

# Anti-Polonism in Contemporary Belarusian Media

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## Abstract

*A critical analysis of the anti-Polish discourse in Belarussian media consist unmasking the classical techniques of propaganda understood as intentional and politically motivated persuasive actions, which – by means of a selected image of reality (events, phenomena, people and their properties) – affect the social awareness of the addressees and appeal to their emotions in order to control (form, consolidate or change) the attitudes of the collective, which is to lead to forming desired opinions among its members or to inducing specific behaviors.*

*This article is the result of the research on the anti-Polish propaganda discourse present in the Belarusian media at the end of the first decade of the 21st century. A collection of selected texts representing various media – from electronic editions of the press, through transcriptions of audiovisual materials, to comments and opinions in the Belarusian Internet – was selected for analysis. I assume that discourse is primarily an interaction between the participants of communication, which in the mediasphere of the 21st century.*

*The essential threads of the anti-Polish narrative are connected with the criticism of the Belarusian opposition as an agent of the West, especially Poland; the Polish actions (state institutions, media and other entities) aimed at destabilizing the Republic of Belarus (and even a coup d'état) and breaking its close ties with Russia; the activity of the Polish authorities with regard to the "human resources" of Belarus (in the national, demographic and social sphere). The anti-Polish discourse the narrative about the past will play an important role, especially in rejection of the Poles' idealized common history and heritage of the multinational Republic; the radical criticism of the Second Republic period; and criticism of the current anti-communist historical policy of the authorities in Warsaw.*

*The strongest manifestation of anti-Polonism is the criticism of the Polish ethos. The environments hostile to Poland and Poles, both in the past and at present, realize that the Polish historical and cultural heritage, and especially the native political institutions of Poles, are related to the idea of the nation understood as a 'community of honor', which links Polishness to the republican sense of freedom connected with duty.*

*Keywords: Anti-Polonism, Belarus, Russia, propaganda, media, critical discourse analysis*



## SOME REMARKS ON THE ANTI-POLONISM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY

The media and the narrations created by them are nowadays the most important space for creating attitudes and opinions. Therefore, the media which are unfriendly or even hostile towards Poles strengthen xenophobia, nationalism, contempt for Polish history, axiology, culture and statehood. The contemporary anti-Polishness in the Belarusian media is closely connected with the anti-Western discourse created by the Kremlin's propaganda machine, of which the Belarusian media are an important element.

The study of anti-Polonism in public discourses – as I assume – means identifying any prejudice, discrimination, dislike and hostility towards Poland and Poles. Anti-Polonism is not only a lack of respect for our country, but also a form of symbolic and cultural aggression that may lead to physical acts of violence against Polish citizens or members of the Polish community, Polish institutions and the cultural heritage of the Republic. Anti-Polonism contains some features of racism and is based on racist stereotypes, therefore it is extremely dangerous.

Radical anti-Polonism at its beginnings was one of the ideological elements of absolutist and later totalitarian political systems. It was used for an uncompromising fight against Polishness, which was a manifestation of the brutal realization of the interests of the partitioning states on the territories inhabited by the Polish population. Therefore, it did not come from nowhere; on the contrary, its sources can be found in more or less distant history and in the actions of those political entities which built their power at the expense of Poland and Poles. Therefore, it is worth paying attention to the historical policies of some countries, especially contemporary Russia (and Belarus under its influence), because the contemporary political culture and the resulting real actions (especially on the part of Moscow) are a clear continuation of certain actions from the past<sup>1</sup>.

The politics of history, present also (or perhaps above all) in the media and popular culture, does matter. It is undoubtedly an element of "soft power", which modern states use to improve their situation in the international arena, and thus build attractiveness in the economic dimension – in trade or foreign investments. A country that wants to count in the modern world has to conduct both foreign and domestic policy by referring to its own history.

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, anti-Polonism is not a phenomenon present only in the historical and contemporary actions of the Republic of Poland's powerful neighbors. However, the sources and manifestations of Polonophobia of, for example, the Czechs or the Lithuanians (who consider themselves rather victims of certain Polish actions in the past) are different, while the French or the Americans look at Poland critically in a different way (and for different reasons). The aversion to Poland and Poles on the part of Jewish circles is of a completely different nature.



The key element of narration about the past (as a component of contemporary historical policies) are great events, decisions of statesmen and leaders, victories and, in the case of Poland, also tragic defeats, albeit presented as beautiful and in a messianic spirit of *gloria victis*. The prudent use of historical policy is one of the fundamental issues, and conducting international policy that does not take into account the events of the past cannot be effective. By nurturing a collective memory an effective state and its institutions tell their own story efficaciously – otherwise our story will be told by others.

One of the components of anti-Polonism is fighting the Polish *logos*, especially the Polish language and culture. And since various media are nowadays the basic area of dissemination of symbolic content, especially the content with which a large part of the community identifies itself, and since the means of communication, both traditional and new social media, are more than ever the platforms of participation in national culture, the repository of common, rich symbolism and the collective storehouse of feelings and thoughts, it is the media that are today's main weapons in the cultural and civilization wars, which anti-Polonism is part of.

Another manifestation of Polonophobia is the extremely critical narrative about the Polish *epos*. The mediatization of modern times is related to the overwhelming processes of the era of the crisis of traditional media and the rise of social media, from which more and more people obtain information and opinions about the past and political ideas. Therefore, it is difficult to ignore the role of the media hostile to Poland – whether in the past or in the present – in depreciating the history of the Republic of Poland and shaping a historical narrative critical of Poland and Poles.

Anti-Polonism is also manifested in the negation of the Polish *topos*. Various narratives in the world of multimodal communication of the 21st century deconstruct the symbolic images of Poland as the homeland, to which Poles attribute great value. Criticism of the Polish *genos* – as another dimension of Polonophobia – manifests itself in the combating, uncompromising negation of Polish ideas about the common fate of Poles and their neighbors, which is of particular importance in the East, i.e. the areas of the former First and Second Polish Republics. The aim of such projected Polonophobic narrations is to disintegrate the strong feeling of bonds between Poles and close (historically) relations with the nations of Eastern Europe, which once formed a common, multinational, multicultural and multireligious state. This is supposed to lead to the annihilation of the community consciousness.

