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THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PROJECT IN BELARUSIAN POLITICS IN 1980s-1990s: ZIANON PAŹNIAK'S VERSION

THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC NATION-BUILDING PROJECT has played an important part in political transformation of Belarus in 1987-1995. Under a project here are meant the ideas and intentions concerning building of the future state, society and the actions related to it, as well as respective institutions to be established.

For the analysis purposes, the main themes and thematic categories of the political project articulated by Zianon Paźniak have been identified, and his statements — speeches and texts — in the late 1980s — early 1990s, i.e. during the period of Paźniak's direct political activity in the country, which has been interrupted by emigration in the mid-1990s, are being considered.

It should be emphasized that Paźniak — perhaps not intentionally — became to a certain extent the ideologist of the National Democratic movement. In his texts and speeches, and also in his general political activity, however, he appears in a role of rather practical (but not necessarily pragmatic!) politician (reacting to *ad hoc* situations), not in the one of the ideologist (not offering holistic vision or program). However, as a result of his intensive and flamboyant political activity in those years, he could actually become an embodiment of the National Democratic movement in general for Belarusian society.

Context: the National Movement

The National Democratic movement in Belarus has emerged as a result of politicization of the national-cultural associations established in the 1980s (in particular “Tutejšyja” (“Local People”) and “Majstroŭnia” (“Workshop”)) and individual activists engaged in protection of the cultural heritage in the Belarusian Soviet Socialistic Republic (BSSR). In this social movement which has emerged in the early 1980s, however, there were specific features which should essentially have limited its mass support base in the future. Mass nationalist movement at early stages of national consciousness development as such has, at least, essential left-wing elements (of populist, Socialist or other kind) in its ideology, but as Ihar Babkoŭ pointed out, “*Revivalists at the end of the 20th century considered themselves to be more like descendants of Polish-Belarusian nobility from the 19th century than descendants of the (Left)*”

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populists-Revivalists from the beginning of the 20th century". In any case, the National movement failed to establish sustainable mass associations, organizations or parties up to the mid-1990s, except perhaps for the Belarusian Popular Front (Bielaruski Narodny Front) until its split in 1999.

Awareness of defeat has come later, after complete political destruction of the opposition in 1999, and especially after the opposition lost such strong factor mobilizing its supporters as danger of Belarus's annexation by Russia. In 2001, the philosopher Valiancin Akudovič published his reflexive text "Without Us": *"Revival has denied the real Belarus absolutely any value. Behind the demands of returning the historical heritage, language and cultural experience of the past was concealed the rigid ideological design in which there was no place for achievements and values of contemporary Belarusian society, for all its victories, achievements and the happy moments had either Communist or colonial origin... The Country of Belarus lives without us. (...) we stayed alone not because someone has departed from us, but because the overwhelming majority of inhabitants of the state, in which we hang around from side to side, has never had an intent to go to the 'new land' opened by us"* (Akudovič, 2001).

A symbolic turning point in the history of the National Democratic movement possibly occurred at the mass rally devoted to the traditional Memory Day of "Dziady" on October, 30th, 1988, and was associated with the first public appearance of Zianon Paźniak as a politician. The request for a march and meeting that day has been formally filed with the authorities by the organization "Tutejšyja" not associated with Paźniak. One of its activists, Uladzimir Adamčyk, recalled, *"this event, in my opinion, was fatal for Belarusian political life. Because then, from our, such youthfully uncertain hands, the flag of freedom has passed to the Belarusian Popular Front, into the hands of Zianon Paźniak. (...) it was a mistake which is still bringing its consequences till now"* (Hlobus, 2008).

The Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) has been founded in the wake of the "Dziady", in October, 1988, with Paźniak's initiative, and it would become the main organization of the Belarusian National Democratic movement in the 1980s — 1990s, first in the form of ideologically broad-based people's front, and later — since 1993 — as a political party. Paźniak described that event in a rather romantic mood: *"The Temple man-made, bright and fine as our land, is already visible on the horizon, there, behind the cloud curtain, there — where we go, where, without seeing the way, comes back, goes our tribe. Only a little, but a heavy piece of the road remains — to go through a snakes' field. (...) on October, 19th, 1988 we entered this field. Then the Organizing Committee of the Belarusian Popular Front was established. And we remember how the entire thousand-head bloody dragon hissed, began to grind, cried with its fiery mouths"* (Paźniak, 1993d).

The constituent congress of the BNF took place on June, 24-25th, 1989, in Lithuanian capital of Vilnius. Along with Paźniak's active contacts with lead-

ers of Baltic democratic movements (proven by his speaking at congresses of the Baltic popular fronts and in the Baltic mass media which were used as a tribune, in the absence of that in the BSSR), such a place of congress once again demonstrates the importance of Baltic, in particular Lithuanian, influences on the development of the National Democratic movement in Belarus.

