet states are still secularized: there is no such obligatory subject as "Religion" at the state schools curricula of all levels (primary, secondary, and high school). Some initiatives to introduce this subject in Russia generated enormous resistance supported by different institutions. In Belarus, there was no such initiative at all, while the official scientific institutions strongly protect themselves from religious propaganda. Second, there are only a few voluntary Sunday schools in some cities where children can learn the religious dogmas of some religious denomi-



nations. Protestant denomination has more Sunday schools, being more active than the Orthodox denomination. As for the adults, belonging to the Orthodox church, there is no way to learn the religious norms and dogmas even for those who shifted from non-believers to believers: such people can sincerely (truly) believe in God, but they do not know the whole traditional system of beliefs. Even during the religious services these people can't systematically learn what they would like to know.

At the same time, in Belarus and elsewhere in post-soviet region, there are many sources of pseudo-religious information in the media and ads: one can find horoscopes in the newspapers, TV programs, Internet, journals, and the like. So, it is necessary to get a strong will if a person wants to learn the religious dogmas; on the contrary, it is very easy to learn about horoscopes, lucky talismans, and the like.

To summarize: in Belarus the majority of believers combine some traditional (Christian) beliefs with some non-traditional non-Christian beliefs. This is a tendency to individualize beliefs based on personal preferences that make beliefs uncertain, ambiguous. Indeed, it is possible to interpret the religious situation in Belarus as a part of the period of Post-Modernity rather than a linear part of the period of post-soviet transformation. From this view, eclecticism, uncertainty and combination of several beliefs are typical post-Modern features, at least for Western countries (Varga 2001) so that we can find the category of 'non-believing practicing' or 'non-practicing believers' in many other European (and probably not only European) countries (Ester e.a. 1994).

Even so, for some authors there will be a question mark whether post-Modernity can be ascribed to post-Soviet states on the same scale as to Western countries. From the same methodological view there exists even more fundamental question: whether the stage of Modernity could be ascribed to the former Soviet Union (FSU). The core concept is modernization: if we assume that modernization in the former Soviet Union had the similar nature to its western type, then the Soviet type of modernization was a real and similar one. However, according to Eisenstadt's theory of multiple modernities (2000) that is well applicable to the FSU, and taking into account different historical background of the discussed countries one may conclude that the Soviet modernization differed greatly from the western pattern. Soviet modernization was forced, speed-up, incomplete, as it mainly included industrialization and rejected social, cultural and political dimensions that were essential aspects of the western modernization. We may assume that deficient character of Soviet modernization produced deficient cultural programs for further social and cultural development of this society, so that the Soviet (and post-Soviet) type of modernization by no means copied the western type. In this respect our opinion totally coincides with opinion of other scholars of religion in post-communist countries (Zrinscak 2004a, Tomka 2006).

Still, it does not mean that Soviet modernization was a pseudo one. The incomplete character of Soviet modernization probably was a consequence of the dominant role of the state. Domination of the soviet state prevented the process of growth and diffusion of institutions adjusted to radical economic and technological changes. The same factor (a strong state) determined a contradictory nature of post-Soviet transition: on the one hand, post-Soviet states could not escape the global cultural influences and challenges; on the other, new societal elements coexist with many features of the previous epochs - Soviet-type Modernity and even patriarchal, traditional society.

*RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE OF  
RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES*

In order to draw the whole picture of Orthodox religiosity in current Belarus, let me stress some additional aspects. First, it is necessary to explain the relatively low attendance of religious service in Belarus (and other post-soviet countries) in comparison with the western European countries. Thus, according to EVS data, 35% of Western Europeans attend religious service more than once a month while only 13,5% respondents in Belarus do the same (Halman 2001).

It is true that Orthodox believers do not attend religious service as regular and often as Catholic or Protestant believers (see Table 2 here). On the one hand, it can be described as a consequence of the soviet decades of atheist propaganda. If so, one can expect the growth of church attendance during the post-soviet period. Table 2 proves this statement. The data show that currently much more people in post-soviet states attend the religious service than they did when they were 12 (under the soviet regime). Other researchers confirm this statement. As Kaariainen (2007) showed, during the period of 1991-2005, percentage of Russians who attend services at least once a month grew from 6% to 11% (almost double), while percentage of people who never attend these services declined from 59% to 38%.

