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**BELARUSIANNES AFTER PROTESTS OF 2020: THE NATIONAL IDENTITY
OF BELARUSIAN YOUTH IN EXILE**

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Summary: This thesis analyses the national identity of Belarusian youth in exile in the context of the protests of 2020. The theoretical part of the thesis presents the constructivist approach to the nationalism studies. The empirical research tries to deconstruct the national identity of Belarusian youth in exile. The study seeks to find out what is the content of the national identity of Belarusian youth living abroad, what is the intensity of it and investigates the effect of the protests to their national identity.

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INTRODUCTION

The presidential election of 2020 in Belarus was exceptional. Although it was not the first time when the three-decades-long ruling Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenka and his regime prevented the candidates of the opposition from participating in the elections by accusing them of various crimes and sending them to jail, also blatantly falsified the results, this time it coincided with the global COVID-19 pandemic. The head of the state openly demonstrated his carelessness and disrespectfully talked about the non-existence of the virus in front of the Belarus people, who suffered from the consequences of the disease and lacked help from the state. Unlike all other times when the election process was not fair, after the 9th of August, the Belarusian nation mobilized on an unprecedented scale. Thousands of Belarusians went on the streets of Belarus, and these demonstrations and protests, continuing until now, appeared at the centre of world attention.

A complicated nation's history, the short experience of an independent state of the interwar period, an underdeveloped titular language many years of significant Russian influence determined an unfavourable starting position of nation-building after the independence. Regularly called a 'sleeping nation'¹ or terra incognita, for a long time, Belarusian national identity was considered unclear not only by international experts or academic society but even for Belarusians themselves.² However, when Belarusian society openly expressed its desire for change in nationwide protests, many commentators and experts evaluated it as the largest crackdown in Europe for the past 30 years. According to them, this historic transformation taking place within Belarusian people allowed them to define the new Belarus – 'no longer prepared to stay silent in the face of the regime's criminal actions and increasingly self-confident in its embrace of European democratic values'.³

One of the features of the revolt was that the protests gathered together Belarusians of many distinct social groups: starting from the active participation of women and pensioners, performances of artists, demonstrations of workers, as well as protest actions of academics and students. The latter group is facing repressions, not for the first time. Politically active professors and students are constantly targeted by the Belarusian authorities or educational establishments loyal to the regime. Nevertheless, the currently used measures of harassment, violence and persecution of academia seem to

¹ Nelly Bekus, *Struggle over identity: the official and alternative Belarusiannes*. Budapest: Pátria Nyomda, 2010, 13.

² Vadim Vileita, „The Identity of the Belarusian State: A Never-Ending Process?“ *Bell BelarusInfo Letter*, 2(32), 2013, 4-5.

³ Hanna Liubakova, „Terror tactics fail to stop the rise of a democratic Belarus.“ Atlantic Council, 2020. <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/terror-tactics-will-not-stop-rise-of-democratic-belarus/>> [2021 06 15].

be extraordinary and the severest since the independence of Belarus. Notwithstanding the human rights violations, students and academics remain active participants in the fight for their freedom and one of the central driving forces in the protests.⁴ According to the researcher, philosopher Gintautas Mažeikis, those students who went out to the streets and participated actively in the protests, even if they were later expelled, gained very important civic and life experiences, which cannot be learned from the books. He also adds that without this kind of experience, any qualitative transformation is not possible, and these protests in themselves are of great significance.⁵

Considering such circumstances as living in a world of globalization, thus travelling more than previous generations, being able to explore the world and see how people live across the Belarus border, given that the internet also may have an influence on changes of thinking, along with the experience of students' participation in the ongoing revolution, it can be assumed that the young generation may have a different perception of themselves as a part of the national community, as well as about the Belarusian nation as a whole. It is worth noting that this social group is little researched in terms of national identity. The only one reviewed this kind of study is a monograph released as a result of the joint project of Vytautas Magnus University, Belarusian State University and the University of St. Thomas in 2013. It was a comparative Lithuanian and Belarusian national identity analysis, linking its changes with the influence of European integration processes. One part of the study sought to find out what is the nature of the national identity of Lithuanian and Belarusian youth. Considering the young generation of 'future rulers'⁶, it can be argued that such a level of research on this social group is not enough. Thus, studying it in the context of the revolution is in itself self-serving and important.

Taking these new conditions into account, **the aim of the research** is to find out what is the national identity of Belarusian students.

The research has the following objectives:

- To present the constructivist approach to nationalism and the main ideas of its proponents;
- To construct a theoretical model for defining national identity;

⁴ „We baptise you in the name of Saint Alyaksandr Lukashenka and the riot police.“ Amnesty International, 2021. <<http://eurasia.amnesty.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/crackdown-on-students-in-belarus.pdf>> [2021 06 16]

⁵ Ina Šilina, „Mažeikis: baltarusių mokyklose protestai moko pilietiškumo, o Lietuvoje nyksta žmogiškumas.“ lrt.lt, 2021. <<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/pasaulyje/6/1412174/mazeikis-baltarusiu-mokyklose-protestai-moko-pilietiskumo-o-lietuvoje-nyksta-zmogiskumas>> [2021 06 16]

⁶ Vadzim Smok, „Belarusian Identity: The Impact of Lukashenka's Rule.“ Minsk-London: Centre for Transition Studies, 2013, 20.

- To conduct empirical research and find out an answer to the question of what is the national identity of Belarusian youth in exile.

In order to accomplish the last task, the **qualitative interview and content analysis methods** are going to be used.

The specific group of respondents – Belarusian youth in exile – is going to be researched. The first reason for such a choice is the aspect of the location. According to the independent Belarusian Students' Association, as of 17 May 2021, at least 153 students have been expelled from universities and a significant part of them was forced to leave Belarus due to safety issues.⁷ One of the destinations for them is Lithuania, where some universities offered Belarusian students to continue their studies at Lithuanian universities. In addition, Lithuania operates an international European Humanities University, mainly focusing on providing education opportunities for students from Belarus. In such circumstances, there is a probability this target group to be well-accessible. The Belarusian youth who have moved to Poland were also selected as participants due to their territorial proximity. Secondly, this group of Belarusian youth is likely to have more experience of active participation in protests or other civic activities, as well as an experience of repression. It can be expected that they might have a more clearly defined identity, which is interesting and important to be aware of.

The qualitative interview method has been selected because it helps to fulfil the idea that the respondents reveal their attitude to national identity by presenting their own concerns – what is important and relevant for them. Qualitative interviewing is a way to show greater interest in reflecting the insights of the person interviewed rather than the ideas of the researcher. In addition, unlike the quantitative research method, individual interviews are more flexible and give an opportunity to interact with all the interviewees, to get more detailed answers, to ask necessary follow-up questions.⁸ To categorise and summarise the material, interview content analysis is going to be used. This method is 'an unobtrusive technique that allows researchers to analyse relatively unstructured data in view of the meanings, symbolic qualities, and expressive contents they have and of the communicative roles they play in the lives of the data's sources'.⁹ Therefore, content analysis of interview data serves as a tool to highlight the key ideas and present them in a clear way to the reader.

⁷ „We baptise you in the name of Saint Alyaksandr Lukashenka and the riot police.“ Amnesty International.

⁸ Alan Bryman, *Social research method*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 182-183.

⁹ Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2004, 44.

The time frame of the research is a setting of the Belarusian revolution that started in the summer of 2020. Therefore, the focus is put on questions about what ideas of national identity are reflected and if an active part of Belarusian youth, the students who escaped the country personally experienced any identity changes due to ongoing political events in the country.

1. BELARUSIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY IN LITERATURE

In terms of national identity, Belarus often falls into the group of states that declared independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. There are many studies that argue about the national identity in Eastern Europe region and, particularly, in the post-soviet states. As Larissa Titarenko notes, Western scientists suggested several national identity creation models for post-communist states based on the post-colonial theory. Nevertheless, the concepts of the state, democracy, and market economy could not be applied to some of the countries, while others installed them and have transformed. The author mentions some concepts, which are used in the academic field to outline the problems of post-soviet national identity construction, such as ‘against the soviet legacy’, ‘returning to historical roots’, ‘national oppression’.¹⁰ Theoretician Rogers Brubaker distinguishes three types of nationalism in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union: ‘nationalizing nationalism’, which fit ethnic groups in the new countries formed in the 1990s, ‘homeland nationalism’ – the type which defines minority groups left outside the national borders, and ‘minority nationalism’ – belonging to the minorities which due to collapse stayed outside the borders of new national entities and were exposed to nationalist policies of the new states.¹¹ Other authors indicate ‘the clash of interpretations of the past voiced by conflicting [...] mnemonic communities’ as a typical feature of the creation of national identity in the post-soviet bloc states¹², emphasize the aspect of the Second World War narratives in contribution to nation-building and construction of national identity¹³. Each case of national identity formation in post-soviet states has its own peculiarities and is much explained separately in the academic field.

¹⁰ Larissa Titarenko, „Construction of a New Belarusian Identity: Major Approaches and Paradoxes“. *SOCIAL SCIENCES / SOCIALINIAI MOKSLAI*, 56(2), 2007, 46.

¹¹ Vera Michlin-Shapir, „National Identity: The Political Idea that Refuses to Disappear“. *Institute for National Security Studies*, 23(2), 2020, 119.

¹² Natalia Mamul, „Narrative Templates of Post-Soviet Identity in Belarus“. *Polish Sociological Review*, 2(166), 2009, 233.

¹³ Lina Klymenko, „Narrating the Second World War: History Textbooks and Nation Building in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine“. *Journal of Educational Media, Memory & Society*, 8(2), 2016, 36.

The scientific literature is rich with theoretical and empirical studies that distinguish Belarus as an exceptional case in the Eastern Europe region in terms of national identity. For example, Anna Zadora in her article states, that ‘Belarus is the only post-soviet state to have fully adopted the interpretation by both the former Soviet authorities and today’s Belarusian political regime on the fundamental role played by the Second World War in the construction of the country’s historical narrative and national identity.’¹⁴ The studies conducted in the 2000s mainly were focused on the nation-building processes and on the question of what kind of identity is prevailing in Belarus. Traditionally two competing groups in the arena of nation-building are named in the case of Belarus – the official and of the opposition. Each of them sought to monopolize the national identity question by proposing different interpretations of historical memory, advocating different national symbols, differently treating the importance of the Belarusian language and defending distinct values. This fight and resistance to dialogue from both opposite camps are considered to be a reflection of a ‘denationalized nation’ rather than a divided one.¹⁵

Nevertheless, there is no one commonly accepted attitude regarding Belarusian national identity. Some scientists distinguish set of different existing cultural pro-European, Muscovite liberal, Creole identities¹⁶, state that in Belarusian identity could be characterized by the concept of ‘plurality of identities’¹⁷, others note that because of unfavourable conditions for developed civil society and limited opportunities to act for the opposition, there is no strong consolidating advocacy group that might propose an alternative identity and the result of this continuing situation is rather weak national identity¹⁸ or describes it as the fuzzy identity of peasant nation.¹⁹ Among all interpretations, there is also an academic discussion whether Belarusian identity is more kind of civic or ethnic one. Some studies show that there is a reason to believe that there is more resemblance to a civic form of identity characterized by soft boundaries and that there are less important markers of ethnic identity.²⁰ The supporters of Belarusian identity as ethnolinguistic talk about ‘the unusual form of nationalism’ of

¹⁴ Anna Zadora, „History of the War and Wars of History: Teaching the Second World War and the Holocaust in PostSoviet Belarus“. *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 10(2), 2017, 178.

¹⁵ Nelly Bekus, *Struggle over identity*.

¹⁶ Grigory Ioffe, „Culture Wars, Soul-Searching, and Belarusian Identity“. *East European Politics and Societies*, 21(2), 2007, p. 348.

¹⁷ Larissa Titarenko, „Construction of a New Belarusian Identity: Major Approaches and Paradoxes“, 47.

¹⁸ Vadzim Smok, *Belarusian identity*, 5.

¹⁹ Anna Zadora, The peasant matrix for nation building: an effective model? Some reflections on the Belarusian case. *National Identities*, 2018, 488.

²⁰ Renee L. Buhr, Victor Shadurski and teven Hoffman, Belarus: an emerging civic nation?. *Nationalities Papers*, 2011, 426.

Belarus which consists of an anti-Russian position and, at the same time, approve of the use of the Russian language instead of Belarusian.²¹

The enduring relationship between Russia and Belarus is significant here. The various studies reveal contradictions regarding Russia's influence on the national identity of Belarusians from the point of view of the official government, the opposition, and society itself: 'on the one hand, the country felt a need to strengthen its position as a sovereign state, but on the other hand, it had to deal with the consequences of a long period of a strong "Russifying" influence from inside and outside the country'.²² Researcher Jovita Pranevičiūtė divides the national identity formation factors into two parts: internal and external. The external one, according to the scientist, includes, in particular, Russia-Belarus bilateral relations, while the internal factor is the interpretations of the history.²³ In terms of internal factors, no less important is the influence of the autocratic regime and Alexander Lukashenka's inconsistent nation-building policies, used as a political tool to maintain power. In the 1990s project of fostering the use of the Belarusian language failed, and the president radically changed the direction of policies towards the language and historical memory. Nevertheless, later because of tensions with Russia so-called 'soft-Belarusization' policy was implemented. The aim was again to keep the legitimacy and sovereignty of the regime. This change of direction encouraged researchers to analyze the impact of this policy and to renew the debate on Belarusian national identity. The research of Ivan Posokhin presents the approach of 'Belarusization' as the state's endeavour to support national identity development actions, at the same time seeking for political and cultural boundaries formation between Belarus and the 'Russian world'.²⁴ Nevertheless, the author finds out that the position of state officials is usually inconsistent, ambivalent. For example, the folk craft, 'vyshyvanka', which represented and united the majority of Belarusians with different views, was used by the Ministry of Culture and adapted for its needs, which was negatively accepted by the society of Belarus.²⁵ It is known that although at the present time, the symbols are a crucial attribute in expressing national identity, it is at the same time very sensitive and usually divisive.

²¹ Marharyta Fabrykant, „Russian-speaking Belarusian Nationalism: An Ethnolinguistic Identity Without a Language? *Europe-Asia Studies*, 71(1), 2019, 117.

²² Ivan Posokhin, „Soft Belarusization: (Re)building of Identity or “Border Reinforcement”? *Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences*, 8, 2019, 58.

²³ Kristina Šliavaitė, „Etninio identiteto paieškos: Vilniaus baltarusių atvejis“. *Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centro Etninių tyrimų institutas*, 1(2), 2011, 114.

²⁴ Ivan Posokhin, „Soft Belarusization: (Re)building of Identity or “Border Reinforcement”?“, 57.

²⁵ Ibid, 72.

Regarding the autocratic regime in Belarus, Vadzim Smok adds that the ruling Belarusian elite has no sense of national pride and concludes that the game of identity policies is inseparable from Russia's support.²⁶ Recently, Lukashenka's attempt to manoeuvre between official identity policies, but at the same time, an effort to adapt the ideas proposed by the opposition is noticed. However, despite the tolerance to the oppositional historiography, accordingly adopted Soviet myths and symbols remain the key characteristic of the official rhetoric set up by the regime.²⁷ Unfortunately, there are few studies made that would analyse what the level of society's conformity with regimes identity policies is. However, scholar Maryia Rohava in her research about identity in an autocratic state, asked this question. The conclusion of the study is that, on the one hand, ideational practices do not seem to be equal to political allegiance. On the other hand, the regime has an influence on how Belarusians perceive what national identity is and how their self-identification is formed through the intersection of different national narratives, which determines a lack of clearly expressed coherent identity.²⁸

The empirical studies that analyze the national identity of Belarus are focused on different aspects of identity: the values and cultural identity, religion, symbols, the decision of an individual and polity, as well as education. The most common research objects in the literature reviewed are historical memory or myth and language. History is the main object found in scientific discussions of the national identity of Belarus. It is strongly related to relations with Russia, the Second World War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as the historical heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The projects of remembrance and historiography 'mobilize and articulate facts and historical events in order to legitimize a political discourse and a narrative of historical identity.'²⁹

The language aspect is quite frequently reflected in the studies. Kristina Šliavaitė researched the ethnic identity of the Belarusians living in Vilnius. The narrators stated that knowing the Belarusian language is one of the most important criteria to identify themselves with the Belarusian nation, even if they could not communicate in that language in daily life.³⁰ According to other authors, the Belarusian language is evaluated as the only one element that can be kept as solely Belarusian and can function for distinctness and continuity of national identity,³¹ or even that there are signs of growing aspirations of

²⁶ Vadzim Smok, *Belarusian identity*, 19.

²⁷ Anders Rudling, „Unhappy is the person who has no motherland: national ideology and history writing in Lukashenka's Belarus.“ Book: J. Fedor et al. (eds.), *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*. Singapore: Department of History, National University of Singapore, 2017, 95.

²⁸ Maryia Rohava, „Identity in an autocratic state.“ *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 32(3), 2018, 641.

²⁹ Zadora, *The peasant matrix for nation building*, 190.

³⁰ Šliavaitė, *Etninio identiteto paieškos*, 118, 132.

³¹ Fabrykant, *Russian-speaking Belarusian Nationalism*, 125.

the Belarusian language in everyday life, despite the predominance of the Russian language in the education system.³²

There are already scientists who have tried to analyse what role revolutions in post-Soviet countries might have played in the development of national identities. Studies show that various scenarios are possible depending on the case. After the revolutions in Georgia and Armenia in both cases, the narrative of ‘New Georgia’ and ‘New Armenia’ was created. Despite this, countries self-defined in a distinct manner: Georgia, ruled by Saakashvili, expressed a commitment to European values and focused on foreign policy transformations, while Pashinyan’s Armenia emphasized the need for the economic and social aspect of transformation.³³

The Euromaidan revolution in Ukraine is sometimes built in parallel with the Belarusian revolt. The researcher Volodymyr Kulyk broadly discussed post-Euromaidan Ukraine in his publications. He argues that the effect of protests and following Russia’s aggression resulted in a ‘more salient vis-à-vis other territorial and non-territorial identities. At the same time, the very meaning of belonging to the Ukrainian nation has changed, as manifested first and foremost in increased alienation from Russia and the greater embrace of Ukrainian nationalism’³⁴. A new concept of ‘eventful nationalism’ was introduced in order to explain the massive mobilization and sense of commonality that connected different social groups during the revolution. The key point of this phenomenon is that Ukrainians were united not by certain values and political considerations but it was more by a commitment to a particular event, i.e. a shared experience of solidarity and collectivity.³⁵

The Belarusian revolution has not ended yet, and most likely, the consequences are going to be seen in a longer-term perspective. Nonetheless, as well as during Ukraine’s revolution, street protests in Belarus gathered Belarusians belonging to various social groups and not necessarily having the same political views or even speaking the same language. Scholars are already raising hypotheses on how the current situation may influence the national identity processes. The scholar Nelly Bekus argues that ‘by virtue of there being such a wide variety of actors engaged in contention, a process of re-signification of the cultural and political symbols and ideas was activated, leading to the formation of a blended socio-cultural imaginary, which served to integrate previously disconnected and competing projects

³² Posokhin, *Soft Belarusization*, 73.

³³ Aram Terzyan, „Post-Soviet Revolution Discourses“. *Slovak Journal of Political Sciences*, 20(1), 2020, 138.

³⁴ Volodymyr Kulyk, „National Identity in Ukraine: Impact of Euromaidan and the War“. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 68(4), 2016, 588.

³⁵ Oleg Zhuravlev and Volodymyr Ishchenko, „Exclusiveness of civic nationalism: Euromaidan eventful nationalism in Ukraine“. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 36(3), 2020, 227.

and ideologies³⁶. At the same time, she adds, that the thing that brought Belarusians together to the protests was the modern, developed society's dissatisfaction with the authoritarian regime that governs it.³⁷ Moreover, the previously suppressed motivation to fight for a better life during the protests of 2020 has been transformed into an opportunity for the Belarusian people to become 'peoplehood'.³⁸

According to Aliaksei Kazharski, on the one hand the protests of 2020 were based mainly on political or even ethical demands instead of geopolitical or ethno cultural ones, and could be described as a decentralized grassroots movement, but on the other hand the space for a 'bottom-up creative activity' was left for a Belarusian nation,³⁹ as a possible condition for the creation of a new national identity. The sociologist and historian Mischa Gabowitsch hypothetically asks if we will be able to see any visible new ways of organizing local communities and creating new solidarities in practice or if it will disappear with the end of the protests?⁴⁰ Up to this moment, the answers to these questions are not obvious, but it is evident that some changes in Belarusian society have already taken place irreversibly.

The thesis attempts to reveal the characteristics of the national identity of Belarusian youth in exile and to create a typology in order to show the existing diversity of national identities. Moreover, this research aims to complement the existing study base of Belarusian national identity in the context of the protests of 2020 in Belarus by answering the question of whether these events have had an impact on the national identity of a specific group of Belarusian society, and if so, what are the perceived effects of this.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The term 'identity' is inevitably encountered in today's society and can be interpreted and understood differently depending on the perspective of the discipline from which one view are taken. What does it mean in social science? According to the American Psychological Association's Dictionary of Psychology, the concept 'identity' is explained as 'an individual's sense of self-defined by a) a set of physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics that is not wholly shared with

³⁶ Nelly Bekus, „Echo of 1989? Protest Imaginaries and Identity Dilemmas in Belarus“, *Slavic Review*, 80(1), 2021, 14.

³⁷ Nelly Bekus, „Historical Memory and Symbolism in the Belarusian Protests.“ Presentation in „Cultures of History Forum“, 2021 02 16, 3.

³⁸ Irina Petrova and Elena Korosteleva, „Societal fragilities and resilience: The emergence of peoplehood in Belarus“. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 12(2), 2021, 128.

³⁹ Aliaksei Kazharski, „Belarus' new political nation? 2020 anti-authoritarian protests as identity building“. *New Perspectives*, 29(1), 2021, 77-78.

⁴⁰ Mischa Gabowitsch, „Belarusian Protest: Regimes of Engagement and Coordination“, *Slavic Review*, 80(1), 2021, 10.

any other person and (b) a range of affiliations (e.g., ethnicity) and social roles.⁴¹ In other words, it is a recognition of your differences from ‘others’ and, at the same time, a perception of where do you belong. In the context of this work, the central community to which an individual may belong is a nation. What is ‘nation’, and what is the meaning of ‘national identity’? Why is it important? In order to provide a broader explanation of it and other relevant concepts, it is worth briefly reviewing the basics of nationalism studies.

2.1 Ontological differences in nationalism

Even though it is believed that the idea of nationalism as a kind of political or social movement has existed since the end of eighteenth century, the fundamental theories of nationalism were developed in the twentieth century.⁴² As the concepts of the latter are more applicable and relevant to today’s world, the focus in this study is mainly on them.