However, the strongest – I assume – manifestation of anti-Polonism is the criticism of the Polish *ethos*. The environments hostile to Poland and Poles, both in the past and at present, realise that the Polish historical and cultural heritage, and especially the native political institutions of Poles, are related to the idea of the nation understood as a 'community of honour', which links Polishness to the republican sense of freedom connected with duty.



The patriotic declaration of Polishness first and foremost implies participation in a certain ethical community, and the notion of 'love of the fatherland', which is connected with a sense of moral unification and the obligation to consciously choose the common good.

The beautiful Polish tradition<sup>2</sup> of building a national identity, Polishness understood as an ethical community (and not as an ethnic one) has been fought against for centuries by Russia – first imperial, later Soviet, and now contemporary Putin's Russia. For the Russian 'Turanian' civilization, as defined by Feliks Koneczny, which changes its form but remains unchanged in substance, the traditional triad of Polish values of GOD-HONOUR-FATHERLAND, and especially Polish Prometheism in the formula FOR OUR FREEDOM AND YOURS or the idea of SOLIDARITY between people and nations are an existential threat.

### METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

A critical analysis of the anti-Polish discourse should consist – as I assume – in unmasking the classical techniques of propaganda understood as intentional and politically motivated persuasive actions, which – by means of a selected image of reality (events, phenomena, people and their properties) – affect the social awareness of the addressees and appeal to their emotions in order to control (form, consolidate or change) the attitudes of the collective, which is to lead to forming desired opinions among its members or to inducing specific behaviors.

This article is the result of the research<sup>3</sup> on the anti-Polish propaganda discourse present in the Belarusian media at the end of the first decade of the 21st century<sup>4</sup>. A collection of selected texts representing various media – from electronic editions of the press, through transcriptions of audiovisual materials, to comments and opinions in the Belarusian Internet – was selected for analysis.

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<sup>2</sup> The 19th-century German *volkism*, which defined a sense of national separateness on the basis of a community of "blood and soil," was in fact copied by Ukrainian nationalists, leading to the *genocidium atrox* of Poles in Volhynia and eastern Lesser Poland (Małopolska).

<sup>3</sup> A pilot study to develop a research concept on contemporary anti-Polonism in the world media.

<sup>4</sup> Transmissions from 2018-2020, which were published before the violent protests following the contested presidential election results of August 9 last year.



I assume that discourse is primarily an interaction between the participants of communication, which in the mediasphere of the 21st century<sup>5</sup> takes place mainly in the spontaneous environment of the network, where certain communicative events contribute to the cultivation of collective meanings, i.e. the consolidation of certain thoughts and ideas. Undoubtedly, discourse is also a certain axiological system. Therefore, an important aim of the analysis was an attempt to reconstruct a set of (anti)values, concepts, views present in the emotionally charged Belarusian (and de facto Russian) messages, which are characterized by a specific attitude, and whose foundation is the assumption that "Poland is the enemy".

The research adopted the following main hypothesis: anti-Polonism in the Belarusian media at the beginning of the 21st century is consistent with the assumptions of anti-Western and anti-Polish propaganda. Therefore, the essential threads of the anti-Polish narrative are connected with the criticism of 1) the Belarusian opposition as an agent of the West, especially Poland; 2) the Polish actions (state institutions, media and other entities) aimed at destabilizing the Republic of Belarus (and even a coup d'état) and breaking its close ties with Russia; 3) the activity of the Polish authorities with regard to the "human resources" of Belarus (in the national, demographic and social sphere). I further assume that in the anti-Polish discourse the narrative about the past will play an important role, especially: 1) rejection of the Poles' idealized common history and heritage of the multinational Republic; 2) radical criticism of the Second Republic period; and 3) criticism of the current anti-communist historical policy of the authorities in Warsaw.

#### ANTI-POLONISM IN THE BELARUSIAN ONLINE MEDIA - THE RESULTS OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSES

In the first stage of the analysis, a map of the studied discourse was created, which took into account both the frequency of appearance of certain words in particular units of analysis (paragraphs) and their co-occurrence in the surroundings of other words.<sup>6</sup>