On the other hand, the low level of attendance of religious service is closely connected with the very nature of Belarusian Orthodox Church that follows the Russian Orthodox Church in this and other issues. However, as Tomka insists, the interpretation of Orthodox Church attendance should not be similar as in the West where church attendance is an important indicator of religiosity. Quoting Tomka (2006, 262), just repeat: "The main problem in Eastern Europe is how to grasp religion without the yardstick of an official interpreting agent". According to Tomka, Orthodoxy differs from the Western Christianity in several aspects, including the attitude to church attendance: this criterion is not so important proof of religiosity as in the West.

Some Russian scholars of religion even state that the Orthodox believers are not obliged to attend the church regularly (Vassilyev 1999). Of course, this is a "practical attitude" that does not coincide with the official Orthodox norms according to which weekly attendance is necessary.

However, as Kaariainen correctly noticed (2007), there is always a difference between the “Orthodox written norms” and “Orthodox practice”.

That is why those who identify themselves as believers and do not regularly attend religious services can still be considered as believers, because the Orthodox religiosity is based on people’s self-identification rather than on any formal rituals and practices (Naletova 2004).

This practical feature of Orthodox Church caused many other consequences, such as very close ties with the state under the Tsarist regime, low respect to an individual and individual’s rights, and even low level of knowledge of Christian dogmas. Currently, Russian Orthodox Church can’t overcome this historical legacy as it has become a part of a traditional popular (folklore) culture, a part of national mentality influencing everyday life of all the people in these three countries - whether they are religious or not.

Table 2 also contributes to the argument that it is not only the length of the Soviet atheist propaganda, but also the nature of the Orthodox Church that creates a clear difference in the church attendance. The Baltic republics demonstrate a good example. Currently, many people in Catholic Lithuania attend the church at least once a month (similar to the people in Western Europe), while it is not the case for two other Baltic republics, Latvia and Estonia (currently, 59% of people in Latvia identify them-

*Table 2 Attendance of Religious Services in the European Former Soviet States, in %*

States	More than once a month:		Never attend services:	
	now	when being 12	now	when being 12
<i>Orthodox:</i>				
Belarus	14.5	10.9	27.8	49.3
Russia	9.2	5.6	50.1	75.4
Ukraine	16.9	8.1	30.5	57.3
[Sub-Total]	13.5	8.2	36.1	60.7
<i>Mixed Catholic-Protestant-Orthodox:</i>				
Estonia	11.1	8.6	37.8	55.3
Latvia	15.1	19.7	34.6	52.3
[Sub-Total]	13.1	14.2	36.2	53.8
<i>Catholic:</i>				
Lithuania	31.5	49.0	16.0	13.7
[Total]	16.8	17.0	32.8	50.6
All-European	31.6	56.5	29.5	23.8

Source: EVS 1999-2000

selves as believers, among them one third Catholics, one third Protestants, and almost one third Orthodox; in Estonia only 25% are religious, half of them are Protestants, and the rest are Orthodox).

As Belarus had been Sovietized fully only after the WWII, when western territorised and became independent in 1991, it is the different nature of the dominant religious denomination in Lithuania (and not a Soviet occupation) that explains the dramatic differences in the level of church attendance in three Baltic countries in the recent years. This difference makes the Eastern Orthodox Church less competitive against the Roman Catholic Church (probably, this is a latent reason why the Russian Patriarch Alexiy II did not allow the Pope John-Paul II to visit Russia). As Filatov (2005) concludes, contemporary Orthodox religiosity is badly structured, so that it is very difficult to clearly define the number of Orthodox believers and even the nature of this religiosity itself.

In general, Orthodox religious revival can be characterized "both in terms of external and internal forms. The EVS methodology on religious issues elaborated by the western scholars (see Ester e.a., 1994) and tested in several countries, allowed us to use two major dimensions of religiosity for all countries: external and intrinsic religiosity. In the post-Soviet region, both kinds of religiosity (or both dimensions) can be described as important complex indicators of the current religious situation in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine as they can shed light to different manifested and latent aspects of religiosity in Belarus.

