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Does Belarusian-Ukrainian Civilization Belong to the Western or the Latin Civilization?

Piotra Murzionak

Abstract

The aim of this article is to further develop the idea of the existence of a distinct Belarusian-Ukrainian/Western-Ruthenian civilization, to define its place among Western sub-civilizations, as well as to argue against the designation of Belarus and Ukraine as belonging to the Eurasian civilization. Most of the provided evidence will be related to Belarus; however, it also applies to Ukraine, the country that has had much in common with Belarus in its historical and cultural inheritance since the 9th and 10th centuries.

Key words: designation, Belarus, Europe, civilization

Introduction

The designation of a modern country or group of countries to one or another civilization bears two aspects. If we keep in mind the example of Belarus, the first one means that such a definition built on a thorough analysis of the historical development of the Belarusian nation will contribute to the natural selection of the country's geopolitical position in the universe. On the other hand, Belarus' rich civilization heritage helps her to sort out the developmental trends of modern global civilization / cultures and harmoniously integrate them.

For a long time, namely from the 18th century, thanks to historical mythology compiled by Russian politicians and scientists promulgated around the world, Belarus, like Ukraine, has been viewed and considered as part of Russian / Eurasian / Orthodox civilization (hereafter the Eurasian civilization). Most Western scholars also take for granted such Russian historical myths as:

- a trinity of three Eastern Slavic peoples: Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian;
- belonging and continuity of the historical heritage of Kievan Rus' to Russia; and
- the Slavic character of the Muscovy, the Russian state.

Obviously, these three main Russian myths preclude a vision of free and independent Belarusian and Ukrainian nations, and moreover, the existence of a unique Western-Ruthenian civilization that protected Belarusians and Ukrainians for centuries and continues to do so today. The notion of a Western-Ruthenian civilization, in our opinion, corresponds to the greatest extent to the historical memory and the content of this modern civilization.

Eastern Slavs form two civilizations – Western-Ruthenian and Eurasian

Detailed evidence to support the idea of the existence of the Belarusian-Ukrainian/Western-Ruthenian civilization can be found in recently published articles (P. Murzionak, 2013; 2015). Delineation of Eastern Slavs to form two civilizations began in the 9th century and was determined by various factors including the distinctive features of their tribes; the natural conditions of the East-European Plain and the Eurasian steppe; assimilation of the local tribes; internecine wars between the lands and principalities; the influence of the Mongol Empire and the advent of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL). GDL saved a substantial part of the Eastern Slavs who lived on the territory of modern Belarus and Ukraine from "strong Eurasian influence."

According to A. Shakhmatov (1919), Slavic tribes from the Elbe and Vistula regions moved from West to East in two groups. One group, gradually moving to the North, North-East and East, occupied the territory of modern Belarus and the regions of Pskov, Novgorod and Smolensk. The other group, moving to the South and South-East, populated in a gradual way the territory of modern Valyn, Ukraine and the Carpathians. Thus, the Slavs, more precisely the Eastern Slavs, occupied the territory which historians later called Kievan Rus.

Slowly but surely, a division arose between the Slavs who lived in what are now Ukraine and Belarus, and the Slavs who migrated to the North-Eastern lands (the territory of the future Muscovy). One reason for this division was the assimilation of the "Great Russian Slavs" with Finno-Ugric peoples living in the North-East (Mordvinians, Mari, Vepsians, Meshchera, and Murom) (the first wave of assimilation). The fact that the first principality in the North-East principality (Suzdal) emerged only in 1157, nearly two centuries after the emergence of Kiev and Polatsk principalities, points to a slow migration and assimilation of the Eastern Slavs with the local Finno-Ugric population. It is possible to assume that one of the reasons for this slow migration was a progressive feudal fragmentation of Kievan Rus. Slavs' migration and their assimilation with the Finno-Ugric and Turkic peoples is proved by a significant difference in the distribution of the genetic material and the presence of its gradient from North to South and from West to East in the North-East region, from which a modern Russia started to develop (B. Malyarchuk et al, 2004; O. Balanovsky et al, 2008).