Traditionally, the most influential theories are classified into two categories depending on their ontological approach. One of the approaches is frequently labelled as ethnocultural, ethno-centrist or primordial. The proponents of this approach argue that a nation is something that is inherited and just naturally exists, emphasizing the inevitability of the influence of the past. According to the British historical sociologist Anthony D. Smith, ‘the presence and reconstruction of ethnic ties and pasts tend to determine which units of the population are eligible and likely to become nations’.⁴³ The objective criteria – descent, history, traditions, culture – are taken by the primordialists as the determinant prerequisite to defining the nature of a nation.

The theorists who rely on the constructivist theory have a slightly different opinion on nationalism and the understanding of what a nation is. First of all, they argue that ‘the nation’ was created around the end of the 18th century and that nothing before makes difference and that this position is the main area of disagreement between the ethnoculturalists and modernists.⁴⁴ In this case, nations are rather modern, subjective thing – ‘the products of specifically modern processes like capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, secularism, and the emergence of the modern bureaucratic

⁴¹ American Psychological Association, „APA Dictionary of Psychology“. <<https://dictionary.apa.org/identity>> [2021 12 27].

⁴² Umut Özkırımlı, *Theories of Nationalism*. 2nd edition. New York: Macmillan, 2010, 9.

⁴³ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1993, 43.

⁴⁴ Ernest Gellner, „Do nations have navels?“ <<https://gellnerpage.tripod.com/Warwick2.html>> [2022 0117].

state⁴⁵, than an ancient and a part of a natural order. The anthropological scientists of Vilnius University, Kristina Jonutyte and Ugnė Barbora Starkute, note that an idea of a nation and national identity in contemporary anthropology and social sciences are understood as flexible tends to change and social in its nature. It is a phenomenon that is better described as a relationship with a changing environment and as a result of a relationship with other social groups than objective cultural traits.⁴⁶

The author of this research is making an assumption that the national identity of the youth of Belarus might be a valuable object of analysis. One of the reasons for this could be the generational change – the current generation of young people lives all or most of its life in independent Belarus. The nation-building policy of Alexander Lukashenka was inconsistent and has been changed many times during those more than 30 years of independence, mostly because of changing political and social circumstances in the country. It is valuable to analyse how this policy resonates with the younger generation's perception of the Belarusian nation. Another argument is the reality of a globalised world, the expanded the boundaries of the relationship with other social groups due to evolving information technology. As it was mentioned before, it cannot be separated from the process of formation of modern national identity. Finally, the transformative political events that happened in Belarus in 2020 and the new political situation are considered one of the most important conditions while talking about the case of Belarusian youth national identity. Therefore, the constructivist theory of nationalism is chosen in this work as a guide for further discussion and analysis of the object of research. As there is no single author whose interpretation can cover all the most important aspects, the most relevant ideas of constructivists Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm to form a complete picture of the case of research are provided below.

2.2 Terminology of nationalism: nation and national identity

One of the most prominent modernists, Benedict Anderson, explains the meaning of nation through his concept of nations as 'imagined communities'. In his belief, nations are an anonymous sociological organism which connects the 'dead' and 'not born' yet. The world of perceptions and feelings is at the centre of the understanding of the nation, and fiction that permeates everyday life is a

⁴⁵ Özkırımlı, *Theories of Nationalism*, 72.

⁴⁶ Kristina Jonutyte, Ugnė Barbora Starkute, „Kas ne taip su „prigimtine“ kultūra? Antropologijų reakcija į parodą „Čiabuvių pasakojimai“, 2021. <<https://nara.lt/lt/articles-lt/kas-ne-taip-su-prigimtine-kultura-antropologiu-reakcija-i-paroda-ciabuviu-istorijos>> [2022 01 17]

hallmark of modern nations.⁴⁷ The idea of Benedict Anderson, then, is that a modern nation can exist on the basis of what the members of that nation feel and imagine. This means that all possible criteria for a nation can be considered valid. Being a nation, in this case, would not only mean living in a common territory and speaking a national language but also feeling a sense of belonging to one community, creating new points that could connect and be accepted by all of them.

Theorist Ernest Gellner in his book ‘Nations and Nationalism’ wrote about nations as a product of modernity. According to him, certain groups of people in industrial society are being created artificially by social and cultural means in order to ensure working economics as well as to achieve political purposes, that is, to be used as a tool to consolidate power.⁴⁸ The psychological side of the phenomenon is not considered as significant. Following, Ernest Gellner states that ‘nationalism does not have any very deep root in the human psyche. The human psyche can be assumed to have persisted unchanged through the many, many millennia of the existence of the human race, and not to have become either better or worse during the relatively brief and very recent age of nationalism’⁴⁹. A nation becomes a construct that binds individuals together and mobilizes them with its inherent universal characteristics. It is also likely to be a mechanism created unnaturally and only under certain conditions. It is also possible that this mechanism could pursue its own goals, such as legitimizing its existence as a community and seeking recognition from other communities.

Eric Hobsbawm, a scientist who put emphasis on the political, economic and ideological dimensions’ significance, also agrees with Ernest Gellner’s point on the social engineering aspect. Eric Hobsbawm’s definition of a nation is as follows: it is a ‘dual phenomena, constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analyzed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist’.⁵⁰ Here, unlike Gellner, there is a greater focus on the ordinary people and how they identify themselves is seen as significant and the one that cannot be separated from the whole picture. Another thing that Eric Hobsbawm states, and that is highly relevant to the author of this research, is that national identity is understood as not fixed but one that can be changed and shifted even in short periods of time.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2nd edition. London: Verso, 1991, 35-36.

⁴⁸ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1983, 29-35.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 35.

⁵⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 10.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 11.

The idea that national identity is not determined and final is a very important assumption for the author of this study on the national identity of Belarusian people. In such a situation, if it is assumed that the national identity is formed in the past and cannot be influenced and changed, there would be no point in revisiting what the current Belarusian national identity is, as it has already been discussed in the academic literature before. The assertion of Eric Hobsbawm here further raises the question, how could these changing aspects of identity be noticed and named? What could be the circumstances in which an identity of ordinary people could be expected to be formed and also transformed from what it was before?

2.3 Banal, hot and everyday nationalism

One way to study national identity from „below“ is to look at the everyday lives of members of a nation. The theory of Michael Billig postulates that in order to do that, it is necessary to understand why people living in a contemporary world are aware of what their nationality is, as well as what a nation is and why it is an important thing.⁵² There are several ways to ensure this, but what they all have in common is that it must exist and lead people in their everyday life and be present in popular culture. First of all, the image of a nation is constructed by the way politicians talk about it⁵³, incorporated into daily life practices of the citizens⁵⁴, and repeated in the media and mass culture.⁵⁵ Thus, for identity to be alive and clear, people need to hear and read about it all the time, to speak the „language of national identity“ themselves, and in this way; as a result, it must be seen reflected in their everyday practices.

In terms of the role of ordinary people in the process of creating and maintaining national identity, an approach of everyday nationalism seeks to find out how national communities talk and think about the nation and national identity, how they experience it through everyday moments as well as how these perceptions manifest in a broader sense.⁵⁶ In addition to this, there is a discussion among scholars of nationalism on whether the meaning of everyday and banal are synonymous, and where the line between the banal and hotter type of nationalism lies. Rhys Jones and Peter Merriman questioning that boundary, states that „the exact same process or artefact may be viewed as banal and/or hot in

⁵² Michael Billig, *Banal nationalism*. London: SAGE Publications 1995, 7-8.

⁵³ Ibid, 93.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 95.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 109.

⁵⁶ Eleanor Knott, „Everyday Nationalism“, 2016. <<https://stateofnationalism.eu/article/everyday-nationalism>> [2021 06 16].

character by different agents. While Billig may argue that the term ‘banal’ encompasses this fluidity, there is still a tendency <...> for the term to be viewed as something that deals solely with the mundane and barely noticed contexts within which nationalism is reproduced.⁵⁷ It could be understood in a way that in some cases the same actions of citizens can be considered as a part of a routine, while in a different situation, it should belong to the group of extraordinary events.

Notwithstanding the above considerations, it could perhaps be argued that, for example, protests or other types of opposition to certain national policies could be classified as hot nationalism but are also inseparable from the everyday choices in citizens' lives. Activities like these can reveal the aspects of national identity and an attitude to the nation, but it can also be considered as a unique, transformative experience that can influence the national identity irreversibly.

The following is a summary of the theoretical material used to construct the empirical research. The aim is to answer the research question, which is what is the national identity of the Belarusian youth in exile, a two-dimensional theoretical model based on the literature read, and the theoretical perspective chosen is developed (table No.1).

The first dimension is entitled ‘Content’ and aims to find out what are the key elements of the national identity of young Belarusians who left their home country. Five components of the Belarusian identity that has been most often analysed in the literature and previous studies on this topic and mentioned as important elements of the Belarusian identity have been selected:

The second part of the research model is called ‘Regime’. This part of the framework is based on the theoretical assumptions mentioned in the previous section, and it is designed to assess the strength of national identity. This means that the aim is to find out whether national identity is ‘lived’ in a sensitive and deep way or whether the relation to the nation and feeling of national identity is merely symbolic. Also, this part aims to reveal how the experience of participating in one form or another in the protests of 2020 in Belarus has or has not affected the national identity of young people who have fled the country. The most important aspects of both dimensions are set out as follows:

⁵⁷ Rhys Jones and Peter Merriman, „Hot, banal and everyday nationalism: Bilingual road signs in Wales.“ *Political Geography*, 28, 2009, 166.

CONTENT	REGIME
1. Ethnic and civic identity markers	6. Self-identification
2. Characteristics and values	7. Associations related to country/state
3. National (Belarusian language)	8. Feeling of pride/shame
4. Historical memory and cultural heritage	9. National/state symbols and daily practices
5. National and state symbols	10. Experience of the protests and identity change
	11. Depth of the relation to country/state

Table No.1 Design of the research

3. NATIONAL IDENTITY OF BELARUSIAN YOUTH IN EXILE: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

3.1 Methodology

The author of this paper to collect data for the empirical study conducted 8 qualitative semi-structured interviews with Belarusian youth (the youth in this work is understood according to the European Union definition, which is that ‘young people are defined as being between 15 and 29 years old⁵⁸), currently living outside Belarus.

The face sheet information about the interviewees is provided below:

Interviewee 1.

Place of residence outside Belarus. Lithuania.

Place of residence in Belarus. Stolbtsy, a town in Minsk region with a population of 17 000 inhabitants.

⁵⁸ Eurostat, „Youth – Overview“. <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/youth>> [2022 05 10]

Knowledge of foreign languages. Russian language is a native language, speaks a little Lithuanian, fluently speaks English, can speak Belarusian (fully understand, can write, but cannot speak fluently because of lack of practise).

Media consumption habits. Telegram is a main channel for reading news.

Interviewee 2.

Place of residence outside Belarus. Poland.

Place of residence in Belarus. A small town.

Knowledge of foreign languages. In everyday life speaks Russian and Polish. Also speaks English, can understand and read in Belarusian, but doesn't have practise.

Media consumption habits. Doesn't read news at all. Uses social network Instagram channels to get the most important news. Also gets information from friend who works in oppositional channel Belsat. Used to get news from channel Tut.by (now called Zerkalo.by).

Interviewee 3.

Place of residence outside Belarus. Poland.

Place of residence in Belarus. Stolbtsy, a town in Minsk region with a population of 17 000 inhabitants.

Knowledge of foreign languages. Native language is Russian. Can speak Polish, sometimes speaks in English. Can speak in Belarusian.

Media consumption habits. Doesn't read news at all.

Interviewee 4.

Place of residence outside Belarus. Lithuania.

Place of residence in Belarus. The centre of the city Minsk.

Knowledge of foreign languages. Speaks Russian, English, a little bit of Belarusian, learning a little bit of Lithuanian.

Media consumption habits. The main news channels are Tut.by, Nexta, channels on social network Telegram and Instagram.

Interviewee 5.

Place of residence outside Belarus. Lithuania.

Place of residence in Belarus. Minsk.

Knowledge of foreign languages. Mainly speaks Russian, Belarusian, English. Also can speak a little bit Lithuanian and Spanish.

Media consumption habits. Follows news on Radio Liberty, also the biggest independent Belarusian news channel Tut.by. Follows neutral and non-governmental sources and journalists, civil activists.

Interviewee 6.

Place of residence outside Belarus. Lithuania.

Place of residence in Belarus. The city Mogilov, near the Russian border.

Knowledge of foreign languages. Can speak fluently Russian, also English and Belarusian.

Media consumption habits. The main news sources are Nexta, Youtube, Telegram channels. Also follows Russian bloggers such as Varlamov.

Interviewee 7.

Place of residence outside Belarus. Lithuania.

Place of residence in Belarus. The city Lida.

Knowledge of foreign languages. Russian and Belarusian languages are native languages. Also speaks English, can understand Polish, knows some Lithuanian, Spanish and French.

Media consumption habits. Used to read a lot of Belarusian EuroRadio, Nasha Niva, Tut.by (now called Zerkalo.by), Economics in Belarusian, Reform.by. Follows some private channels of economists, political scientists, journalists. Watches news on Youtube, BBC, EuroNews, CNN.

Interviewee 8.

Place of residence outside Belarus. Poland.

Place of residence in Belarus. The city Mogilov.

Knowledge of foreign languages. Native language is Russian. Can read and cannot speak in Belarusian. Speaks Polish and English.

Media consumption habits. Used to read Belarusian news portal The Village, follows Telegram channel Zerkalo.by. Used to read Russian news portal Afficia Life.

The conversations were held during the period from November 20, 2021, to May 1, 2022. All the interviews were conducted remotely via video conferencing platforms. The conversations were held in a quiet environment, in the presence of only the author of the research and the informant, and in the absence of other people. In all cases, there was an atmosphere of cooperation and trust, which made interviews run smoothly and the questions willingly answered. It should be mentioned that, for technical reasons and due to the quality of the audio recordings, specific words are not clearly audible in some parts of the interviews.

The interviews lasted from 28 to 59 minutes Average length of interviews – was 38 minutes. The language of the interviews was English, with occasional interventions of the Russian language, where questions were answered in Russian due to the difficulty of expressing thought in the English language.

The search for participants in the study was carried out using the snowball sampling method, i.e. each participant was asked to recommend another candidate who met the criteria for participation in the study.

The audio of the interviews was recorded with prior information and permission from the informants. All the participants were also informed that all the interview material would be used for research purposes only and that the data obtained during the interviews were confidential. They were also aware that their participation were based on the principle of voluntary participation and were informed about the right to refuse to continue taking part in the study at any time.

With the aim to deconstructing the national identity of young Belarusian people in exile, the questionnaire below (table No.2) was developed on the basis of the model presented. All questions were designed in such a way as to have it equivalent to the theoretical model.

CONTENT	REGIME
How would you describe a ‘real member’ of Belarusian nation?	Do you consider yourself a Belarusian?
Do you think that Belarusians have any unique features?	What does Belarus mean to you?
Is it important for Belarusians to know the Belarusian language?	What do you feel when you introduce yourself as a Belarusian?
What figures or events of the history of Belarus seem the most significant to you?	Do you use any national symbols in your daily life? In what situations do you use them?
Do you use any national symbols in your daily life? What are these symbols? Why do you choose these ones and not the other ones?	Did you participate in the protests against A. Lukashenka? Have you noticed any changes in how Belarusians talk about Belarus or Belarusians after August of 2020? Do you think that the revolution of 2020 have changed the way you feel about yourself as Belarusian?
	What is your vision of Belarus? How much do you believe this will happen? What needs to be done to achieve this?

Table No.2 Questionnaire

After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed and coded. The coding was based on the aspects identified in the theoretical model. In the analysis of the interviews, the language of the interviewees and the quotes have been slightly changed for clarity only.

It is important to stress that the data collected from the 8 interviews conducted during the research cannot be generalised, and conclusions cannot be drawn about the entire target group of

Belarusian youth in exile. The results of the study identified 3 types of identity that may exist in reality but cannot predict which type of Belarusian national identity is predominant.

3.2 Typology of Belarusian national identity

All research participants interviewed for the study give the same positive answer to the question ‘Do you consider yourself a Belarusian?’ which suggests that they perceive themselves as representatives of the nation and might have a certain image of what Belarussianness is about or might be able to think about it in terms of national identity. The question arises as to which answers to the interview questions could be used to identify certain types of national identity of Belarusian youth in exile and which aspects highlight the differences in the thinking of the research participants.

The analysis of interviews shows that different types of national identity concepts can be deconstructed as a set of answers to several questions. First of all, which identity markers dominate in the mindset of interviewees: is it civic national identity markers – attachment to the state territory, shared beliefs, respect for the law, individual choice to be a part of the community, or ethnocentric ones – culture, traditions, language are given special importance?

Second, it is attempted to understand whether the notion of national identity follows an official or pro-governmental narrative or whether the narrative promoted by the opposition can be recognised. Answers related to historical memory, national and state symbols, as well as the use of the Belarusian language are analysed here.

Finally, the aspect the author of the paper draws attention to in order to draw a line among perceptions of national identity is the strength of feeling of national identity: is it relatively weak, vague and symbolic, or could it be described as a solid and clear sense of identification with the nation? To find out this, the answers in which participants talk about their daily practices, such as the use of national symbols, as well as their participation in the protests of 2020 in Belarus.

The sum of the above-mentioned characteristics makes it possible to create a typology consisting of the three types of national identity presented in the next sections of this research: National Identity Type 1, National Identity Type 2 and National Identity Type 3 (Table No.3).

Type of identity \ Feature	Civic identity vs. ethnic identity	Official vs. oppositional narrative	Intense identity vs. symbolic identity
National identity Type 1	Civic	Oppositional	Intense
National identity Type 2	Ethnic	Neutral	Symbolic
National identity Type 3	Ethnic	Oppositional	Intense

Table No.3 Typology of Belarusian national identity

3.2.1 National Identity Type 1

The concept of Belarusian national identity can first be identified by asking the question, ‘How would you describe *a real member* of a Belarusian nation?’ When asked this question, the interviewees list the most important things that are associated with their Belarusian identity: ‘The most essential thing is to have this feeling of being Belarusian. <...> I think that only in case you have this feeling, if you’re proud of being Belarusian, you can count yourself as Belarusian.’⁵⁹ One of the most important distinguishing features of this type of national identity emerges. It is the situation when a person decides and attaches himself individually to the nation based on a variety of possible reasons, ‘for example, they have ancestry, they were born in Belarus, or they are moving to Belarus to live here permanently.’⁶⁰ National identity is not necessarily understood as a set of constant and unchangeable things but as a personal decision that could change depending on specific circumstances, for instance, the decision to move to a particular country.

According to this type of identity, ethnic identity markers are not included in the list of the most significant attributes. National traditions (‘I don’t think that Belarusian people <...> have to know all the traditions that we have’⁶¹), as well as speaking in the Belarusian language (‘I don’t think that Belarusian supposes to know Belarusian or otherwise he is not Belarusian’⁶²) are not indicated as a necessity. It would be wrong to state that knowing the Belarusian language, in this case, is understood as entirely unimportant. The lower emphasis on the importance of the Belarusian language is more a reflection of the language policy carried out by the Belarusian authorities, which did not create space for it to spread more widely among the population. On the contrary, it created conditions where Belarusian is spoken by a significantly small part of the nation. It is necessary to mention that

⁵⁹ Interviewee 1

⁶⁰ Interviewee 4

⁶¹ Interviewee 1

⁶² Interviewee 4

Belarusian youth see the relevance of the Belarusian language in the future: ‘I think it is [Belarusian language] important. The question is, how long can it take for us to solve the transition in our current circumstances?’⁶³, ‘not only leader but our people supposed to pay attention to this problem. <...> and I think this is what we will have in future.’⁶⁴ Nevertheless, taking the present situation of language use into consideration, the Belarusian language cannot be the main indicator of identity. The feeling of being Belarusian is considered a primary identity marker.

The understanding of what are the main points of the identity of the Belarusian nation evidently follows an oppositional narrative. First of all, this is reflected in the way the history of Belarus is perceived. Despite the fact that history and knowledge of it are not given exceptionally high importance, the answers to the question about the most important historical events support the interpretation of historical memory proposed by the opposition:

‘There was a huge chapter of history Belarus and Lithuania share, and it has been a very prosperous time for Belarus in terms of culture, the national identity. <...> And then, for me, personally, there was one person, who actually recently they found his some remains in Lithuania, his name is Kostiuszk Kalinovski, and he lead an uprising for Belarus against the Russian Empire. We learned about him in schools, and we read his letters from prison. And it’s been very inspiring.’⁶⁵

Another prominent historical figure from the times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Radziwill family, is mentioned: ‘This family made the rest of the world aware of who are Belarusians. And <...> they used to talk only in an old Belarusian language.’⁶⁶ This means that the image of Belarus, which is strong, influential and fighting for freedom, is a preference in the way the historical memory is seen by the representatives of this type of Belarusian national identity. The nation is perceived as distinct from other national communities, and efforts to foster and disseminate a unique national culture are seen as a value.

The choice of symbols also shows that there is no self-identification with the official state symbols but rather alternative ones which are associated with the Belarusian nation. The white-red-white flag is linked to descriptions such as ‘our true flag’⁶⁷, and ‘our real flag’⁶⁸ and the colours white and red are generally associated with Belarusian identity. On the contrary, official state symbols such

⁶³ Interviewee 5

⁶⁴ Interviewee 4

⁶⁵ Interviewee 5

⁶⁶ Interviewee 1

⁶⁷ Interviewee 4

⁶⁸ Interviewee 1

as the national red-green flag and the national anthem are firmly referred to as irrelevant to national identity and evoke negative feelings:

*'National anthem in Belarus it is not something that makes us proud of our country. It is something that teachers in schools make their students learn, and it is something necessary, but this is some kind of necessity that is unpleasant for people. <...> I have this kind of very unpleasant and very scary memories when at school we were like supposed to sing it during every event.'*⁶⁹

The historical national symbol 'Pahonia' (coat of arms), whose public display is prosecuted by Belarusian authorities in Belarus nowadays, is also named as being connected with Belarusianness. In summary, the situation is that the state symbols, officially recognised and even compulsory used, are the ones with which people least identify themselves. And those whose public use is restricted and officially unacceptable are the ones that symbolise and, according to the participants of the study, reflect the 'true' Belarusian national identity.

The author considers this type of national identity to be strong and visibly expressed. The use of national symbols discussed above in everyday life is one possible way to assess the level of expression of national identity. Although according to the interviewees, the use of symbols on a daily basis is not mentioned by every participant as a usual thing, it can be understood that they do not hesitate to use specific symbols to express their preferences and in this kind of way to demonstrate the strength of their sense of belonging to the nation, for example, during special occasions. One interviewee says: 'I have a T-shirt with Belarusian ornament that I wear on my special days. In this red and white scheme.'⁷⁰ Another one mentions 'Pahonia': 'I have like some kind of pins on all my stuff. <...> I made some kind of handmade and yes, now this symbol is always with me.'⁷¹ Belarusian youth living abroad not only clearly identify the things that symbolize belonging to their nation, but also feel the need to use these symbols in certain situations in their lives.

