

Uladykouskaja Liubou

PhD in Philology, Associate Professor, National Institute for Higher Education, Director General, Institution "Intercultural Dialogue" (Minsk, Belarus)
uladykl@gmail.com;

Susan de France

PhD in Anthropology, Associate Professor and Associate Chair, University of Florida, Department of Anthropology, Gainesville, FL, USA
sdef@ufl.edu

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND BELARUS: CRISIS OR CHANCE?

The goal is to define the functional role of intercultural dialogue in modern Belarus. The research **methodology** is based on the next methods: system analysis, structural-functional, historical, anthropological, and axiological, which allow us to consider the national culture and the contemporary socio-cultural space in their integrity and consistency. Philosophical methods (analytical, phenomenological and dialectical) made it possible to identify the tendencies of development and interpretation of intercultural dialogue. Deduction and induction, abstraction and generalization were also used. **Scientific novelty.** This article is devoted to the modern interpretation of the intercultural dialogue and its functional role in Belarus. **Conclusions.** Being a universal value of the modern world and strategy of European cultural policy intercultural dialogue plays a critical role for the nation building and democratic transformation in Belarus. The crisis of the Belarussian national culture, the lack of natural linguistic and cultural context, not high enough level of national identity and the split of the Belarussian society can be overcome to a large extent through the development of intercultural dialogue, which would be an attributive characteristic of Belarussian society due to its historically multi-confessional and multi-ethnic structure and deep democratic traditions of the Belarussian history.

Key words: Intercultural dialogue, European cultural policy, Belarus, nation building.

Владыковская Любовь Николаевна, кандидат филологических наук, доцент Республиканского института высшей школы, генеральный директор учреждения «Межкультурный диалог» (Минск, Беларусь); Сьюзан де Франс, доктор антропологии, руководитель Департамента антропологии, Университет Флориды (США)

Межкультурный диалог и Беларусь: кризис или шанс?

Цель исследования – определение функциональной роли межкультурного диалога в современной Беларуси.

Методология исследования базируется на применении методов системного анализа, структурно-функционального, исторического, антропологического и аксиологического, позволяющих рассматривать национальную культуру и современное социокультурное пространство в их целостности и системности. Философские методы (аналитический, феноменологический, диалектический) дали возможность выявить наиболее общие закономерности развития и трактовки межкультурного диалога. Используются также общенаучные методы дедукции и индукции, абстрагирования, обобщения. **Научная новизна.** Систематизированы основные теоретические и практические подходы к пониманию и использованию межкультурного диалога в современном мире. Показаны историко-культурные предпосылки и препятствия для развития межкультурного диалога в Беларуси, а также его возможная функциональная роль в национальном строительстве и демократической трансформации. **Выводы.** Являясь универсальной ценностью современного глобального мира и основой стратегии европейской культурной политики, межкультурный диалог играет важнейшую роль в национальном строительстве и демократической трансформации Беларуси. Кризис белорусской национальной культуры, недостаточность натурального языково-культурного контекста, уровня национальной идентичности, расколотасть белорусского общества в значительной степени могут быть преодолены путём развития межкультурного диалога, который мог бы являться атрибутивной характеристикой белорусского общества благодаря его исторически поликонфессиональной и полиэтнической структуре, а также глубоким демократическим традициям белорусской истории.

Ключевые слова: межкультурный диалог, европейская культурная политика, Беларусь, национальное строительство.

Topicality. Despite the fact that intercultural dialogue is often used in the world theory and practice, this notion is rather vague, and there are many concepts and aspects of intercultural dialogue.

Dr. Stephen Dahl writes that the term "intercultural dialogue" is used too freely and carelessly [2]. Most of contemporary researchers (like Maureen Guirdham [3], Rossita Albert [1], Jerzy Smolicz [7] and others) believe that intercultural dialogue helps to solve political, social, and religious conflicts. Prof. Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz writes that intercultural dialogue entails an exchange of views between individuals or groups having different ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic backgrounds, requiring that participants listen to one another, but not necessarily reach agreement [5]. The diversity of intercultural dialogue approaches including specific national and regional understanding is demonstrated by the span of its key concepts as proposed by the world researchers on the web-site of the Center for Intercultural Dialogue in Washington, DC (<http://centerforinterculturaldialogue.org/publications/>). In the widest sense, intercultural dialogue is an exchange between different systems of values.

Intercultural dialogue is open and respectful exchange of opinions, which contributes to deeper understanding and perception of others; it seeks peaceful, non-confrontational solutions to diversified questions and issues. In this sense, intercultural dialogue is of great value to the contemporary world. It ensures active participation in global cooperation, which is the intrinsic part of any progress. The adoption of humankind's most valuable heritage and the contribution of one's own achievements to the world treasury is the primary goal of each nation unless it wants to become an outsider, lose its sovereignty, and disappear first from the international arena and then from its own land.