The BNF had a lot of claims, after all, according to Paźniak, it represented *“the confederation of democratic people, association of the whole nation against the totalitarian system, for democracy, national revival, independence”* (Paźniak, 1991c). The democratic character of the Popular Front, however, has been challenged by some scholars. In particular, David Marpls speaks about “authoritarian nationalism” of Zianon Paźniak and early BNF in contrast to the “moderate nationalism” of the BNF-Party of Viačorka, United Civic Party (Abjadnanaja Hromadzianskaja Partyja) of Liabiedźka or different transitive variants which were chosen by the Social Democrats (Marpls, 2007: 95). Actually, later, after the split of the BNF, the BNF-Party under Viačorka has come closer to Liberals while the Conservative-Christian (Kansiervatyŭna-Chryscijanskaja) BNF Party of Paźniak kept rigidly nationalist, conservative and implicitly pro-Catholic ideology.

Paźniak always tried to get rid of “radical” labels which were imposed on him by the opponents from among the ruling elites. *“The centre on the Belarusian political palette has for a long time been occupied by the Popular Front. It was the Communist propaganda which, following its propaganda purposes, named it right-wing”* (Paźniak, 2007a: 78). Then cautious enough purposes have been proclaimed, *“The Popular Front of Belarus has set the task — to unite all people for achievement of three primary goals: society democratization, abolishment of bureaucratic system and national revival on a democratic basis”* (Paźniak, 1989a).

Afterward, the BNF leader shifted from rather faceless centrism to a more conservative position, underlining, however, that the BNF does not use radical means, therefore, say, it is a wide centrist movement. *“In its political actions and aspirations, in its views on economic reforms, approaches to social issues, development of culture, religion, confessional activities, ideas about lawful state, about nation, about society and person, in all main aspects of its political activity, the BNF is coming closest to political practice and principles of the European Christian democracy, as well as to National-Conservative parties”* (Paźniak, 1992f).

Paźniak considers the BNF to be a part of the National Democratic movement, though it is not really clear whether he believes that this movement is united within the framework of the Front, or the Front is its part (probably advanced one). He also does not specify which particular parties and organizations belong to this movement and how this movement corresponds to the broader democratic one. In particular, he speaks about “Belarusian national

liberation democratic forces”, meaning also (or even first of all) the BNF, and at the same time, arguing about the efforts of “the Popular Front and all National Democratic forces of our country”; he recognizes the presence of “National Democratic forces” outside the BNF (Paźniak, 1993b).

Yet generally, Paźniak is not inclined to recognize diversity and complexity of political spectrum and tries to reduce all to polarization and opposition “us-them”. At the end of 1993, speaking about the opposition to the power of the old party-Soviet nomenclature, he names the “our” forces – “*forces of national independence, democracy, the state development*” while again not specifying their structure and frameworks (Paźniak, 2007b: 163).

At the same time, Paźniak does not accept compromises: “... *It is useless to conduct debates with nomenclature Communists or their stooges on program positions. It is only a waste of time*” (Paźniak, 1990d). Even later, in 1993, Paźniak is proud that the BNF “*has not given in to the nomenclature policy of democratic mimicry*” and “*has not gone with the nomenclature*” (Paźniak, 1993c).

It is important to seek for possible reasons of that behaviour. Later, the philosopher Valiancin Akudovič recollected: “*It seems obvious that the idea of national Revival (as well as of the Popular Front) is borrowed from ‘Balts’ who before others (Soviet nations) chose a separate way and had managed to formulate already a lot of things by the time the national movement in Belarus gained at least some strength. And it was indeed so. At the same time, we shall realize, that as soon as the political focus of transformations moved from anticommunism to ethnocultural tradition, then in the conditions of Belarus, the idea of Revival could not be bypassed irrespective of whether it existed already somewhere, or it should have been invented by Belarusians themselves*” (Akudovič, 2005).

It is indeed so, but the idea was implemented in practice according to a certain model which was borrowed exactly from the Baltic nations. At the same time, the Baltic model is based on the previous political history of these nations which considerably differed in the recent century from the Belarusian one — in particular, all three Baltic nations had their own statehoods destroyed by the USSR in 1940, but the memory of which remained, and owing to the socioeconomic factors, the national movement in the Baltic was rather right-wing and focused on statehood, instead of just revival of the decayed culture. It was facilitated in particular by considerably smaller, in comparison with Belarus, Soviet-time industrialization and modernization in these countries (especially Lithuania), as well as their looser integration within the USSR.

The program adopted at the first BNF congress in June, 1989, has proclaimed the main goals of the movement – struggle for independence of Belarus, government (ulady) democratization, revival of the Belarusian language and culture — a standard set of demands for popular fronts in Soviet national republics, though it has been adopted rather early, very soon after the respective Baltic movements have proclaimed similar goals.

The main ideological principles have been set at the 2nd congress of the BNF in March, 1991, in the political statement succinctly named “*Freedom, Independence, Revival*”. In 1993, Paźniak explained: “*the main principle, the main motto of our movement is the Revival. (...) the most important value for us now is the national state... If we can consider independence as the main political goal, then the Revival is the main historical goal of the nation. If we revive our culture, language, history, our traditions, our public bonds – then there will be the independence, our state will live. (...) to a certain degree, we converge with liberal understanding of freedom in economy, but for us, the priority is people’s freedom, because such a historical necessity has arisen*” (Paźniak, 1993c).