Participation in the protests of 2020 against Lukashenka, in terms of content, is a clear expression of dissatisfaction with the policies of the authorities, as well as an aspiration for changes in Belarus. But it is also an active way of demonstrating solidarity and support for one's own nation and, at the same time, a practical manifestation of a sense of national identity. Going directly to the streets to protest ('There were a lot of people to come out in the streets who showed their opinion <...> and of

⁶⁹ Interviewee 1

⁷⁰ Interviewee 5

⁷¹ Interviewee 1

course I was in this crowded place'⁷²), indirect participation by being active on social networks and calling people to join protests ('I was the one who was making everybody go out on the streets'⁷³), as well as participating in solidarity events outside Belarus ('And I was coming to Lithuania, and you guys had this March of Solidarity, <...> so I came to Vilnius and dressed in white and red and had ribbons on my hand and I felt very proud'⁷⁴) shows that sense of national identity is in a more 'intensive' mode. Belarusianness, in this case, is not only an individual inner feeling of identification. It is also transferred to the public sphere and manifests itself in active engagement, in expressing one's own opinion, and in seeking to defend the values that bind the community together.

In summary, this type of national identity includes more features of civic nationalism than ethnocentric nationalism. According to this version, there is a belief in an inclusive form of nationhood, which means that the Belarusian nation does not only include people of Belarusian origin or people living in the territory of the state. Self-identification and a sense of pride in the nation is the criterion that allows one to call oneself Belarusian and be accepted into the national community. It does not mean that other components of identity are irrelevant. The meaningful historical images of an independent, influential and freedom-fighting Belarusian-speaking nation in the future and of Belarus representing itself in red and white colours are painted through the eyes of this group of Belarusian youth in exile. They do not associate themselves with the officially promoted narrative but tend to think in line with the national ideas proposed by the opposition. And finally, supporting these ideas and fostering a sense of national identity is inseparable from actively demonstrating it, both in everyday life and at moments of national importance, such as the protests of 2020 in Belarus.

3.2.2. National Identity Type 2

The alternative to National Identity X is National Identity Y. The characteristics of this type of national identity allow it to be categorised as a more ethnic national identity. It is the markers of ethnic identity, such as language, culture and traditions, that form its basis: 'I think it is very very important. Because when people know history, language – is a nation. Because nation is people who have one language, one history, one culture'⁷⁵. As for the Belarusian language, another participant in the study gives it special importance, pointing out that it is also a prerequisite for the existence of the nation and

⁷² Interviewee 1

⁷³ Interviewee 4

⁷⁴ Interviewee 5

⁷⁵ Interviewee 3

it ensures its continued survival: ‘For me, the language is very important in definition of nation. <...> Belarusian should talk in Belarusian to save our nation, our nationality, not to just forget that we are Belarusians.’⁷⁶ Here, in practice, one encounters the ‘unusual form of nationalism’ of Belarus mentioned in the literature.⁷⁷ It is the situation where mainly Russian-speaking Belarusian youth have a negative attitude towards circumstances that Belarusians do not speak their own language due to Russification (‘it is very uncorrect’⁷⁸). However, despite the fact that Belarusian is currently limitedly used in both private and public life in Belarus, its significance is described as special in terms of Belarusian identity. According to one of the interviewees, the inability to communicate in Belarusian evokes negative feelings such as shame: ‘I consider myself a part of the Belarusian people, but I am ashamed that I don’t speak the Belarusian language.’⁷⁹ Thus, it can be said that ethnic components, and especially the Belarusian language, have an especially important place in the portrait of a ‘true Belarusian’.

The importance given to the Belarusian language in the official narrative of the Belarusian government is one of the defining features of this identity type. However, the analysis of the interviews shows that it would be inaccurate to state that there is obvious support for the ideas put forward by the opposition, and it could be rather argued that a less pronounced position is chosen. For example, when talking about historical memory, one of the interviewees say that ‘Belarusians know our history, history of country <...> but our president don’t like it.’⁸⁰ This answer implies a rejection of the version of history offered by the official narrative, but it does not name the specific event or historical figures that are meaningful in the context of Belarusian national identity. Another participant in the study refers to the period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as an important one ‘because Belarus and other countries was really great just huge great country.’⁸¹ This can be recognised as an element of an alternative to historical narrative supported by the government of Belarus, but above all the emphasis is on the greatness of the whole common state, which included other European nations. The role of the Belarusian nation as a separate nation is not emphasised.

As far as preferences for national symbols are concerned, in general, they coincide with the ones of all the Belarusians interviewed for the research in the sense that they reject identification with official state symbols. Nevertheless, this type of identity does not really answer the question of which

⁷⁶ Interviewee 2

⁷⁷ Marharyta Fabrykant, *Russian-speaking Belarusian Nationalism: An Ethnolinguistic Identity Without a Language?*, 117.

⁷⁸ Interviewee 2

⁷⁹ Interviewee 3

⁸⁰ Interviewee 3

⁸¹ Interviewee 2

symbols are part of Belarusian identity. In response to questions about this, it is stated that: ‘I don’t use this <...> especially of green-red flag because I really don’t want to use it anymore’⁸² or no preferences at all are indicated. The fact that in the mindset, there is no idea formed of what symbolic things, colours or any kind of signs, are associated with Belarusianness partly explains one of the reasons why national symbols are not used in everyday life of interviewees belonging to this type of identity. Other explanations are also mentioned during the interviews: ‘I don’t use any symbols <...> because I am scary for my family’⁸³, ‘I don’t have any things with these symbols because I don’t have options to buy it.’⁸⁴

Going out on the streets during the 2020 protests in Belarus, or expressing support for one’s nationals in any other way, is one of the criteria for an ‘intense’ national identity. Thus, the fact that the interviewees claimed not to be involved in such events and actions in support of protesters leads to a characterisation of the identity as more passive. In other words, national identity is not visibly expressed through everyday practices due to a sense of national identity that is more symbolic and abstract than strongly manifested, partly conditioned by a sense of fear due to A. Lukashenka’s regime’s policy against the free choice of how to understand and express a unique Belarusian identity.

The essence of the type of national identity discussed above is that the answer to the question ‘How would you describe a ‘real member’ of Belarusian nation?’ is answered by the thesis that Belarusian culture, traditions and the Belarusian language are the things that are inseparable from the definition of the nation. It is important not only to know these things but also to put them into practice. This logic allows to classifying this type of identity as a more ethnocentric one. Another distinctive feature is that when it comes to historical memory and the choice of symbols associated with Belarusianness, it would be misleading to claim that the demonstrated position is in line with the official identity policy of the state or that it is clearly following the narrative proposed by the opposition. It is considered to be more weakly articulated. This identity type can also be described as weak if we consider everyday life situations, where national identity is not actively displayed by using national symbols or participating in the protests of 2020 but rather remains in a passive or more abstract state.

⁸² Interviewee 2

⁸³ Interviewee 3

⁸⁴ Interviewee 2

3.2.3 National Identity Type 3

The third type of national identity distinguished in this paper has characteristics of both the first and the second type of Belarusian national identity analysed in the previous sections. The problem of this identity is evident in considering whether it fits the definition of civic or ethnic nationalism. On the one hand, the Belarusian language, which is currently not spoken by the majority of the population in Belarus, is not a criterion for identifying a person as Belarusian. As one interviewee explains:

'Being a Belarusian doesn't mean to be a person who speak Belarusian, unfortunately. Unfortunately. Because only few per cent of Belarusians speak Belarusian on everyday basis. There is maybe two per cent, according to the statistics. Also around maybe three-four-five per cent speak some mixed languages, like Belarusian, Polish and Russian <...>. If you speak Belarusian it doesn't mean you're automatically Belarusian and if you speak Russian doesn't mean you Belarusian or not Belarusian, as well. So, it's not an indicator.'

Another interviewee also echoes the link between self-identification as Belarusian and national language use: 'I think I can't say, unfortunately, because you know Belarusian language, <...> not many people speaks on it. And also it's not supported in our culture, unfortunately.' That is to say, not speaking Belarusian is accepted as a result of historical circumstances and the current language policy of the state, and non-native speakers generally are not excluded from the definition of the nation. But despite this situation, the Belarusian language is considered to have a vital role to play. It is a condition for the survival of the nation ('I do believe that we as a nation will go extinct if we stop using Belarusian language'), and therefore one of the most important components of Belarusianness ('I can say that Belarusian language is the first one that identify you as a Belarusian person'). This type of identity does not require Belarusians to speak Belarusian in order to identify themselves as part of a national community, but the importance of language for maintaining Belarusian national identity is unquestioned.

The situation of Belarusian culture, like that of the language, is double-edged. On the one hand, when it comes to culture and traditions, participants of the research say that they don't think that to 'be a Belarusian means to be a person who is traditional Belarusian person. <...> Being Belarusian means to be a little ashamed of your culture' or even that Belarusians 'don't have this culture, Belarusian culture.' However, it is also very important, according to the Belarusian youth interviewed, to know and cherish it.

Periods and events in Belarusian history are significant insofar as they identify the Belarusian people as independent or aspiring toward that independence. In many cases where Belarusian history is intertwined with the history of other countries, when answering the question ‘What figures or events of the history of Belarus seem to you the most significant?’ the representatives of this type of national identity point to exactly those periods when the paths of these countries took different directions: the period in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (‘the most important part of our history when we can identify us like Belarusian nation’), the beginning of the 20th century (‘it was the time when the nation basically <...> came from almost nowhere. It had never existed before and in the early 20th century it you know claimed itself’), and liberation from oppression by other nations (‘the significant event that we always value in Belarus is when Belarus became free, like after the Second World War <...> because we were freed from German occupation. And also when we became like as a country after the USSR fell apart’). This logic of thinking means that the past is more likely to be thought of in an alternative version to the officially promoted narrative of historical memory.

According to this version of Belarusian identity, symbols are a significant part of it. As mentioned before, the Belarusian youth interviewed tend to reject the symbols officially recognised as national symbols in favour of others with which they identify more deeply. In the words of one interviewee, ‘for me the flag white-red-white it’s more as the symbol of new Belarus. <...> And red-green as like the symbol of old Belarus.’ Another one adds:

‘I was born in 1993 that means that I never saw my country under white-red-white flag, only saw under green and red. And I can hardly remember and time in my life when I saw green red flag and I was like: ‘Ok, this is my country.’ Never happened. <...> I know this flag is my, is our country’s, but what I’m trying to say is that I don’t feel associated. <...> Talking about other symbols, like, for example, the anthem, anthems, modern anthem – same thing. <...> Some other symbols, like non-official, I do relate to them.’

In brief, by rejecting the official symbols as alien and irrelevant, the accents of the Belarusian identity are taken from an alternative source, such as the one proposed by the opposition. The combination of colours white and red, one of the most prominent symbols of the 2020 protests in Belarus, is dominant in the minds of the research participants in the context of national identity.

When assessing the level of ‘regime’ of national identity, it is important to mention that preferences for national symbols are not only clearly perceived but this is also manifested in practice. A strong identity is considered when it is not only a reflection of what is significant to you but it also

requires an expressed action. The interviews reveal that the research participants tend to use the symbols they associate with their national identity in their daily lives, for example, they claimed: ‘Now we in my home now we have like a [white-red-white] flag’ , ‘I have this [white-red-white flag] flag here nearby like on my wall. <...> I don’t show it to others, because this is not like governmental symbol for me. <...> It’s kind a memorabilia if I can say so. Thing that reminds me of the events what I went through.’ In other words, the meaning of symbols consists not only of a sense of identification, but also brings together memories of personal experiences.

In the framework of this paper, the ‘intensiveness’ of Belarusian national identity is also linked to having experiences such as participation in the protests of 2020 or actively demonstrating support for them. According to the interviewees, they were directly (‘I still went there with my friends, with my friend’s father, you know, with all those people with flags, with mottos to the city center’) or indirectly (‘I was in Lithuania. And I only could participate in my, I shared all the stories, I shared all the information. <...> But of course if I were there, I would go to the square’ , ‘Unfortunately, I wasn’t in August in Belarus. <...> I remember that I was posting a lot of stuff’) involved in these events. This kind of testimony justifies the characterisation of this type of identity as clear and strong, as it goes beyond understanding your own values and a sense of identification but is also embedded in everyday practices.

The distinguished ‘Identity Z’ is described by three defining characteristics. As the analysis of the interviews shows, despite the historical and political circumstances that make the non-use of Belarusian culture and Belarusian language acceptable as a reality, it is these markers of national identity that are highlighted as vital components of Belarusian identity. The way in which the history of the Belarusian nation is perceived and which things are emphasised suggests that this type of identity relies on the narrative of the opposition rather than on the official understanding of the nation. This is also evident in the situation where official symbols are dismissed as having nothing to do with the concept of present-day Belarusianness. Finally, this version of identity defines the part of the Belarusian youth living outside the country that demonstrates its belonging to the nation by using national symbols in certain situations of their lives and by engaging in processes such as the protests of 2020 in Belarus.

3.3 Changes of national identity

The interviews were conducted in the context of the protests of 2020 in Belarus. The scale, resonance and ongoing consequences of the events justify classifying them as ‘extraordinary events’.

Assuming that this type of event may have an impact on national identity, two questions were asked of the participants during the interviews in order to find out if there were any national identity changes: ‘Have you noticed any changes in how people behave or talk about Belarus or Belarusians after August of 2020?’ and ‘Do you think that the revolution of 2020 has changed the way you feel about yourself as a Belarusian or not?’ It is worth noting that the participants’ answers to the questions varied regardless of the experience of participating in the protests and, for the purpose of summarizing them and identifying existing patterns, they are not differentiated by type of national identity.

The answers to the first question can be divided into two parts. First, the protests encouraged Belarusian people to start taking an active part and interest in the political processes happening in their own country. For instance, as one interviewee says, ‘people just started not to be afraid to talk about it [government]. And now every person can really loudly talk what they think.’⁸⁵ Another one points out that ‘it definitely changed a lot. Because people felt a power. <...> That they have power and that the regime is not infinite.’⁸⁶ However, one of the participants gives the opposite opinion, stating that ‘people are scared, this is the main, the first change that has happened. <...> They are irritated, they are depressed and that’s pretty much the major feelings are these.’⁸⁷ The second part of the answers is more closely related to the changing perception of the nation and shifts in Belarusian national identity. The most significant change identified – was the strengthened feeling of belonging to the Belarusian nation, an increased desire to get to know all things Belarusian and being proud of it.

‘This is the feeling like you just woke up after a long dream. <...> People started to feel more proud about each other and nation at all. Because this process united people. <...> Because when we were, when people were participating in protests, you need some signs, some details that identify you, like flags or something. Also people started to be more interested in history. <...> They want to know more about their own culture that makes them more, to bring them strong feeling that they’re Belarusian, not Russian or Ukrainian people.’⁸⁸

It is the change in the thinking and behaviour of the nation as a whole that is at the essence. Nevertheless, the experience of such events is also personally transformative. Examples of such changes include a new interest in the public life of their own country (‘I didn’t have my own opinion, I had my parents’ opinion. <...> And it changed personally and I think I kind a grew up of this

⁸⁵ Interviewee 2

⁸⁶ Interviewee 5

⁸⁷ Interviewee 7

⁸⁸ Interviewee 8

situation'⁸⁹), the clarity that has emerged as to what one does and does not identify with ('Wasn't really mindful of symbols before 2020'⁹⁰), and growing pride in your nation ('Now I become more and more interested In my culture, in my language, in traditions. <...> I started to be more proud of Belarusian people because I saw actually we can stand up'⁹¹). In other words, the changes associated with the protests in Belarus in 2020 are visible and manifest at the level of the Belarusian nation as a whole, as well as at the individual level.

In terms of personal experiences, not all interviewees were involved in the protests directly or in any other way. Nonetheless, it is important to note that all the participants of the research have the experience of living in a foreign country. Although they were not asked about it, the majority of interviewees noted during the conversations that it was also their experience of leaving the country and living abroad, among other nations, that had an influence on the emergence of a stronger perception of themselves as Belarusian.

*'When I came to Lithuania I saw in my universities that many people from different countries had a group <...> and we didn't have it as Belarusian, like in my university, I couldn't find any Belarusian people, we kind of are separated. And now we are getting more like together with each other. <...> And actually now I become more and more interested in my culture, in my language, in traditions. <...> When you come to another country, abroad and you see that actually other people appreciate their culture, other people at least know their culture, know their history, know their language, they can speak their language, and you see that actually you cannot, you don't know about your culture, you cannot like fluently speak your language, you and I felt so sorry for myself because like I don't know my culture.'*⁹²

Living abroad is a unique experience that gives the opportunity to get to know other cultures and experience the reality of everyday life in different national communities. At the same time, it allows getting a stronger sense of one's own differences. In other words, to recognise your national identity through day-to-day practices: 'I can say that when I came to Lithuania, I started to feel this, you know, feeling of national identity even more because when you live in among common Belarusian people, you do not distinguish yourself from others.'⁹³

⁸⁹ Interviewee 4

⁹⁰ Interviewee 7

⁹¹ Interviewee 6

⁹² Interviewee 6

⁹³ Interviewee 1

To summarise all the responses on this aspect, the dominant narrative was that through this extraordinary personal experience, through the encounter with other nations, the participants of the study experienced a feeling of change in their national identity, i.e. these experiences strengthened or even was an incentive for it to emerge, to learn about their own culture, to speak their national language, and to spread the message about their nation. There also appeared to be a clear sense of unity and belonging to their national community.

The protests happened in Belarus in 2020, and the experience of living abroad strengthened the sense of national identity of the interviewees of Belarusian youth in exile, encouraged them to take more interest in their culture and history, to cherish it, to speak Belarusian and aroused a sense of pride in their nation.

3.4 Issue of generational differences

One dilemma related to the Belarusian nation emerged during the conversations with the interviewees, which they considered significantly important and which is also worth mentioning in the context of this research. This phenomenon has been described as a ‘generation gap’. One of the interviewees explains it as follows:

‘There are some recognizable and substantial differences between the generations. <...> So they [young people] do not understand the older people, elder people, because youth thinks I believe, most young people, think of their parents as like they are from you know like ancient people, like tribal people who not only, they older people not only they like do not understand why like free movies, free music, free literature is important. They don't want others to have this freedom. And this is very important conflict in Belarusian society – between older generation and youth generation. Older generation just don't want for themselves to have it, and they don't want others to have this freedom, because they don't understand the value of this freedom. This difference is crucial. <...> Perfect future is the future where we find common language.’⁹⁴

In other words, first of all, this generational division in Belarusian society is primarily defined by differences in values. Values are an important part of national identity, and the obvious conflict of values in Belarusian society is likely to become an obstacle to the formation of a coherent Belarusian national identity. It is also necessary to mention the conditions that exist for these beliefs to change.

⁹⁴ Interviewee 7

The conditions referred to are: established habits ('I think people who grew up in the Soviet Union, they have more caution, just in general caution for what's going on outside them, because they were growing up in the situation where, you know, some things could only be said in where is two of you or three of you, you couldn't just be yourself openly in the public'⁹⁵), as well as the ability to adapt to a rapidly changing world ('Young people they are kinda more first of all they know better how to use all these social media things. That's why they know more about the real protests, the real events, what's happening there, while like elder people, elderly people, they still worry about TV stuff and they watch all those propaganda things. Here is the difference'⁹⁶).

One of the interviewees pointed out that these generational differences are directly reflected in the perception of Belarusian national identity:

*'Like from my grandparents view point of view they came from like all they spent whole their life being part of one great country, so, they don't have really, how to say, this feeling of being Belarusian people because we all were the same. <...> So, they don't really know about the things. And now they they just trying to have what they have now, and they don't want to go anywhere else because they're old generation and also they don't want changes.'*⁹⁷

These insights are considered particularly important in the context of this thesis, given that if the participants of the study were of a different generation of Belarusians, the results of the study might be completely different. However, it is also necessary to mention that it is important to understand the conception of the national identity of the younger generation, which constitutes a significant part of the Belarusian nation and will influence the future of the country.

⁹⁵ Interviewee 5

⁹⁶ Interviewee 6

⁹⁷ Interviewee 8

CONCLUSIONS

This Master's thesis provided the main arguments of the constructivist approach to nationalism, presented the most relevant scientific literature on the topic of national identity in general as well as of Belarusian national identity, developed a two-dimensional theoretical model based on the presented theoretical approach and the academic literature, in aim to deconstruct the national identity of Belarusian youth in exile and to assess the impact of the protests of 2020 in Belarus on it.

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Studies of nationalism that define the concept of national identity are traditionally divided into two camps: primordialist and constructivist. In order to explore national identity as a changing rather than a fixed phenomenon, this paper refers to the ideas of the supporters of the latter camp. First of all, B. Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities', the main idea of which is that members of a modern nation can identify themselves as belonging to a national community on the basis of their own feeling and individual choice. Also relevant are the ideas of E. Gellner, and E. Hobsbawm, which propose the view of national identity as a concept that changes for various reasons.

The scientific literature and the studies that have already been carried out show that there is no single position on the issue of Belarusian national identity: some authors discuss features of ethnic and civic identity, while others claim to see a mixture of different identity markers or argue that such an identity hardly exists at all.

The result of empirical research on the national identity of Belarusian youth in exile is a typology which distinguishes 3 types of national identity: National Identity Type 1, National Identity Type 2 and National Identity Type 3. The first type is characterised by a more civic nationalism, following an oppositional nation-building narrative, and an 'intense' sense of national identity that encourages an active demonstration of it. The second type is distinguished by a more pronounced importance of ethnic identity markers, a very neutral stance towards the official or oppositional narrative of the nation, and a symbolic rather than an intense identity 'mode'. The third type is distinguished by the following characteristics: a strong emphasis on ethnic aspects of national identity, a clear support for the

oppositional narrative and rejection of the official one, and a clear and strong sense of identity expressed through everyday practices.

Finally, the interviews conducted during the research revealed that there are recognisable changes in identity in Belarusian society as a result of the protests in 2020. In particular, they have encouraged the Belarusian people to take a more active interest and involvement in the political process and have strengthened the sense of pride in the nation. And also, experiences such as participation in the protests and living in a foreign country led to similar identity transformation processes at the individual level.

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SUMMARY

The title of the Master's thesis is: Belarusianness after protests of 2020: the national identity of Belarusian youth in exile.

This Master's thesis explores the topic of national identity in order to find out what is the national identity of the Belarusian youth who left Belarus in the context of the protests against Lukashenka in Belarus in 2020.

Research problem. The last presidential elections in Belarus led to mass public protests in the country. The dissatisfaction with the electoral process surpassed the scale of previous protests and mobilised many different groups in Belarusian society. Questions have been raised as to who was the force that united the Belarusian people, what the objectives pursued and what changes in society this might lead to. The change in the political context created the need to find out whether the protests could have influenced changes in the national identity of the Belarusian people and what those changes might have been.