Intercultural dialogue is a fundamental model of democratic communications that resists violence and learns to live peacefully and constructively in the multicultural world. At the same time, intercultural dialogue is the instrument that contributes to consensus and non-admission repudiation of conflicts thanks to respect for a human person and any displays of creative initiative.

Intercultural dialogue is primarily a supra-cultural, universal phenomenon that embraces the features typical for all nations and cultures and is based on the recognition of equal dignity and equal opportunities of and for individuals, social groups, nations and cultures.

This is exactly the national culture that can be the central subject of the contemporary cultural dialogue in its international perspective. And this cultural dialogue is feasible when, on the one hand, there is no confrontation, and, on the other hand, there are one's own traditions, as well as respect for others. The understanding of intercultural dialogue, which acknowledges the right to be different and sees the value of cultural diversity and creates the foundation of many international acts, including the UNESCO Declarations.

The European Union declared 2008 the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue. Furthermore, the European Union chose intercultural dialogue, as a strategy for its cultural politics based on cultural diversity. The Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue: Living Together as Equals in Dignity (2008) advanced the conviction that "it is our common responsibility to achieve a society where we can live together as equals in dignity" [9, 5].

Cultural politics is rather different in European countries where the preservation of cultural originality and native language is one of the main tasks of the Europe of Fatherlands. Intercultural dialogue is essential for avoiding conflict and the marginalization of citizens based on their cultural identity. Unlike multiculturalism, which has failed in some European countries and which maintains a focus on the preservation of separate cultures, intercultural dialogue seeks to establish linkages and common ground between different cultures, communities, and people.

In his essay "Identity and Migration" Prof. Francis Fukuyama (2007) proposed ways to overcome negative issues of multiculturalism and migrant movements. He revealed why and how old multicultural structure must be replaced by more energetic efforts to integrate non-western populations into the common liberal culture: not multiculturalism, but inter-culturalism instead. The intercultural debate must be opened in order to redefine modern liberal identity. To continue the idea of cultural diversity as a common good, more energetic efforts are needed in order to integrate all sorts of people into the common liberal culture. In order to get that done, this multiculturalism based on group recognition and group rights must be abandoned [4].

Intercultural dialogue is perceived more and more as an alternative model to the previous integration policies marked by assimilations and multiculturalism. Thus, intercultural dialogue today is essential for every modern community especially when related to the planned migrant movements and the collapse of multiculturalism in Europe; the importance of intercultural dialogue has become even more obvious after the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015.

In Belarus, specific features of intercultural dialogue are not associated with the migrant movement or multiculturalism. Migrant movement to Belarus has been connected to Ukrainian refugees since 2014; however, there are no cultural conflicts because of similarities between Belarusian and Ukrainian cultures and languages due to economic and political reasons.

Our goal is to define the functional role of intercultural dialogue in the modern Belarus.

Main part. Intercultural dialogue is extremely important for Belarus in the aspects of nation building and democratic transformation. Additionally, intercultural dialogue and its relationship to national building and democratic transformation force one to evaluate the specific traits of contemporary Belarusian society to find possible ways for preserve Belarusian sovereignty.

Over the last two decades Belarusian nation building has been substituted with the process of nation destroying and decay in all spheres of society, including the sociocultural one. This is especially problematic given the trend toward the substitution of social and human sciences in Belarus with ideology, as well as the lack of natural Belarusian national cultural context with historically inherent democratic values.

Meanwhile facilitation of the intercultural dialogue is vital today and traditionally intrinsic to the Belarusian culture and it would generate the formation of open thinking and democratic values, insofar as intercultural dialogue implies the recognition of equal dignity and equal opportunities for people, social groups, and cultures.

Intercultural dialogue could become a basis for the democratic transformation in Belarus. This could be achieved through several means. First, a dialogue of various social groups, parties, initiatives, schools, ethnic cultures and religions – in the framework of the development of civic society by means of the strengthening of national identity and Belarusian cultural values as opposed to the Soviet ones. Secondly, through the study and adaptation of European and American experience in intercultural dialogue, which will reveal and consolidate democratic attitudes in contemporary Belarus. Thirdly, through dialogue between cultures and nations on international and global levels that will include Belarus in global (Western) context.

