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SOCIAL THOUGHT IN 1960s-1970s' BELARUS: HISTORY, NATION AND INDEPENDENCE

Creating a chronology of the history of post-war Belarus, we will certainly consider the general periodization of the history of the Soviet Union. Naturally, accentuation of the periods of Stalin's Terror, Khrushchev's Thaw and Brezhnev Stagnation is similarly valid for determination of the history of the BSSR. But these definitions of the grand narrative are not able to characterize the specifics of the Belarusian history. After all, there is a history of social thought, which has manifested itself in its diversity, despite the seeming monotony of the intellectual life. Considering the cost of the printed word in the Soviet era, we shall use only published texts for analysis of the sentiments of social thought.

The Academic Discussion of the Mid 1960s: Forming the Postulates

The mid-1960s were notorious for an unprecedented for the Soviet Belarus public historiographic debate. Besides, some names symbolic for the present times were also actualized during those events.

The immediate impetus for the debate was the publication of the work by Aliaksandr Koršunaŭ (rus. Korshunov) on the Orthodox writer, polemicist, and the church leader of the first half of the 17th century Athanasius Filipovič (Koršunaŭ, 1965). But appearance of controversy is associated with the name of the author of the review on this book, the Belarusian literary critic Mikoła Praškovič.

Praškovič himself was quite a colourful figure (for details see: Čamiarycki, 2004: 149-152). As a specialist in Ancient Belarusian Literature, he worked at the Institute of Literature named after Janka Kupala, at the Academy of Sciences of the BSSR. In 1965, Praškovič defended his candidate's dissertation on the early period of work of Simeon of Polack. Thus, he could develop himself in the professional sphere. But, as noted by all who knew him, Praškovič had a temper that was difficult to lock in an academic environment. In the same way, Praškovič's review (1965: 174-177) on Koršunaŭ's academic work appeared to be polemically sharp, suspended the official views and was subjected to a wide publicity in Belarus.

In general, Praškovič rated Koršunaŭ's work quite highly, but rather scathingly criticized some historical stereotypes inculcated by the semiofficial propaganda. Thus, referring to Koršunaŭ's statement that "*bearing in mind*

[1] Passport spelling: Aleh Dziarnovich, in Belarusian: Алег Дзярновіч

the interests of the lower classes, he [Athanasius Filipovič – A.Dz.] went to Moscow to seek protection from Catholic aggression and tyranny," the reviewer evaluated this thesis as "at least frivolous". Further on, Praškovič wrote more bluntly: *"With his whole flow of thought, the researcher affirms that the Orthodox monk wanted to trade espionage information to the orthodox king for material assistance to Kupiatits Monastery"* near Pinsk, where Filipovič lived for some time. And for the *"Orthodox monk, the Union was certainly a deadly evil. He wanted help from the Orthodox king to destroy the abhorrent Union. The social liberation is out of the question."*

The very idea of the Church Union was viewed by Praškovič quite positively: *"The religious struggle, mutual intrigues, blackmailing, bribes and accusations weakened the already weak Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which was forced to join the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569. The most prudent people, realizing the harm and danger of internal contradictions, found the only way out of this predicament: to unite the Orthodox and the Uniates (Greek Catholics – A.Dz.) in the church council by mutual concessions, and create a Patriarchate for Belarus and Ukraine with the center in Kyiv. Indeed, it was at that time a very progressive idea. Creation of such patriarchate would firstly cease internal religious problems in the country, and secondly, would pull the Uniates out of the Jesuits' influence. But. As fairly pointed out by Koršunaŭ, this idea turned out to be a utopia."* In general, Praškovič noted that *"Koršunaŭ's view of the Union (Church Union – A.Dz.) is obsolete and one-sided."* And *"he takes the purposes of introducing the Union for its ultimate result."*