It emphasizes initial differences from the liberal-democratic platform of West European style. Speaking about the dilemma between sovereignty and human rights, and doubting the correctness of priority of human rights in the form it was implemented then in Western European countries, Paźniak noticed, “*we should not speak about priority — either sovereignty or human rights. For the sovereignty – as the rights of entire people – is also a human right (...) it is necessary to recognize not a priority, but parity, equality of these rights*” (Paźniak, 1993c).

The Main Components of the Project

Independence

Paźniak invariably regarded independence as an overall objective of his political mission. Approximately since 1989, he has openly struggled for an exit from the USSR. “*The main questions which the republics of the USSR objectively face now are the questions of national revival and national independence. Just one and a half years ago, the situation was different. National revival was perceived as a component of democratization of the society, the sovereignty seemed to be completely achievable through structural reorganization of the USSR — the conclusion of the new Union treaty based on confederative bonds between free republics. But time has passed and it became clear that the essential change in functions of the party superstate is not to be expected*” (Paźniak, 1989b).

Being in the Soviet context, Paźniak did not escape its influence; the clear evidences of that are his quotations from and references to Lenin (Paźniak, 1988a), deliberations on “progressiveness” of a process (Paźniak, 1989b) and

other borrowings from the ideology and rhetoric of the Soviet regime: the turning point in giving up the external mimicry was 1990 when the “overall objectives of the movement are defined both in the Program and in the Charter of the BNF: creation of democratic society in Belarus, achievement of ‘the real sovereignty’ of the republic and revival of the Belarusian nation. (...) we intend to revive ‘Lenin’s principles of a national policy’. As though we do not know that these ‘principles’ are vague, inconsistent, confused and false. And what does Lenin have to do here? (...) one and a half years ago, we followed the template and started with utopian understanding of the future USSR ‘as a voluntary union of the equal in rights and sovereign states with the right of their free exit out of its structure’. (...) Either there is sovereignty, or there is not. It can neither be shared, nor divided into halves. Illusiveness of notion of (BSSR’s) sovereignty as a part of the USSR is proven not only by logics and common sense, but first of all by the history of ‘the Soviet country’ and especially the political practice of the Perestroika period” (Paźniak, 1990d).

Paźniak articulates also presumably rational arguments in favour of independence. “It is the empire, it is the Soviet Union which peels all republics, which peels our people, our Chernobyl country. What have we received from them because of Chernobyl? (...) we have nothing. We have Chernobyl and our hands. Therefore – unless we have independence, we will never rise from our knees” (Paźniak, 1991a).

The acute Chernobyl problematics could easily mobilize the society for supporting the independence goal: “The Chernobyl tragedy has merged together all our predicaments, all our problems – ecological, economic, political, cultural, moral and has put a question straightforwardly – either we will die as a people, as a nation, as a culture within the USSR, or we will be rescued through independence, through an exit from the USSR and restoration of the sovereign Belarusian state” (Paźniak, 1990d).

Later, after proclaiming sovereignty, he demands to strengthen it and argues that the original independence has not been reached yet. “In our conditions basically nobody noticed the proclamation of independence of Belarus and understood it, including the Supreme Soviet legislators. (...) as for today, the Declaration is merely an empty piece of paper” (Paźniak, 1990e).

The leader of the BNF frequently reiterates that it is necessary to strengthen independence also in the 1990s, after disintegration of the USSR. “For independence strengthening, it was necessary to make the following transformations: to implement a governance reform (to abolish Soviets and to shift to a municipal governance system); to carry out an economic reform on the market basis; to revive national culture and national consciousness; to create institutes of state independence” (Paźniak, 1992f).

Vision of the Independent State

In July 1990, Paźniak declares that besides achievement of independence, a main purpose of the Popular Front is building of a democratic society and republic. *“The BNF has devoted the main part of its activities in (recent) one and a half years, as well as paid the most attention to this task. Without a democratic society, in our circumstances both independence and nation and culture revival are impossible, since the existing BSSR regime is the most conservative, antinational and even antisocial, antidemocratic, and among its nomenclature highest ranks”* (Paźniak, 1990d).

In those years, the notions of “independence” and “democracy” in Paźniak’s texts appear always together. *“There is a grand historic task facing this generation of the citizens of Belarus – to establish the independent democratic Belarusian Republic”* (Paźniak, 1990a). He almost does not articulate any ethnic nationalism notions, and sometimes demonstrates explicitly civic orientation. *“Only in Perestroika, only in democratic Belarus there will be freedom and equal rights for all nationalities. Therefore, it is necessary to struggle together for Perestroika, for our future. (...) Let us not forget that all of us make the Nation. Russians, Jews, Poles and Tatars – all of us. Never forget about it!”* (Paźniak, 1988b).

However, some contradictions exist, as Paźniak speaks at the same time about the “Belarusian republic” (Paźniak, 1990f; 1990c or 1990b), i.e. underlining ethnic Belarusian character of the future state. This comes along with absolute denial of the Belarusian socialist Soviet statehood with its dictatorship of proletariat as an ideological principle. *“History of the BSSR has shown that the state based not on the nation and national will of united citizens, but on class identities (prykmiety), false social illusions and the utopian ideological doctrine, - such state turns against people, destroys the culture, the land and the people, such state cannot be a democratic humane (humannaja) republic”* (Paźniak, 1990a).