Our research on external and intrinsic religiosity in six post-soviet states (three Baltic and three Slavic states taken as two groups where only a second group belonged to Orthodoxy) was made on the basis of EVS methodology and the 1999/2000 EVS data. According to this methodology, each above-mentioned religious dimension was constructed as a result of several indicators. Thus, external religiosity was interpreted as an integral set of manifested patterns of behavior (each was measured by "yes-no" scale): person's belonging to a religious denomination, attendance of religious service, having any traditional Christian beliefs, and celebration of 'rites of passage.'

The key issue for intrinsic religiosity was self-identification of a person as a religious one; then four more indicators were selected: belief in Personal God, personal importance of God, regular praying outside the religious services, and positive answer to question that religion gives a person comfort and strength.

According to our research (Titarenko, 2004: 376-380), the levels of external and intrinsic religiosity do not coincide in both groups of countries. However, in the Baltic states, there was a bigger difference between these two dimensions (external religiosity was equal 0,79 on a [0-1] scale where 1 means the highest level of it; intrinsic religiosity was equal 0,63 on a similar scale) than in the Slavic states (0,72 and 0,70 accordingly). These

results show that (1) the level of manifested (external) religiosity is much higher in the Baltic states than their "emotional" level of personal involvement (the gap between them was equal 0,16); (2) an external dimension of religiosity in the Slavic states was lower than in the Baltic states while the level of intrinsic religiosity was higher; (3) in the Slavic states both dimensions were very close to each other. We may conclude that both sides of religiosity show a consistent coincidence in the Orthodox countries. Also, the results prove the fact that an emotional dimension of religiosity is more important in the Slavic (Orthodox) states, than in the Baltic states (with different dominant denominations). As we can observe, there are different trends in religiosity between the ex-soviet Baltic states and the ex-soviet Slavic (mainly Orthodox) countries, although both aspects of religiosity (or both dimensions) can be measured in both groups of countries.

The lower level of external religiosity in the Slavic countries indirectly prove that the Orthodox church does not control its believers' behavior on the same level as Roman Catholic or Protestant churches: as a social institution it still can't greatly influence the practical life of Orthodox believers and increase their level of attendance or membership.

#### *FROM THE UNLIMITED FREEDOM OF CONSCIOUSNESS TO RESTRICTIONS OF RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES*

From the beginning the Belarusian state did not clearly assess the growing importance of the symbolic role of religion in post-Soviet society as an indicator of cultural identification and a marker of a stable unshakable life desired by the majority of the population. To recognize the enormous cultural significance of religion was equal to admit a greater role of religion than the role of a post-Soviet state. The post-Soviet state hardly could do that, as the whole situation in Belarus was viewed from another political framework.

From our point of view, the post-Soviet history of Belarus demonstrates the struggle of two different tendencies of modern development (Eisenstadt 2005): pluralistic and totalizing. While in 1991-1994 the first tendency was dominant, since the presidential election in 1994 the second tendency was elaborated. Actually, in both cases the Belarusian state simply tried to apply to the sphere of religion its own political approach that was predominant at any particular period of time among the power elites in Belarus (however, for each of these periods the state approach differed).

During the very beginning of the period of national independence the necessity to elaborate its own legal basis for all spheres of life, including the regulations of the religious activities, appeared. In December 1992 a special law on religion was adopted by the Belarusian parliament. It was the first state law on religion in the independent Republic of Belarus: The Law of the Republic of Belarus "On freedom of religion and religious organizations". This law was based on the cancellation of the previous mo-

nopoly of the communist ideology, so that every citizen could freely choose his/her own world outlook and freely execute religious feelings and behavior. This law accepted the principle of absolute equality of all religions in Belarus. Therefore this law guaranteed the full equality of citizens before the law regardless of their religious affiliation and the full equality of all religious groups regardless of the number of their members. In other words, the law stated that nobody would be punished on the basis of his/her religious beliefs. Actually the 1992 Law constructed the liberal pluralistic basis for freedom of religion of citizens of Belarus, although, as Kotlyarov and Zemlyakov (2004, 162) explained, Belarusian society "was not ready for the liberal approaches in the sphere of religion".