But on the other hand, the collapse of Kievan Rus was the prerequisite of a further ethno-national division of the Eastern Slavs. It led to the development of two Eastern centers with their own specific features: the Principality of Polatsk (the precursor of the future Belarusian state) and the Valyn-Galich principality (the predecessor of the future Ukrainian state). The distinct character and independence of both principalities became even stronger.

One of the key factors dividing Eastern Slavs in two civilizations, Belarusian-Ukrainian (Western-Ruthenian) and Eurasian, was the Mongol-Tatar invasion. The dividing line between the two civilizations becomes evident if one considers the territory captured by the Mongol Empire. If the territory of Belarus and Ukraine remained mainly free from the invaders from the Eurasian steppe, the Muscovy State was captured by the Mongols and had a vassal status for over two centuries, from 1240 to 1480. During the rule of the Golden Horde in the 13th-15th centuries and later, during the period of expansion of Muscovy in the 16th-19th centuries, it was the second wave of assimilation of Muscovy Slavs with Turkic peoples that further distanced them from Belarus's and Ukraine's Slavs.

Belarusian and Ukrainian Slavs retained their identity and civilization in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), which effectively united the Eastern Slavs in the 13th-15th centuries after the breakup of Kievan Rus. This kind of unifying role could not be performed by Muscovy for a good reason—at that time it was a vassal state of the Mongol Golden Horde. The GDL ceased "eurasiatation" of a large part of the Slavs, the future Belarusians and Ukrainians. Until the end of the 18th century the Belarusians made up a significant part of the GDL population and later of the Rzeczpospolita/the Commonwealth of Two Nations, and they did not belong to Muscovy or to the Russian Empire.

Evidence of Belarusians belonging to Western civilization and culture

A brief description of the reason for the creation of two civilizations by Eastern Slavs was given above. This part provides evidence that the Belarusian-Ukrainian civilization has many features of Western civilization and can be attributed to it.

Given that the Belarusian-Ukrainian civilization existed for eight centuries, starting from the 13th century, while Eurasian civilization was just taking its shape at this time, it can be assumed that it is nearly three centuries older than the Eurasian one. This difference can be explained by two reasons: 1) by slow migration of the Slavs in the lands of the North-East region—the future territory of the Muscovy tsardom, as evidenced by the much later formation of the Vladimir-Suzdal principality (1157) compared to the Polatsk (960) and Kiev (882) principalities; and 2) by the status of the principalities in the North-East region, which were vassals of the Golden Horde for nearly 240 years (1240-1480).

For centuries the population of Belarus and Ukraine, assimilated with Balts or Sarmatians, has lived in the same territory, and today is mainly ethnically homogeneous. In contrast to the Belarusians and Ukrainians, the North-Eastern Slavs assimilated with the Finno-Ugric tribes (the first wave of assimilation), and later with the Turkic peoples (the second wave of assimilation), and the area of their settlement, as a result of the capture of other nations, increased dozens of times to form the territory of modern Russia.

The main difference between the populations of the two civilizations in our time can be observed by calculating the ratio of the Slavs to other ethnic groups (30:1 and 24:1 for Belarus and Ukraine, and 4.8:1 for Russia) (P. Murzionak, 2015, p. 67). These data were supported in a recent study of the history of the exchange of genetic material between the nations of the world (G. Hellenthal et al., 2014). It was shown that among eight nations from the East European group, only the Eastern group, Russian and Chuvash, have similar types of genetic material exchange, and their predecessors came from two sources, from South-East Asia and from Europe. It is interesting that in the Russian and Chuvash group that exchange occurred twice, once in the period before 500 BCE, and the second time during the rule of the Golden Horde. Both exchanges are responsible for 10% of the DNA in Russians, and approximately for 35% in Chuvash's. For the rest of the countries surveyed (Belarusians, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Greeks, Lithuanians, Romanians) such an exchange took place once, and only about 2-4% of the DNA was derived from Asia (for Belarusians the figure was 3.6%, with the remaining genetic material originating from the North-European part—about 65%—and from the South—about 30%).