Solving social problems is also linked to independence. *“National state independence is an essentially social institution (stanovišča sacyjalnaje) which unites all the population of a nation. For self-governing (samastojnaść), independence of the people (narod) and the state is a normal condition of society which guarantees that it works for itself, (its own) cultural development and historical prospects”* (Paźniak, 1990d). At the same time, Paźniak invariably, while discussing virtually any problem, emphasizes the fundamental role of the factor of national consciousness and its language component. *“Without national consciousness, it is absolutely impossible to create a national state. Without universality of national language, the history is lost, there is no development of the culture of society, the highest form of which is again creation of the national state”* (Paźniak, 1992b).

Revival

Paźniak writes a lot about denationalization as the key problem of the Belarusian society, meaning by it assimilation and destruction of the Belarusian culture. Its overcoming is linked with “Revival” (*Adradžeńnie*), a key component of Paźniak’s political project. As the BNF leader reminded, “*it is not accidental that the BNF is called ‘Adradžeńnie’.*² *Without the revival of national community – consciousness, Belarusian language, culture, historical memory, Belarusian schools, religion — any freedom is unattainable, any reforms are unreal, no improvement of life conditions will occur*” (Paźniak, 1991c).

Sometimes, the concept of Revival is reduced to a narrower definition of explicitly cultural character. “*To ensure the development of market reforms and stable existence of a certain civilized condition of a society, there should be a corresponding level of culture (development) based on unity of traditions, national consciousness, history and language. (...) many European peoples, which due to historical circumstances and catastrophes have found themselves in unfavorable conditions of existence, had to restore the unity of culture. (...) there is only one way (to do that) – national-cultural revival which occurred in the way of the accelerated development (acceleration) and within (this process) restoration of universality of the national language was the main task*” (Paźniak, 1992a).

Historical tasks, however, mean for him something more than merely cultural and language aspects. Thus, another time Paźniak treats the concept of “Revival” much more widely, “*... Belarusian Revival is a universal, deeply democratic, antitotalitarian movement which covers all public processes (political reforms, economy, culture, social issues, environment, army) and are directed at creation of the national independent democratic and lawful state*” (Paźniak, 1992e). Therefore, it is logical that Paźniak speaks in general about “Belarusian National Democratic Revival” (Paźniak, 2007c: 116).

However, these concepts remain not clearly differentiated also in the rhetoric of Paźniak himself, since he regularly speaks again only about the “national and cultural Revival” (Paźniak, 1993d), and tries to reduce other issues to the cultural ones. “*It is necessary to begin the Republic’s revival with (work in) two directions — economy and culture, while remembering that a basis of any economy is the culture of society in the widest sense of the word. Any development of new technologies, new ideas, any progressive reforms of economic development are impossible in a backward society. No civilization in the history has ever been lost because of hunger or an economic crisis, but many have ceased to exist because of moral desintegration. It is necessary to begin (our work) in culture with national school, national language, history, religion and information*” (Paźniak, 1992c).

² The full official name of the BNF initially was Belarusian Popular Front for Perestroika “Revival”, although the words “for Perestrojka” were soon dropped.

Nevertheless, there are all reasons not to reduce the content of the concept of Revival in Paźniak's ideology only to cultural sphere, or even mostly to cultural sphere. It is more wide-scale and multilateral ideological design — assuming radical reorganization of the entire society and the state. Meanwhile, the Revival concept which initially was really articulated as cultural-linguistic one, later inevitably should have been turned into a fundamental political ideology. It happened in parallel to entrance of its proponents into the “great politics”, — by their launching the mass actions, election to the parliament etc. — and in connection with their willingness to politicize the issues of language, culture and identity, and — the most important point — mutual willingness of the ruling elite to also make these issues political and, as a result, to accept the dividing not only along political or ideological lines, but also along language-related and cultural ones — i.e. actually to agree on the nation split.

Indeed, the Revival concept in Paźniak's political project and the National Democratic movement rapidly developed towards expansion and deepening of its positions, and owing to the objective circumstances specified above could not keep only cultural-language orientation. Here he differed from the notions of “Revival” in the views of the Belarusian public figures in the first half of the 20th century. Nevertheless, it is necessary to emphasize the continuity between Paźniak and the former “Revivalist” tradition — after all, Paźniak initially also adhered to a narrower, “cultural” interpretation (similar to the positions of the ideologists of the Belarusian national organizations in the first half of the century), and only later in the process of his increasing engagement into politics he gradually reviewed the concept. It may prove the existence of a certain (however indirect) continuity in development of the Belarusian National Democratic movement.

Of course, the problem of identifying temporal and spatial parallels and predecessors to the concept of “Revival” is still far from being solved, but it is remarkable that already in his emigration period, Paźniak wrote in his book “Reflections. New Belarusian Revival Concept” (Paźniak, 2007) about the Belarusian “National Revolution” of 1991 (Paźniak, 2007: 6 or 53), and it can prove the influence of the European Right radicals.