Also, the issues of terminology - so relevant even today - drew Praškovič's attention. Here, it is important to understand that the discussion around the semantic field of terms "Lithuania" (Litva) and "Lithuanian" (Litoŭski) is by no means an invention of Mikola Jermalovič and practice of the 1980s-1990s. The example with Praškovič demonstrates that these issues were raised in the academic environment as early as in the 1960s. In continuation, here is another typical terminological passage by Praškovič: *"Identification of the term 'Russian' from the times of Kyivan Rus' with its current meaning has also led Korshunaŭ to a misunderstanding. Thus, he affirms that the St. Sofia Cathedral in Kyiv is the 'pride of the Russian people'. Of course, Koršunaŭ had in mind all the East Slavs of Kyivan Rus'. Then, apparently, he should have said so clearly."*

One has to have a good understanding of the specifics of the Soviet - including scientific - press of those years. The thought pronounced there represented not just the voice of the author, but also the position of the edition which had the official approval for publication. Mikola Praškovič's review was published at the very end of 1965, and in February 1966 the main official newspaper of the BSSR "Sovetskaya Byelorussiya" printed a critical feedback

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on this review by quite unrenowned postgraduates Uladzimir Liukievič and Jakaŭ Traščanok (1966). Yes, this is the same Traščanok, who in another era will be rated as one of the most significant representatives of the "directive historiography" (see: Smaliančuk, 2006: 56-64; Smaliančuk, 2007: 351-361; Naša Niva, 2003).

Polemically disagreeing with some theses of Mikola Praškovič's review, primarily on the possible positive evaluation of the project of the Church Union, the reviewers took the liberty to obviously hyperbolize and hypertrophy Praškovič's views. In particular, they attributed Praškovič with affirmation that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a Belarusian and Ukrainian state, which does not correspond to the text of the Belarusian philologist. But, more importantly, these authors allowed themselves political assessments of the discussed text: *"The fudge about the Grand Duchy of Lithuania [in lowercase letters in the original – A.Dz.], that in that state the Belarusian people lived in prosperity, that the Union was a specifically Belarusian religion is not original or new. Its complete scientific failure and questionable political significance has long been disclosed by the Soviet historians. Therefore, the appearance of these false allegations in the pages of "Polymia" ("Flame") can not but cause surprise."* And further on more bluntly: *"We do not believe that the editorial board of 'Polymia' share the 'historical concepts' of M. Praškovič, but are convinced that they have to remember their duties to carefully read all the materials printed in the magazine. It is not appropriate for a basic literary, artistic and socio-political magazine to provide their pages for promotion of views that distort the history of the Belarusian people and have nothing to do with science."*

The status of the publication raises questions. This very critical text was placed just under the heading "Letter to the editor." Could critical texts by unknown postgraduates get in the pages of the main newspaper of the BSSR so easy in those days? The subsequent events show that the publication was only a part of a planned action. As noted by literary historian Viačaslaŭ Čamiarycki, Praškovič's publication provoked a sharply negative reaction from the main semi-official historian Laŭren Abecadarski and his associates. His article in 1966 served as the basis for a special scientific debate at the Academy of Sciences on the issues of Belarusian statehood, assessment of the role of the Church Union in the history of the Belarusian people, and others. (Čamiarycki, 2004: 149).

Adam Maĺdzis, recalling the atmosphere of that discussion, noted that the first time Praškovič came under a "significant trial" in the large conference hall of the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences after publishing his review on Koršunaŭ's book in "Polymia" (Maĺdzis, 2003). According to Maĺdzis, Praškovič in his review *"criticized Orthodoxy and cautiously praised Uniatism, which at that time was considered a great sedition."* All this *"gave reason to the*

two careful postgraduates from the provinces, Liukievič and Traščanok, to accuse Praškovič in Belarusian nationalism in 'Sovetskaya Byelorussiya'. A command was received from the top: to sort it out, to condemn." The "trial" lasted for two days, as a real international scientific conference. *"The hall was full, because many attended such trials as theatrical spectacles. But young people supported Praškovič – some with a word, and some with applause. Therefore, each party considered itself both the winner and the loser.*" It will be interesting to note that Koršunaŭ was the one feeling most "awkward", because *"although the review seemed to praise his book, he was required to dissociate himself from the reviewer...*" But despite the validity of one or the other position, all the leaders - from the science department of the Central Committee of the KPB (the Communist Party of Belarus) to newspaper editors and directors of academic institutions - began to treat Praškovič cautiously. He broke an unwritten rule of loyalty - triggered a public debate.