The content of this law reflected the social situation of the first period of the independent Belarus: the so-called period of political romanticism and broad democracy when the multi-party parliament played the major role in political life. It practically copied the American model of relationship between the state and religious organizations: full independence of the religious community from the state, full equality of religions and religious organizations before the law, etc. According to the 1992 Law (article 16), any ten persons above 18 could form a religious community and register it without any restrictions; according to article 14, it was not necessary to register the Charter or Statute of this organization. A special expertise of the content of its religious practice and dogmas also was not in demand. Article 8 allowed the organization of religious education for children through the Sunday schools, special groups, and other forms. Article 24 allowed the religious organizations openly and freely produce and distribute among the population any religious literature and other related materials. No special state expertise for this literature was necessary. Also, the law did not demand for a religious organization to be "historically rooted" in Belarus, so that the new religious groups and denominations could easily be registered as well as any "old" denominations that existed in this territory for several centuries.

The 1992 Law was the most liberal in Belarus. Actually, this was the first national attempt to create a national law to regulate the religious activities in the legal, economic, social, educational spheres. This law was created in the atmosphere of political pluralism, when individual freedoms were flourishing, and the parliament's deputies tried to radically change the legal basis of the post-Soviet state. Due to this law, lots of foreign missionaries came to the republic and started practicing religion in several religious communities. According to Zemlyakov (2001, p. 35), for example, only in 1997 the Protestants religious communities invited to serve in Belarus 339 foreign clergymen, half of them from the USA. Along with the growth of traditional for Belarus Christian communities (Orthodox and Catholic – both Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic), new sects and small religious groups quickly appeared. For example, several communities

of Chrishnaites and Baha'i, some Muslim communities, and even one community of Oomoto were officially registered during these years (Akincits, 1999).

However, as followed by Zemlyakov (2001, 170), this law contradicted the goals of several political elites that came to power structures after 1994 and whose interests coincided with the interests of the Belarusian Orthodox Church to increase their positions in a society. These groups concluded that the law allegedly did not contribute into creation of social solidarity and even misled social groups as political opposition mainly was supported by Catholic and Protestant denominations (Zemlyakov 2001, 7-8). Also, the law contradicted with some traditional views of the higher representatives of Belarusian Orthodox Church, as all religious confessions took the equal status regardless of the fact that only few confessions had deep historical roots in Belarus. That is why soon after the presidential election (1994) another model of regulations of the state-religion relations was selected: the so called French model (Babosov 2004). This model was officially approved as it allegedly fitted the historical traditions of Belarus (it made difference between the role of denominations that existed in Belarus for several centuries, significantly influencing the population and having many believers, and those religious organizations that were recently established). This model also perfectly complemented the new political goals of the state: strong social order and control over the public life (Kirvel 2006, 84).

Belarusian Orthodox Church actively supported these changes in the state politics towards religion, as, according to some estimations (Zemlyakov 2001, 28), it lost some adherents under the situation of "free religious market" and quick growth of influence of other religious organizations, especially Protestant. First of all, Belarusian Orthodox Church increased its participation in the education of the younger generation and in the cultural life in the whole country. Then, it provided service for the Belarusian Army: an additional agreement on cooperation between the church and the Ministry of Internal Affairs was signed in 1997 (Zemlyakov 2001, 164).

Since 1995 many small amendments to the existing law on religion were gradually adopted. The main goal of these amendments was to create favorable conditions for functioning of the so called "traditional for Belarus" confessions and at the same time construct some restrictions for further distribution of the new religious cults and new religious movements (so called "non-traditional" religious organizations).

In the beginning of 1995 the first 13 amendments were adopted. For example, article seven was supplemented with the statements that all religious organizations would be prohibited if they would organize anti-Constitutional activities, or break the existing laws, or violate the human rights. The new conditions for prohibition of religious organizations were introduced (article 18), and new duties and commissions of the state office on religious affairs were included (article 29).