Research question: what is the national identity of Belarusian youth who left the country after the 2020 protests?

The object of the study: is the national identity of Belarusian youth who have left the country.

The aim of the research is to deconstruct the national identity of Belarusian youth who have left the country and to find out whether the 2020 protests in Belarus have had an impact on identity changes.

Objectives of the study:

1. To introduce the constructivist approach to nationalism and the main ideas of its proponents;
2. To develop a theoretical model for deconstructing the national identity of Belarusian youth;
3. To conduct empirical research and answer the question of what the national identity of the Belarusian youth in exile is.

The main results of the research.

The outcome of empirical research of the national identity of Belarusian youth in exile is a typology consisted of 3 types of national identity: The Type 1 is characterised by a more civic nationalism, following an oppositional nation-building narrative, and an 'intense' sense of national identity that encourages an active demonstration of it. The Type 2 is distinguished by the more pronounced importance of ethnic identity markers, a very neutral stance towards the official or oppositional narrative of the nation, and a symbolic rather than an intense identity 'mode'. The Type 3 is distinguished by a strong emphasis on ethnic aspects of national identity, a clear support for the oppositional narrative and rejection of the official one, and a clear and strong sense of identity expressed through everyday practices.

The analysis of the interviews revealed that there are recognisable changes in identity in Belarusian society after the protests of 2020 in Belarus. It encouraged the Belarusian people to take a more active interest and involvement in the political process and strengthened the sense of pride in the nation. Also, the experiences such as participation in the protests and living abroad led to similar identity transformation processes at the individual level of the participants of the research.

SANTRAUKA

Magistro darbo pavadinimas – Baltarusiškas po 2020 metų protestų: baltarusių jaunimo, palikusio šalį, tautinis tapatumas.

Šiame magistro darbe tyrinėjama tautinio tapatumo tema, norint išsiaiškinti koks yra baltarusių jaunimo, išvykusio iš Baltarusijos, tautinis tapatumas 2020 metais Baltarusijoje įvykusių protestų prieš A. Lukašenką kontekste.

Tyrimo problema. Paskutiniai prezidento rinkimai Baltarusijoje šalyje sukėlė masinius visuomenės protestus. Nepasitenkinimas rinkiminiu procesu mastu pranoko ankstesnius vykusius protestus, sumobilizavo daug skirtingų Baltarusijos visuomenės grupių. Kilo klausimai, kas buvo ta jėga, kuri suvienijo Baltarusijos tautą, kokių tikslų buvo siekiama ir kokius visuomenės pokyčius tai gali paskatinti. Pasikeitus politinėms aplinkybėms, atsirado poreikis išsiaiškinti, ar vykę protestai protestai galėjo turėti įtakos Baltarusijos žmonių tautinė tapatybės pokyčiams ir kokie tie pokyčiai galėjo būti.

Tyrimo klausimas: koks yra baltarusių jaunimo, palikusio šalį, tautinis tapatumas po 2020 metų protestų?

Tyrimo objektas: yra baltarusių jaunimo, palikusio šalį, tautinis tapatumas.

Tyrimo tikslas yra dekonstruoti baltarusių jaunimo, palikusio šalį, tautinį tapatumą ir išsiaiškinti, ar 2020 metų protestai Baltarusijoje turėjo įtakos tapatybiniais pokyčiams.

Tyrimo uždaviniai:

1. Pristatyti konstruktyvistinį požiūrį į nacionalizmą ir pagrindines šios teorijos šalininkų idėjas;
2. Sudaryti teorinį modelį tautinės baltarusių jaunimo tautinės tapatybės dekonstrukcijai atlikti;
3. Atlikti empirinį tyrimą ir atsakyti į klausimą, koks yra baltarusių jaunimo, palikusio šalį, tautinis identitetas.

Pagrindiniai tyrimo rezultatai. Empirinio baltarusių jaunimo, palikusio šalį tautinio tapatumo tyrimo rezultatas – sudaryta tipologija, kurią sudaro 3 tautinės tapatybės tipai: Pirmajam tipui būdingas labiau pilietinio nacionalizmo bruožai, sekimas opozicijos skleidžiamu naratyvu ir „intensyvus“ tautinio tapatumo jausmas, pasireiškiantis aktyviu jo demonstravimu. Antrajam tipui būdinga ryškesnė etninių tapatybės žymeklių svarba, labai neutrali pozicija oficialaus ar opozicinio tautos naratyvo atžvilgiu ir labiau simbolinis nei intensyvus tapatybės „režimas“. Trečiasis tipas išsiskiria ryškiu etninių tautinio

tapatumo aspektų akcentavimu, aiškiu opozicinio naratyvo palaikymu ir oficialiojo naratyvo atmetimu bei stipriu tapatybės jausmu, išreiškiamu per kasdienio gyvenimo praktikas.

Interviu analizė atskleidė, kad Baltarusijos visuomenėje yra atpažįstami tautinio tapatumo pokyčiai, sąlygoti 2020 m. šalyje vykusių protestų. Minėtieji įvykiai paskatino baltarusių tautą aktyviau domėtis ir dalyvauti politiniuose procesuose, sustiprino pasididžiavimo savo tauta jausmą. Taip pat tokios patirtys, kaip dalyvavimas protestuose ir gyvenimas užsienyje, lėmė analogiškus asmeninius tyrimo dalyvių tapatumo transformacijos procesus.

AFFIXES

INTERVIEW 1:

So, my first question would be: do you consider yourself a Belarusian?

Yes, for sure. And I can say that when I came to Lithuania I started to feel this, you know, feeling of national identity even more because when you live in among common Belarusian people, you do not distinguish yourself from others. And for now, yes, for sure I will never say to anyone that I am not Belarusian and I am proud of it. Yes, and my feeling of national identity is really strong. At least, for now.

And what does Belarus, in general, mean to you? What are the associations when I ask you this question, what it means to you personally? Belarus.

For me, the first word that came to my mind is homeland. Whenever I will be living and be studying and travelling or whatever, I would feel that Belarus is the place where I am always welcomed. Even though Belarusian workers sometimes do not allow me to enter my home country, but it doesn't matter. So, Belarus at first for me is my homeland.

Ok. And how would you describe so-called 'a real member' of Belarusian nation? What would be maybe the characteristics or what should 'a real member' of Belarusian nation know, or how she, he or she, would have to act, I don't know...

First of all, I would like to say that I hate any precise description of Belarusian people. Like, it is impossible to describe a usual Belarusian citizen, because everyone is super different and I don't think that Belarusian people have to speak Belarusian language or have to know all the traditions that we have. First of all, the most essential thing is to, your, is to have this feeling of being Belarusian. This is only thing that is needed to be a Belarusian, you know. In my opinion.

Ok, so you would say that people who live in Belarus could feel, could have that feeling and could not have that feeling?

I think that only in case if you have this feeling, if you're proud of being Belarusian, you can count yourself as Belarusian. But it doesn't mean that you need to speak Belarusian language, need to know traditions, history and etcetera. The only thing that is matter – is your feeling of national identity. I know some people who are not from Belarus, who are from Russia, like they were born in Russia and

then in their childhood, they moved to Belarus and they feel themselves and see themselves as Belarusian people, and in their case I believe they are true Belarusian people because they have this feeling what I am talking about.

And you already mentioned a little bit about characteristics or features that could have Belarusian or not, but there, have, are there any unique features that set them apart from other nations, from, I don't know, differences from Lithuanians, or Russians, or neighbours, other neighbours? Do you see any exclusive...

Yes, I see. Probably, it would sound a little bit strange and it is a common prejudice about Belarusian nation. That we are super tolerant. I very don't know why, but we can tolerate things from very long time. It can be seen in political situation, in the, you know, social situation, and it is common and usual in everyday life, like for now I don't have a lot of Belarusian people in my surroundings, in Lithuania, but those that are Belarusian a couple of them, there are, have one like common characteristic, and this is our tolerance. Tolerance to all unknown things and even some bad things.

Maybe there are any, I don't know, stories or jokes or anecdotes about Belarusian people, maybe do you remember now any of them or there are not?

You know, especially now there are some among like in the community we usually tell jokes about our so-called president. And we have really like, I guess funny name for him, is Lukash, or Tarakan, or and, you know, or Bulbash, or sometimes you know when we for example even in the dorms when we met other Belarusians they would say: 'Oh, I am hungry.' I would say like: 'Oh, take my potato and just fry it'. Like, yeah, there are some jokes about potato, about like Lukashenka, but I would not say that we have something super you know traditional, that would be like our distinguishing feature in the field of jokes.

<...>

So my question was you already mentioned that you feel that feeling being proud of being Belarusian, but I wanted to ask could you remember or say any situations when you felt that being proud of Belarusian? I don't know, it could be maybe when you said that you are abroad, or it's some events, I don't know, are there any situations that you exclusively felt being proud of Belarusian, or when you did not wanted to identify with your nation?

Ok, amh, let's say about this feeling in one positive case. I clearly remember when was my first time seeing this kind of meeting in Klaipėda as it was focused on support to Belarusian nation. And many Belarusians who live in Klaipėda were standing with our real flag, I mean white red white flag and it was like in the central square and I was walking around and when I noticed that this kind of events can be held in a foreign country, and your country Lithuania is not against of showing like our identity, although we are not like not see ourselves as Lithuanians and etcetera, so at that moment I felt proud and the same situation happens when I see our flags like on the buildings, you know. Sometimes Belarusian people even in Vilnius or in Klaipėda they just like shows this flag on their balconies or I don't know, windows, and etcetera, yeah. At that time I feel really proud of being Belarusian people, Belarusian citizen, yeah. The time when I felt I cannot say not proud of being Belarusian, but very unpleasant situation happened in my university and I really want to speak up about it. Towards three weeks ago like our university suggested us to raise our national flag. And when we were suggested to do that, they said that the flag will be only like I don't know how to say it... A fake flag. Like red with green color, because this flag is accepted by international community. And there was like: 'Do you really think so?' Like Lithuania has already mentioned it's position about like the government of Belarus and about our flag and at that moment I was surprised, that probably someone from Belarusian students suggested that, because it don't seems that my university came up with this idea by someone from staff, you know. And at that moment I was like: 'Why? Why someone did that?'

And how did that ended? What flag or was...

We made a petition, and in two days I guess two hundred of LCC students, not even Belarusian students, sign out this petition and this event, or celebration was canceled, because LCC refused to raise a normal flag, they were like they were afraid I guess of some kind of conflict, they said that they are politically neutral institution, but it is bullshit, you know.

Ok, continuing with the symbols. I wanted to ask do you use state or national symbols in your daily life? And maybe what if you use, what are these symbols and in what situations, maybe you could tell something?

Yeah, I don't know how to translate in English, but we have a symbol called Pahonia. And I have like some kinds of pins on all my stuff, it's like can you see? On my bags, where is it? And this pin was given to me by my father, because my father is a soldier. And he told me the story that in 90s when he just started to be a soldier, this symbol was a national symbol and he said that it's an absurd that 30

years ago all people who worked in military were supposed to wear this symbol on their wardrobe, on their some kind of I don't know special clothes, but now this symbol is prohibited. So he gave it to me and I made some kind of handmade and yes, now this symbol is always with me, on different bags, just different stuff.

Ok, and what about maybe, for example, how usually do you sing the anthem in your life, in... do you sing it? or other things, for example, you also already mentioned about flag – I think it is clear that you prefer that white red flag, white red white flag, yes? Not the official one, yeah? So, do you use other any symbols in your life, did you use it in your family in Belarus? Or just this one?

I would like to make it clear for you, that national anthem in Belarus it is not something that makes us proud of our country. It is something that teachers in schools make their students learn, and it is something necessary but this is some kind of necessity that are unpleasant for people. Because we don't feel... [pause] For example, I don't feel anything I don't have any feeling during singing this anthem, because I have this kind of very unpleasant and very scary memories when at school we were like supposed to sing it during every event and it was, it was awful, you know. It's not like in the U.S. where people really feel proud while singing this kind of songs, it's not about us. And in my family none of my family members use any kind of symbols. My father use Pahonia as I do, my mother doesn't use anything because she's afraid of... how to say, being even fired from job...

From consequences?

Of some consequences, yes, it's right. And even wearing some clothes, that have some kind of mixture with white and red color, can cause some dangerous consequences for you if you are in Belarus. So, it is not really safe to show somehow your attitude towards national symbols.

Ok, now a little bit about history. Are you interested in history in general, in Belarus history?

Yeah, I used to be neutral about history at all, like I was mhhh, I can learn it but only for school exams. But as there is what happened to my country because of this situation, I mean political situation, I started to learn a lot just to find out where is the truth. Yes, for now I can say that I am interested in history.

Could you mention any, I don't know, figures or events of the history of Belarus that seem to you now significant or the most important, or there is no that so important...?

I can mention a family. There is a family called the Radzivilii family. There was a greatest family who lived in Belarus probably for centuries. And we have three palacies, one is in Nesvizh, and one is in Mir, city called Mir, and another one is in Vileika, I guess. But I went to I visited only two of them. So this family made the rest of the world aware of who are Belarusians. And, one thing that I am really proud of that this family are used to talk only in an old Belarusian language, like. You know, it's a kind of thing when Russian speaking people and Ukrainian speaking people try to persuade you that Belarusian language is a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian. But history tells otherwise. Because looking at history, we can find ?? of differents documents, that were written in an ancient Belarusian, old Belarusian language, and that's probably means that this was a begining of Russian language and old Ukrainian language, yeah. Is it a valid information for you?

Yes, it is very interesting, some... Yeah, it's very good answer and interesting answer. Now I would like to ask you to talk a little bit about the protests and about the events of 2020. Did you participate in the protests against Lukashenka in some way? I don't know, maybe going out in the streets or any other activities?

Ok, I want to really surprise you, because I don't know whether I told you or not, but I am from super small town, 17 thousand people and even in that town there were a lot of people to came out in the streets who showed like their opinion, who showed their disagreement and of course I was in this crowded like place. And I remember one thing that there were so many police people and at one moment they just started to like... to go... can I go to Russian language, switch to Russian language? Полиция начала надвигаться на толпу, как выстучать дубинками по как то называется... по озащитным таким штукам... по щитам, и потом они, когда толпа начала рзбегаться, толпа начала забегать в живые двары, и полиция то есть прям отряда, ОМОН забегали в живые двары. I was with my friend, with my school friend and we also tried to escape from the police in our like in our homebuilding, like it's like это многоквартирная здания и мы забежали в подъезд и так как у меня был ключи в подъезд, человек из ОМОНа несмог забежать, мы забежали ко мне в квартиру, многих других люди кто были в переход в домов они были catch, caught up just because they didn't have keys or any ability to going to the house. Yeah. That's what I remember.

So, your the most... your experience of it, yes? The most what left for you from these events, yes? From your experience...

Yeah. And you know that day I left Belarus. It was like it was 9th of August and on 10th of August I left Belarus and came to Lithuania because this was the only way to start like living a normal life and to feel safe and yeah... I don't think that it is some kind of showing lack of courage or bravery. I believe I just looking for a bright future and it is normal to want something better for yourself. Because I understand that on larger scale I can do nothing you know?

Have you noticed... Do you think people have changed over this year or do you noticed... Have you noticed any changes in how people behave or talk about Belarus or Belarusian nation after August 2020?

You mean foreign people or our... Belarusians behaviour?

Belarusians.

Surfully starting from this winter, I mean winter 2021, all the protests, all the opposition movements started to be less and less strong and it's a pity but I understand that people are just tired. They don't see any changes and I guess the European Union somehow tries to help us, but all these sanctions, all these limits for Belarusian...

Businesses?

Government people – they just don't work. And yeah, people are tired, people, I can not say stopped fighting, but for now we need some kind of break, we need to take a new breath, and maybe in the next year we will continue fighting, even harder. And this new fresh minds with fresh powers and I hope with some support from more powerful countries, I hope so.

And maybe... was there a change how do you speak or talk with your friends or family in Belarusians in general as a nation? Or didn't you, maybe you didn't notice any change after that revolution? Maybe do you remember how it was before and now or there is you didn't notice any change about...?

Ok, sorry for interrupting you. Of course, I noticed these changes. There are incredible changes. We got this sense of national identity and people started to speak about us as a whole nation, like, even my friends who live in Poland now, many people moved to Poland, because Poland offers a lot of great scholarships and a lot of great support for Belarusian students who were somehow you know misunderstood in our country or even repressed. Yeah, even they, they don't stop to think of ourselves

as a whole nation, as a Belarusian nation. And even in my family you know, my father, I have told this that my father is a soldier, he used to work in a military and he supposed to be a super patriotic, super government follower, but he doesn't. He doesn't do that because his feeling of national identity is much stronger than his feeling of just following orders that can be given to him by someone from the government, you know.

Ok, what is your vision of Belarus, of future Belarus? What kind of country would you like to see, would you want it to be? How do you imagine the future? Or your dream country of Belarus...

You know, there is a common thing about Belarusian nation that we are hard-working people and that is true. If, you know, even like the land is not very suitable for growing different agricultural things, but we somehow manage to do that because Lukashenka decided that we are an agricultural country. And I believe that if we were given at least a sense of freedom, we would do some great things. We are very talented in the scale of IT, and I think you have heard about the fact that many talented Belarusian IT people moved to another countries because of repressions.

<...>

So, first of all, I want to see three major changes in the future of Belarus. I don't want to see full democracy, but I want to see a freedom of speech, first of all, and a freedom of choice. Freedom of choice for not faking elections and freedom of speech for allowing some kind of magazines or different networks, tell the truth about situations and about actions that happen in Belarus. The second major change that I want to see in Belarus is economic growth. Because we do have a lot of opportunities. We are basically located in the centre of Europe, we can be the perfect logistic place for many foreign companies. Our nature is incredible, and those we want to do freelance can just live in Belarus and work on a distance, you know. And the third major change that I want to see in Belarus is revolution in our education. In our educational systems, because it is feel, feels like we've been in a Soviet Union. There are some subjects that even are unknown in Lithuania. For example, we have *труды*, *труды* is like in Lithuania you have 'technology' lesson in schools, right?

Yes.

And this is the same but during *труды* we are told how to make some things from wood, or how to sew, I don't know. It's – we are not in prison, why do we need to know that? Yeah, and it is just like

a small thing that is a bad about Belarusian education. So, education, freedom and economic growth are three things that I want to see in Belarus of future.

Do you think all these things are possible, or what should be done, or what should happen that it would be possible these changes? Do you have an opinion or ideas?

Of course, I do think that, and I've started to believe even harder when I came to Lithuania. When I look at Lithuania, it is super small country, you have only two million people, it's like it's four times less than in Belarus, but you managed to do that. You managed to gain your freedom, of course, with some kind of opposition movements, meetings and etcetera. But now you are on your way to bright future. You have already gained some kind of democracy, of course I believe that there are some threats, as in every country. And I just don't, I am not aware of them, because I am not a you know a local, yeah. But when I look at Lithuania's example, I believe that this possible. And the only thing that is needed, is a good ruler, at least a ruler who will not prevent Belarusians from their development, yeah.

Thank you.

INTERVIEW 2:

Ok, so my first question would be short easy question do you consider yourself a Belarusian? Belarusian, I don't know how it is better to say - Belarusian, I think, yeah.

I don't know how it will be correct, but it's okay. Do I confirm?

Do you feel or do you when you say for other people who you are, there is a feel that you are you could how to say name yourself a Belarusian, do you feel that?

Yes, when I'm meeting someone I always say that I'm from Belarus. Especially there in Poland where I meet a lot of people and a lot of Russian-speaking English Russian-speaking people, and they are from other countries, not only Belarus, it's Russia, it's Ukraine.

<...>

You said, I think, that when you meet people, Russian-speaking people and they said that Belarus, Russia, Ukraine... I think you said something like this...

So yeah, I always said that I'm from Belarus and even if they have same culture in some way ??, but we are very different and I really see this difference. I always said that I'm from Belarus and I feel like I'm from Belarus, so yes.

And what does Belarus mean to you? When I say this word, what associations maybe come to your mind? What Belarus is for you?

Belarus for me is a place where I was born, where are was my childhood, there are my parents, my family. So it's like more my life there, not like country or something like that, but my growth and so on.

And about Belarusian nation, about Belarusian people - how would you describe so-called the real member of Belarusian nation? What maybe features he or she would have? Or what he or she should know about Belarus or anything? What do you think, what person you could call a real member of Belarusian nation?

Of Belarusian nation... So, When I was in school, I have great teacher of the history and we had history and history of Belarus. And when we studied this history of Belarus, I always think thought and my teacher also said that Belarusian people are how to say... They don't fight for the their freedom. And always for example in different historical situation Belarusian always were like... страдачие??

Да, да.

So, in Russian... But situation is ?? after this election when Belarusian people really показали as a people that hey can fight. And so that they are united and they are strong people.

Would you think that for example, language is important or not? Belarusian language to talk in this or it is not important for you in your opinion?

For me, the language is very important in definition of nation. So, also historically Belarusian is one nation who not speak their language and the постоянно отказались their language and now we don't speak it. For example, we can see example of Ukraine where also people talk Ukrainian and Russian. But from, I don't remember which year, there is rule that all television??, all programmes and so on are on Ukrainian language. So, we can see that the country really care of their language, of their nation. But in Belarus, we have two national languages - Russian and Belarusian but most of people communicate in Russian, also we have education in Russian language, education in school and also in

universities we have education in Russian. Also our president, president [showing quotation marks] speak we call it trasianka, is the Russian and Belarusian just...

Mixture, yeah?

Yes, yes and it's very uncorrect. So, it's very important to speak in Belarusian. Also, for example, all documents are on two languages - on Russian and Belarusian. But I think that also government should take actions to bring this Belarusian language in our life. That Belarusian should talk in Belarusian to save our nation, our nationality, not to just forgot that we are Belarusians, that we are why we speak Russian it's just because historically we were on Russia, so there were policy that we all should speak Russian and Belarusian it really was this. For example, the historically also Polish people there was also a policy of Russification, but they don't agree with that, fight, and we can see that they don't speak Russian but speak Polish. And Belarusian people like I said earlier wasn't very fight and strong for this. I think that we should fight with this to be Belarusian and be proud of the speaking in Belarusian language. For example, when I meet people also from different countries, not only there, just in internet or somewhere, and when I say that I'm from Belarus and they ask me to say something in Belarusian language, and I can tell something them but when I tell them that we don't speak Belarusian all are just...

Surprised?

Surprised, yes. And I should just I should just tell them why we are speaking in Russian and so on. So, I think that we should start and we should start every person, also documents should start to bring this Belarusian language in our everyday life just.

Ok, thanks. And my next question is you a little bit mentioned that even now when you are in Poland, do you noticed any features or exclusive characteristics how Belarusians differs from other nations, I don't know, from Polish, from Russian... You a little bit mentioned, maybe there are I don't know any features that it is said that Belarusians are like this and not how it is with Russians or Lithuanians or... Is there are there any features or?