Belarusian philosopher Uladzimir Konan in his memoirs adds other features of that discussion (Konan, 2008). We can see that not all of the scientific community was ready to just passively accept the ideological guidance, and the unwinding intrigue was not one-sided: *"It was then that the Bolshevik ideologist of 'Sovetskaya Byelorussiya' Abecadarski got entrapped: he agreed to participate in an academic debate on the dispute. Though even I, then inexperienced assistant, understood that Abecadarski with his academic followers will be isolated.*" Everything turned out according to Konan - literary critics, historians, philosophers were delivering speeches one after another, and having paid the service tribute to the official atheism and Marxist-Leninist dialectics, having gently criticized Praškovič for "Unionphilism" and polemical exaggerations, "*quite thoroughly, though politely criticized Abecadarism (orig.: Abecadarščyna). Lauren was entirely boiling inside, but was at first keeping cool as Kuliašoŭ's 'young man under interrogation', repeating his well-known arguments and theses.*"

As Konan recollects, somewhere in the middle of the debate a portly young man with an open and calm face came out to the podium. He did not look like an ordinary, ever stooped scientist with his 83-ruble pay. "'*I am an artist Liavon Barazna - presented himself an unknown to the public speaker. – I am not an academic scholar, but know something about the issue of the dispute.' And within formal correctness, but without those compromising 'however', 'nevertheless', 'on the one hand and on the other hand', showed all unscientificness of Abecadarism and convincingly proved correctness of Praškovič's statements.*"

As we can see, public debate in the mid 1960s could still develop in an uncontrolled way, violating the planned scenario of condemnation. As a result, being quite confident in the university auditory, Laŭren Abecadarski "*exploded, seemed to be shouting something, finally shook his finger menacin-*

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gly at everyone (in translation into the official 'Bolshevik-NKVD language' that gesture apparently meant: 'You just wait, bloody hell, I will show you who you are!'), and left the academic amphitheater."

But the editors of "Polymia" magazine neither remained voiceless in this pressing situation. Philosopher Mikoła Alieksiutovič using the name of the text in "Sovetskaya Byelorussiya", published his detailed article "But where is the objective truth?" in "Polymya" (Alieksiutovič, 1966: 179-185). Already at the beginning of his text, the author formulated the crucial problems, due to which the debate turned so hot: *"The negative reaction to the review of M. Praškovič has its own explanation. The thing is that even nowadays there is a category of people who fail to understand that not everything related to the activities of Russian tsars and the Orthodox Church was progressive. Therefore, everything that came to us from the countries of Western Europe (and even from Slavic Poland) is perceived by them as evil.*" Further, the author amplifies his thought: *"This is the reason of curses to all Catholics and praises to the Orthodox leaders, convictions of foreign monarchs and feudal lords and bows to the Russian tsar and landlords, curtseys to the Russian feudal state and suspicious attitude to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which by its ethnographic composition, territory and culture was predominantly Belarusian.*"

It is fully appropriate that in the mid 1960s the Belarusian philosopher based his views on the Marxist method. And indeed, if to strictly keep within this methodology, there is no place for the unconcealed sympathies for the Russian tsarism and obscurantism. Belarusian intellectuals of the Soviet era actively used such scenario of discussion.