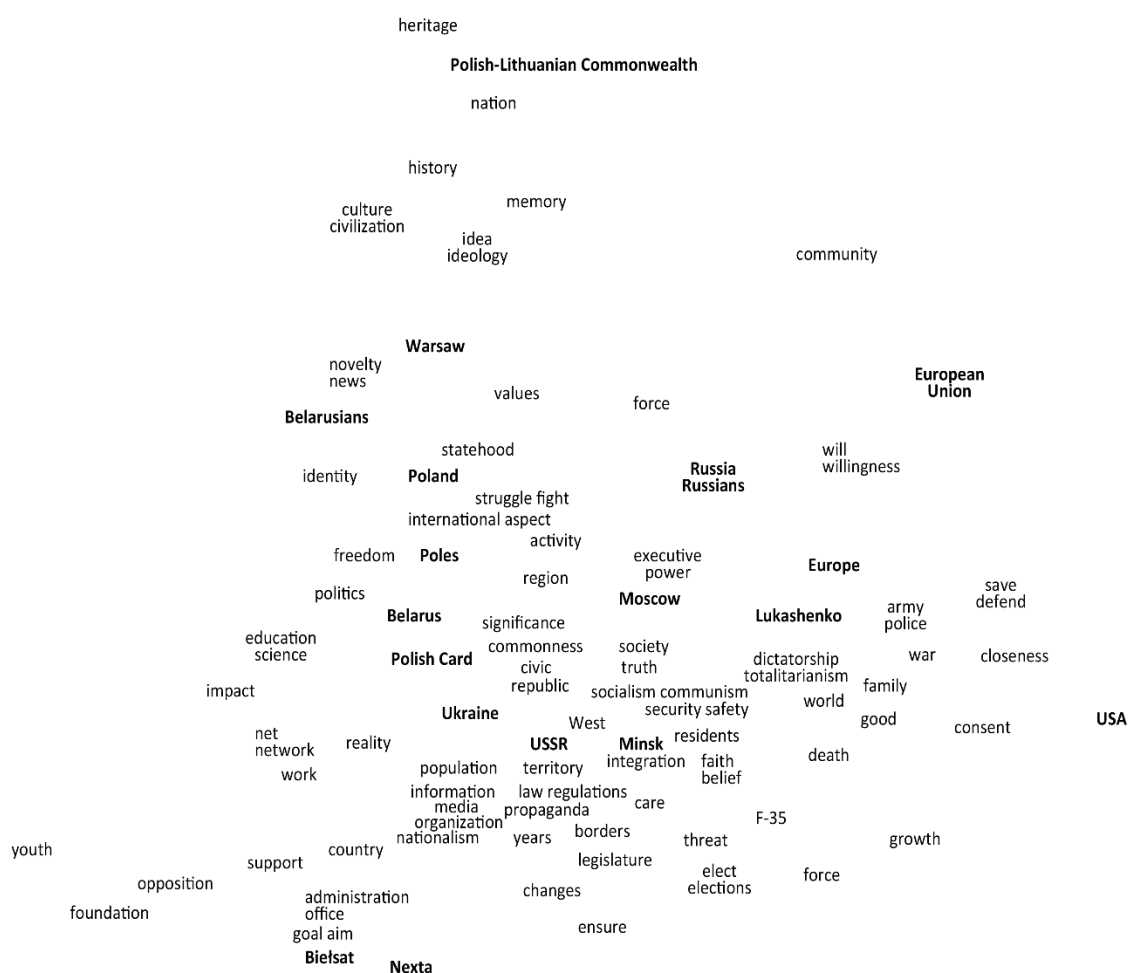
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<sup>5</sup> The 21st century mediasphere is a complex and sophisticated system of diverse media in all scales, from sub-local to global media. It includes newspapers, magazines, non-periodical print publications, electronic broadcast media, and new online media, including personal social media. The system of informational, persuasive, and entertainment messages functions as a chaotic network of diverse cultural codes, produces a competitive space for conflicting social knowledge systems and leads to expressive culture wars. In reflecting on communication in the postmodern world, it is necessary to go beyond the normative liberal model of media perceived as the "fourth power" in democratic systems, and to examine the multidimensional interactions of the mediasphere as an amorphous, yet compelling, radial symbolic space. The contemporary media - as never before - enhance human experience and expand the scope of knowing and experiencing the present, which manifests itself in media "overproduction" ("excess") of competing aesthetic systems, discourses, narratives, and social images of the world.

<sup>6</sup> I write more about this procedure in the text entitled "Computer text analysis in media discourses" (Szymańska, Lisowska-Magdziarz, Hess 2018).



Fig. 1. Map of critical discourse about Poland in the Belarusian Internet 2018-2020



Source: own elaboration

## THE MAIN NARRATIVES OF THE ANTI-POLISH DISCOURSE IN THE BELARUSIAN MEDIA

In the next phase of the research, a qualitative content analysis of the collected texts was performed, on the basis of which the multidimensional discourse about Poland was reduced to five main streams. The authors of the studied texts:

- *firstly*, believe that the government in Warsaw together with Polish media institutions and NGOs unceremoniously interfere in internal affairs of Belarus, and by supporting the opposition they plan to repeat the Ukrainian scenario, i.e. to carry out another 'color revolution' – which is de facto a *coup d'état* – this time in Minsk;



- *secondly*, perceive Poland as a threat (also in the military sphere), as the armed vanguard of NATO (de facto the USA), and consider its actions as destabilizing for the whole region;
- *thirdly*, criticize mainly the Polish elites – political and media – among whom there is an anti-Belarusian (and in fact anti-Russian) consensus;
- *fourthly*, expose the alleged anti-Belarusian activity of the authorities in Warsaw, which aims at colonizing a considerable part of the Belarusian nation (especially youth); and
- *fifthly*, radically criticize the Polish historical narrative and policy, both with regard to the distant past and the most recent history.

#### Warsaw's interference in Minsk's internal affairs

The most pronounced strand of critical discourse about Poland in the Belarusian media is related to the current political situation. The Belarusian opposition is presented in the categories of 'enemy of the nation'<sup>7</sup>. The opposition's betrayal towards its own country and towards brotherly Russia (or even more broadly – the Orthodox community) consists in the fact that it collaborates with Poles, i.e. "traitors to the Slavs". "Pshki," (Pszeki)<sup>8</sup> the authors of the researched texts emphasize, and the Belarusian citizens who engage in opposition activities are simply Poles (Shimov 2019).

"Mobilization and protest technology" imported from Poland is a Polish plan to destabilize the situation in Belarus (Uralov 2019). It is being implemented under the false slogans of Europeanization of the country, while in the meantime the stakes of the game are the historical change in relations between the brotherly nations of Russia and Belarus. And yet, as we read in numerous anti-Polish materials: either Belarus will remain in friendship with Russia or its end will come.

Warsaw is presented as the center of governance of the Belarusian opposition (Szimow 2019). Therefore, the circles that do not seek agreement with the authorities are presented as foreign agents of influence. Such strong accusations – connoting betrayal – are reinforced by the narrative about Warsaw, which as Washington's puppet, participates in igniting successive "color revolutions" on the territory of the former USSR, which ultimately leads to chaos and weakening of states and societies traditionally friendly towards Russia. Warsaw's interference in the internal affairs of the neighboring countries is an attempt to revive "imperial Poland" because Poles perceive Belarus as part of the heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and treat the Belarusian nation in the categories of peripheral "borderland of the Polish core".

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<sup>7</sup> The online opposition project NEXTA, for example, was attacked in an exceptionally brutal manner, and was simply presented as a kind of agent directed from Warsaw (Uralov 2019).

<sup>8</sup> "Pszeki" is an onomatopoeia popular among Russians, a colloquial term for Poles that is a mockery of the Polish language, from their perspective heavily "hissed". For some Russians, the Polish language sounds as if it consists mainly of combinations of "psz" consonants, hence "pszeki".