Another important point that should be mentioned here is the etatist tendencies in his vision of how the Revival should be achieved. According to Zianon Paźniak, “*civil society and state shall take care of high culture, art, literature, publishing and everything related to cultural-national Revival and development. The state shall support and fund the national-cultural Revival, pursue state policy aimed at development of national culture (...) Culture cannot exist without subsidies, just on its own*” (Paźniak, 1992a).

Language

The Belarusian nationalism of the end of the 20th century paid extremely much attention to the national language. Pažniak sharply opposes possible introduction of the second state language – Russian – discussed in the early 1990s, explaining it by the monoethnicity of the country and not indigenous origin of the Russian population in Belarus. “*Two languages for one people is a complete absurdity*” (Pažniak, 1992b).

In the second half of 1992, during the discussion on the new Constitution draft, the parliamentary faction “Belarus” known for its support of prime-minister V. Kiebič, together with representatives of veterans in the Supreme Soviet proposed to take a number of constitutional questions to the referendum, in particular the ones on state system and state-language status for the Russian language. Objecting to them, the BNF leader has declared it impossible to take such questions to a referendum, “*one generation does not have the language at its disposal. Language is the most important phenomenon, factor and culture instrument. It belongs to the history, the present and the future. Its continuation is in eternity, and nobody has the right to stop this continuation but only to promote it. It is the higher moral law of cultural existence fixed in numerous traditions and laws*” (Pažniak, 1992a).

At the same time, Pažniak is explicitly cautious in his statements concerning the expansion of use of the Belarusian language. “*Nobody ever forced anybody, nobody anywhere forces or will force anybody to speak Belarusian. Since if a language has the state-language status, everyone will aspire to know it. The state language is an obligatory one first of all for the state establishments*” (Pažniak, 1992a).

Another important moment is Pažniak’s strong support for returning the written Belarusian language to the orthography known as *taraškievica* – a set of rules codified by Branislaŭ Taraškievič without changes of the 1933 Soviet Belarus language reform. He did not elaborate on this matter publicly but anytime he could insist on publishing his texts in that orthography which was identified as a marker of non-Soviet Belarusian language clean of any Russian intrusion. The orthography debate and usage of its Soviet and non-Soviet variants became a political issue and differentiated political movements all along into the 2010s.

The Prospects of Belarus

Belarus in the early 1990s, according to Pažniak, “*has the best conditions for integration into the European system. (...) we have a rather balanced economy, (in Belarus) functions a full-fledged economic complex on rather high organizational and technological level, there is a high level of skills among the*

working class, significant concentration of intellectual resources: fundamental and applied science” (Paźniak, 1992d). Speaking abroad, he proudly declares: “*Belarus is one of the most economically developed states among the republics of the former USSR, with the high-technology diversified production, with rather high level of agriculture (...), with significant scientific and intellectual capacity, with rich resources of industrial raw materials, with public stability*” (Paźniak, 1992f).

Thereby, Paźniak does not notice how he contradicts his own opinion of the BSSR, according to which he saw virtually no positive moments in the existing Belarusian Soviet statehood. At the same time, making the quoted statement at the beginning of independence and recognizing the presence of preconditions for successful development, Paźniak avoids the question of how and in which structural framework these preconditions have been created. However, such failed logics and discrepancy are not something extraordinary for any ideology. Further, Paźniak again denies rationality of the government in the Soviet times. “*Now it lacks good state thinking since during the Bolshevik rule and the Soviet occupation the culture and national consciousness of the people were heavily destroyed. The leadership included functionaries, renegades, traitors who hated their people, their land*” (Paźniak, 1992d).

At the end of the first year of independence, Paźniak estimated the situation of the new independent state and, that is remarkable, recognized the existence of the state structure, but did not consider it important, and neither considered important the presence of the functioning state mechanism and bureaucracy — an important factor for retaining independence in any country.

“What heritage has received the independent Belarus?

- *The state located on 2/3 of the territory of the Belarusian People’s Republic³ (...);*
- *The economy and the production (branch), the essence of which was to be the assembly line of the USSR. (...) higher level of production, which, however, is not adapted to our internal and state needs (...);*
- *Agriculture, focused on industrial stock-breeding that has transformed our Belarus into a huge pigsty of the Soviet Union” (Paźniak, 1992a). Besides, Belarus has received “the environment, which contains nitrates in the soil, chemical sewage rivers, nuclear test areas in Palesie where the nuclear weapon has been tested on human beings, and (...) Chernobyl – the ‘child’ of the CPSU;*
- *The deformed national consciousness, spiritually sick society – the result of culture destruction, history falsification, humiliation of the native language;*

³ Belarusian People’s Republic (Bielaruskaja Narodnaja Respublika), known in Belarusian short name as the BNR, was proclaimed in Minsk, in March 1918, yet failed to fully establish itself, though it probably influenced the Moscow’s decision to proclaim its Communist counterpart – the BSSR in January 1919, in Smolensk.

- (...) *the geopolitical position, the essence of which is dependence on Russia and constant threat from the East*" (Paźniak, 1992a).

Such disregard of existing effective state structure at the same time perfectly corresponds to the Right Conservative intellectual tradition with its rather contemptuous view of bureaucracy and preference for the state model of a "republic" with minimum government. Of course, it contradicts the statist orientation in implementation of the "National Revival" mentioned above, though such contradiction in ideology and activities of practical politicians is a rather common thing for politics in general.