The geographical belonging of Belarusians to Europe during the GDL and Commonwealth time is not in doubt as the Eastern border of Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries was at the same time the Eastern border of the GDL, i.e., between the GDL and Muscovy. In the second half of the 18th century, Empress Catherine II inspired the creation of Russian historical myths, which were later used to justify the seizure and accession of the Belarusian and Ukrainian peoples to the Russian Empire. Attempts of Muscovy and the Russian Empire (the Eurasian civilization) to do it before had no critical success. Muscovy was attached to Europe geographically only in the early 19th century when Europe's borders were pushed back to the Ural Mountains (see the description of its boundaries by the French scientist M. Malte-Brun) (W.H. Parker, 1960).¹

¹ The idea of the eastern borders of Europe by the Ural Mountains belonged to the Swedish officer P.-J. von Stoltenberg, expressed in the 18th century (M. Bassin, 1991).

In the 15th - 17th centuries the GDL defended European values from Eurasian ones. Numerous wars provoked by Muscovy against the GDL under the guise of Orthodox population protection were not successful because people of the GDL defended various civilization values including religious tolerance. Since the end of the 15th century, as soon as the domination of the Golden Horde ended due to self-disintegration, and to the middle of 17th century, there were nine major wars between the GDL and Muscovy: the 1st Muscovy-Lithuanian War - 1492-1494, 2nd - 1500-1503, third - 1507-1508, 4th - 1512-1522, 5th - 1534-1537, the Livonian War - 1558-1583, the war of Muscovy with Rzeczpospolita - 1605-1618, the Smolensk war - 1632-1634, and the Northern war - 1654-1667. Thus, for the period from 1492 to 1667, i.e. for a period of 175 years, 80 years were the years of war, when Belarusians fought directly with the Muscovites. Indeed, it can be called a clash of civilizations. There were many victims. During the Northern war alone 1.5 million Belarusians were killed (G. Saganovich, 1995).

There is enough scientific evidence for the designation of Belarusian-Ukrainian civilization to Western civilization (N. Bekus 2011; Z. Kohut 2001; V. Kuplevich, 2013; R. Szporluk, 2001). For example, V. Kuplevich (2013) identifies 15 key factors which point to the European nature of Belarus, including the 1,000-year history of Belarus; the presence of European civilizational processes in Belarus (the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, the Union of Brest, the Enlightenment); the presence of European institutions (Parliament, the Sejm, the Magdeburg rights, town halls); and modern state-building processes, as well as the integration of Belarus into the European political, cultural and economic life. For example, the Magdeburg rights held sway in many Belarusian cities of the GDL: Brest (1390), Grodno (1391), Slutsk (1441), Polatsk (1498), Minsk (1499), Braslau (1500), Navahradak (1511), Mahilou (1577), Pinsk (1581), Vitebsk (1597), Druia (1618), Orsha (1620), and others. This is in contrast with Muscovy, where there was no such European institution.

The influence of European processes of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation on the religious life in the GDL in 16th - 18th centuries is reflected in numerous facts (A. Kotliarchuk, 2015). The Orthodox, Catholic and Greek-Catholic denominations coexisted in the GDL; however, their influence among the various sectors of society was unequal. Thus, during the second half of 18th century the majority of the Belarusian population (about 70%) joined the Uniate Church, while a considerable part of the Belarusian elite kept faith with Catholicism and a smaller part followed Orthodoxy.

Muscovy, and later the Russian Empire, constantly expanded and conducted a colonial policy towards its neighbors. The colonial mentality of the Russian elite and the public before and now grew up as a state policy, and in the past two centuries was glorified by Russian poets and writers, such as A. Pushkin ("Journey to Erzerum during the campaign in 1829", "Caucasian captive"), M. Lermontov ("A Hero of Our Time"), L. Tolstoy ("War and Peace"), A. Solzhenitsyn ("Cancer Ward"), V. Rasputin ("Siberia, Siberia"), and many other Russian writers largely of the Russophile environment (E. Thompson, 2000). This would impact the mentality of the enslaved peoples, in particular, Belarusians and Ukrainians in 19th and 20th centuries. The fruits of the colonial policy of russification, which continues today in the form of the "Russian world," are easy to see looking at the use of native languages and the spread of the Eurasian idea via media channels in Belarus and Ukraine, and, finally, by the open aggression of Russia against Ukraine.