Therefore, the so-called “soft Polonization” is, according to critical authors, a fundamental threat not only to the Belarusian state, but above all to the Belarusian national identity (Potapiejko 2019).

### **Poland as a military threat to security in the region**

The anti-Polonism of part of the Belarusian media is also manifested in exposing some alleged Polish “militarism”, which poses a deadly threat to the entire region (Sputnik 2018). Of course, Warsaw’s strength is, as we read, solely derived from the power of the North Atlantic Treaty, which no longer even hides that its only enemy is Russia, and thus its allies as well, especially its closest ally, Belarus. A gradual increase in the potential and quality of the armed forces of the Republic of Poland is an existential threat to Belarus.

Obviously, Poland is (currently) not strong enough to realistically threaten the much stronger Belarusian army. Therefore, Warsaw adopts a tactic of destabilizing the security situation by inspiring a political coup in Minsk. Thus, the Poles actively work on organizing a coup in Belarus. On this occasion, an accusation of “Phariseism” of Warsaw appears in the analyzed texts, which prepares a coup in Belarus (Dzermant 2019) not to – as it declares – promote freedom or democracy in the region, but in order to achieve tangible benefits, mainly from the acquisition of high-quality “human resources”, as is currently the case in Ukraine. The instruments of political subversion in the “Blue-Eyed Country” are primarily the media sponsored by Warsaw. And Bielsat TV, for example, is considered an instrument of psychological warfare, also against Russia (Tkaczuk 2020).

To sum up, Poland – despite everything – may pose a real threat to Belarus as Russia’s closest ally. According to the authors of the analyzed texts, the purchases and development of offensive weapons are especially worrying (Chorolenko 2020). This is also the best evidence of NATO’s offensive actions in the eastern direction. The North Atlantic Treaty is a threat not only to the security of the Russian Federation, but also to the areas that the Kremlin considers its sphere of influence. Only deeper integration of Belarus and Russia can be an effective defense against Polish (and NATO) aggression. And since, as we read, Russia is always strong (or even invincible), it cannot only stop its enemies, but also punish them. And since Belarus is implicitly part of the Russian world, Moscow’s power radiates to Minsk, or to be more precise, to Lukashenka’s regime, which, by the way, not without a reason boasts about the strength of its own army.

There is also an interesting side thread in this discourse, namely a specific concern for Poland, which is treated by the United States as a puppet and used to implement its rogue policy in the East, which will inevitably end in a disaster for it.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that this de facto Kremlin narrative effectively resonates also in some anti-American nationalist circles in Poland.



### Political and media elites in Poland as enemies of independent Belarus

The warp of yet another anti-Polish narrative is the thesis of a general consensus among Poland's political and media elites regarding its Eastern policy. The analysed texts devote much space to, for example, Polish criticism of deepened integration within the Union of Belarus and Russia. Warsaw presents this initiative as the end of the Belarusian state, while it is the actions of the Polish media and politicians that threaten the independence of the country. Obviously, Warsaw's strategic goal is the destruction of fraternal relations between Minsk and Moscow, as this will enable it to take control of the East (Nosowicz 2019).

This narrative contains several interesting detailed threads. For example, we are dealing with a massive attack on the Polish media which, according to their Belarusian critics, only spread lies. The aim of Warsaw's propaganda campaign carried out through the media<sup>10</sup>, among others, is – as already mentioned – criticism of close collaboration between Belarus and Russia. Poland is a hostile country, whose aim is to destroy Minsk's excellent relations with Moscow and, especially, to prevent a deeper integration of the two countries. Why does the West react so hysterically towards the consolidation within the Union State between the RF and Belarus? – the Belarusian authors ask. The reason, they answer, is that the government in Warsaw is preparing a new plan to take over Belarus, which will only be possible if the traditionally friendly Belarusian-Russian relations are destroyed, especially in the interpersonal dimension. The idea is to repeat the Ukrainian scenario and to divide the brotherly nations: Belarusians are to perceive Russians as enemies.

The narration of Russophobia which the Polish elites (and not "ordinary" Poles who like their eastern neighbors) try to export to the territory of Belarus is related to the thesis of Warsaw's despicable national policy. The consolidation of the Polish minority in Lithuania, Ukraine or Belarus – as we read – is done by strengthening "anti-Russianism".

Why do the Polish policy makers act to the detriment of Belarusian independence? Why is media propaganda aimed at audiences not only in Poland, but also in the EU and CIS area wiping Belarus off the map? (Pawlenko 2019) Such a question (and a number of similar ones) is usually answered simply by the authors of the analyzed texts – Polish elites are afraid of Russia. And yet, Russia, first of all, is not an aggressive state, and secondly, it has the right to take care of its own interests and spheres of influence<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> According to Alexander Nosowicz, Warsaw is creating a new plan to capture Belarus. So the Polish media are part of it, which is why they attack Russia so uncompromisingly: "The task of Western 'friends' (those who seem to wish 'well' but in fact falsely) in the current difficult geopolitical situation is to keep Belarus for the future 'democratization', in which (now) Russia is "poking its predatory sting". According to Nosowicz, even a cursory review of Polish newspapers allows one to see how directly and clumsily this idea is promoted: *Russia is absorbing its neighbor, the Belarusian regime may collapse at any moment* – these are typical headlines in Polish press (Nosowicz 2019).

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to use pro-Russian themes quoted from the Polish press, such as the biweekly "Najwyższy Czas".