History gives examples of democracy only in free countries; only free country can be democratic. That is why any democratic transformation in Belarus must be connected with Minsk-centric thinking, the Belarusian system of coordination of values and priorities, as well as the Belarusian national identity, culture, and the national language. The dialogue of national cultures is possible in the national languages and from national perspectives and interests. There is no constructive dialogue between homeless. That is why contemporary Belarus should preserve spiritual and cultural independence. Dependence on the imperial paradigm is still very strong (especially in the social sciences and humanities) and now it has a tendency to increase: Russian

authors and Russian interpretations absolutely dominate. In that context, Belarusian traditions – European, gentry and at the same time democratic – are not growing, but are concealing, destroying, and replacing.

Belarus is a part of European Christian civilization with Christian values and ideals, where the worldview is shaped by the rejection of war as a means of solving conflicts, where the ideas of equality and justice, as well as sympathy and understanding of the needs of other individuals, have always been very popular. The Belarusian mentality is liberal. Belarus has historically absorbed the respect to the notion of right, the urge towards the supremacy of law, and trust in foreigners and those who are different.

The Belarusians are hospitable, peace loving and resilient. There are several factors attest to this unique combination of peacefulness and resilience. Among them there is unconditional nuclear disarmament during the early days of independence in exchange for security guarantees from the major states (as well as Ukraine – a participant of the Budapest memorandum), while the state still has to deal with huge expenses to liquidate the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. Among other factors, there is the emergence and survival of Belarusian entrepreneurship in very difficult situations.

Belarus is a traditionally multi-confessional country. Representatives of various religions always coexisted here peacefully. There were no serious clashes, as well as religious persecution in Belarus. Orthodox and Catholic churches have interacted a lot in Belarusian territory. At one point Belarus even made an interesting attempt to unite them to create the "Uniate Church" (1596). During the Reformation and in the 17th century Protestantism had significant influence in the region. As argues a Belarusian researcher Victor Odinochenko (2014) according to the survey conducted in 2011 by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Science of Belarus every fifth Belarusian feels himself a "true believer" and 57.3% of Belarusian true-believers are Orthodox, 34.5% are Catholics and 31% are Protestants. Furthermore, Muslim culture has also been well developed in Belarus, especially as represented by Tartars. It has had many contacts with ethnical Belarusian culture [6].

There is a very interesting tradition of coexistence between Pagan and Christian traditions in folk Belarusian culture. The rich Pagan heritage is currently revealed, for example through ancient names: Neman (name of one of the biggest river in Belarus) bears the name of the Celtic Goddess of War, while Kupala (the alias of the famous Belarusian writer and poet Janka Kupala) is the ancient Goddess of Water. Moreover, a hedonistic summer celebration, "Kupalle," is the most beloved pagan holiday in contemporary Belarus.

On the one hand, because of the long and extensive interaction of religions and cultures, Belarusian culture has developed a high degree of resilience as well as the capacity for cultural and linguistic independence with the preservation of a "cultural core" that has been a century-long guarantee of periodic national renaissance. On the other hand, multicultural and trans-civilization societies have been subject to entropy, which, in theory, provides for the development of the socio-cultural community through the adoption of new cultural forms and the reshaping of traditional forms. In the Belarusian case, however, this process was impeded by the oppression of Belarus's own cultural tradition, and in some instances, was also due to traditional Belarusian conservatism.

Today Belarusian culture is in crisis. This crisis is due not only to national problems, but also due to crisis in the (Western) European cultural space, as well as a whole set of global challenges connected with moral relativism, axiological crisis, and so on. Moreover, the crisis of the Belarusian national culture has been brewing for a long time as a result of the gradual separation of two interrelated subsystems culture: the sphere of creation and the sphere of mass and grassroots level functioning. This is not the fault of the creators, such as writers, artists, scientists, and cultural workers in general. Belarus is actually ahead of other countries on literature, scientific development of the mother language, production of national encyclopedias, and literature and national folklore studies.

Contemporary Belarus is both traditional and modern, Soviet and European. National identity for most of the population is rather weak and that fact prevents social solidarity and social self-organization. The lack of national consolidation is a result of the weakness of the Belarusian national identity and the coexistence of its mutually exclusive versions (e.g., zapadnorusizm, tuteyshasts, Soviet identity, European identity, etc. [8].

It is necessary to overcome a system of negative Soviet, colonial sociocultural stereotypes and to protect cultural originality. It is obviously that the Belarusian culture, the Belarusian language, and the Belarusian identity need to be supported, not only by the government, but also by the civil society.