200 years of Russian domination in Belarus have led to significant changes in the outlook of the Belarusian people. Comparing political and economic reforms which were carried out in 1991 in Latvia and Belarus, it was observed by D. Meadows (2012) that: "... Belarusians took a divergent view, as Belarusian political-cultural worldviews saw themselves as historically linked culturally to Russia, Eurasia and Orthodoxy."

At the same time, the author notes that

[t]his does not mean that Belarusians lacked a cohesive national identity, but instead that their historical political-cultural worldviews did not deem it necessary, nor expedient to move away or break off from Belarus's traditional cultural realm. Thus, what National Identity arguments miss is that Belarus has its own coherent and unique national identity, which simply contains different ideas, contrary to normative definitions constructed by many observers.

Agreeing with the author's latter statement, we think that some changes in the outlook of the Belarusians, encouraged by Russia, are not irreversible. Considering the process of development of the Belarusian and Ukrainian societies in space and time, from the Polatsk and Valyn principalities until the end of 18th century, one can argue that in terms of civilization, Belarusian-Ukrainian civilization is significantly different (ethnically, religiously, mentally) from Eurasian civilization, and in many ways should be referred to as a European or Western civilization. A temporary inclusion of the Belarusian and Ukrainian nations into the Russian Empire for two centuries and their contemporary struggle for a separate place in the world only underscores the fact that a civilization in a dynamic, cyclical development may experience periods of prosperity and decline. However, given the long duration of historical cycles, we'd like to think that the Belarusian-Ukrainian civilization gradually enters the phase of recovery today.

In the 20th century, Belarus and Ukraine have had twice the chance to become full-fledged independent countries, in both cases after the collapse of empires: the Russian empire in the beginning of the 20th century, and the Soviet Union at the end of 20th century. Though the first chance was not fully successful, as both countries remained Russian colonies, the second chance seems to be more real now, although emancipation is not such an easy task. In the situation with Ukraine, it involves a direct military confrontation with the Russian empire. As for Belarus, it seems that its leaders, especially recently, do not quite force or take decisive steps to distance the country from the formidable neighbor peacefully.

Determination of Belarus position among Western sub-civilizations

It seems that a number of features define civilization together— (language, ethnicity, religion, culture, and economy), and that civilizations develop in space and time. The Belarusian-Ukrainian civilization is no exception despite the very slow progress on the part of Western researchers in understanding the individual role of Belarus and Ukraine among Slavic nations. This view is changing very slowly, mainly due to researchers' geopolitical or religious preferences, conservatism and inaction in the revision of established Russian historical myths as well as a strong pro-Russian lobby.

According to S. Huntington (1993), there are eight civilizations: Western, Orthodox, Islamic, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Latin, and African countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Many scientists adhere at most to the same classification, while A. Targowski (2009) introduces two modern developing civilizations with a hybrid, global culture.

However, many scholars, for reasons not completely understood, ascribe Belarus and Ukraine to the Eurasian civilization. For example, in Kuzyk's and Yakovets' monograph (2006) two countries, Belarus and Ukraine, can be seen on the maps of the future development of the Eurasian (Russian) civilization in 2050. The rationale for the inclusion of these countries in the Eurasian civilization, according to the old Russian tradition, is not given. The position of the Russian authors is rather clear as they adhere to the ideas of past and present Eurasists, with the colonial character of these ideas having distinct geopolitical overtones.

Classical Eurasist traditions, unfortunately, are very often accepted by Western researchers *a priori*, which is largely due to the ignorance of the ideas of Belarusian and Ukrainian researchers who had fairly limited access to the international arena in the Soviet times. Taking historical Russian myths at the face value, Western researchers follow them building on their foundation theories that do not take into account the existence of essentially three separate East Slavic nations, Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. All three East Slavic nations are generally assigned by them into Eurasian civilization.