Democracy and Anticommunism

In 1991, Paźniak declared, *"the Belarusian Popular Front is based on the principles of democracy, independence of Belarus and national revival. As in other such movements, all are united by antitotalitarianism which by the middle of 1990, as a result of political ripening of the society, took the form of anticommunism. The BNF consistently adheres to the basic democratic criteria: protection of human rights, the right of nations to self-determination, and national communities to state independence, human rights to freedom, work, free movement, freedom of worship and expression of one's views, etc."* (Paźniak, 1991c).

At the same time, democratic orientation of the National Democratic movement was a constant source of grievances at the Front's inability to reach desirable width of popular support and this ideological component by itself created contradictions in the real politics. Despite its initial successes in mass mobilization by using social tensions, the BNF in the future renounced using social issues which would be comprehensible to numerous social groups. Very soon it became the most numerous party, but also the party which gained rather serious negative image, forming a specific group separated from the larger society.

This evolution has been facilitated by radical anticommunism which was a problematic political idea in Belarus whose population did not share such antipathy to the Soviet regime as in all neighbouring Soviet republics and testified it at the March 1991 referendum. This reality was recognized also by the representatives of the Belarusian National Democratic movement who picked up after publicist Alieš Adamovič his epithet "Belarus is Vendée of the Perestrojka".

Attempts to explain this absence of broad popular support – and Paźniak and other representatives of National Democratic movement constantly spoke about their relying on people's support – were probable reasons for emergence of the new concept of population's "lumpenization" (*"Democracy in a lumpenized society is impossible"* (Paźniak, 1991d)), as well as the preser-

vation and further development of the concept of “denationalization” (i.e. actually attempts to declare Belarusian population to be “not original, spoiled” people). *“They [Communists] have undermined the consolidation base of the Belarusian nation. Therefore, until these consolidating base of national consciousness are revived, no political movement in Belarus can be a mass-based (masavy) one”* (Paźniak, 1991e).

The situation was exacerbated by the problems faced by the BNF and its parliamentary faction in their interaction with rather pro-communist 12th Supreme Soviet elected under the Communist rule (Paźniak, 1991f or 1991d), and their futile attempts to get the parliament to vote on early parliamentary elections (Paźniak, 1991d). For a time, this impossibility to hold new elections allowed to explain the political difficulties of the party and all the National Democratic movement, optimistically referring to democracy and elections as the solution, yet in the mid-1990s the BNF lost rather free presidential and parliamentary elections.

The BNF has its own reservations on democracy. Paźniak repeatedly expresses his negative opinion of the Russian political regime in the 1990s, he puts in inverted commas the expression “Yeltsin’s democracy”, underlining its inadequacy and speaks about it as a source of danger to Belarus (Paźniak, 1992a). At the same time, despite numerous Paźniak’s criticism of the Russian and Western democracy models, even in the late 1990s the BNF keeps declaring its adherence to democracy.

Anticommunism

Anticommunism, along with the concept of national Revival, is one of the key components of Paźniak’s project. He retains an uncompromising stance concerning the Communist party and everything related to it. He was sure that even the reformed Communist system had no future whatsoever. *“There is only death, disintegration of this semi-civilization ahead (inside Communist system). (...) there is only one exit from the dead-end – back, if, however, the society is still capable to move. Back to the market and private property, back to democracy, back to religion and traditional moral, back to the humane culture, back to the sovereignty and state independence. (...) it is OBVIOUS THAT EACH honest person by his or her humane essence should struggle with Communism and overcome the Communist ideology as the extremely antihuman, inhumane and antisocial phenomenon”* (Paźniak, 1990d).

Moreover, even Social Democracy in Paźniak’s view is just “a spare trench” for Communists. (Paźniak, 1990d) Paźniak in his statements condemns cooperation with communists after achieving formal independence as well. *“In Belarus, there can be no coalition government and or coalition with participation of Communists”* (Paźniak, 1993b).

This lashing out at the Communist regime in the BSSR whose population as a whole still kept loyalty to the Soviet regime focused on social aspects, had its consequences. Akudovič, reflecting on the results of the “Revival project”, wrote: “*The Belarusian state cannot be other but social, as the overwhelming majority of inhabitants of our country both prioritize, and will prioritize not national-cultural or ideological, but social values*” (Akudovič, 2005). Therefore, the sharp negation by the BNF of the social values which have spread in the society in the USSR age, should have affected its image and support by the society.

Religion

Religious issues are present in Pažniak’s ideological designs and he declares in particular, “*I am Catholic. I consider myself to be a believing Christian. I feel equally well among believers of all Christian faiths in Belarus — Orthodox, Catholics, Uniates, Evangelic Protestants. The Christian faith, our national history, culture and Fatherland-Belarus should unite all of us*” (Pažniak, 1991c). Thus, generally the Christianity of the Western rite is meant more as a cultural tradition, than creed as such.