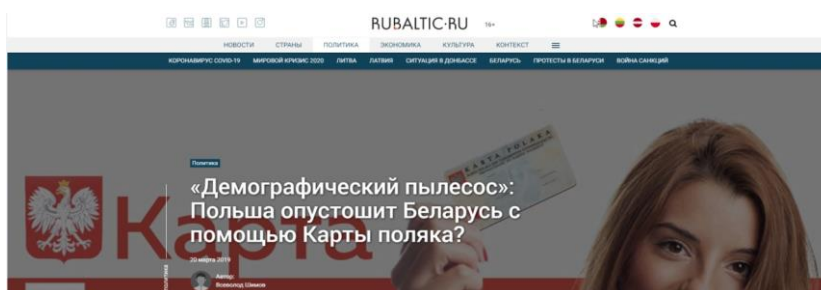


Belarus, which has never posed a threat to any of its neighbors and, on the contrary, has constantly been a victim of external aggression, is even less aggressive. At present, thanks to Russia, Belarusians may enjoy a sense of multidimensional security. Unfortunately, it is Poland which introduces dysfunctional elements into the situation in the region, treating Belarus as an arena of serious – perhaps decisive – rivalry with Russia. Warsaw starts its own expansion, striving to regain the lost historical lands. This is, according to Belarusian critics of Poland's eastern policy, shameful because, for example, in the early 1990s, it consisted of "preying" on certain weaknesses of post-Soviet states – "wreckage after the USSR" (Pawlenko 2019).

### Polish "demographic offensive" in the East

The next thread of the anti-Polish narration reconstructed on the basis of the preliminary analysis of the Belarusian messages refers to the demographic factor, and in the long-term perspective, also to the national one. It can be summarized in a few model formulations such as "Polish identity in exchange for a visa," "Polish Charter"<sup>12</sup> as a "demographic vacuum cleaner" or "To turn Belarusians into Poles" (Szimow 2020a, 2020b).

Fig. 2. "Demographic vacuum cleaner: Poland will devastate Belarus with the Polish Card?"



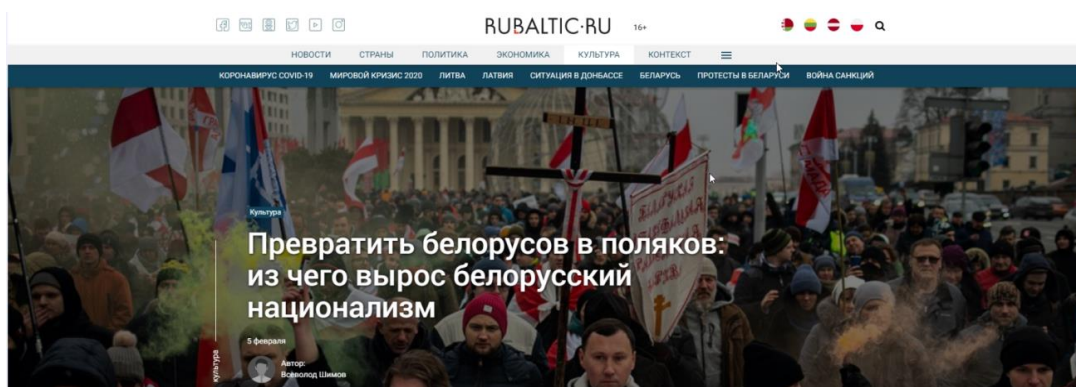
Source: W. Szimow, «Демографический пылесос»: Польша опустошит Беларусь с помощью карты поляка?, <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20032019-demograficheskiy-pylesos-polsha-opustoshit-belarus-s-pomoshchyu-karty-polyaka/>

<sup>12</sup> Karta Polaka ['karta pɔ' laka], literally meaning Pole's Card, but also translated as Polish Charter or Polish Card, is a document confirming belonging to the Polish nation, which may be given to individuals who cannot obtain dual citizenship in their own countries while belonging to the Polish nation according to conditions defined by law; and, who do not have prior Polish citizenship or permission to reside in Poland. It was established by an act of the Polish parliament dated 7 September 2007 called the Act on the Pole's Card (Ustawa o Karcie Polaka, Dz.U. 2007 no. 180/1280), which specifies the rights of the holder of the Card, the rules for granting, loss of validity and rescission of the Card, and the competencies of the public administration's bodies and procedures in these cases. The law came into force on 29 March 2008.



The institutional actions of the Republic of Poland, which mainly benefit the Belarusian citizens of Polish origin and the Belarusian youth, are particularly strongly attacked. According to anti-Polish authors, such actions are a kind of intensive Polonization. There is a struggle for identity, because – as we can read – “Polish nationalists” grant the “Polish Card” to native Belarusians. This document is a kind of “mobilization card” for the Polish minority in Belarus, but also, worse still, it effectively recruits people with ambiguous identities to “Polishness”, and the visa-free movement within the EU is here an incentive inviting enough to renounce one’s heritage (Geraszimczik 2019).

Fig. 3. “Turning Belarusians into Poles: What Belarusian nationalism grew out of”

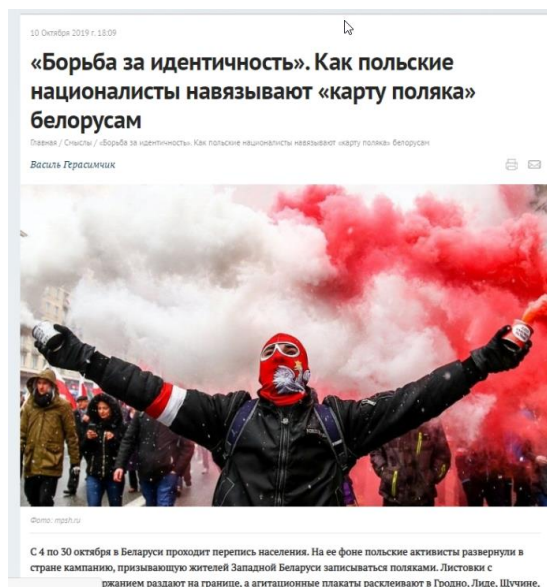


Source: W. Szimow, *Превратить Белорусов в Поляков: из чего вырос белорусский национализм*, [www.rubaltic.ru/article/kultura-i-istoriya/05022020-prevratit-belorusov-v-polyakov-iz-chego-vyros-belorusskiy-natsionalizm/](http://www.rubaltic.ru/article/kultura-i-istoriya/05022020-prevratit-belorusov-v-polyakov-iz-chego-vyros-belorusskiy-natsionalizm/)

To make matters worse, as we read, during the general population census in Belarus (in 2019), the government in Warsaw carried out a massive agitation campaign by the hands of Polish activists from the banks of the Niemen River to declare Polish identity, which should be considered a hostile provocation on the part of the neighboring state towards Belarus. (Ibidem)



Fig. 4. “The Struggle for Identity. How Polish nationalists impose the ‘Polish card’ on Belarusians”



Source: Geraszimczik W. (2019), «Борьба за идентичность». Как польские националисты навязывают «карту поляка» белорусам, <https://eurasia.expert/kak-polskie-natsionalisty-navyazyvayut-kartu-polyaka-belorusam/>

In the described “demographic” and “nationality” trend, there appears a certain detailed thread which introduces a clear inconsistency to the narrative under discussion. Surprising, not to say breakneck, is the thesis of the Belarusian critics of the Polish government’s actions that the action of transforming Belarusians into Poles strengthens Belarusian nationalism, which, paradoxically, is a by-product of the confrontation between Russianness and Polishness (Szimow 2020b).