All what I've mentioned when live in Poland and have a lot of friends from Ukraine, some friends from Russia, so Belarusian people are more polite. Also we are more polite and we understand that we are for example in other country, where not country, not Polish people are the guests, but in Belarus, but we are guests as in Poland. So we should just we should understand their rules of life and we

should do like them because we are guests like I say. And Belarusian people can really understand it and they do it. But for example, Ukraine people there are like this is their country really I really see that and in this moment Belarusian people are really... I can say the main difference and what I really mentioned Belarusian people are more... how it say work lover...

You can say it, if you know the word in Russian, you can say it, I will understand.

Трудолюбивые. As I can... like this. What I can also mention... I don't ?? also mention like that is what come to my head.

Ok, that's great. I wanted to ask you could you remember any situations, maybe recent situations or that was earlier, when you felt proud of being Belarusian or when you did not wanted to identify with your nation? Maybe there was some situation, maybe there was some situations when you didn't feel good? If you understand my question...

I was proud of Belarusian people all this nation when was this election and like I said Belarusian people just tell to every to every people that they are really matters??. that they are really united nation. Of course, we have not the best examples of Belarusian people like our government, also these people who walk in this... police, we have a police but in this structure. And that people who really don't agree with this and say just out from this structure. But there are also people who stay there and of course always there are not the best people. But I was really proud of Belarusian nation. I don't take action in this meetings but I really proud of these people because you know every person know that there could be consequences of this and really really strong consequences. But people still do it. And they don't afraid because I think that people just ?? be afraid and they just want best life for them and they really fighting for this. I'm really proud of these people and be a part of these people, even if I ?? make a part...but I really, I just really proud. Situations when I don't want to identify... I guess that I haven't these situations. Also, like I say that also there are peoples, exceptions from the rules that have not the best the best things but I don't identify me with them because I just know that are just exceptions.

Ok, a little bit about history. You already mentioned that you had a great teacher, yes, at school?

Yes.

So, are you interested in Belarus history, I understood that yes?

It's I don't really love history at all. But I just understand that it's really important part of life of every people. So, we just should know about it to really understand how life is go on and so on. But basically, I don't love history.

And if I ask you to mention in your opinion the most significant or important events or persons, historical figures in Belarus history, what it would be? Maybe event or people who are important, in your opinion.

I don't tell you about people, because I just don't remember them. And I guess that no special events because I just don't remember them. But I think that important period for Belarus was likely was a part of Великое княжество Литовское. Because the Belarus and other countries was really great just huge great country which was huge important in our world. And we just can see that these nations really can be so huge and so important and so strong. Not the best events was I don't remember when it was like I say when we was under Russia... Russia I don't know what was... in these times, just Russia. And there was this policy of Russification and Belarusian people just don't fight it... no, I can't just say that they don't fighting, because they really fight. And there are lot of also people who were heroes in this situations but I wasn't enough to just to be to win in this situation just.

And it's interesting for me do you use any state or national symbols in your daily life? Maybe flags, or I don't know, any symbols and in what situation if you use them?

In my everyday life no...

Or in specific I don't know events, maybe or maybe it was in school life?

In school life, we used it just because it was like the rule. For example, when we had special events, so, for example, The Victory Day, the 9th of May, we all should have to wear like nachiook?? this was something connect with communism even I can say. And just this ?? flags and so on in special events no I don't use this nations??. especially of green-red flag because I really don't want to use it anymore. And what about this white-red-white flag I really like it, I don't have any things with this symbols because I don't have options of to buy it just. But a lot of my friends there, or for example I live in dorm, and for example if you just go through our floor, one to five doors you can see flag, наклейка, sticker of our flag and friends motivated...

That white-red-white flag, yes?

Yes, yes, white-red-white flags and and different motivation цитаты. So, yes, But I don't use it because don't have events or situations to wear?? it, I don't have situations to buy it. So, yeah.

Ok, now I wanted to ask about the events of 2020, about the protests. You've already mentioned that you didn't participate in protests, am I right?

Yes.

Ok, did you noticed any changes in how people behave or talk about Belarusian, about Belarus nation after these events? Did you notice any difference or there is no difference?

I can really mention this difference because before this election behind people there was like we don't about our government loudly, just somewhere to each other, somewhere at home or somewhere else. And because it was better not to talk about it. But before like few months before election when this team of this election, of our government just Sergei Tsihanovski started to say about it loudly just to for all country. Though people just started not to afraid to talk about it. And now every person can really loudly talk what they think about government. Of course we all know the consequences of this, But people just don't afraid anymore of this. Of course, there are exceptions who still afraid of this, for example people who walked in government structure because they just they can't have opinion about this, because if they walk in government structure so they unfortunately should be a part of government. And in that situation of course I guess that at home they can say that they really don't like it. But at work they ?? work for government.

So, basically people are talking about what they don't like about government, yes?

Yes.

Ok, and the last part of our interview I would like to ask you to tell me about a little bit about what is your vision of Belarus? How would you like to that it would change maybe overtime? What kind of country would you like to see in the future?

I really hope that we will win in this fight. That we have that we will change our government and of course it wasn't the best life just after change of government because where country since this since давление?? like after USSR we have one government and just Belarusian people nation Belarus just don't know how to be with other government, we just don't know what what will be in this situation. So I really want it to be that we will change this government and the need a little bit time to

know how to live in this new country with new government, the I guess new rules. It really take a time and not a year and not two year. But really take time. But I guess when people will live in country they really want to live, they will be more happy, more happy to stay in their country and really be proud of their country. Because like we can see in Belarus are a lot of really smart people, and they all just don't stay in Belarus because they have no have options to stay. Because they don't have develop and so on. And they know that the brains would be really better отценины in other places. So they just go out from Belarus. But if we have option?? we really want to stay, we want to use our knowledge, our strong for our country not to without in other country and use it there, in this country, for example we are there in Poland, of course we all are smart people and we just can?? stay in Belarus and use our knowledge, our brains in Belarus, but we just see that we that we haven't возможности opportunities to develop in Belarus. So, if we have country where we really want to stay, and we understand that we really be use for this country, we would stay. And I hope that it really will be somewhere like I say it wouldn't be in one year or in two years, it take a really long time. But I hope that we will have country like like people wants to live in not government want to have this country, like Switzerland where people are government, we can say people can decide in which country they really want to live. And when every person in Belarus for example we understand that it really depends on them in which country we will live. But I guess people understand it a little bit, but of this ?? of government we just can't do anything for this because government said that it would be like this and not like in other way anymore. If people will feel that they really matter, that they are government, that the voices are really heard, and they really understand that there is their country, not government country, so and will really proud of this country and be proud of be part of this country and so on.

Ok, thank you.

INTERVIEW 3:

So, now we can start I think. And my first question is do you consider or do you introduce yourself as Belarusian? As a member of Belarusian nation to other people?

Yes, of course. But, sorry, yes of course, but I sad?? I don't speak Belarusian language. And is very...

<...>

And... I consider myself a part of the Belarusian people, but I ashamed that I don't speak the Belarusian language or do not participate in rallies because for example at Warsaw at the Poznan and at

the any Poland cities... are rallies?? in support of Belarusian are taking place but I don't going in the these rallies because I think when I go at these rallies is... this is will be bad for my family. Because my family is in Belarus and when somebody see me in these rallies my family will suffer, I think.

Ok, I'm interested in what Belarus when I say Belarus word what associations comes to your mind, what Belarus mean to you?

I think Belarusian people is very kindly, very people who will help in any situation for Belarusians. For example, I work at the restaurant and with me work any Belarusian people. And when I don't know how... I don't think how to work good the help me. And I think...

Belarusian people help you, yes?

Yeah. And I think Belarusian people very kindly and but we have one thing of where... of our nation is we always...

<...>

Я думаю у нас есть такой минус что мы всё прощаем, всё... если нам что-то не нравится то мы говорим: хорошо, мы ???. И этот терпеливость, это нашый главный минус, потому что неприжении?? голгова времени, мы терпели а нашего президента, и теперь мы ну получили что получили.

Ok, and my question would be how would you describe a real Belarusian people? A real member of Belarusian nation? What maybe features you already mentioned that feature of Belarusian, but maybe there are things that real Belarusian should know, maybe language, maybe I don't know, cultural things or to know very good history. What things are important to be a real Belarusian nation, member of Belarusian nation? How do you think?

I think is are all - language, history, but many Belarusian know this history, this language but our president are do everything for this for...

<...>

Do all to our people forgot this forgot language, forgot history because all we have documents, for example, learn at school is in Russian language. And we have for example in school one lesson for Belarusian language and three lessons of Russian. And Belarusians know our history, history of country, we know for example our really flag but the white-red-white but our president don't like it.

But you think that it is important, yes? To know that history, language, do you think it is important or it's not so important?

I think is very very important. Because when people know history, language, is a nation. Because nation is people who have one language, one history, one culture... I think is very important.

Okay, you said that you feel that you introduce yourself as Belarusian. And I wanted to ask could you remember any situations when you maybe feel proud of being Belarusian, feel good when you say that you are Belarusian, and maybe there are situations where you did not wanted to identify or to call you Belarusian, maybe it was not a good feeling. Are there any situations, could you remember maybe something?

At first I say that I don't have situation in I don't proud of that I am Belarusian. And I were proud of my country when I be at school. I go the dance class and we go to the other country, for example it's Russia, it's Poland, and we have any competition friends at the dance??. And we always get first place at this competition. And I this at this moment I be proud of my country. And when I study and teacher asks me where I live, when I say that I live in Belarus, I really proud.

Okay, do you are you interested in history, in history of Belarus?

What?

Are you interested in Belarus history, do you, I think you studied it in school, but do you, it's interesting thing for you? Maybe you read about Belarus history and know some events or important things from Belarusian history? Or not? Maybe you are not very deeply interested in it?

I don't be really deeply interested in history of Belarus. But I really said that when I go I have {m)any?? relatives ?? Poland. My uncle live in Poland, the... and he always says that Belarus don't have history, that Belarus have history only... only after the Soviet Union. He say that Belarus after the 1991 after Soviet Union. But I think Belarus has long story and when I said I don't think?? that Belarus don't have history.

Is there any historical person or event or, I don't know, period, how you say, that it seems for you important in Belarus history? I don't know maybe period of after USSR, after Soviet Union, or maybe when it was the one country with Poland and Lithuania. Or maybe it there is no such an event or historical person that would you say that it is important for Belarus?

I think... for Belarus is Kukolas??. Janka Kupala, because they wrote?? about our culture and today all people know that people in Belarus are creative. But for example we have Adam Mickewich, and Belarus think that Belarus ... Belarusian poet, and Poland think that Poland poet. This is very difficult, because...

Yeah, it is important for both countries, yeah. Do you use in your daily life or in some events maybe specific situations any national or symbols, for example, flag or, and what kind of flag if you do you use it or maybe some any other symbols, Pahonia, I guess, this is in Belarus... Do you use that symbols or not in your life usually?

I don't use any symbols, because I don't ?? the all politic things and because I scary for my family. And I don't do anything for this. I don't have flag, I don't have anything. Because I am scary.

Okay, now I wanted to ask a little bit about the protests, about the events what happened in 2020, in Belarus. You already mentioned that now you are not participating in such event in Poland. Am I right? Yeah?

Yeah.

Did you participate in protests or did you participate not how to say, do you support in any other way maybe not going out on the streets in 2020? Or did you not participate in that protests in any way? I don't know if my question is clear.

I don't participate this meeting. I don't go at this meeting. Because, yeah, we have difficult situation and my family don't support our president. But we see how my people sit in prison. And I don't want go to the prison, that my family too. And maybe is strange, but we see that two years people go at the street, but I think people don't go to into street now, and all is ... nothing has changed in our country and I think we should we should wait for our president is died. I don't know because I see that I think don't change and I don't know.

Nothing, it may seem as you said that nothing changed in political level, that your president is Lukashenka is here, but have you noticed any changes in how maybe people in your family or you with your friends talk about Belarusians, about Belarusian nation after these events of 2020? Is there any change or is all as it was before? How do you see it? How they talk about nation, how they I don't know, talk about this protests and revolution and changes?

We don't talk about this. In my family, with my friends we don't about this because we scary. And when I talk with my mum on phone??, we ?? say about this because we scary. And this is very difficult. And I don't want ?? for me and my family and I don't think and don't say about this.

Okay. And now for me it is interesting to know what is your personal vision of future Belarus? Maybe you would like to see any changes in the future. What kind of changes it could be? What is your dream Belarus, let say this like this. Dream country, where you would like to live.

My dream country Belarus is Belarus free Belarus. And I wish that we, I live in Belarus with my family and we ... we just live. I don't know, I like Belarus, I like our nation, our culture and I wish live in Belarus but in free Belarus - with free economic, with people and I think is very difficult to do. But I think is Belarus change but maybe any time we...

Not now, yes? If I understand you.

Yeah, not now.

INTERVIEW 4:

So my first question would be do you consider yourself as Belarusian? Or do you introduce for other people as Belarusian?

Yes. I like people, for example in Lithuania, like?? speak Russian, because I don't speak native language that much, I don't like to be considered as Russian or Ukrainian. I want to be called?? Belarusian because I think this is kind of disrespectful for people to think like, oh you speak Russian, you're Russian. And I don't want people think I'm Russian. Everybody knows that I'm from Belarus.

Okay, what does Belarus mean for you? What associations comes to your mind when I say Belarus?

As I live in Lithuania for more than year, and I haven't been in my home country for half of year, I think, I have some thoughts?? that come to my mind. Like when I think about Belarus, I think that in Lithuania when I go to the parks, for example, I see only деревья, it like... ёлки. Yeah, and in Belarus we have more like more oak??, more trees than people?? And this is like ?? come up to my mind that we have like ?? we ??, culture and nature of our country. Because it like unique.

<...>

Okay, I can hear very well now. Sorry, I interrupted you. You were talking about if I heard right, you said that when I say Belarus, positive things comes to your mind, yes? Nature, people... Yeah? Could you repeat one more a little bit?

Sorry. So, what I was saying that I have mostly positive things that come out to my mind when I think about Belarus. I don't think the first part is not about Lukashenka and all bad things what happened, for example, in August of last year. And I think because for example now it's Christmas events, New Years events, we always now we like main square, we have like huge Christmas tree, what's always like ?? or like the whole street I think, and we have like all those decorations for Christmas. And I really New Years mood right now, it's something that warms my heart right now.

Okay, my next question would be how would you describe a real member of Belarusian nation? Like, a real Belarusian people, what they should know or how they behave, or how they talk? Maybe there are some features that you would say that it is important.

I think this is hard question because you can generalize all nationalities. But mostly as I compare with other people, for example, that our people like kind and always help each other. But it always depends I think. Like, you can meet bad people in Belarus, for sure as well in another countries. But I think that our people are for example, smile more than Russians. I don't know. Maybe.

I wanted to also to ask if there any things that for example, differs your nation from Lithuanians or from Russians, or from any other nation? Yeah, it would be interesting to, if you noticed anything or not.

Yeah, I have something. For example, it like kind of fun thing, I don't know. But here in Lithuania if you speak not Lithuanian language, the people kind of stare at you, ?? speak to you, glance?? at you. But in Belarus if someone speaks like another language, everyone is: Oh! Like talk to you, help to you, ?? show you where to go, this is always the thing, especially in crowded places, where in our main streets. When people like hear?? foreigners and they're trying to ask where to go, people will always like ??, gonna show where should go, ?? even get you here ourselves.

Okay, and a little bit different question then. Are there things, for example, knowing Belarusian language or knowing Belarusian traditions - are these things important to feel that you are real Belarusian, or not? Or it's or are important other things? For feeling if you are Belarusian or not?

I think that people who don't speak Belarusian like now it's not their fault, it's more fault of our government. Because they not paying not much attention to it. And I think this is kind of a problem like now. Because I communicate a lot with Ukrainian people right now and most of them know their native language and our people it's like ok for us not to know our language. So, I don't think that Belarusian suppose to know Belarusian or otherwise he is not Belarusian. Because like this is the problem with?? in our country, so it's not how one?? would describe Belarusian person. So, this is kind...

Okay, and could you remember any situations or moments now or earlier, when you felt proud of being Belarusian or in other way when did you not didn't want to identify with your nation and there was kind of bad feeling about it? Or maybe there were not situations like this?

When I wasn't kind of proud of my...

When you were proud...

I had the situation when some some old woman in Klaipėda came up to me she like started to cry, I didn't know what to do. So we were just like sitting, she ?? like I'm Belarusian as well, she asked were what from where we are. And I?? said from Belarus and she said I have like my family in Belarus, and she started to appeal that because all of the things that were happening in August, like I can't go to my home country because of youngsters like you. Because ?? everything, that you go out to the streets and boycott and etcetera. And I was I don't even know what I was feeling. It was kind of just strange feelings. You're kind of agree with the woman because you don't want all such things to happen in your country. It's kind of negative things, but also I was the one who was making everybody go out on the streets, so that was kind of ?? and also had situation where some I said to some men that yes I am Belarusian and he is like: oh, so you are refugee. And I was like: no, I just study here. He like: oh, so our government is paying for you, ??, yeah, ?? молодец. But that was also kind of strange thing. But I didn't have like a moment when I wasn't proud of my country, just there are some people that are trying to accuse you of being Belarusian, but it doesn't still doesn't change as I person I think. I don't think that I've had like biggest moment that I was like oh I'm so proud of being Belarusian. I'm just being proud at some point, but I don't have like this one moment ??

A little bit about history. Are you interested in history of Belarus?

I'm not the person who likes history at all. So, I'm kind of ?? for this question.

Okay, because I wanted to ask if there are there any I don't know historical persons or events that seems to you important in history of Belarus, or not? It could be answer not, but... Maybe you've studied something at school and something seem for you important. Some moments or periods of history.

I think important period in our country I'm not gonna go in deep like because first of all I don't really know that much. I mean maybe I know just don't remember because it was quite a long time ago when I studied history. But I think one of the important things that flag was changed in ?? It was like Lukashenka it was kind of thing that changed. But nobody really paid attention to it. Of course we had ?? because of it but still nothing changed. But with the time coming by people started to paying more attention to it and ?? now things that the white-red-white red-white-red flag is our true flag. And the green one like is not our true flag. It's like people who support Lukashenka use green-red flag and people who support like Belarus itself like just oppositional people they use red-white-red. This kind of the most important thing for our society.

My next question was about symbols. And I wanted to ask if you use any national symbols for example, flag or any other symbols in your daily life or in special I don't know, events or occasions.

I mean, in day to day life maybe not. But I support the red-white-red flag and recently we had a situation in our university when our like intercultural peer?? tried to повесить the green-red flag to like support our country, like ?? our country, and I paid a lot of attention to our flag. Like, want to raise your flag but is accepted by the international community and bla bla bla. I paid attention to this email and said like so I created a post on Facebook saying that me, as a part of Belarusian community, I don't want it to be raised. If you want to celebrate our country, it's better to talk to us first. And then organize some kind of events. Because it will create some disruptions?? for both sides, for people who support Lukashenka and who doesn't support him. So they will make like political arguments here. I?? said ?? worry, people go crazy just don't do it. And other people supported my post and we didn't have this flag raised in our university.

Okay, now I would like to ask some questions about the protests and happened in 2020 in Belarus. Did you participate in protests in any way - or going out in the streets, or maybe I don't know, any support for what was happening?

So, I didn't go on massive protests, because there was very scary for my to go out. Because my classmate who were going out they had like big stories like one of my she had like back injury because

of protests. Because like OMON they started to punch her in her back. And she was in hospital. So, to have like I don't want just anything like that ?? because they were not touched by ?? It was kind of also I think this is a moment when I was feeling proud of my country. Because we?? were standing all together, and like other people like signaling from machines, from cars. So that was kind of moments when I was feeling proud of being Belarusian because you stand with people on the same bond that you have, and other people support you through all these things and it was like ?? if you understand.

I at one moment I wasn't you were stopped, I don't know if it is about connection. There was an event when you felt proud, you said that you don't didn't go out on the streets?

Yeah, I said that this moment was the one that made me feel proud of my nationality. Never?? was going out on Sunday ??

Okay, for me it is interesting if you have noticed any changes in how people talk about Belarusian nation or Belarusians. Maybe you how you talk with your family or friends among yourself? Is there any change or it is the same as it was before the events of 2020?

I think it changed for sure because before even like family my father was always like saying: oh, Batka, is our like I don't know the father of all our nation, everybody laughs, he was like an ?? everyone. Like, but even me?? he was like a grandpa who is just doing bad thing but everybody doesn't care, like, this is our president, ?? everybody is ok. But when the time comes by even before the events that happened in August, we have like the whole ?? presidential...

Campaign?

Yeah, campaign. People started to paying much attention to who Lukashenka is itself. And we had a lot of oppositional youtube channels and telegram channels that were saying that more truth and I think people started to change their opinion. That Lukashenka is bad just a ?? of our whole nation. He is like the bad guy?? in this situation. He shouldn't be our president and that it's ?? to be like president for more than twenty years.

And do you think that this revolution of 2020 have changed you personally how do you feel as yourself as Belarusian? Or not? Or it didn't change your feeling?

I think that that was?? way in my family I didn't feel not much about all the things that were happening because my parents are not ?? in political conversations even if they are even if they were

talking about it wasn't?? like Lukashenka is this or that. So I didn't have my own opinion, I had my parents opinion. He's ?? guy, hahaha, let's ??. But when all this things started to happen, a lot of oppositional channels were on, created, I started to get more into details what is actually happening in the country. And it changed personally and I think I kind of grew up of this, this situation. I think this situation changed everyone in our country. Doesn't matter if support our government or doesn't.

I wanted to ask you imagine your dream Belarus and what would be your vision of future of Belarus. What kind of changes would you like to see or maybe some things you would like that it would not change, what it would look like?

I really hope that in the future when we will hope first of all we will have another president that people will choose, I'm not saying that people suppose to Tsichanouskaja suppose to be our president. I don't support any candidates right now. Because I don't know I don't really have my own opinion on this topic. But I want people to choose our president and I want to a lot of changes to be made in our country. For example, I want our new leader to pay more attention to our history of Belarus and to our language. Because I think it's dying language and very small amount of people use this language now ?? and I think that not only leader but our people suppose to pay attention to this problem. Maybe ?? to have some emotional campaign. And I think this is what we will have in future in years?? But also I don't really know what else I want to change. Like, because I love my country as it is right now and I think it suppose to say stay the same, kind of it's nature, it's people, and our like cuisine, etcetera. Maybe some changes like with the language, with our government systems, maybe educational systems, they need to be changed, for sure. For example, in our universities like people just don't study. Like they don't do homeworks, and a lot of ?? we have like braindrain. People just leave our country because students don't see any opportunities in our country. But it is because people just don't see all the opportunities, but in our country it is very hard to start business, but also it's very easy to start business. It's hard because our government will take everything from you. But it's easy because we don't have that much strong businesses in our country. So, this is kind of something that need to be changed.

And do you think is it possible all these things? And do you believe when it could happen - later or sooner? How would you see?