In July 1995 a new Status on activities of foreign clergymen in the Republic of Belarus was adopted where (a) these activities were put under the state control, and (b) some restrictions for the duration of stay of foreign clergymen were placed. Later in February 1999 a new *Statement on Foreign Clergymen* was adopted by the council of ministers, so that the number of foreign priests was dramatically restricted. Thus, in 1996 only in Minsk administrative penalty for the law violation was imposed on 18 foreign missionaries, 3 citizens of Russia and 2 citizens of Kazakhstan, and non-registered religious organizations were prohibited to organize summer campuses for youth in Belarus (Zemlyakov 2001, 155).

In November 1996 an important amendment to article 16 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus was adopted. Before this change all the religious confessions were equal and did not have any privileges. According to this amendment, the principle of equality has been reinterpreted, as the input of particular confessions into the history of Belarus was taken into account. The new edition of article 16 declared: "Interrelations of the state and religious organizations are regulated by the law minding the influence of each religious confession on the formation of the state, spiritual, and cultural traditions of Belarusians" (Constitution, 1996, p.7). Thus, along with the fact that religious confessions took part in the formation of Belarusian culture, this article secured for some confessions more practical privileges than for the others. In 1997 a special organ - the State Committee on Religious Affairs - was founded, so that all the religious activities were under the strict control of this Committee. A few months later the above-mentioned committee started the procedure of prohibition of many neomystic and destructive sects and introduced the obligatory expertise for Statutes and activities of all religious organizations in Belarus.

To summarize: the new system of the state control of the religious activities in Belarus was formed, according to which some confessions got some practical privileges, the non-registered were prohibited, while the rest could act within the restricted conditions. According to this system, the Constitutional statement "equal before the law" was still correct, however, in reality, rights of religious believers and the priests were subjected to the new established regulations that protected not only historical and cultural traditions of Belarusian people but also coincided with the political goals of the established political system in Belarus.

Regardless of the process of strengthening collaboration between the political regime and the Orthodox Church, as Zemlyakov (Zemlyakov 2001, 196) noted, during the period between 1989 and 2000 the number of Orthodox religious communities decreased almost eight per cent (from 52 to 44 per cent), while the number of Roman Catholic communities stayed almost constant (less than 16 per cent) and the number of Protestant communities increased greatly (from 29 to 35,7 per cent). As one can see the situation has significantly changed since the beginning of independence:



Catholic and Protestant Churches have been gaining more strength, and the growing number of their adherents is much more interested in learning the Holy Scripture and practice religious rituals than their Orthodox opponents (Kotlyarov and Zemlyakov 2004, 134). Such situation is more or less similar in Russia as well (Filatov 2004, 31).

These tendencies are worrisome for the Orthodox Church that still tries to keep its religious dominant position in Belarusian society (Zemlyakov, 2001, p. 19). As it is clear that Belarusian Orthodox Church can't resist these tendencies without the state support, it itself strongly supports the state initiatives and helps the Belarusian state in problem-solving in many civic matters: Orthodox clergy work in prisons, the army, hospitals, as well as they are allowed to the state TV and radio programs.

However, the state worries about the growth of new religious movements. By April 2002 in Belarus there were 89 new religious movements and more than 200 cults (Shelest 2003, 169). Currently, there are around hundred new religious movements. In this respect, the situation in Belarus is not exceptional: it demonstrates the same tendencies that are typical for the West (Varga 2001, 26). It means that global religious processes take place in post-Soviet region as elsewhere.

Overall, new relationships between religion and state have been established, so that a clear totalizing tendency of cultural modern program (in Eisenstadt terms) was unfold.

#### *COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE DOMINANT ORTHODOX CHURCH*

On the surface of the religious development the rapprochement between religion and post-Soviet Belarusian state can be understood as a return to the Russian pre-revolutionary model of relationship, with one significant historical difference: instead of the slogan on unity of Orthodoxy and the state power, the idea of the closeness of the secular post-Soviet state and the so called dominant religious denomination was practically elaborated. On the one hand, the Constitution (article 16) declares equal rights of all denominations before the law, on the other, the state-religion relationships are regulated taking into account particular influence of each religious organization "on cultural and state traditions of Belarusian people" (Constitution 1996, 7). Therefore, only the Belarusian Orthodox Church was declared to be the dominant one and recognized as the most respected by the majority of the titular nation in Belarus. These two constitutional principles make it possible for the state to allow religious pluralism and also establish better relations with selected denomination.