It seems that the strengthening of Belarusian national identity requires an objective interpretation of Belarusian history and the abandonment of the Soviet mentality, stereotypes and evaluations. There is a need for creation of a pantheon of Belarusian heroes (primarily by means of literature, art and media), national myth-making, the transition from the colonial mindset to the Belarus-centric one, popularization of Belarusian values and ideals, and the revival of the traditions of the Belarusian gentry. In conjunction, there is a need for rejection of Eurasian concepts in Belarus, adoption of the Law on the Protection of the Belarusian Language, and regulation of the language situation as it is accepted in all sovereign states. The processes need to develop hand in hand with respect for an individual and all manifestations of individuality including the creation and promotion of Belarusian brands in tourism and business, etc.

There are different examples of national histories and roles of language in Europe. Sometimes the main factor of nation building is not a language, but we always find some other united national factor that plays a fundamental role in national identity. For example, English speaking Ireland is united via its Catholic faith. The Belarusians created a state in their ethnic territory. The main factor of nation building is not religion or some other factor, but rather the Belarusian language. The Belarusian language is the foundation of national freedom and together with the nation-state it realizes the potential of the people's cultural and socio-economic development – the national idea.

From 1995 onward, the ruination of Belarusian national culture has displayed a very active, systematic and purposeful character, especially when concerning the Belarusian language. There is not any demand for the Belarusian

language in the workplace or in academia. Moreover, it is dangerous to use Belarusian because the native language is associated with the political opposition. Therefore, the Belarusian language is used and comprehended less and less.

According to the information of the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (Education in the Republic of Belarus: Statistical collection 2015, 32), 12.8% children at preschools in Belarus in 2010 studied in Belarusian, in 2013 the number was 11.1 %, and in 2014 it was 10.5 % (respectively in cities: 3%, 2.6%, 2.4%; in villages: 61.6%, 57.6%, 56.4%). In secondary (high) schools during the 2010-2011 academic year 19% of pupils studied in Belarusian, in 2011-2012 the number was 17.8%, in 2012-2013 it was 16.6%, in 2013-2014 15.5%, and in 2014-2015 14.5% ((Education in the Republic of Belarus: Statistical collection 2015, 67). Other pupils study in Russian even though more than 53% of the population of Belarus calls Belarusian their native language (for comparison, in 1990s more than 80% in Belarus people called Belarusian their native language). Unfortunately there are no universities in Belarus (as well as abroad) that teach in Belarusian, although the national elite has been trying to create one for twenty years. It is likely that official data do not show the real picture of the Belarusian language because usually schools that have the status of "the Belarusian language of studying" use Russian.

Being a transient and problematic country, which depends on the outside world – a world that cannot fundamentally affect the internal situation in Belarus – Belarus, like any other country, cannot exist without public consensus on determining strategic issues.

A society that is not based on national ideals, cultural traditions and historical memory (despite the fact that the Belarusian nation has all these values), has no spiritual support, no patriotic faith, is non-competitive and is lacking in its own subjectivity and geopolitical perspective. Such a society is unable to achieve the implementation of the basic conditions and ways of democracy: political pluralism, free elections, human rights, freedom for mass media, and so on.

A splintered and divided society can be united based on fundamental national values, rather than an ideology that creates further division. Belarus can be united by Belarusian national culture in the broadest sense, the national (Belarusian) language, national identity, intercultural dialogue and an idea of particular relevance in the contemporary world.

Thus, as a dialogue of national cultures, intercultural dialogue can, on the one hand, actualize the issues of national culture and language, and on the other hand, it can open up the boundaries of provincialism, backwardness, closeness and isolation. It is important to find the balance between the preservation of cultural originality and open intercultural dialogue at different levels: individual, local, regional, national, international and global.

Conclusions. Intercultural dialogue plays a critical role for the nation building and democratic transformation in Belarus. Modern Belarusian society is closed and intolerant although Belarusian national culture has a rich history of developing democratic traditions. Belarusian society is multicultural and multi-confessional, but now it is too fragmented due to the lack of national identity and natural cultural context, and discrimination of the national language.

Belarus should research and practice intercultural dialogue as a constructive dialogue of national cultures and civilizations, as inter-ethnic, inter-religious communication, interaction of subcultures within the same socio-cultural environment, and as a social dialogue between the representatives of different professional groups, schools, opinion, parties, etc. Intercultural Dialogue provides inclusion into the global context, and it forms open, critical, and dialogical thinking with its respect to difference, diversity, democratic manner of communication, and so. Intercultural dialogue also demands preservation and development of Belarusian traditions, such as historical multiculturalism and ideals of personal liberty, law, and respect to others.

Intercultural dialogue is extremely important for Belarus as it ensures the possibilities of implementing the integral function of Belarusian culture and national identity and contributes to the goals of democratizing contemporary society and encouraging a self-sufficient, and creative personality. It promotes the formation of modern open thinking, where the main values are freedom and equality.

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