I think this is changes that can't happen like in one moment. Because this is not something like you cannot to learn a language for one day, yes ?? but I think those are the changes that can happen like

in ten years or in twenty years, this is more than possible. I if we have ?? values and leaders and because our people like can learn, they can help, like we can help each other on our country, but right now I think these changes can't happen really. But we will see.

Okay, thank you, thank you very much.

INTERVIEW 5:

Ok, so let's start with the first question and I would like to ask you do you consider, do you introduce yourself as Belarusian?

Yeah, I do.

Ok, and what does Belarus mean to you - when I say this word, what first associations comes to your mind?

Amh, my home, in my town, no town, in my home city. So I am from Minsk, and I imagine Minsk, I imagine my house, I imagine my favourite spots and my family. So.

And another question is about being a Belarusian - do you think are there any things or any criteria to be a Belarusian? What makes a person a Belarusian, how could...

Ok, understand. Amh, for me personally if there is a person who identifies themselves as a Belarusian, and they have a reason to do so, for example, they have an ancestry, they were born in Belarus, or they are moving to Belarus to live there permanently, I think they can call themselves a Belarusian.

So, there are are there different things that makes you a Belarusian, not one thing, as you said, I understand right, yeah?

Aha.

Ok, and do you and ?? different question - do you think that Belarusians, as members of this nation, have any characteristics that or unique features that set them apart from other nations? Could be like Lithuanians, Russians, Ukrainians...?

Probably, yes. It would be difficult to, you know, pin on?? those, because there is this huge generational difference, like in my post-soviet countries. And you can in younger people and in the

older people but like if we if we take this general image of Belarusian, they would be more quiet, more introverted, more protective of their personal space, from the outside. But when you get to know them, they could be as well ??, you know. But yeah, I would say that generally I heard this from other people and I can confirm because I think I fit this stereotype very perfectly that I respect my personal space and I don't open up to anyone. So it's not like Spanish people, who are just they can kiss you from the first meeting, we're not like that.

And it is interesting that what you mentioned that generational differences, maybe you can a little bit explain or expand on it?

Yeah. So, I think people who grew up in the Soviet Union. They have more caution, just in general caution for what's going on outside them, because they were growing up in the situation where you know some things could only be said in where is two of you or three of you, you couldn't just be yourself openly in the public. Younger people they grew up with internet, they see that diversity, they know that it's okay to express themselves in many ways, and they most likely you know are on the edge of this progressive modern agenda, so they support LGBTQ, they support racial diversity, they are more tolerant, they are ??feminist or feminist, and you know, stuff like that.

Very interesting. Ok, I would like to ask you how what do you feel when you introduce yourself as Belarusian? Could you maybe remember any situations that you felt proud being Belarusian or maybe the opposite way when you felt negative feelings, maybe there was were some situations or moments?

Definitely within those one half years from the August of 2020 in?? both. Recently, with the migration crisis there is so much shame attached to me, as being Belarusian. As those you know it's part of my responsibility what's going on right now. We had this discussion in class in visual rhetoric class, and we were discussing the visual discourse in the news about the situation. We looked?? at Belarussian news, we looked at Polish news, we looked at Lithuanian news, we looked at Ukrainian news. And I felt like I have to speak up, but before I spoke up, I said that I have to make a disclaimer that I'm a Belarusian, therefore for me the situation involves shame, frustration. But, you know, I can give an inside, because I actually read as a ?? news from Belarus, not only what the government says. Because what they say, is not public opinion at all. But proud, definitely still proud in many situations, for example, when I was coming to Lithuania in August 2020, after the elections it's been like two weeks and at that time there was like crowds, big protests in Minsk, like five hundred thousand people just in Minsk. And I was coming to Lithuania, and you guys had this March of Solidarity when

everyone was holding hands, so I came to Vilnius and dressed in like white and red and I had ?? ribbons on my hand and I felt very proud just like everyone saw that I was from Belarus and everyone was so supportive. And yeah, that made me felt proud.

Nice, ok, thank you. And I have question about language. In your opinion, it is important to speak Belarusian language or it is not so important for Belarusian nation?

Yes, I think it's important. The question is how long can it take for us to solve the transition in our current circumstances. Because if there are nations, that don't have their language, for example, Moldovans, they don't have their language, it doesn't make them less less worthy of being called the nation. But if there is a language, there is a history with that. And I think it is a big part of being a nation. So I think, like I I'm not fully fluent in Belarusian, I think I'm fluent in Belarusian as much as I am in English, but it's still not that bad, you know being raised in a Russian-speaking family, then going to a Russian-speaking school. But I think there are a lot of people who are going to, they just need a push to fully transition to Belarusian language. And with the new government, I'm one hundred percent sure that it will happen.

And, what about history? Are you interested, or how much are you interested in history of Belarus?

I'm interested, like in school it was one of my favorite subjects. And when I was studying in school, I know that they were teaching different things, than for example they are teaching kids now.

What are these things? What are these differences? Maybe you know...

You know, like with the discourse that is going around right now, coming from the government, they are trying to conceal some things, for example, like the fact that during the Soviet Union, during the 1920 Belarus was promised their own nation state with their own language, and there was local government formed. And they declared independence. So, if we look from that perspective, there was independent?? Belarus, for the first time in many years, in many centuries even. But then the Soviet Union like no, no, no. No, we don't allow that, and it all kind of went down. And that we were learning in schools. And I heard information that they are not learnig that in schools now, because from those people who were on gov, like at the fore fence?? of that event, many people are not considered to be like a national heroes, an their image is a threat to the government right now. Like, we have this second independence day celebrated just by the people who are in the position of the government, and they

have been banned this event for year, they have been arrested people ?? for years, like so. I had a chance to learn about it at school, but I'm grateful for that that times were allowing for that at that point. Because history as language is a huge part of a nation.

And what events or periods or maybe historical figures for you personally seems the most significant or important in history of Belarus? Are there any?

Yeah, like this one that I mentioned I think it is the most recent out of those, like in the 90s we had huge shifts in 90s, in the beginning of the 90s, before people or I don't even know what were down ?? electing Lukashenko? but before that there was a huge check of history Belarus and Lithuania share, and it has been a very prosperous time for Belarus in terms of culture, the national identity. Because we have a lot of symbols, literature, even architectural things coming up from those years, like our castles for example. That's still stand and like you can come and see that this is a piece of history, you know. And then, for me, personally, there was one person, who actually recently they found his some remains in Lithuania, his name is Kostiuszk Kalinowski, and he lead the an uprising for Belarus I against the Russian Empire. We learned about him in schools, and we read his letters from prison. And it's been very inspiring. But also I think our writers, and our poets from that period of time and from the Soviet period of time, because despite you know all the hardships that they endured, that they were not welcomed to you know, to perform art, they produced great texts, they have great international significance. Like, some of those writers are Vasilij Bykov, who wrote about the Second World War period in Belarus, and he's continuing to be like one of the existentialists and we're reading him in the context of you know Sartre?? and Kamiu, who are like the pioneers of existentialism. I love him a lot. There is so much, but I cannot remember right now, those two names would be alright.

Ok, and one question about the symbols. You already mentioned something. I'm interested in do you use any national symbols in your daily life or in any I don't know celebrations, anniversaries, events. And if you use, what are these symbols and why you use them or not?

In daily life probably no, but I have a T-shirt with the Belarusian ornament, that I wear on my special days. In this red and white scheme. And in general I think the Belarusian identity like the color skin of Belarusian is white and red. So, even you were in a white T-shirt and a red lipstick would signify something, it's that one?? of the connection. I think, these colours that I use, some people, even like Belarusian here and I saw that, they display flag, the white-red-white one, they display the Pahonia, you also have that on your ??, they are a bit different.

A bit, yeah.

Closely, but the idea is the same, yeah. I know people who have attending?? in their rooms even from my peers here in Klaipėda. These are the strongest ones, I think. But there are also animals, but many people...

Animals that are associated with Belarus, yeah?

Yeah, these are the European bison, and white stork. The bison is because on the territory of Belarus it was like the first place where they re... how to say, repopulated, the European bison, because they went extinct, yeah.

Ok, very interesting. And now the second part of my questions is about the events of 2020. I wanted to ask did you participate in protests against Lukashenko in some way - going on the streets or maybe in any other way you supported that things and events?

I was at that time in Lithuania. So, because of the quarantine and start of the year I left the day before I think, the elections happened. So, for me it was looking at the news, being stuck in the apartment, and I kind of not regret that because maybe I would be in danger if I stay. But that period of time when the internet was shut down, and we received information about what was going on, but we knew that people inside Belarus did not have that information, only couldn't reach them, it was terrifying. And so the only like ?? real life thing that I attended was the event in Lithuania, in Vilnius. But you know we had internet, so I felt responsible, like I posted a lot, I have a lot of peers from LCC who are foreigners, and I felt like it would be you know good to let them know what was happening. And they were supportive. Like a lot of people texted me, a lot of people shared what I was sharing, and that was a great time I think. Yeah. And I was also connected to my family, some of them went to the protests, so I was like looking from their point of view.

And have you noticed any changes in how people behave or in how people talk about Belarusians, Belarusian nation after these events? Do you feel there is some change or it is the same as this was it before? Slightly diff...

There is definitely a change. First of all because the discourse itself appeared. Not many people were talking about Belarus in the first place. For many countries' people it was probably a surprise that you know, there is a country in Europe where is the visa regime. And that discourse appeared. And like

the neighbours, like from neighbouring countries definitely saw a lot of support from then, from all of the countries. At that point it was probably like the discourse like was brave people, people who were very like polite in the way they like express their protest, a lot of pictures going on around people who ?? on their shoes to stand on top of the bunches??, people who were you know given each other water and food and flowers, who like strangers hugging, and stuff like that. So, it was very positive. Like now, I cannot say that it completely disappeared, but I mostly see when Belarus is like appear on the news it's not about the citizens, it's about the regime. So, not more about people, not much about people themselves.

And how it do you feel personally what this extraordinary event, revolution, did it change anything how do you feel or how do you talk about Belarusian as a nation or as you as a Belarusian?

It definitely changed a lot. Because people felt a power, although they received a lot of you know, contraction. Many are in prisons, and since August 2020 the number of political prisoners is growing, is not going down. Each day there are more people appearing in prison than the previous day. But I think people just see that they have power and that the regime is not infinite. There is an end to it. Even though the actions of the government are just horrible, and inhumane, we see that their actions speak about their fear and the not knowing what to do. Because the only thing they know is to shut down, to put the person to prison, to cancel the like non-governmental organizations, to cancel the independent press, that's all they know. They don't know how to you know have a dialogue. I think it meant a lot and many people left Belarus, a lot of people left Belarus, but many of them are ready to return or they have a chance. So, when things change, we are kind?? sure that they will change. I hopefully Tsichanovskaya will come back, and claim her place, which she deserves very rightfully. There will be a lot of people who support her, who will return to Belarus after her. And there is a chance for a good future, I think.

My next question was about the future. And I wanted to ask what is your vision of Belarus? What kind of country do you want it to be in the future? Maybe are there things some things that you would like to see?

Definitely would love to see a country with the first female president among some of the neighbours like from Russia and Ukraine, eastern Europe. And would love to see a country where civil society is a thing again, where people have the power to form organizations, to discuss ideas, to like move forward. A lot of works?? should be made like about such things as equality, like gender

equality, and racial equality and I would like I would just love to see the discourse changed and people from Belarus be able to stop fighting and living in fear and thinking all the things that the rest of the world is thinking. Because when you are under threat, you cannot think about progress, you're just trying to survive, you know. And when we forget about how was how that feeling is like, you know, trying to survive, we will be able to progress, I think.

How much do you believe this could happen? And what needs to be done that it could happen?

I can't give you a percentage. I don't even know how to express like I think it's like seventy per cent it's gonna happen, thirty per cent Lukashenko dies and a next Lukashenko ?? his place. But still, I think it's very likely. What can we do? As people from Belarus just don't stop. There are more people than people who don't support Lukashenko than people who do. So, people should just realise that they are still a majority and that they have the right to fulfil what they see right because this is how democracy suppose to work. It's the power of the majority. So, yeah, I think people should realise that and I think very important is for Tsichanouskaya to also not stop. Because she has been not sitting on her ... will not say that word... She has been doing a lot of things since she had to leave Belarus. She has been building relationships, she has been you know organizing the contractions, helping other countries see what is going on and I think she has so much expertise right now in terms of external relationships. And she will definitely find a team to help her. She was talking about re-elections, because she was not intending to be a president. But right now I see that she can definitely be a president.

Ok, thank you.

INTERVIEW 6:

So my first question would be do you consider yourself Belarusian? Do you introduce for others and for yourself as Belarusian?

Yes, of course. I consider myself Belarusian. And always I introduce myself I'm from Belarus and Belarusian, yes.

And what does Belarus mean to you? When I say this word what associations comes to your mind first?

So it's my home country. It comes from that I was born there, it's my country that I love. And I don't know, yeah. First, it's come that it's country, not about the Government, or something. It's country, it's family, it's a country I also want to visit, I always want to know about it, like some?? what happened there. So yeah, it's first comes as a country that I was born there.

And what about Belarusians as a nation - maybe how would you describe a real member of Belarusian nation? Are there any criteria what makes a person a Belarusian? How do you think? Maybe what should Belarusian know or how it should behave some traditions, I don't know, language, anything. What person makes a Belarusian?

So, actually before those events in August, I wouldn't say that we had some traditions, language even, we were speaking mostly in Russian, so maybe people considered Belarusian traditions kind of dying. And after August I could say that more people started to talk Belarusian, especially in Belarus and abroad. So now I can say that Belarusian language is a first one is the first one that identify you as a Belarusian person. And also, I can say that Belarusian people are really kind. First of all also I think many people saw [ar thought?] that Belarusian are very like tidy. They don't like this mess, they don't like all this stuff, so they always try to clean after themselves. Like, care about others and of the place where they live. So I also can say that it identifies as Belarusian people. Yeah, very kind, friendly, but also tired. I don't know, like but yeah, unfortunately, I don't know yet maybe about that how to answer this question because yeah actually we were very Russified, and mostly we were associated with Russia. Like Russian language, Russian culture even I would say. But now it's kind a more more and more popular to become like Belarusian Belarusian language, Belarusian traditions, Belarusian culture. Even before those events I could say that when I came to Lithuania I saw in my universities that many people from different countries they kind a had a group, like Moldovian group, like let's go out, let's know each other. And we didn't have it as Belarusian, like in my university, I couldn't find any Belarusian people, we kind of are separated. And now we are getting more like together with each other, we started to know each other, we started to gather because I think like Belarusian community come backs together, so yeah I think yeah, that yeah for now I think I cannot answer this question clearly what makes Belarusian Belarusian. So but yeah, I think that what I can say for now.

Ok, that's great. My next question, I wanted to ask you personally how do you feel when you introduce yourself as a member of Belarusian nation? And maybe you could remember any situations

or it's situations in your life when you felt proud of being Belarusian and maybe there was situations when you don't feel very well or very positive when you introduce yourself as Belarusian?

So, when I introduce myself as a Belarusian person, I never feel ashamed of that or something like that. I love my country, I love that I'm Belarusian person. But I don't know I kind of I proud of my people, I proud of my country. But it's again, I'm not proud of my government. For my it's absolutely different thing. So, I don't know. Like, I have never been ashamed that I am a Belarusian, I always felt proud. I always say?? it's my home country, it's my identity. So, yeah.

Ok, and you already mentioned about language that it is for you seems important, as I understand. And how much are you interested in history of Belarus? Are you interested in it?

Ok, again, when I was like at school when I was studied at school, not only for me, but for many children it was not interested at all. Like, no, history, no Belarusian language, like many, still I think many children do not understand why do we need study Belarusian if we don't speak Belarusian. And actually I remember when I was twelve I asked that question to my friend, like huh, I don't, speak only Russian, why do we need to this language? And now after all these events, after I came to the university where I study, I understand that actually we don't have this culture, like, Belarusian culture, because I've seen that many people speak their language, like Ukrainians, like Romanian, Italian, whatever but we don't. We speak Russian. And actually now I become more and more interested in my culture, in my language, in traditions. So, for me now it's really important, really interesting to study. And yeah, now I became interested in my history, like the history of the country, and in my language. Now actually I really love it, like love the sound, the words, all the things, I really really love it for now. And yeah, like earlier couldn't understand it.

So what was the point when it changed? It is when you came abroad from Belarus? What was the line when you felt that it have changed that you feel more interested in it? Or it is the events? Can you...

Not the events, it came to me before the events because when you're in Belarus, you see that all the people speak Russian and for you it's normal, you think it's like: yeah, it's Russian, it's part of our culture, it's normal. But when you come to like to another country, abroad and you see that actually other people appreciate their culture, other people at least know their culture, know their history, know their language, they can speak their language, and you see that actually you cannot, you don't know about your culture, you cannot like fluently speak your language, you and I felt so sorry for myself

because like I don't know my culture. How is it possible? I don't know my language, my... How is it possible? And I remember when I met some Ukrainian girls, we were just like talking to each other about the cultures, and they started to speak Ukrainian. And there's like: oh, I understand you, that's cool. And I started to speak Belarusian, but it was hard for me without the translator. I couldn't fluently speak it. And I felt like: wow. That's that not how it should be. So, and then I started to learn about my culture, started to appreciate it. Because I understand that it's important, we really need it, we really need to know it. At least know, not maybe use, but at least know it how it is. Like to speak Belarusian, to know the history, like real history, the culture, the traditions we kind of lost it a little bit I think.

Ok, understood. And about the history - I wanted to ask are there any events or historical periods, maybe historical figures that seems for you significant, important in Belarus history?

So, the actually don't know about the persons, people, like the significant event that we always value in Belarus is when Belarus became freedom, free, like after the Second World War, we always celebrate this because we were freed from German occupation. And also when we became like as a country after the USSR fall apart. We also always celebrate it. Yeah, there are two significant events in our country. About people actually I don't know. Because when we studied at school, again the history of Belarusian history always was connected with Poland, with Lithuania, Russia and we studied more all those figures there, we just studied some Belarusian writers, like Francisk Skorina, some like that, but about like some Belarusian figures, I don't really know.

And my next question is about the symbols. Do you use any national symbols in your daily life or in some events or celebrations? And if you use them, what are these symbols and why why you choose one and not another?

So, for me in daily life I don't use any symbols. But as I consider of course as an official flag of Belarus is like red and green. And all the events are I always have in?? those flags. Personally for me I consider the Belarusian sign like it's the sign not sign, Pahonia, if you heard it. It's like the horse and the person?? And I consider this a Belarusian I forgot the word, not sign like symbol. And yes a flag... Again I don't use it in daily life, but for me the flag like white-red-white it's more like again as the symbol of new Belarus, I think. So, yeah I would consider this flag as Belarusian for now, and red-green as like the symbol of old Belarus. And also of course we have this repб, but it's again it's kind of a symbol of USSR, like the old version of Belarus, that's stayed as the USSR Belarus. I think that in new Belarus we will get rid of this those signs. Because I don't want to be the part of USSR, like I think

we should move to the new new versions, new time now. So yeah, we should move forward, I would say so.

A little bit about the protests and what happened in 2020, this... I wanted to ask if you participated in protests against Lukashenko in any way - maybe not, going to streets or maybe you just supported in other ways and could you tell me about it if there any experience of it?

So, I understood if I was in Belarus in that moments I of course would participate, but I was in Lithuania. And I only could participate in my I shared all the stories, I shared all the information as much as I could, so yeah that how I participated. But of course if I were there, I would go also to the square, to all those places, I would stay there. And, yeah. So, I think yeah, people should just stand up and protect themselves because it's too long that Lukashenka was like ruling the country, and like ruling people I think it's not right like twenty six years, again I was born like when Lukashenka were there and he's still there. And like I'm twenty two, like it's not normal. I think people want something new, and they want to see other life because like again as he says stability, but it's not right. Like stability sometimes can be bad. And especially as it's now in Belarus, it's not good when people don't have enough salaries, don't have enough like food, they basically survive from salary to salary and some people don't understand that there's like other life, and yeah, I would go there to the protests and I would stay there, I think.

Have you noticed any changes in how people started to talk about Belarusian nation or how they behave after these events of August 2020? Do you feel that something changed or it is not it's like the same as before?

So, of course outside Belarus everything changed. Like people started to know at least what is Belarus, where is it, what problems are there. Like outside of course European Union said that there are sanctions, all this stuff, like they are doing something but in Belarus actually I visited it this September and I actually didn't see any changes. Because I think it's even get worse after all those cases because people lost their jobs, people are more scared, like the ?? like the food stuff it's less like there, and I don't think it had has changed a lot in Belarus inside and actually especially the older people they even more started to believe for Lukashenka after all these events and yeah. So I don't think that it changed a lot in Belarus inside, but outside of Belarus and especially young people who use the internet, who use all the social media platforms of course they kind a started to speak at least online about that. So, yeah.

You mean Belarusians? Belarusian young people? Or just in general?

No, no, Belarusian people, yes, especially young people, they started to speak more about that, they started to do something at least like to teach what's happening inside here what do we live, how do we live, like so yeah, I think we just started to speak more, but still I think they need some more actions to solve the problem.

Do you think that revolution of 2020 have changed you personally about how you feel, how you feel about yourself as a Belarusian or as well not as in general as you said in general there are no big changes and what is about you personally? Do you do you can you say that something changed how you feel about yourself or not?

No, of course it changed me like my attitude to Belarus because earlier I wasn't that concerned about this governmental stuff, about all these problems that happened in Belarus. After those events I have seen that I need to know that, I need to learn about that, because like it happens to my country, happens to my family that live there. So, I started to learn more about the event that happening, the people that are doing all these things outside the Belarus. I started to follow all those like Youtube channels that tell me about what's happening inside. So yeah, I think I started to be more aware of the thing that happened inside Belarus, even though I live outside a bit. So those events showed me that yeah I need to follow it. And actually changed I started to be more proud of Belarusian people because I saw that actually we can stand up, and like we can protect our ??, we can protect our lives, but I think yeah I think still we need to do something more. No just like just stay there, I don't think I don't mean violence, of course, but I think that we should continue what we started, not just give up like that.

And what... I wanted to ask a little bit about the future of Belarus. How do you imagine the future? And what maybe is your vision of Belarus, what kind of country would you like to see?

So, of course I want to see without Lukashenka, without the dictatorship. I want to see that people so I want to see Belarusian people there is another life they can live, not just survive, but they can actually enjoy it. So I think still I want to stay in Belarus not the part of any country like Russia or something like that, so I want to still see my Belarus country as a free country. Maybe not even as a part of European Union, but still I want Belarus start to cooperate with other countries. Because kinda now we are isolated, the only country we cooperate is with Russia. So I don't want it to be like that, I want we cooperate with the world. Because we cannot be separated, we live on one earth. So, we need to cooperate with others. And I think that's how we will improve our life. So, yeah just friendly,

cooperative, that's how I want to see my country and of course happy - happy people mean happy lives, so, yeah that's I have hope that someday it will be like that. And I believe it, yeah.