In our opinion, another aspect of the narrative is extremely interesting. The Polish state is presented as a “demographic vacuum cleaner” which “sucks in Belarusian youth”. Thus, a process of “appropriation” of young and talented Belarusians is taking place (also in the axiological dimension), mainly through academic scholarship programs that are used to promote pro-Western values, which in the future is supposed to result in the formation of properly formed pro-Polish political elites in Belarus (Szimow 2019).

Catholicism<sup>13</sup> is also a tool for (re)Polonization of the Belarusian nation and seizure of human resources. The fact that the Republic of Poland refused to accept refugees from the Middle East, precisely because of religious and cultural differences, is given as evidence for this claim.

<sup>13</sup> A subcategory of the narrative discussed here is the theme of the “offensive of Catholicism” as a means of Polonization in the East, not only in Belarus, but also in Ukraine and Russia.



However, the Polish state, forced to compensate for deep deficiencies in its own labor market, decided to import and then culturally (and often religiously) assimilate immigrants from Ukraine and Belarus. All these actions in the sphere of identity and demography, we read, are evidence of Warsaw's strategic plan to resurrect the past greatness of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Szimow 2019, 2020a, 2020b).

### **"Falsifying" the history, or imperial Poland in the East**

The mediatization of history and memory invariably constitutes, especially in our part of Europe, a keystone of collective identities<sup>14</sup>. Elite actors (including institutions of power) continue to disseminate hierarchically organized narratives in the form of media messages, archival resources or educational programs, which is an expression of the hegemonism of historical memory manifested in the form of specific historical policies and soft power activities in the international arena<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, according to our predictions, historical discourse occupied a central place in the anti-Polish propaganda in Belarus, influenced by the Kremlin.

*What does Poland need a "common history" with Belarus for?* – asked one author reluctant to Warsaw in an alarmist tone (Strelcow 2019). Another protested that the *Polish Sejm was teaching Belarusians history* (Łazutkin 2020). The cited headlines exemplify a stream of messages in which we have an uncompromising opposition to the Polish historical narrative. This criticism applies to all periods of shared history between Poles and Belarusians, and the Belarusian media hostile to Poland tend to reproduce the Russian historical narrative.

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<sup>14</sup> The postmodern deconstruction of traditional communities, the apotheosis of liquid reality, and the praise of cosmopolitanism (understood as an inevitable and supposedly liberating consequence of globalization), often manifesting itself in the form of a paternophobic aversion to one's own heritage is, I believe, doomed to failure. In a spontaneous, disordered, and uncertain – from the perspective of a modern man – world, the importance of history and collective memory paradoxically increases, since it is precisely certain interpretations of the past that can alleviate the deep sense of indeterminacy and uncertainty of our times.

<sup>15</sup> Today transmedia space is the most important area of symbolic rivalry and clash of various discourses in contemporary culture wars, also in relation to history according to Orwell's still valid formula: *Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past.*



Fig. 5. "Polish Sejm teach Belarusian's history"



Source: Łazutkin A. (2020), *Польский Сейм учит белорусов истории*, 24 I,  
[https://imhoclub.by/ru/material/polskij\\_sejm\\_uchit\\_belorusov\\_istorii](https://imhoclub.by/ru/material/polskij_sejm_uchit_belorusov_istorii)

What seems to be most striking is the criticism of the concept of common history of both nations and its presentation as a false creation of Warsaw. This idealization of the Polish-Lithuanian union is supposed to be part of the "new history" allegedly created by Poland in order to strengthen the historical concept of Belarus as a sovereign European state and not part of Russia and the Russian world<sup>16</sup>.

The anti-Polish discourse is most often a reproduction of the communist – in modern times also the Kremlin's – version of history.

The period of the Second Polish Republic is – in the narrative described – the tragedy of the Belarusians, another stage of the centuries-long Polish colonization of lands in the East (Głuszkow 2019). Józef Piłsudski, we read, was a hypocritical demagogue who, under beautiful slogans, led his legions into the territories of present-day Belarus to colonize them.

<sup>16</sup> Of course, it is difficult to state unequivocally that such a point of view dominates the public perception of the past in Belarus. First, there is ample evidence that more and more Belarusians feel a bond with the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It is also worth noting that the authorities in Minsk often cherish this heritage. Secondly, many Belarusian historians and journalists, such as V. Derużyński, the author of the excellent work *Мифы о Беларуси*, undertake an effective polemic with the Soviet historiography, which is today reproduced by Putin's propaganda (Derużyński 2013).



“Equality” and “freedom” remained empty slogans in the borderlands, as “under Polish rule” Orthodox Christians were persecuted, Belarusian schools were closed, and children were forcibly Polonized from an early age. Poles “tortured” local civilians, and Poland has never apologized for these crimes, which were also committed against Lithuanians and Ukrainians. In this situation, writes one of the authors, Belarusians cannot think about any friendship with their western neighbor, and the only possible option (and a form of defense against aggressive Poland) is friendship with Russia. Already, thanks to the establishment of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic it was possible to build a “Belarusian home”, i.e. a homeland. Poles are not brothers of Belarusians, but vicious neighbors with the mentality of colonizers, whose only goal – even today – is expansion to the East (Głuszakow 2019, Pers 2019).