As Alieh Latyšonak argued, “*national and religious revivals developed independently of each other since national leaders, despite their efforts, could not achieve support neither of Catholic, nor Orthodox clergy. The former preferred bonds with Poland (...). The latter has made a choice in favour of Russia (...). In this situation, the National Democratic opposition has once again turned to revival of the Uniate Church as a national denomination*” (Latyšonak, 2007).

Officially, revival of the Uniate Church has never been mentioned as a purpose of the BNF in its documents, but the idea has been articulated by the representatives of the National Democratic movement, including Pažniak. “*It is the tragedy of the Belarusian people that the enemy forces have torn off its Christian religion from it. (...) the Russian tsarism together with the Russian Orthodox church have destroyed the Unia (Greek Catholicism) in Belarus. It was a real genocide on national-denominational grounds – murders of people, destruction of churches, burning books and icons... 80% of the population of Belarus were Uniates. (...) I do not see any positive role, any moral future for the present Russian-Muscovite Orthodoxy in Belarus unless the repentance for the tortures, for the blood of innocent murdered Uniates takes place (...) The Holy Unia in Belarus is reviving*” (Pažniak, 1991e). Pažniak openly idealizes Uniate Church. “*The Belarusian Uniate Church is the martyr Church. The Unia has not soiled itself by cooperation with the NKVD and KGB. It has been drowned in blood by the Russian autocracy and Russian Orthodoxy merged with the imperial regime*” (Pažniak, 1993a).

Along with the Uniate revival, Pažniak cautiously raised a question of autocephaly for the Orthodox church in Belarus. “*I have not any doubt that Bela-*

rusian Orthodox Autocephalous Church existing in the free world will expand its activities in the future also to ethnic Belarus. Orthodoxy in Belarus for the Belarusian people should be Belarusian, sacred and Christian, not Russian, Bolshevik, Black-Hundred style, or what ever” (Paźniak, 1991e).

The instrumental approach to religion displayed by the BNF leader slightly contradicts his declared religiousness. However, his attacks against Orthodoxy are more frequent than against Catholicism. *“Catholic priests and especially Orthodox priests now support the Communist nomenclature, the incumbents, sit in the Supreme Soviet and, by the way, are allied with the CPB party group, even sign the common appeals with Communists against Democrats. (...) priests should not participate in politics, sit in the Supreme Soviets and parliaments. (...) after destruction of the Unia, the religion in Belarus became the tool of policies and manipulations by the forces hostile to the Belarusian people. By means of Russian Orthodoxy, tsarism and Russian chauvinists (and now communists) carried out the policy of Russification here. Polish chauvinists tried to use Catholicism as a means to Polonize Belarusians, and they have done damage to Belarusians and an equal one to themselves and Catholicism. (...) We see Catholicism future in the free Belarus together with the Belarusian people, with its language, culture and revival” (Paźniak, 1991e).*

Paźniak’s views on religious policy also correspond to his general principles. It is remarkable that he names Orthodox and Catholic Churches as Orthodox and Catholic “administration” and believes that the state can solve the destiny of the Belarusian people by supporting the Uniate Church — practically following the principle *cuius regio, eius religio*. *“That faith will have the future in Belarus, which will master and revive Belarusian in its official use more quickly... If the Orthodox and Catholic administration by that time do not turn toward Belarus, the Belarusian language, historical, spiritual destiny of the Belarusian people, then one should not doubt that the Belarusian state will support the Unia” (Paźniak, 1993a).*

Of course, Paźniak invariably assures that the BNF supports all traditional Christian denominations and aspires to ensure their equality, *“the Belarusian Popular Front treats equally and supports all traditional faiths in Belarus. No one is given priority. A basis of revival and consolidation in Belarus is formed by the national consciousness, instead of religion, as at is in Poland” (Paźniak, 1991e).* Yet given the rather tendentious display of the history of the Uniate church, these assurances do not look so convincing.

Project Implementation

Although at the first glance it seems that Paźniak does not propose conducting revolutionary changes in the society *for implementation of his project*, and emphasizes a more “revival” approach, i.e. restoration of former, more cor-

rect order,⁴ but in the late 1980s — early 1990s his proposals to place the issues concerning the BSSR under the control of the Minsk government and solve them independently of Moscow, sounded unprecedented in the Republic and looked radical. *“If Belarus did not give almost half of its national income to the USSR every year, if it itself owned its territory, natural resources and productive funds, if it itself collected its foreign currency, conducted the foreign policy and itself ruled over its own destiny, then we would already be effectively saving ourselves from Chernobyl since long time ago, and, I am sure, would already be rescued”* (Paźniak, 1990d).

Besides considering independence as only the way to solve essential problems, Paźniak also comes nearer to populism in his other appeals to the people. The BNF leader actually calls them to direct action, *“people should help to conduct de-partization, i.e. labour collectives should disband the Communist Party structures (...), people should help the councils in sealing up the property of the CPSU and Komsomol through personal participation, positioning pickets, organization of patrols, collection of petition signatures. (...) it is necessary that people join the building of their independence, their Republic. (...) indeed, the only way to enforce nationalization is to create faites accompli. The mechanism is as follows: the Soviets decide on property, however temporally, and people should take what belongs to them. (...) we should rapidly form our own governance structures and the structures for protection of these governance system. People’s initiative in this direction will very much accelerate implementation of this goal”* (Paźniak, 1991b).