Such collaboration between the state and the "dominant religion" can be interpreted as conservative in its nature. It actually conflicts with the pluralistic model because the Orthodox Church plays function of an obedient tool of the state and enjoys some material privileges (for example some

religious buildings were returned to the Belarusian Orthodox Church as its property). A similar practice existed in Stalin's days when the Russian Orthodox Church had to compromise with the totalitarian soviet state in order to survive. Some scholars of religion pointed out this tendency toward the revival of a state church in Russia in the early 1990s (Filatov 1994, 123). Now this trend has become even more obvious.

This situation was secured in the new edition of the Law on religion that was adapted in 2002 and marked the beginning of the third period of evolution the state-religion regulations in Belarus. The continuous growth of religious communities (especially non-Orthodox) speeded up the process of adoption of this document. It is possible to name this period as the time of further legal recognition of the unequal statuses of confessions practically attributed to them earlier (between 1995 and 2000), although did not recognized formally. In addition to the adoption of the dominant role of Belarusian Orthodox Church, the stricter conditions for registration of religious groups were adopted, including the demand for obligatory evaluation by the state experts of all supporting documents (constitutions, by-laws, statutes, etc.) submitted by such religious groups.

Actually, the third period started a year before the adoption of the new edition of this law, in July 2001, when the fundamental basis for new restrictions was provided in the "Concept on National Security" adopted by the President of Belarus. Among the new cultural and informational threats for Belarus there were mentioned religious dissensions, national and religious extremisms, devaluation of traditional spiritual values, as well as foreign missionary activities, neo-mystical cults, and some other activities. The basic idea – freedom of consciousness – was reinterpreted. The roles of religions were defined according to their historical past: only those religious confessions were considered to be most welcomed that were typical for Belarus at least for several centuries.

The state assigned an extremely important role to the Belarusian Orthodox Church within this "Concept of National Security". According to this document, the Belarusian Orthodox Church must help achieve certain important state goals, such as the struggle against the "negative influence of foreign religious organizations and missionaries," providing expertise to assess new religious organizations, strengthening "traditional values", and preserving the spiritual heritage of the Belarusian people. From this point of view, religious hatred, as well as the activities of foreign religions and missionaries, and neo-mystical cults are defined as "information and cultural threats" to the Belarusian state (Concept 2001). If the law declares that only a few religious denominations are "natural" for the Belarusian people to participate in, it is not difficult to discriminate against any other religion and therefore to infringe on the people's freedom of religion in practice.

The final interpretation of the constitutional right was summarized in the above-mentioned new edition of the Law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" adopted in November 2002. Af-

ter the hot scholar discussion of what is democratic and what is not in the new interpretation of religious confessions, the hard-liners won: the "dominant role of Orthodox Church in the formation and development of the spiritual, cultural and state traditions of Belarusians" received the full confirmation. Additionally, an important spiritual, cultural and historical role of Catholic Church in Belarus was also recognized, as well as inseparable statuses of Evangelical-Lutheran, Muslim, and Jewish religious organizations (Law 2002).

In general, the rules for establishment a new religious community were restricted: only a citizen of Belarus can be an organizer of any new community; any religious organization must have citizens of Belarus as its members and serve for their spiritual needs, any organization must be legally registered and has to provide the necessary documents for its purpose (statute, dogmas, list of at least 20 members, legal address of the organization, etc.).

On the basis of this edition of the Law, the Belarusian state selected the most appropriate partners for cooperation in promoting some social and cultural programs (in education, propaganda of patriotism, building new churches, etc.). In February 2003 the Belarusian state and Belarusian Orthodox Church signed an official Agreement on cooperation. It is called "Agreement on Cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the Belarusian Orthodox Church". According to this agreement, the Belarusian state allowed the Orthodox Church to weigh in the spheres of education, public morality, culture, art, protection of the people's historical heritage, social work, charity, the army, prisons, as well as the ecological sphere. In fact, the agreement gave carte blanche to the Belarusian Orthodox Church to participate in public affairs, i.e., to involvement of the dominant Church in public life and public activities (i.e. to counteract secularization, but under the control of the state). As some scholars noted, this is an example of conformism and ideological adaptation of the Orthodox Church to the current political regime in order to gain some privileges and took the dominant positions in the republic (Babosov 2004). As a result, the contemporary Belarusian state (i.e. the profane, temporal power), being secular, allowed the church (the religious power) to share the cultural power and to find a decent place among the state institutions.