Yeah, my next question was how much do you believe it could happen and maybe so you answered it already. but maybe you can you have some ideas what needs to be done or what can happen that it would be reality of Belarus? These changes.

I think Lukashenka is not like forever, he is still a person. So, either?? like he will die or he will go away by himself, I don't know. But I think someday it will happen for sure. And he doesn't have endless life. So, and I think that the moment when people should start just something, like they shouldn't allow Russia to put there kind of hands in Belarus and to put their person on the place. I think they should choose another person who is going to protect our people, who is going to protect our identity and our culture. And yeah, I think it is reality, it can be, why not because for example my Romanian friends said that they also had ?? who also was a dictator and they could win him and now the like yeah they are in European Union, and I can say they are pretty normal country, like people pretty happy there, so they can live their normal life, so I think in Belarus it's also possible, why not, just maybe we need to wait some time, maybe we need to do something else. But I think it's one hundred per cent possible.

Ok. So, that was my questions that I wanted to ask you. Maybe there were something you wanted to say but I not asked you? There was maybe if you have some ideas or I don't know you would like to say...

Yeah, I don't know what do you need else to know about Belarus. I just want to say that inside Belarus it's still really really I wouldn't say bad but people inside Belarus still believe Lukashenka, still believe all this propaganda, that because mostly they watch tv. And you know Russian and Belarusian propaganda is really strong unfortunately. So, yeah inside Belarus people still believe that European Union is bad and Russia is good because European Union wants Belarus to kinda come closer to Russia, to Russian border and I understand that actually they don't need it, like that they still don't believe it. So that's why they kinda so against all of those events, against all of those like protests. I think?? it will change someday, when they will see that it's not that good that they live now, how do they live now. Yeah, so that is what I want to say.

Also, I remembered one thing - maybe you see some differences between generations? How young people think and how how to say older think, another generation think. If you if you have any ideas about it?

As I said young people they are kinda more first of all they know better how to use all these social media things. That's why they know more about the real protests, the real events, what's happening there, while like elder people elderly people they still worry?? about tv stuff and they watch all those propaganda things. Here is the difference. And when for them when I was talking to some of my relatives, like my aunt, so my even my grandparents they protect Lukashenka so much like I can't I try to explain it like it's better there, I want like Belarus to be like in Europe, for example. Like, and they say no, no, no, we were good with that stability, we're fine because you just haven't seen what was there after the USSR, he kinda helped our country, he's wonderful person, we need to protect Lukashenka, we need to him to live here as long as possible. Like, it's wonderful life here but when I say ok, but why you don't travel, why do you survive from salary to salary, like what is good here, they cannot explain it, they just like they're so sure, so strong that he's just good, but they cannot explain and when when they started to discuss problems, like their personal problems, they say that oh, we don't have money, we don't have all this?? food, we don't have products, we don't have any ??, like yeah but you're kinda satisfied with this life if you protect Lukashenka. So, here is I don't know maybe after the USSR it was really that bad and he kinda somehow helped us, ok. But right now he kinda became like psychologically not healthy person. Because he's not about people anymore, he's more about his power and he doesn't care about the crowd like Belarusian people. So, yeah, they kinda older people they're sure that he is really good, that he we need him, that he can help us. And like even if you try to explain that how he can help us, like look, after the USSR you were there and you're still here. There are not many changes, you're still, when people come to Belarus it's like when they come back to the USSR, the same for them. But they don't see it I think because they haven't moved abroad like they haven't traveled a lot. The only places they traveled it's like Egypt or Turkey because they cannot travel to Europe or we cannot see other life and they say they think it's normal to them to live like that. And while young generation they can travel, they like around the world, they visit all these new countries, they communicate with other people, even online, they like they can talk with other people from different countries, they kinda hear what life can be and how good it can be. And here's the gap between young generation and older generation. And I think that's why they don't understand each other. And, yes, so I think there's a big gap. And I think it's need to be fixed someone, somehow. But I don't know how for now.

Yeah, maybe naturally somehow.

Yeah.

Ok, thank you very much.

INTERVIEW 7:

Yeah, and I also before we start want to mention some things I already mentioned for you that this our conversation will be used only for my research, that also I ensure anonymity, that means that all the personal details, information will be deleted and changed. And you have a right to refuse to participate during this conversation, and after this conversation, if you would feel that something was wrong or you just don't feel that this conversation would be used so you just can tell me and that will be okay. So and I would like to ask you to confirm that you know this information and that you voluntarily agree with this.

I confirm, I agree.

Okay, thank you. And so we can start. So my first question would be do you consider or do you introduce to other people yourself as a Belarusian?

Yes, I do. I do, present, introduce myself as a Belarusian, yes.

And what does Belarus mean to you? When I say this word what first associations comes to your mind?

Well, the first one is probably the territory, territorial. And it's quite common like to say that Belarusians are those who live in the territory. But it's just the first the first thing that comes to my mind. It doesn't mean that it's the only thing. Second thing is probably the more important personally for me is the language, Belarusian language. And there are also some other things, like for example cultural, traditional and historical things. But as I culture I mean like both the tangible culture, like things you can touch, like you know architecture, maybe pieces of art. and also intangible culture, like traditions maybe, songs and literature and so on. All these things.

Okay, we will touch almost all these things a little bit later. Now my question would be about how would you describe a real member of Belarusian nation? What maybe there is there are some criteria to be a Belarusian? What makes a person Belarusian? How do you think?

Wow, that's really good question, I read a few books on this topic myself, like for example, Yachudovich?? Mr. Yachudovich wrote a few good books on national ideas, about Belarusian national ideas and well, to be a Belarusian well, you know, it will take some time definitely for me to answer this question. It's hard because too many things contributed to the Belarusian idea. Like, recently it was Soviet Union. A lot of Belarusian people are well, Soviet people, basically. They, they do not call themselves Soviet, it's like not common anywhere, I don't believe people usually call themselves Soviet, including Belarus. But I do believe that they are still. Because they associate them with you know mainly with you know with Soviet culture, Soviet movies, maybe Soviet practices, like every day practices, cultural thing like you know, even ??, what is New Years. And they do not follow the how to say, let me find a better word, like Belarusian traditions that come from ancient times, pre-Soviet times, are not that important for many Belarusians in nowadays. For that reason I don't think be a Belarusian means to be like a person who like is a traditional Belarusian person. Also, being a Belarusian isn't like doesn't mean to be a person who speaks Belarusian, unfortunately. Unfortunately. Because only like few per cent of Belarusians speak Belarusian on everyday basis. Like there is like maybe two per cent, according to the statistics. Also around like maybe three-four-five per cent speak some mixed languages, like Belarusian Polish and Russian, especially in the Western regions. And yeah, for that reason the language cannot be like an indicator. If you speak Belarusian it doesn't mean you're automatically Belarusian and and if you speak Russian doesn't mean you Belarusian or not Belarusian, as well. So, it's not an indicator. For that reason, probably, that is the reason why I answered the first question with the word territory. Being Belarusian means to live in Belarus and ?? to understand it. Understand it like socially. Understand the differences like between urban, between those who live in cities and between those who live in countryside. Also to understand the political rules. How the political game goes in Belarus. Like all these things you know that are never written anywhere, they only exist, like verbally. Like for example, you never ?? clap on public places. People who live in Belarus know that, because you could be detained for that. So being Belarusian mean to know these you know little rules. Like, rules of the game, basically. Also, let's say?? being Belarusian unfortunately, means to be, means to have little interest in what goes what happens in the country on the larger scale. Because Belarusian let's say is a person who is like lives his small in his small little society. Very limited. Limited to his family, very limited to circle of friends. Maybe it's if it's small

city, limited by the city. If it's a large city, it's usually just small group of people. So, Belarusian are not like the connection between people across the country is very very limited. And that also means to be a Belarusian, unfortunately. And also, being Belarusian means to not be aware of own history well. Belarusian don't know their history, unfortunately. Yeah, there is like lots of misconceptions, misunderstandings. There is lots of you know fake things, on the internet especially. About Belarusian history. Being Belarus means to be a little ashamed of your culture. Because even within the country in Belarus you cannot every time you try to speak Belarusian for example, or you try to be like more national, if I can say so, is also like, you attract other people's attention. It immediately attracts attention. It's like something that you don't usually do, unless you want you know to make a joke or something. So, being Belarusian is means to be like always encounter pressure, society pressure, when you want to be like more Belarusian that you are regularly. Yeah, that's basically my answer. Unfortunately, as for now, being Belarusians means more like do not something, rather than do something.

Okay, thank you. And you already mentioned I think it was very broad answer. Can you distinguish some unique features that set Belarusian nation from apart from other nations? Maybe there are some stereotypes or something like that?

Yes, I think I can name a few. Well, first of all is language. Is the main distinguishable main difference. First of all, language. Secondly, is what we have, the heritage we have from the previous generations. One of them I believe is very important but is often neglected, is the unified church - catholic and orthodoxal church. It was one of the It was major religion, the major church on this territory like hundred ?? years ago. It still exists. And I would say that the relationship between modern catholics and orthodox people is so good in Belarus that it's like it's like perfect place for such like unions to exist, like unified church, I don't know, union church it's called, yeah, I'm not sure about exact word in English. Let me find the exact ?? because I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing it correctly. Let me see. It's called Belarusian Greek Catholic Church. It's another feature unique to Belarus. So, what else. I had a few other things to mention but I just they just skipped out of my mind. So, the question was features...

Yeah, about maybe Belarusians themselves as a persons maybe. There are some I think everyone who are interested in Belarusian things know that they are about all the nations I think there are some stereotypes that is said that I don't know, Lithuanians is are cold people and they try to be distant from

strangers and something like that. Maybe I was interested also maybe you could say something from the inside. How it is with Belarusians?

Yeah, stereotypes.

But if there are no it's okay, just, I wanted to be clear that what I asked.

Surely they are. There are some stereotypes. Well, one of them, one of the most common is that Belarusians are tolerant people, which means they tolerate other nations, tolerate other other religions, tolerate people of other origins and I don't believe it's true. I don't believe it's like something that is takes is that we have in fact. I think it's very untrue, unfortunately. It's vice versa. Again, due to our Soviet heritage. Like, yeah, I just don't believe. People are...

So what is the reality? What is maybe you can tell how do you think it is for real?

Well, Belarusians don't travel a lot, don't travel much. Especially, older generations, maybe only within the pot-Soviet countries, like Russian-speaking countries - Ukraine maybe, Russia maybe, and maybe Poland sometimes, if it's Western Belarus. Belarusians don't speak foreign languages well. Like, good English in Belarus is like yeah, it's an asset, still asset. It's not something like you know you can it's not like here, in Vilnius, where everyone speaks English. It's not the case in Belarus. Yeah, Belarusians are, I would say, are sometimes afraid of foreigners?? and people of different skin color and they do not understand it's like you know in the bad meaning of this word. They have no real understanding how others live, they have like misconceptions about how people another countries live. About their cultures, about maybe Muslims, about lots of misconceptions. Like, terribly lots of misconceptions about people of different sexual orientation, like, not straight people. Not tolerant people. I don't think Belarusians are tolerant. Maybe, yeah, of course, there is like an issue??, some part of nation, young people usually who speak English, who travel a lot, who are fine with you know LGBT community, but not most of nation. It's like usually it's very small part.

Would you think...?

So that was... Sorry.

Sorry, I just had an idea would you think that maybe generational things are are could you see the some generational things - how elderly people think and maybe something is different with the youth?

Yes, definitely. There are some recognizable and substantial differences between the generations. I think people who like let's say there are three main generations I can describe. The first one is the oldest generation, people who were born like the first half of the previous century, like thirties, maybe forties of the twentieth century. And there are two types of such people. Those who were born in cities, in large cities Minsk, Gomel, Grodno and so on. Those who born in countryside, villages. o they're very different. Those who were born in villages are like real Belarusian people, cause they can still speak in some?? Belarusian, they know the traditions, they know, like Belarusian saints??. they easily like they this is the difference between them, themselves and for example people from Russia. For them, the difference is obvious. Same people, of the same age, who were born in cities kind a little different. They can have like you know better Russian language, they can you know have see no difference between Belarusians and Russians, for example. Then the second generation I can talk about is my parents, for example. Those who were born like in sixties, late fifties, maybe seventies. They are absolutely Soviet people. Even if they like understand the value of the value of Belarusian idea, even if they speak Belarusian, even if they came from villages, they understand traditions and stuff like that, still they are absolutely Soviet people, because they were born when they didn't see anything else. They don't know if it could be like different. They don't understand you know still they don't understand the value of private property. It's really hard to explain to them sometimes why it is valuable. They understand you know till remember those Soviet slogans, mottos and they still are dedicated, not dedicated but maybe still values those things that they were taught when they were young like Marxist, Leninist things, Stalinist things and not all of them like cruel people or anything, that's not what I'm saying. I'm just trying to say that they understand like we have like youth organizations, government youth organizations in Belarus, like BRSM called. It's literally the same thing as pioneer organizations in Soviet union. They understand it. And they understand why it's needed, they think like ok, we have same thing, thing when we were young, in Soviet union, we understand how it works, it's simple, it's understandable, it's, we comprehend it. And but they don't understand why youth, for example, does not participate in it. Why it's not involved, why don't they like Soviet movies, for example. They just cannot understand it, because they don't see how time's changing. They don't like for example private property is very important thing. They don't understand the need to learn languages. Because they they still exist in this mindset where they were Soviet union exists and where their globe is like one-sixth of the globe is occupied by one country, where people speak same language. And they see no reason to learn something else. They know Russian and it's enough for them, they think of themselves that as they were like citizens of the globe, as if they were citizens of the globe, although they are not, of

course. This is the second generation. Like my parents. The third generations is people who were born like late eighties, maybe nineties and later - completely different story. These people cannot understand how it is possible to live without things like private property, for example. They cannot imagine life without now all these new things we have in our time, like internet. For example, free media. They do not understand how it is possible to live in the world where you cannot read like certain books, where you're disallowed from reading or like watching movies, for example. You can access wherever you want for the internet and even it's like blocked by the government, you have thousand opportunities to steal, to find where around?? So they do not understand the older people, elder people, because youth's things I believe, most young people, think of their parents as like they are from you know like ancient people, like tribal people who not only they older people not only they like do not understand why like free movies, free music, free literature is important. They don't want others to have this freedom. And this is very important conflict in Belarusian society - between older generation and youth generation. Older generation just don't want for themselves to have it, and they don't want others to have this freedom, because they don't understand the value of this freedom. This difference is crucial.

Very interesting. And, okay, a little bit different question. About feeling of being Belarusian - I wanted to ask you what do you feel when you introduce yourself to others as a Belarusian and maybe you could remember any situations when you felt proud, felt good about it and maybe the opposite way - when it wasn't a good feeling or situation when you had to introduce yourself.

Ok, understood question. Well, first of all, I never feel proud or I never feel ashamed, it's just something that does not really depend on me. I didn't choose to be Belarusian. And secondly, this, however I do have some feelings when I introduce myself as Belarusian. I this mean?? I received some feedback from people I talk to, in their eyes, in their behaviour I can say like whether I feel good or not based on their feedback. And this feeling changed, changed significantly after 2020. Before the elections of 2020 before all that happened, it was like whenever you say you're from Belarus, you're Belarusian, you expect a reaction like: Ok, what it some between Poland and Russia, right? Depends on who you talk to, if it's an American person, like for example Western Europe is usually something like: Ok, I heard of this country, I know it's somewhere near Russia, ok. After 2020 you expect different things and these expectations fulfill ?? Like, more people know about Belarus, and when I say I'm Belarusian, I expect a different reaction. I expect condolences, usually. Like, oh, I'm really sorry. For that reason from one side it feels good to you know to know that people know your country and they know that Belarusians are good people. I never heard anything bad about Belarusians. Like, except

from ?? some maybe commentaries on the internet from you know it is just an exception. Usually people who you talk to in person never say anything bad. But on the other hand, this now things like: Oh, I'm sorry, really sorry. It just you know doesn't feel okay because like it feels even worse from certain point of view. Because it reminds me it reminds me that Belarusians kinda they failed in a way. I don't believe I don't think so. It's like not what I personally think. But it just feels so when people say: Oh, I'm really sorry about what happened. It feels like we Belarusians, I personally myself was there, by the way, if we failed. We didn't fail, but it feels so sometimes. Failed as a nation, not as a state, but as a nation.

Yeah. You already mentioned about language and you said that unfortunately Belarusians don't speak their language. So I wanted to ask in your opinion it is important, I guess yes, but maybe you can expand on it? It is important for Belarusians to speak their language? How do you think?

It definitely is important. I do believe that we as a nation will go extinct if we stop using Belarusian language. It is an ongoing process, unfortunately, it's happening right now. Belarusians go extinct. It's started in 1996 after let me find word...

The referendum, no?

Yes, referendum, yeah, referendum. Belarusian language has not been used publicly since then. It rarely used you know sometimes in public transport, people do not hear it. They do not use it. They do not communicate in it. And they simply don't speak Belarusian, especially young people who were born after 2001 and 2002?? Young people just don't speak Belarusian. It's like terrible situation. And I truly like personally convinced that we will go extinct if we don't if we don't speak Belarusian.

And what about the history. Are you interested on how much are you interested in history of Belarus?

Well, I think I can say that I'm interested in history. It started at school. I had really good teacher. Yeah, and also my ??, my specialty, thing that I studied in university is cultural heritage and tourism. It has lots of references with historical things, obviously, since it's about heritage. There are some you know parts of Belarusian history that I am interested more in than the others. But in general, yes I do like to you know, read about Belarusian history, read historical novels, and I'm not really good at some things, where you were like teacher of history I won't be able to maintain a good conversation, like to

remind all you know dates and kings maybe, or like wars that happened here and everything else but I do know it like in general. And yeah I'm really interested in history, I like it.

And what figures or historical events or historical periods of history of Belarus seems the most significant for you personally? The most important... Maybe you can say some.

Well, it's hard to tell whether historical period is important or not, whether it's more important than others. Well, I would say that maybe really 20th century is very important. It's was very frustrating and frustrating time for Belarusian history. Wasn't a good time. Like, not from many prospective. Like, First World War, like occupation and stuff like that. But it was a time when the nation basically those it like came from almost nowhere. It had never existed before and in the early twentieth century it you know claimed itself, let say. For that reason this period is one of the most interesting and most dramatic at the same time. Then Soviet period is like is not that interesting for me personally because it seem ?? of history of Russia, history of Ukraine, it's pretty much the same everywhere. Lithuania, also, like, repressions, murders, starving people and all that stuff. Also maybe there a lot of interesting stories, actually. Probably Medieval period is not that interesting I do believe. Maybe a late 19th century. And 19th century and 18th century, also, yeah. Period after Rezpotspolita, I don't know, how it's called.

Yeah, I know what are you talking about.

After it was you know divided in pieces by Austria, Prussia and Russian Empire is that period little after, is also interesting and some you know not rebellions but yeah, you can call it rebellion. Kosciuszko rebellion and also some other rebellions in the 19th century, 1830 and then 1863 also. Some, 19 century is pretty much one of the most interesting I would say, and then the beginning of the 20th century.

Ok. My next question is about the symbols. About national symbols. I wanted to ask you if you use any of them in your daily life or in any occasions, special occasions, events. And if you use something, why do you choose one and not another? And in what occasions you have them with you.

Good question. Wasn't really mindful of symbols like when I was before 2020, let's say. I knew that my flag is white-red-white flag and it's like nowadays is like symbol by which people recognize Belarusians all over the world. And I have this flag here nearby like on my wall, yeah, here, near my computer. But using it is like what does use mean I don't understand how like person regular person

can use it. I have it on my wall because it's not on my window, anywhere, I don't show it to others, like here because this is not like governmental symbol for me. I held this flag when I was you know escaping from OMON and in Belarus, when I ran on Belarusian streets with this flag and it's kinda you know memorabilia if I can say so. Thing that reminds me of the events what I went through and yeah, that's why I have it here, not because it's personal. It's more personal rather than you know national, for me. But still, it's never green and red. I was born in 1993 that means that I never saw my country under white-red-white flag, only saw under green and green-red flag. And I can hardly remember any time in my life when I saw you know green red flag and I was like: ok, this is my country. Never happened. Never. Literally never. I do not associate this flag with my country. I mean, I know this flag is my is our countries, but what I'm trying to say is that I don't feel associated. I can't relate to it. It's just not my. Talking about other symbols, like for example the anthem, anthems, modern anthem - same thing. It's just you know it's basically same as Soviet anthem, for example. Some other symbols like non-official I do relate to them. Like, let me find ??, this beautiful flower - cornflower, it's called. Васильки in Russian, cornflower or Воложки in Belarusian. Is often associated with Belarus and I think it's beautiful, beautiful association. It is like often mentioned in classical Belarusian literature. And, yeah. For many other reasons, like cultural reasons, like historical reasons. What else, there are things like, you know, it also touches the stereotypes part, stereotypes question about potatoes. You know like potato is a symbol of Belarus because Belarusians like potatoes. I don't know... But I like potatoes, like I like ?? and you know dishes made out of potato, but I don't think it's a symbol, neither good nor bad. It's just not a symbol. I don't refer to it as a symbol. Other things... Well, let me think what I can also name. Nothing much. Maybe just the some you know the cornflowers, maybe white-red-white flag because it's like it's been with us like long time ago, since old ancient times. Pahonia which is the same as in Lithuania this you know Coat of arms it's called in Lithuania, is also symbol of Belarus but I don't think many people like relate to it and understand it's importance, associate the country themselves with this coat of arms, I don't think it's like. It is historical, if we were like you know academics, discussing symbols, anything, that would be like for sure. I would name this is an important symbol. But as like a regular citizen, keeping in mind like how my parents see the situation, how friends of mine see the situation, I would say that it doesn't really matter for Belarusian. And I personally only refer to minor?? symbols like I mentioned cornflowers, for example.

Ok, another part of question is about the events of 2020, of course. And as I understood, you participated in the protests against Lukashenka, yes? Am I right?

Yes, I did.

Could you tell me a little bit about that experience, maybe you have some... What was your experience of the protests?