To a certain degree, the mechanism was used in the first days after August 1991 events. As Viačasłaŭ Siučyk testified: *“In addition to the party (BNF) guard, we also created the national guards from volunteers (about two thousand persons). They have done a lot to make the state take the Communist Party property - buildings of the Oblast Committee, City Committee and Central Committee of the CPB”* (Tamakovič, 2008: 66).

After disintegration of the USSR, in Paźniak’s judgment, nothing really changed, that is why he believes it is necessary to eliminate the power of the communist nomenclature, and first of all to replace the government. *“... The old Government pursues anticultural, antinational (antynarodnuju) policy. (...) a new government of national trust is necessary. If we can form the new government, in 5-8 years we will not only rise on feet, but we will reach a living standard of such countries as Denmark, Austria, Finland etc. (...) I have the respective calculations”* (Paźniak, 1992d).

But the BNF and Paźniak could not achieve the change of the government and start of realization of their political project in the 1990s through constitutional mechanisms. Probably therefore, during later period of the political activity in exile, Paźniak argued for more activist stance, *“let’s not*

⁴ A propos, both etymologically and in initial usage the word “revolution” meant return to earlier, “correct” order of things.

forget: neither America, nor Moscow or Brussels decide. Belarus and the Belarusian People decide” (Paźniak, 2001). Jaŭhien Miranovič commented on it, “Paźniak’s belief in collective wisdom of the people is deprived of rationalism to the same extent as belief of the same people in the wisdom of the ‘Father’ [Lukašenka]” (Rudkoŭski, 2005).

Conclusions

The ideology of the Belarusian Popular Front has been reflected first of all in speeches and texts of the leader of the Front — Zianon Paźniak, because of personalized hierarchy of this organization, especially from the point of view of general public. The political project (however rather situational and not comprehensive) of Paźniak has become fundamental for the BNF ideology.

Meanwhile, in his political activity during the reviewed period, Paźniak was a practical politician rather than an ideologist. It is proven by such features of his ideology as its situational character (reaction to *ad hoc* challenges), absence of the consistent and elaborated vision of some essential problems (for example, the concept of the “Belarusian nation”). The latter detail is especially important, because in the absence of his own developed vision of these questions, Paźniak also avoids to refer to any already existing canon of the Belarusian national movement. Meanwhile, in all texts and speeches of the BNF leader, the project of building the future Belarusian state and society is presented only along the most general lines. Paźniak virtually discussed only the principles and was doing that frequently in a negative modality (against: the USSR, communism, nomenclature, russification), and neglecting any positive aspects (for: independence, culture revival, establishment of democracy and human rights).

The political project of the BNF defined in Paźniak’s texts and speeches, played an important part in Belarusian politics in the 1980s — 1990s, both per se and by generating opposition to the National Democratic movement. To a significant degree, its character has been shaped by some traits of Paźniak’s person, for example by his invariably suspicious — if not hostile — approach to Russia, and the sceptical view on the modern West, despite the declared firm adherence to Western, European civilization and implicit closeness to the “Latin tradition”.

These specifics can somehow explain also the majority of other main features of the ideology considered in this article — in particular its neglect of social aspects, strict moral foundations, priority of the rights of nation over the rights of individual etc. It should be mentioned that these principles correspond more to the ideology of Christian Democratic parties in European countries, rather than to ideological platforms of the nationalist organizations of the nations struggling to achieve independence or immediately after gaining independence. Therefore, one should speak about Paźniak’s nation-

alism with significant reservations, and perhaps he should be identified as a representative of National Democratic wing, not nationalistic one. The ideological platform of the BNF also indirectly points out the necessity of such identification, as they are too right-wing and conservative for a national-liberation movement.

Paźniak, who grew up as a person in atypical for the average citizen of the Soviet Belarus conditions, has not only taken a rather specific civil and political position, but also probably distanced himself from the Belarusian context of those years. This semi-isolation was combined with close contacts of the BNF leader with the Polish cultural and political discourse,⁵ and also rather close relations with Baltic anti-Soviet movements and the context of the Baltic Soviet republics. As a result, his already specific for such Sovietized and modernized country as Belarus ideological platform has been covered by further ideological concepts, which very likely had non-Belarusian origin (in particular motives of “the Soviet occupation”, extreme anticommunism, motive of “independence restoration” etc.).

The political project developed by Paźniak and centered on the concept of the “national revival”, thanks to its alternativeness to the Soviet regime, could attract attention of a considerable segment of the Belarusian society at the decades’ turn, but only for a short time.

In general, Paźniak’s views and political project are rather characteristic for anticommunist movement in the western Soviet Union, though it is important to emphasize the specificity of the modern political history of Belarus which crucially differed from other European republics of the USSR. This specificity limited the chances of Paźniak’s right Conservative platform accompanied by radical anti-Communist rhetoric to find responsive and supportive audience in the BSSR. In particular, it is necessary to note that in other European Soviet republics there were stronger traditions of their own statehood during the newest history, as well as there was no factor of powerful cultural hegemony of the Soviet regime which was strongly felt even in the independent Belarus in the 1990s.

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