It appears that the inclusion of Belarusians and Ukrainians into Eurasian civilization, in most cases, is carried out on religious preferences. Both S. Huntington and A. Targowski assign Belarus and Ukraine, along with Russia, Bulgaria and Moldova, to Eurasian civilization. Only a small portion of both Belarus and Ukraine enters into Western civilization as shown on S. Huntington's map, who sees the existence of just such a border between East and West over the last 500 years (cited from P. Eberhardt).² It seems that if the Europeanization process took place in 17th and 18th centuries simultaneously with the classification of civilizations, there is no doubt that Belarus and Ukraine would be adjoined to European or Western civilization. However, the division between East and West, Orthodoxy and Catholicism / Protestantism began to take shape scientifically in the 19th century thanks to both Russian and Western philosophers and politicians.

Discussing the new concept of the division of Europe between Latin and Byzantine civilizations, P. Eberhardt (2016) adds an even smaller part of Belarus and Ukraine to Latin civilization than those shown on the map of S. Huntington. This territorial division of Belarus and Ukraine on religious principles generates itself a possible conflict between the Orthodox and Catholics. Interestingly, according to P. Eberhardt the "latin" part of Belarus is almost the same as a fictional country of "Veyshnoryya", which was "a target country" during the recent Russia-Belarus military exercise "Zapad-2017" ("West-2017").

It seems that the designation of any country to a certain civilization, even if it was carried out on the basis of religious preference, would have to take place within a historical context. Here we need to provide more detailed evidence on the variety of religious situations in Belarus and in Ukraine between the 10th and 18th centuries. The introduction of Christianity to the Kievan Rus' by Prince Vladimir did not lead directly to the Christianization of the whole population. For example, in the late 14th century, a significant part of the GDL population (in present-day Lithuania and Belarus) still adhered to paganism. There was also the so-called *dual faith* (*dvuver'e*), a hybrid of Christianity and Paganism. Modern scholars believe that Gedymin (1275-1341) and Algerd (1295-1377), the Dukes of GDL, followed pagan beliefs (J. Muldoon, 1997). We may suggest that the Dukes' people might have the same religious preference.

² "The text says that the division "has been roughly in its current place for at least five hundred years," but one can hardly agree to this statement (P. Eberhardt, 2016, p.54).

The existence of the GDL in the very beginning saw its leaders balancing between various denominations in accordance with the political situation and their personal preferences. For example, Mindoug, the first Lithuanian king, followed pagan beliefs at first, then became Orthodox, later Catholic, and again pagan; Duke Vitaut was baptized three times (Catholic-Orthodox-Catholic); Duke Jagaila hesitated whom he should marry—Polish Princess Jadwiga (and become a Catholic) or Russian Princess Sophia, the daughter of Duke Dmitry Donskoy (and become Orthodox). Jagaila chose Jadwiga, and Catholicism began to spread over the GDL, although Orthodoxy remained a significant part among common people.

The beginning of the Reformation processes in Europe in the early 16th century certainly affected the GDL. This is evident by the publication of Protestant books in Belarusian language (Lutheran Catechism by Symon Budny in Njasvizh in 1562; the New Testament by Vasil Ciapinski in 1580); by the opening of Protestant parishes in the GDL (there were 229 Calvinist, 16 Arian and 12 Lutheran congregations in the GDL in 1600) (cited from A. Kotliarchuk, 2015); by the formation of the Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church in the GDL (Brest, 1596); and by the counter-offensive of the Roman Catholic church as evidenced by the establishment of the Jesuit colleges in Belarusian cities: Polatsk (1585), Niasvizh (1586), Orsha (1616), Grodna (1625), Minsk (1625), Vitsebsk (1648).