Oh, well. How ?? say, I saw some ??, I'm sorry. Well, I knew what the rules were in my country. Like, like I considered, I've been considering myself as an opposition to the government since I was like fifteen, fourteen years old. The first protests I knew about happened in 2006. That's important to mention here because that's when I you know realized what what what my country is, what the government is. Friend of mine who was older than me he was like maybe twenty, and I was like thirteen years old, he was there 2006 and he gave me disk. CD with the movie about Lukashenka regime. I knew some things, I definitely knew like about you know you know ?? was young enough but I knew like this country isn't a democratic country. It wasn't like anything like that. I just knew there was something wrong but I didn't knew any details. I watched the movie and since then it's been like fifteen years, I knew that this government needs to be changed. And it's been the same in 2010 I didn't?? participate in 2010 because I was like school student back then. 2020, 2015 again I did not participate because it was meaningless, there was no other way around, it's just you know, nothing happened and I knew nothing would happen. 2020 it was the year when we me and my friends I'm talking about like people I know, not about all Belarusians in general, received not received like we yeah what happened is hope happened to us. A hope shined and we decided that it's a chance to do something. Like finally, like we've been dreaming of it. We like discussed it, we sang songs about freedom, about you know democracy and we spoke Belarusian, we you know discussed like political themes with each other. Like dreaming of this day when we can change things finally. And build the country where we can live, not be afraid. We knew the rules. We knew that you know in all previous situations, in previous protests ended with you know repressions, with you know torture, violence. We knew all that. But this time it was I don't know. Maybe just because of this hope it shined too bright probably. We were no little blanked?? At some point I even you know now retrospectively understand that at some point I lost my mind. I did things that were too dangerous and again I knew everything that could happen. But I still went there with my friends, with my friend's father, you know, with like all those people with flags, with mottos to the city centre and happened what happened. So basically what you know what I had known about happened. I personally didn't see any like tortures. I saw some cruel detentions, violent detentions, some you know people were beaten. I personally was lucky enough. Was faster, I would say. But, yeah when all that happened, I came back to Vilnius because it was you know

too dangerous to stay in Belarus. Yeah, it took me like few months probably to you know to understand that this shining hope blinded me. That it's it's it was terrible what I saw but it was important to see that. It was terrifying to see these streets of your city where you live, where you know you used to meet your friends, where you used you to know have fun and walk around with your parents maybe, with your sisters and brothers. It's terrible to see was terrible to see those streets occupied by you know army, people with shields, attacking people, shooting, firing, shouting and stuff like that. It was like same place but like alternative universe. It was important to see in person to you know understand better what this regime means. Like I said I knew this. I've been aware of this since I was thirteen years old. But to see in person is a completely different story. And that's basically I believe this is the reason why it changed everything for Belarusian because too many people saw it in person. Too many. It's just you know there is a point after which there is no way back. It's just it can't be changed. And I was the one, again. I was I considered myself an opposition towards the government since I was thirteen maybe fifteen. Still, there was way back. Until that moment, there was a way back. Now there is no. And the feelings it's fear, of course it's fear. It' like terrible fear. Like physical fear. Also I don't know what it's called, in English, let me find the equivalent. Sorrow. Sadness. Ultimate sadness, so to say. Depression, maybe. Yeah, fear, fear is the first one, yeah.

And what you have just mentioned these all these feelings, do you mean that it they are this is what Belarusians feel now? This is what is the result of this? Because my next question was about changes, I'm interested in have you noticed any changes in how people talk about Belarusian nation, situation in Belarus among Belarusians themselves, not what are talking people outside Belarus. Do you feel that something is different now or it is the same as before maybe you can expand on it a little bit?

When you say before you mean before 2020, right?

Yeah.

It is definitely different. Like too many people saw what can happen. If you you know violate the rules of the game. Prior 2020 it was like everyone knew what the rules were, but it was like you know only some very little per cent of people knew exactly what can happen. Now, like the majority of the population knows what can happen and it scary people. People are scared for sure. Even those who did not participate, those who say they're like not into politics, they still know what can happen. And that's the game changer here. Even if they never participate in politics, they know that it's not something that

can save them from these consequences. They can be detained. They can you know undergo detention, they can undergo beatings, they can undergo torture for no reason at all. If just someone thinks or points on them. And this is the game changer. People are scared, this is the main, the first change that has happened. Yeah, people are afraid of you know like it's not like they do not you know do anything political. They do not show their political views or anything. It's this fear is different. It's when like people are afraid to you know communicate with one another. For example my mother she did not participate in any activities, she is not like you know oppositional person. She even was in elections commissions once. Like she voted for Lukashenka several times. So, she is not like an opposition person. However she now does not communicate with her friends the same way. She knows that there are certain things that she simply cannot discuss. Even in private settings??. She just cannot allow herself because it's too he is too afraid basically. Even my father who never goes to any elections he is not interested in anything at all. Even he knows like even he feels that something is wrong. He never like goes out of his house. He lives you know like in one place in house and never goes out. Even he living in one place knows that something out there is wrong. He just know. Listening to what people say, communicating on phone with friends or something. He knows that something is you know something has changed. Everyone knows that and especially those who who participated, of course. They have like this feeling the fear feeling first of all, first place and also irritation, I would say. Because being into this for so long, being in that stress, emotional stress and even something physical stress, is too hard, like physically hard?? overcome those feelings, they are irritating??. It's sometimes difficult you know to start a communication with the person, even if the person recently read an article on news article. Because it always like detention, detention, criminal, criminal, court, criminal, court - like everyday. And it's hard you know support people to say something. Especially giving that I'm here in Vilnius. Because I'm in different position. You know, I can freely express my thoughts, I can freely say what I think. My friends in Belarus they cannot do the same. Even when we're like in in public private like private communication channel, still do not say everything. They cannot just allow themselves because everything can happen. Like why would they be risky. Also, like fear, irritation and depression, like mental depression literally, there is no light at the end of the tunnel. It doesn't seem to be coming to an end. It's like getting worse with time. Worse and worse, and it's seems to be the violence has been trivialised and has been normalised. Not because people you know get used to it, but because there is no other way round??. If it happens, no matter what you do, what else do you are you left to do? Like with the situation. You can only just adopt to this situation and yeah, that's why people fear, they are irritated, they are depressed and that's pretty much the major feelings are these.

And my last questions is about the future. It would be interesting to know what is your vision of future of Belarus? What kind of country would you like to see?

Well, I would like to see democratic, euro not european, but pro-european country, at least in a mid-run, like in the next thirty maybe forty years. Because too many problems accumulated over the last thirty fifty hundred years. Too many problems have not been resolved and what we need first is to deal with ourselves. To understand who we are. So, perfect future for me is a future where Belarusians know how to deal with each other. How you know like pro-democratic, pro-european people Belarusian people should deal with those who are pro-russian, pro-autorotative like those people are still Belarusians. Those are still our people. Like people who live here, we cannot just you know say go out, go to Russia or something. So, perfect future is the future where we find common language. Where we find you know like how to organize our government, our institutes, the way the benefit both sides, not both, but all sides, where there are?? more actually it's not like both, there are the third, the third ?? coexist?? in the fourth?? ?? it's just you know there are not that major. And yeah, institutes. Good institutes that regulate these relationships, like I know probably in Lebanon they have like non-religion?? rule like in the government, they have people from Christians, from Muslims and from Jews, like something like that. It's never written anywhere or something, they just know that there should be like this order, like all people from all cult.. all religions should hold positions in the government. We need to have something similar in Belarus, we just need to have like an agreement. Between people like how we should live here because like nobody else will tell us. Also, in the perfect future we will use more Belarusian language. Otherwise, there is no need in anything else. So, just no need to continue like this. It's pointless. If we speak Russian, if we have that many Soviet heritage, if we do not value the Belarusian culture, why would we still exist? It's like it's pointless, it doesn't have any meaning. Particular, practical meaning or any other meanings. So, the third thing is Belarusian language and Belarusian culture it's like something that will come after, I believe. We just need to start using or at least stop how to say stop limiting its use. Intentionally and manually. We just need to allow people use it freely and stop you know bullying those who use it on daily basis, at least, please?? these steps must be taken. Also, we need to find a common language with our neighbours. Because we have lots of problems with all neighbours and we cannot understand who we are until we understand who our the neighbours are. Who are Lithuanians are towards us? Who they were? Our common history, like what we have in common, what we have like what differences we have. What things were, literally interested in. Same with Russians, with Ukrainians, with Polish people, Latvian people. We just need to

like look at us from a different perspective. From the global perspective. Look at the world, and say hey, here we are, this part of the globe, here is the place where we live, we cannot change it, it's just set in stone, that's what we have, let's you know like think what we can give to the world and the world can give to us and yeah, but that's not as important. The primary thing is the agreement in the society. It will take lots of time. And I'm afraid it will not be an easy path, yeah, this regime is done. Okay, it's just matter of time. This regime it's done in a matter of like several years. Not that much in terms of you know on the scale the global scale. But talking about decades, maybe three decades, four decades, it has not yet determined what will happen. So, there are several ways we can follow. And nothing is determined. Lots of efforts need to be we need lots of efforts to you know come to that future I've just described - with agreement, with institutes, with you know culture, Belarusian language and with relationships with our neighbours. It will take time and it will take efforts, and as of right now there is little to know resources for that. We at this point, we are you know we're simply looking for the resources. It's not like not about using them. It's not like we have resources, just give us time, give us you know some freedom and we will use the resources. No, it's just we don't have resources at all. What's happening it's just we are getting rid of some you know restrictions and limitations, I'm talking about the regime. And after that, what we will have to do is find the resources. Because we don't yet have them. The future isn't bright.

What do you mean resources?

Resources I mean people, first of all, who you know who have ideas, how to solve these tasks, how to you know who have proposals, who have suggestions, who have knowledge, who have skills to solve these things. Because it's like I'm talking about global things like for example, agreement in the society, but it underlies lots of other things - like building institutes, from scratch. Because what we have is like is Soviet heritage, it's useless. It's absolutely useless, it cannot be used for anything in the future. We should get rid of it completely, should be completely new. So, like, yeah, and we need skilled people, talented people. We need like good educational system. We need good economics. We need all other things. These are just instruments. And we still don't yet have them. So, we need like to find the resources first. Money, people, you know, skills, education, health also. Health system is terrible in Belarus. All these things.

Ok, thank you very much.

INTERVIEW 8:

Ok, thank you. So, I think we can start and my first question is do you consider yourself as a Belarusian? Or do you introduce for other people as Belarusian?

In general I think like I about myself like I'm Belarusian, especially when I go abroad. Because there is all these differences between people there and here but sometimes when I live in my country I ?? it's a thing about my generation not about me personally because you know all the world become global and people becoming how to say more similar to each other with mindset and points of view, so I sometimes I feel like I don't, like a more open minded maybe in comparable?? with some people but I think it's just like the thing about my generation. So in general I think about myself like I'm Belarusian.

And what does Belarus mean to you then? What associations comes to your mind when I say Belarus?

First of all this is my hometown, my family. Because my family means a lot of to me and now I'm kinda misses them because my cousins we used to be together since I was born. So this is the big part of my life and they're my best friends. So I miss them so much. And yeah my family means a lot because I used to have a big family, it's not only traditional like father like parents probably grandparents, it's for me it's also my mom sister family. So it's like ten people of us, so I used to be in a big family. It's about nature, of course. Because it's so so so beautiful. Is it's also what I think identify us like our country in comparing with another countries. What else, like some cultural moments, like singers maybe. I don't know, some cultural events, it also belongs to our country not global world, how to say. Yeah, so, some literature as well, because I have my favourite book of Belarusian language and it's from it was written by Belarusian writer so, yeah. There is a lot of things.

Ok, and are there any is there any criteria or are there any things that would describe a real member of Belarusian nation? Or what does it make person a Belarusian? Are there any things how do you think? Maybe that person should know something or should behave in some way?

I think it's kinda mentality behaviour. It's to us obvious during process in Belarus because how to say... Like we use to like wait for a long time before we stop, sorry I forgot the word...

That's okay, that's okay.

Like we're waiting, waiting, waiting for a long time and then when we can't wait anymore we just it's exploded. So, I think it's kinda like our part of our mentality but not in a bad how to say not in a bad

sense. In a good because we we're so how to say welcoming for to another people. Also, I think I can't say unfortunately because you know Belarusian language because of course it not?? our national second language, but not many people speaks on it. And also it's not that supported in our culture unfortunately. So I think it's may be for every person it's different, also. How to say, it depends on family, on how you was bringing up. As I can say about me, I don't know like when I how to say difficult?? for example when I go to when I go abroad in Europe it's easy to identify yourself like a Belarusian people. But when you go to Ukraine for example, or Russia it's coming hard. Especially when you don't speak Belarusian language because you know it's so hard to identify. So I think in when you talk with people, in small ways it ?? like it some ways like jokes, memes, and also because we have different histories and also in some ways how we're speaking, because Russian language are different in way of speaking in using of some ways of some words in Russia in Belarus and Ukraine and people in Russia can identify you as a Belarusian because you talking in a like saying words in another way so it, and also pronouncing, we have like specific dialect, because we come from the Belarus.

I just wanted also to ask you about I think you mentioned something that there are any unique features that set Belarusians apart from other nations. You are there any features? I think you mentioned something, yeah? But it was about nature... at the beginning?

Nature, literature, yeah literature because we have our own famous writers and poets. 08:28 Also we we have different art things because we like we have famous artist Mark Chagall. He is totally he is Jewish but he was born in Belarus so it's like a national treasure for us and he is so famous.

Could you repeat his, the name?

Mark Chagall.

Okay, thanks.

Because his works are introduced in Louvre, Paris. So I think it can be you can identify it in art as well because we in that time like in old time culture was influenced by Poland and by Europe so it's also different from Russia, for example. What else...

And what about people? Maybe you can now when you are not in Belarus maybe you identified or noticed some things that Belarusians differs from other nations, I don't know, Polands, other people?

It's kinda difficult now to identify here because you know people coming from Ukraine and from Russia, but mostly from Belarus, they still speaking Russian but I think if you?? just mention how to say some things that belongs to Belarus like maybe name of the city or like places some places that belongs to Belarus or I don't know like. We don't have particular accent because you know people who coming from Ukraine have accent. But Belarusian people no and it's kinda easy to identify because you know Russian people are not really welcomed, not welcomed but they don't come to Poland so much so you can if you see Russian-speaking person you can say like it's Belarusian people but I think it's only because they mention some if they say like I'm from Belarus, or they say like some some things that like some places or town cities or something like that. Or some cultural I mean political specific things. This is how you can identify.

And about Belarusian language, do you think, what's your opinion personal opinion, do you think it is important for Belarusians to learn their language, to speak Belarusian? Or it's not so important?

I think it's so important. It also comes from how to say political political history. And like you know language is the first sign that can this is how how you can identify person what country they came from. I think language is so so important. Because it also when you speak your own language it makes you more belongs to your country, more involves. And now it's kinda how to say it's difficult because in some ways Belarusian language identify like symbol of opposition how to opposition... Political direction.

Yeah, opposition just, ok.

Yeah, opposition. So yeah, I think especially now it's so important to talk to speak Belarusian but the thing is I'm sorry it's difficult because people are not it like it's not because I'm Belarusian I should speak I should speak Belarusian language. It should comes from government as well. It should be supported like everything should be on Belarusian language not only in how to say documents that belong to state or something. It should be street, it should be culture, especially culture. Things like menus, as well. For example, or I don't know like for example in cinema when you go to the cinema and captions should be on Belarusian, not Russian, for example. Or a translation should be on Belarusian language, it also involves. And in our country it's not that developed so people are not get

used to Belarusian language from the very beginning when it's so easy for them, so. It's so hard for them to understand why this should be taught?? Belarusian language because Russian is the most popular. So, they need Belarusian language.

Okay, my next question is about what do you feel when you introduce yourself as a Belarusian? Or maybe could you remember some situations when you felt proud of being Belarusian or the opposite way when you didn't want to identify with that nation? Where there any situations in your life or not?

There was so so many, especially because I have foreign friends. And I remember so brightly it began when protests started at 2020, even a little bit earlier the August. Because I was ?? friends at that time and when everything just started, I was posting in Instagram information about president elections and how is how was situation is going. But unfortunately I wasn't in August in Belarus. So I was abroad but I was checking all the information about what's going on and I was so so so involved in that and was worried about my friends who was in Minsk that time and my family cause they turned off the internet for three days I couldn't reach my family. It sounds crazy but this is how we live. And yeah, I was so remember so brightly because I was so proud what people are doing. And also I was like I was I remember that I was posting a lot of stuff and some people were not that involved because you know there is not it's not their country, so they were just they just unfollowed me. But my friends they were even posting, reposting information from my stories to their stories and try to how to say try to tell people what's going on and describe the situation. So I was so proud and also it I just remember like this feeling when you even your arms shaking, because and you have tear in your eyes because your feel so so good about people and you're so proud. And after that, like my friends they started to ask me more about the situation, political situation as well, and now for example when I came to Poland, before I brought a book with me. It's Belarusian photographer and she was making she created a collection of photos mostly from Minsk, but all around the Belarus. And like I have this book and when I meet new people, who is not from Belarus or ??, I just show them book with this all this kind of things to show how beautiful Belarus. And also when when we create more stronger connection with each other, I show them some cultural things like music, first of all, because this is how this is what unite people. So it's Belarusian most Belarusian not singers but rappers, and unfortunately I can't show some Belarusian films, but yeah, it's mostly music. So, yeah, this is how I introduce my country to other people.

What about history? Are you interested in history of Belarus?

What do you mean about history?

Well I wanted to know if you could tell any historical things or persons or events periods in history of Belarus that seems important for you, that for you seems important to mention maybe...

I used to study history for a long time but I feel so bad ?? that I probably will not tell most of the things because I need to remember it in comparison for example with my friends but know that during the history we used to be part of many like the other countries so this is that's why because that's why it's hard to us even through history identify like as particular nation. But we used to be like Great Lithuanian Dutch, I think that's how it's called. This is the most important part of our history like when we can identify us like a Belarusian nation. And also it's very beginning of 1900 when we tried to create our own country, but then we came became a part of the Soviet Union and also after the Soviet Union we like it was the first how to say president elections it was fair, so when every people were fight for to get this place and we tried to like there was two ways. And people because you know they came from Soviet Union and everything fall down in one moment, and they wanted to have the same life they used to have before so they choose the way of the not Soviet Union but Russian influence. But we had we had another option. The totally opposite, this is that's for what we're fighting now. But this is also was the important moment because if we choose another person, that time, like twenty six years ago, we would be probably like Poland, I think now. In the way of of development.

Like Poland you said?

Like Poland.

One short question about this do you see any generational differences how the situation is seen I mean the older and for example the youth, the young people, how they see maybe the future or the situation what's happening now in Belarus? Are there any differences in how the things?

Like from my grandparents view point of view they came from like all they spent whole their life being part of one great country, so, it's they don't have really how to say this feeling of being Belarusian people because we all were the same. And also like maybe like the level of education that time wasn't that developed like for my grandparents because it was mainly about to get some skills, to be useful in a building a new country, so it's it wasn't about like language or cultural something. So, they don't really know about the things. And now they they just trying to have what they have now, and they don't want to go anywhere else because they're old?? generation and also they don't want changes.

For you know more younger, it's it depends because you know part of people influenced by propaganda. So but it's it's a less percentage of the whole nation. Like for example my parents they are more like they are part of opposition. So, but some of like parents of my friends, they are just try to have like all the generation try to have the life they have so they don't want to be they don't want to move anywhere else because they afraid to lose what they have now. So, yeah, I can understand them, so in older like our parents' generation it's not half half, but most like we still have more people who supporting ??...

And young people like you?

Young people, of course, supporting like their they want country to be more involved in global culture, global system to be more open to each other and to be involved in economical system as well. I can like I I'm not a right person to talk about the future of my country because I'm just it's because I'm just a person who don't like to stay in one in one place for a long time. So I I always ?? if everything was good in Belarus now, I would probably leave the country still leave the country because I just like to to switch places. But of course I want I want a good future for my for the country and I'm supporting changes what people try to do now. Because I want to be because we we are part of Europe and I want to be my country to be a part of Europe but still like with our all culture an be like how to say as a whole part, I don't know, like part of the puzzle I don't know.

And can you name the changes you would like to see in Belarus? Maybe some some you know to mention some changes? What do you mean?

It's so many things to tell. I mean it connect with all the part of the state, of the government, I mean from how to say, from president from president and judges and judgemental system and police and everything. It should be changed. Because when when everything belongs to one person, it so easy to go to become blind and don't see don't take any another point of view. And you just freezing, you just you know stay how to stay stucking. So it's unhealthy for country. You know if we will changed what comes from the very top, it should like changes begin just a ?? start to begin in the future. And also in economical system, and because we also need to change it and I don't know. I mean in culture we should support Belarusian language more and it should be started with educational system as well, so. This how we should change and yeah, there is like a lot a lot of things to change.

And do you think these all changes are possible? And what needs to be done that the future of Belarus look like this?

I think it's possible. This is how every any country were developing before. We just you know we just stucked and we need more time and everything will begin after we changed the government. The person who is making ?? of president. And but it I mean the new person should be with the same state of mind like a new generation what they ?? see. Because if they will change with the same mind person, there is no changes will become, so. Yeah, but it will take a long time, I don't know how I don't know how long because in Poland I think it took like 15 years probably, maybe more. For us it it's hard to say because we also now are involved with Russia and sanctions against Russia. So, our system is extremely falling down and even faster than Russian. So, it's it makes changes become harder. Because it's like it can be from this and go like this and now we are falling down should we go from ?? from the bottom. You know people don't live for a long time, like we all die, so. Earlier or later, it's gonna happen.

Ok, I want go back a little bit about the protests. You said that you participated but not in direct way, not you weren't in Belarus at that moment, as I understand, yes, right? But you how to say supported the events like in social media. Can you tell...?

I was just trying to say to tell people about ?? people. But when I'm telling about the protests, I don't think I have a right to say that I was participated because there was people who were really like go out on the streets and I was to be honest I was afraid of my how to say of my life. Because I was not participating but I was a little bit involved because I was it was like a protests was on my direction ?? something and a few times I just felt this huge fear and I just was felt freezed. So I also know like I'm not going stay in this country so I can't I can't risk my life and also I can't say like I was participating because it wasn't the participation in comparison with other people who i really was doing a great job, and still do.

And have you noticed any changes in how Belarusians themselves talk about Belarusian nation after these events of August 2020? Maybe do you feel that something has changed or it is as it was before? Talking about like feeling of being Belarusian or about Belarusian nation? Does it feeling of being Belarusian somehow changed after these events? Or do you not see changes?

This is the feeling like like you just woke up for after long a long dream. So, yeah, this is how it felt and also people started also started to feel more proud about each others and nation at all. Like this

because process united people and made them feel more like to make this identity from another cultures as well. Because when we were when people were participating in protests, like you need you need some signs, some details that identify in you point of you, like flags or something. Also people started to be more interested in history as well, because they did because now people don't want to be let's say don't want to be blind as well cause of propaganda. Because people who ?? the country the changes history for like changes history facts, so history are useful for them. It works on them. So people don't want to be blind and also they want to be more they want to know more about their own culture that makes them more to bring them strong feeling that they're Belarusian not Russian or Ukrainian people.

Do you personally use any national symbols in your life or maybe you have some with yourself and which symbols do you prefer rather than other ones, if you use?

In social media sometimes when I post something I can you like three hearts but it's red, white red white, in colors of opposition like also. I think we in my home now we have like a flag as well. What else, I don't think I use any kind of thing I just have like a book that reminds me of Belarus and also another book that was made about protests in Belarus. So maybe this is can be like a symbol of a bit.