On January 8, 2007, President Lukashenko honored several members of Belarusian Orthodox Church with "For Spiritual Revival" awards in recognition of their efforts to develop "moral traditions which contribute to the spiritual values...between various nationalities and religions." In a meeting with the Orthodox bishops on December 21, 2006, President Lukashenko praised the cooperation between the Government and the BOC and stressed their common goals of civil accord and national unity. The President also noted the Government's assistance to the Belarusian Orthodox Church: in 2006 the Government funded \$3 million (6.4 billion rubles) in the Orthodox projects.

To summarise: the legal right to cooperate with the state is common for any religious organization in Belarus, according to the Civic Code. In practice, Belarusian state has an agreement on cooperation only with the Belarusian Orthodox Church and therefore practically provides some additional opportunities for this church. So, this church helps the state to perform the important functions in a society and strengthen its own status. The legal basis for such state decision is the official recognition of the Belarusian Orthodox Church as the dominant one in Belarus.

### *RELIGIOUS PLURALITY AND THE STATE IN BELARUS*

In general, the religious situation in Belarus can be characterized by the following important features: pluralism of religious organisations, free choice of religious beliefs by the individual, special agreements between two of the Christian Churches and the state, and religious tolerance among the population.

As has been mentioned earlier, according to some data, more than a half of the population in Belarus consider themselves to be religious, as they support the idea of God. Among them, more than 75% are Orthodox; around 10% are Roman Catholics, while the rest belong to many religious other Churches and sects (Halman 2001). As for the number of religious communities, their proportion, according to the statistics, is the following: Orthodox – 45%, Catholic – 15%, Protestant – 32%, and others – 8% (Kotlyarov and Zemlyakov 2004, 126). According to some research estimates, there are around 400 new religious movements in Belarus; approximately half of them have come from abroad while the other half have local roots (Martinovich 2008). This fact – the variety of new religious movements along with the diversity of the major religious denominations – supports the statement that the religious situation in Belarus resembles a mosaic where many Churches, sects, and movements co-exist. This is also a proof of the individualisation of religious beliefs in Belarus.

What is the official attitude of the state toward this pluralism?

The above-mentioned provided this Church with some privileges in the practical life: the Orthodox Church obtained access to the army, hospitals, schools, and other institutions. However, as I have already mentioned, current relations between the state and the Roman Catholic Church have improved greatly as well. Since 2008, some important official visits between the Vatican and Belarus took place. In the spring of 2009, Belarusian president Lukashenko visited the Pope in the Vatican and discussed with him the religious situation in Belarus and other post-Soviet states. This visit was aimed at demonstrating that Belarusian authorities treat equally the two Christian Churches that have the status of traditional ones and are supported by the majority of believers. A special agreement between the government and the Catholic Church – similar to the one between the Orthodox Church and the state – is to be signed, so that both Churches will

enjoy similar access to the public institutions in Belarus. In the case of Belarus, such an agreement can be viewed as a legal basis allowing for increasing religious pluralism, since it would provide the Roman Catholic Church opportunities similar to those the Orthodox Church enjoys.

As for other religious denominations, people may also openly support them – in case these organisations function within the legal basis provided by the law. It should be noted that the state considers certain sects and cults dangerous for the population, and their activities are strongly restricted by the state, while many new religious movements are banned outright (Kotlyarov and Zemlyakov 2004, 148-149). For example, Hare Krishna community in Minsk was forced out of its office in December 2006 because in November 2006 the authorities denied the registration for some formal reasons. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate precisely how many people support new religious movements in Belarus. However, the very fact of their existence confirms the religious pluralism in the country.