This evidence shows that a non-alignment of Belarus and Ukraine to Western (Latin) civilization does not correspond to reality if it is justified by some researchers based only on evaluation of Orthodoxy in these countries. P. Eberhardt pointed out that the whole of Belarus and much of Ukraine belongs to Western civilization between the late 16th century and the end of the 18th century; this only underscores our thought.³

It is obvious that after the capture of Belarus and Ukraine by the Russian Empire there were a number of events dictated by the Orthodox Russian church in both countries. All Greek-Catholic churches visited by about 70% of the Belarusian population suddenly turned into Orthodox ones in 1839. Nevertheless, in spite of an almost 200-year colonial period, the religious spectrum of Belarusian-Ukrainian and Eurasian civilizations differs significantly. It was shown in a recent study (N. Sahgal, A. Cooperman, 2016) that Russia and Bulgaria, countries with a similar proportion of Orthodox population, had a significant part of Muslims (the Orthodox to Muslims ratio was 7:1 and 5:1, respectively), whereas in Belarus and Ukraine, Muslims constituted a small proportion of the population (the ratio was 150:1 and 50:1, respectively).

³ “It can be therefore assumed that between 1596 and 1772/1795 the boundary between Western and Eastern European civilization ran along the Dnieper river, with all of Belarus and a large part of Ukraine belonging to the Western civilization .” (P. Eberhardt, 2016, p.54).

At the same time, Russia and Bulgaria almost have no Catholics, while in Belarus and Ukraine the Orthodox to Catholics ratio is 6:1 and 8:1, respectively. Similar results were obtained with the assessment of the ratio Christians to Muslims in Russia - 7:1, in Bulgaria - 5:1, in Belarus - 90:1, in Ukraine - 27:1 (P. Murzionak, 2015, p. 67-68).

Thus, it is difficult to agree with the classification of civilization along religious lines, especially with regard to Belarus and Ukraine. We agree with the views of F. Koneczny who believed that "there is no distinct causal relation between race and civilization, nor between language and civilization" (cited from P. Eberhardt, 2016). We can only add that it is true in respect to the religious approach used to separate civilizations. For example, the religious approach excludes from Western or Latin civilization such countries as Greece and Romania; it would be hard to believe these countries would accept that. It seems the same conclusions can be applied to both Belarus and Ukraine. Civilization is an integral structure that has distinct ethnic, linguistic, religious, and mental signs multiplied by the historical experience, heritage and development of the society and people. It seems that in this sense, mathematical modeling could demonstrate more evidence of a difference between Belarus and Ukraine and Eurasian countries such as Bulgaria and Russia.

The title of S. Huntington's book is *The Clash of Civilizations* and its content follows the idea that cultural and religious differences might be a main source of world conflicts. P. Eberhardt (2016) did not rule out the possibility of various conflicts along the "religious" line between Latin and Byzantine civilizations. However, he does not comment on the war that goes on between Russia and Ukraine (Crimea, Donbass).⁴ This is not a religious war, but an inter-civilizational one.

At the same time, we share P. Eberhardt's opinion⁵ that the role of religion in the life of human communities will slowly diminish. Speaking about Belarus, 41.1% of the population today are non-believers. The role of the Orthodox Church in Belarus is deliberately exaggerated. According to various official polls, the Orthodox Church covers less than half of the Belarusian population (48.9%) and the number of active members is rather low (20-27%) (Gallup, 2007; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, 2011; P. Murzionak, 2016).

The definition of the form and content of civilization is the subject of discussion so far. The simplest of terms defines civilization as "the type of culture and society that emerged in a particular country or region, or in a different era."

⁴ "Thus, Huntington's prophecy of unavoidable conflict along this boundary may in fact be fulfilled." (P. Eberhardt, 2016, p.66).

⁵ "The shrinking influence of religious motivations in many parts of the world shall alleviate potential religious differentials." (P. Eberhardt, 2016, p.65).

In a recent review by A. Targowski (2009) you can find dozens of early and contemporary definitions of civilization.⁶ In our opinion, Belarusian-Ukrainian/Western-Ruthenian civilization in many ways corresponds to the definition of civilization or rather sub-civilization if we bear in mind that some researchers have extended Western civilization to a civilization of a presumptively lower order. A. Targowski (2009) distinguishes Western-West, Western-Latin, Western-Jewish, and Western-Central sub-civilizations, while Kuzik and Yakovets (2006) define North American, Latin American and Oceanic, West European, and East European sub-civilizations of Western civilization. Based on the evidence presented, we can assume that Belarusian-Ukrainian civilization exists, it differs from Eurasian civilization, and should be classified as Western-Ruthenian sub-civilization of Western civilization.