Fig. 6. “Western Belarus: how the Belarusians lived under Polish rule”



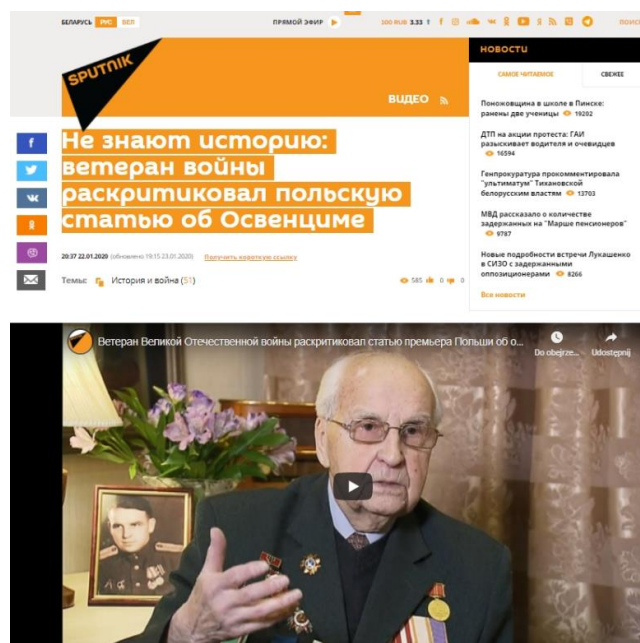
Source: J. Głuszakow, «Крэсы вшходні» или Западная Беларусь: как жилось Белорусам под польской властью, <https://poligraf.red/kresy-vshodni-ili-zapadnaya-belarus-kak-zhilos-belorusam-pod-polskoj-vlastyu/>

The extensive part of the discourse on history consists of references to events connected with the outbreak, course, and end of World War II. Anti-Polish authors thus move within the structure of the Soviet “myth” of the Great Patriotic War, which – as the highest sanctity – is not subject to any reinterpretation in the politics and historical narrative of contemporary Russia. Much and often has been written about World War II “lies”, emphasizing that Poland is the source of the most flagrant, defamatory acts of profanation of the Great Patriotic War.



The contemporary Republic of Poland is in the eyes of its Belarusian critics a “barbaric” state, because it cannot appreciate and respect the memory and monuments of its liberators, i.e. the Soviet soldiers who died in such large numbers on Polish lands. The argument about the alleged “inhuman disrespect” of the Polish state towards the fallen and killed is also applied to the civilian population of Warsaw, especially Jews.

Fig. 7. “They don’t know history: a war veteran criticized the Polish article about Auschwitz”



Source: Sputnik.by, *Не знают историю: ветеран войны раскритиковал польскую статью об Освенциме*, <https://sputnik.by/video/20200122/1043760472/Ne-znayut-istoriyu-veteran-voyny-raskritikoval-polskuyu-statyu-ob-Osventsime.html>

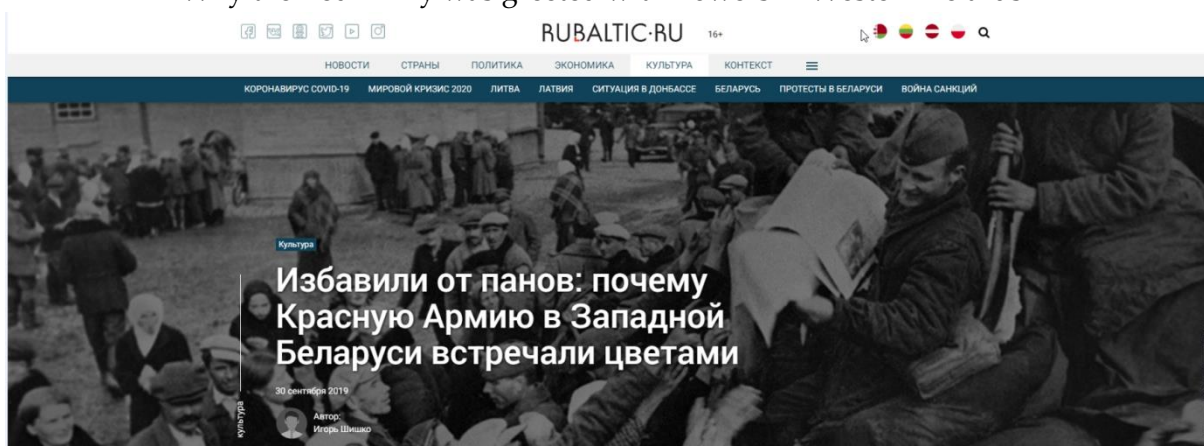
“Shame on you!” is the name of a campaign to expose alleged Polish lies about World War II (Sputnik 2020). In a similar vein – in numerous articles in Russian – the authors denounce the Polish view of postwar communist enslavement. The defense of the “Soviet liberation” narrative is accompanied by a campaign to rehabilitate Stalin and his rule, and more broadly, to glorify communist totalitarianism (Łazutkin 2020). I believe that a Polish reader who had the opportunity to read the narrative discussed here would be particularly pained by the fact that in place of the “Katyn lie” (now no longer defensible) there is an attempt at camouflaged justification of communist crimes<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> For example, the author writes that there is no evidence that there are graves of victims of executions carried out by communists in Kuropaty (Łazutkin 2020).



An important element of the contemporary anti-Polish historical narrative is spreading deceitful accusations against the Second Republic of Poland about making secret pacts with the Third Reich, which allegedly was the main reason for the outbreak of war, and which is another example of duplicating the main theses of Putin's propaganda<sup>18</sup>. On this occasion, modern Poles are accused of historical hypocrisy or amnesia, who, as we read, do not want to remember the "pact with Germany", the world's greatest anti-Semitism, and acts of aggression against neighbors, using the power of Germany, such as the occupation of Zaolzie by the Poles (Łazutkin 2020).