The second most important feature of the religious relations in Belarus is tolerance between different religious organisations. Usually, they show no hostility toward each other even when competing for new believers. No major religious conflicts or religious splits (similar to those in Ukraine or Russia) are to be expected in Belarus. In the opinion of the leader of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Filaret, the reasons for such splits and conflicts in the post-Soviet space are usually political: 'It is obvious that the historical heirs of the major world religions – Judaism, Islam, and Christianity – are fighting with each other. However, the reason for these conflicts is in the heirs themselves and not in the religious legacy' (Metropolitan Filaret 2006: 66). Being aware of possible battles on religious grounds, the Belarusian Orthodox Church seems to be doing its best to avoid conflicts with other Churches and religious organisations. The role of the Orthodox Church in maintaining religious peace is very important, as is the personality of its current leader.

The second factor that contributes to insuring religious balance is the state itself: state regulations on the relations between the religious and non-religious organisations contribute to the tolerant situation in Belarus. This fact is recognised by scholars as well as by the representatives of different confessions in Belarus. It does not necessary mean that there are no conflicts between the believers or the Churches; however, when they arise, they are peacefully resolved.

Sociological surveys run by the Institute of Sociology also confirm that the relations between the believers of the main religious confessions are mostly peaceful. According to Novikova (2007: 48), the level of tolerance has consistently grown between 1998 and 2006 in all selected groups of different consciousness (religious, quasi-religious, hesitating, and non-religious). Thus, among the religious persons the level of tolerance increased from 58% to 76%, among the group of the quasi-religious – from 49% to 76%,

among the seekers (hesitating) – from 64% to 83%, and among non-religious persons – from 68% to 84%.

In 2008, a new public organisation called ‘Dialogue Eurasia’ was established in Belarus with the mission to promote a peaceful intercultural dialogue between Christianity and moderate Islam (the organisation embraces former Soviet countries and Turkey). This initiative has the support of the state and the public: joint conferences of representatives of these religions take place, public discussions, meetings and exhibitions are organized, and books are published. This is also evidence that Belarus is a place of peaceful coexistence of many religions.

### *CURRENT RELIGIOUS SITUATION*

Current religious tendencies include the rise of interest to religion among the population; widespread eclectic ‘Christian’ beliefs; relatively low regular attendance of religious services; moderate rise of Baptism and Pentecostalism (‘Christians of Evangelical Faith’), and homogenization of the religious field.

As of 1.01.2009, 25 religious confessions (3062 religious organizations) were registered, the most popular among them being:

- Orthodox Church (1473 parishes, 1274 churches);
- Roman Catholic Church (467 communities, 451 churches),
- Protestant Churches (14 denominations and 992 communities, among them 557 Pentecostals, 269 Baptist, 27 Lutherans),
- Uniate Church (14 communities),
- Church of Old Believers (32 communities),
- Islam (27 communities),
- Judaism (46 communities).

Among almost a hundred new religious movements the Krishnaites, Baha’i, Mormons, New Apostolic Church, Witnesses of Jehovah, and Johannites are registered. Additionally, around 150 sects and cults are registered as public and other organizations.

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## РЕЛИГИЈА У БЕЛОРУСИЈИ

### Резиме

У раду се разматра пресовјетска историја Белорусије као позадина за анализу тренутне религијске ситуације у постсовјетској земљи. Ауторка показује да је становништво на подручју које данас представља Републику Белорусију било етнички измешано: преци савремених Белоруса, Руса, Литванаца, Татара, Јевреја, Пољака и неких других народа су вековима живели на овим просторима. Они су толерисали једни друге, као и религијска веровања сваког етницитета. Тако су једни поред других живели православци, католици, протестанти, муслимани и јевреји.

Совјетска сила је начинила Белорусију делом атеистичке земље, Совјетског Савеза. Религија је била одвојена од државе, али није нестала. Стога се овде након распада Совјетског Савеза јавила религијска обнова, са неким специфичним одликама које се могу сматрати доказом разлика између источне и западне религиозности.

У првом делу рада су описане савремене одлике религиозности у Белорусији, са фокусом на мозаички карактер и превласт православља које се посматра и као религијски и као културни идентитет становништва. У другом делу рада се анализира однос између цркве и државе у Белорусији.

**Кључне речи:** постсовјетска Белорусија, православље, обнова, мешовита религиозност, религија Словена