It is clear that the development of civilization or its recovery requires a long time, but we hope that in the era of global changes in the world, Belarusian-Ukrainian or Western-Ruthenian civilization will take its rightful place through understanding and cooperation between Belarus and Ukraine, which have had a lot in common since the 9th century. As noted by A. Targowski (2009), “[t]he process of determining the nature of civilization is continuous and evolves with the development of civilization and our knowledge and wisdom in this matter.”

Conclusions

Designation of Belarus and Ukraine to Eurasian civilization in a few classifications was directed by old historical myths created by Russian politicians and scientists in the second half of 18th century. Those historical myths were propagated around the world and accepted by many scholars in the West. These main Russian myths include, in particular, a trinity of three Eastern Slavic nations, a continuity of the historical heritage of the Kievan Rus' to Russia, and the Slavic character of Muscovy and the Russian state.

Obviously, those main Russian myths preclude any idea about the existence of independent Belarusian and Ukrainian states. Although the situation in Europe has dramatically changed in the last 25 years, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the ideas of the first and current Eurasists remain the same, despite the evidence of what could be termed a civilizational war between Ukraine and Russia.

⁶ The composite definition of civilization by A. Targowski is:

“Civilization is a large society living in an autonomous, blurry reification (invisible-visible) which is not a part of larger one and exists over an extended period of time. Labor is specialized and a civilization is differentiated from other civilizations by the development of its own advanced cultural system driven by communication, religion, wealth, power, and the sharing of the same knowledge system within complex urban, agricultural infrastructures, and other infrastructures such as industrial and information ones. It also progresses in a cycle of rising, growing, declining and falling.” (2009).

Belarus and Ukraine have a lot of commonalities in their historical and cultural development since the 9th century. We provide evidence that starting in 13th century Eastern Slavs formed two civilizations: Belarusian-Ukrainian or Western-Ruthenian and Eurasian (Russian). The delineation of Eastern Slavs has been determined by the distinct features of their tribes; natural conditions; the assimilation with different local tribes; internecine wars between the lands and principalities of Kievan Rus' and the North-East territory; the impact of the Golden Horde rule in Muscovy; and the creation of the GDL, the principality which united a substantial part of Eastern Slavs, current Belarusians and Ukrainians, and saved them from the strong Eurasian influence. Until the end of 18th century Belarusians and their territory had never belonged to Muscovy or the Russian Empire.

During the last two centuries, there were a number of changes in Belarus and Ukraine encouraged by Eurasian culture and politics; however, we believe they are not irreversible. Considering the development of Belarusian-Ukrainian civilization in space and time, one can observe that it differs substantially (ethnically, religiously, mentally) from Eurasian civilization. The people of Belarusian-Ukrainian civilization have a number of attributes which point to their European nature including a multi-centuries history; the presence of European civilizational processes and institutions (Renaissance, Reformation, Counter-Reformation, Uniate, Enlightenment, Parliament, Sejm, the Magdeburg rights); modern state-building processes; and integration into European life. Keeping in mind the long duration of historical cycles we believe that Belarusian-Ukrainian civilization now enters the phase of recovery and prosperity.

It is difficult to agree with the classification of civilizations in Europe based on religion and moreover the role of religion in the life of human communities is slowly but surely reduced. Civilization is an integral structure that has distinct ethnic, linguistic, religious, and mental signs multiplied by historical experience, heritage and the development of societies and peoples living there. We believe that Belarusian-Ukrainian/Western-Ruthenian civilization in many ways aligns with the definition of civilization. The presented evidence supports the idea that Belarusian-Ukrainian civilization exists, it differs from Eurasian civilization, and it should be classified as the Western-Ruthenian sub-civilization of Western civilization.

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