Fig. 8. "Liberated from the Lords:  
Why the Red Army was greeted with flowers in Western Belarus"



Source: I.Sziszko, *Избавили от панов: почему Красную Армию в Западной Беларуси встречали цветами*, <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/kultura-i-istoriya/30092019-izbavili-ot-panov-pochemu-krasnuyu-armiyu-v-zapadnoy-belarusi-vstrechali-tsvetami/>

<sup>18</sup> Both Belarusian and Russian communists like to look for the blame for the outbreak of World War II, but they never mention the complicity of the USSR. Putin's men - and their agents of influence in many countries, including Belarus - do not hesitate to make any historical falsification, nor do they feel ashamed of spreading arrogant lies, the target of which is very often Poland. The main element of the Kremlin's contemporary anti-Polish narrative is spreading deceitful accusations against the Second Republic of Poland for making secret agreements with the Third Reich, which allegedly was the main reason for the outbreak of the war. This is obviously part of Putin's broader strategy, which years ago proclaimed that "the collapse of the USSR was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the second half of the 20th century," and today, in an attempt to rebuild Russian influence in the world, wants to rehabilitate the USSR and restore pride in its power and successes. This message is addressed not only to the citizens of the Federation, but also to the brotherly nations within the CIS, especially Belarusians. Unfortunately, this narrative is effective because many Belarusian citizens still feel a bond with the past epoch and the powerful Soviet state. Falsifying history is an important instrument of the Kremlin's neo-imperialist activities.



In this perspective – as if in opposition to the despicable Polish actions – there is an attempt to rehabilitate the USSR, to restore pride in its power and successes. And one of such great and noble achievements was – as we read – successful “saving” of Slavic nations from ruthless military dictatorships (Polish and German)<sup>19</sup>. The reader also learns that the USSR, unlike pre-war Poland, had an exemplary nationality policy. It was for this reason that “your Poland” lost in September 1939 (Łazutkin 2020).

Any responsibility of the USSR for the acts of bestiality towards numerous nations (not only towards Poles) is unacceptable for the contemporary authorities in Russia, numerous circles (outside its borders), but also – sadly – by a large part of the post-Soviet societies, including Belarusians. Meanwhile, it is extremely easy for anti-Polish authors to blame Poland and Poles for the Holocaust.

On the basis of the analysis of the anti-Polish materials relating to historical issues, it can be concluded that they do not in any way consolidate the national identity of Belarusians. All the more, they do not contribute to the development of their historical consciousness. Thus, attacks on Poland and Poles do not serve to strengthen the Belarusian ethos, and it is rather a one-dimensional narrative about Belarus and its inhabitants as part of the Russian – ethnically, culturally, historically, etc. – world that was seized by Poles. Hostility towards Polishness is a key element in the success of this peculiar – repeated – Russification of the “Blue-Eyed” and its citizens. For centuries, Russia has been changing the forms but not the content of its policy. For Moscow, Belarusians and Ukrainians are just “Little Russians”<sup>20</sup>, and Belarus is ‘White Russia’. Unfortunately, there are people in Minsk who pretend to be experts in various fields, but their real ‘profession’ is spreading Moscow’s propaganda<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Since Poland - according to this narrative - was exclusively a ruthless colonizer of the eastern lands, the accession of Belarusians to the Soviet Union was beneficial and by all means rational for them.

<sup>20</sup> Little Russia, sometimes Little Rus’ (Russian: Малая Русь, romanized: Malaya Rus’, Малая Россия, Малороссия; Ukrainian: Мала Русь, romanized: Mala Rus’, Ukrainian: Малоросія, romanized: Malo Rociya; or Rus’ Minor from Greek: Μικρὰ Ῥωσία, romanized: Mikrá Rosía), is a geographical and historical term used to describe the modern-day territories of Ukraine. As a justification for its use it was attributed to be first used by Masovian-Galician ruler Bolesław-Jerzy II (House of Piast) who in 1335 signed his decrees as Dux totius Russiæ minoris (at the time of Kingdom of Galicia-Volhynia).

<sup>21</sup> The saddest image of the moral decline of the Kremlin’s agents of influence coming from temporarily ‘acting’ Belarusians is the group of ‘experts’ - political scientists, journalists, etc. who broadcast live from illegally seized Crimea about the eternal friendship of the two states and nations.



## SUMMARY

Anti-Polonism in Belarus is controlled by the media subordinated to President Lukashenka and remains a tool for creating negative attitudes towards the West as a whole. Poland is in a way the vanguard of the Western world. Therefore, it is also the main target of the Russian Federation.

Russia's growing problems, both internationally and domestically, have led to the intensification of Russian information warfare, which should be seen as a continuation of Soviet political technologies that have been used effectively for many years. Traditional psychological warfare operating with simplistic mental constructs is clearly referred to by contemporary Russian information geopolitics. It is a peculiar imperative of modern times that Moscow's (and its allies') political persuasive activity today takes into account the latest media and network tools, and these innovations mainly concern the organization of operations in the new technology environment. The new Russian theory of warfare involves behind-the-scenes influence on the opponent's society rather than open military actions – that is a vision of total war. Information operations are not just a form of supporting a military campaign, but the primary method of achieving victory – they are *de facto* warfare<sup>22</sup>.

The analysis of the collected texts leads to the general conclusion that the majority of authors critical of Poland simultaneously remain loyal to Russian politics and narration. It is worth noting that the anti-Polish authors do not hide their Russophilia at all. Unfortunately, the Belarusian government take active part in the new information war. Minsk's propagandists spreading Polonophobic theses, which often contain elements of the speech of hatred towards Poland and Poles, are usually people of communist, pro-government and pro-Russian views. Anti-Polonism consists in mixing facts and lies skillfully (especially in relation to the past) and it takes advantage of ignorance and lack of criticism of Belarusians. Anti-Polonism in the Belarusian media is largely a result of the activity of Russian propaganda; it is a "softened" version of Kremlin's Polonophobia. And since Russian imperialism feeds on complexes and insecurity, Lukashenka's anti-Polish propaganda has a similar orientation.

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<sup>22</sup> Due to the Internet and social media, it is now possible to do things that the old Soviet specialists in psychological warfare could only dream of – changing the internal politics of other countries using information (or disinformation) alone.



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