As noted by Alieksiutovič, "*all abovementioned leads us to the most important issue raised by U. Liukievič and J. Traščanok in their article. It is the question of the state.*" Alieksiutovič quotes Liukievič and Traščanok: *"The Belarusian people obtained statehood only through the victory in the Great October Socialist Revolution.*" But Alieksiutovič uses this thesis only to shift the discussion to another direction, breaking the hard-lined schemes of Liukievič and Traščanok: *"If the authors had clarified - the socialist statehood - there would be no reason for dispute. But a little earlier they claim that in the 13th century, Lithuanian feudal lords integrated the western areas of Rus', weakened by heavy fighting against Mongol-Tatars and German 'dogs-knights', into their state, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.*" But precisely in these lands, as Alieksiutovič noted, from the 14th century, the Belarusian nation began to form. And the "*Lithuanian and then Polish magnates kept the local feudal lords with all their rights and privileges, thus providing themselves with social support.*"

Thus, Alieksiutovič poses a rhetorical question: *"So, what do we have: there were West Russian lands that were fighting against strangers, but there was no state. Who inhabited these lands: savages organized in clans, kins, or people who were already familiar with the state system? It is seen from the article of U.*

Liukievič and J. Traščanok that these lands were already ruled by feudal lords, but there was …no state. And suddenly Lithuanian feudal lords just took these sparse lands and included them in their state. Where is the logic in this?"

Perhaps such argumentation, after passionate debate in 1980s-1990s looks a bit simplistic, but that was actually the first relatively free - meaning not under such rigid pressure - historiographic debate in post-Stalin Soviet Belarus. And the style of the era itself demanded appealing to the obvious things.

One phrase from Mikola Alieksiutovič's article can be considered a refrain to all that debate: *"…one can not just simply cross out few centuries of the history of the Belarusian people only because at the relevant time there was no ethnographic term 'Belarus' yet."*

Concerning the history of the pogrom of the "Academic environment", it is well described (detailed description: Čarniaŭski, 1999: 55-64; Čarniaŭski, 2004: 196-204; see also: Antanovič, 1991; Kaŭrus, 1993; Misko, 1994 ; Rabkievič, 1995; Lyč and Navicki, 1996: 374-375; Dziarnovič, 2004: 11-13). Those events have also left archival sources in open archives (expulsion of V. Rabkievič from the CPSU: NARB Fund 447, inventory 4, case 2: p. 81; case 6: pp. 52-54; materials on employees of the Academy of Sciences of the BSSR: NARB Fund 4, inventory 20, case 518: p. 248). We should give a little more detail on the fate of Mikola Praškovič, since his text was in the heart of the debate and provoked such response. Viačaslaŭ Čamiarycki wrote that Praškovič was a trustful, open and unnecessarily emotional man who was used by the special agencies, *"under the watchful eye of which he was kept,"* for discrediting some national patriots, fabrication of the case and "revealing" a "nest of Belarusian nationalists" at the Academy of Sciences of the BSSR ("Academic environment") in 1973-1974. As a result, along with Praškovič suffered a whole group of Belarusian scientists, especially Alieś Kaŭrus, Sciapan Misko, Valiancin Rabkievič and Michaś Čarniaŭski, who were dismissed from their jobs and could not find employment anywhere in their specialty for a long time. On a charge of Belarusian nationalism in 1974, Praškovič was also dismissed from his job at the Academy of Sciences. For some time he was unemployed, then worked as a loader, as a proofreader in "Rodnaya Pryroda" ("Our Nature") magazine and "Vecherniy Minsk" ("The Evening Minsk") newspaper. In 1982, he left the job for health reasons. Praškovič tragically died in a fire in his home village (Čamiarycki, 2004: 150).

Adam Maĺdzis evaluates some character weakness of our hero more bluntly: *"[Praškovič] is earthly, peasant-like, trustful Belarusian maximalist. Even postgraduate studies at the Leningrad Pushkin House*[2] *did not deprive Praškovič of his peasant naivety. He could tell anyone about his correspondence with Ukrainian patriots, about him collecting money for them fired from their jobs.*

[2] "Pushkin House": Institute of Russian Literature of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (Russian Academy of Sciences).

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He could invite anyone - for just being Belarusian-speaking - to his postgraduate room, and then to a studio flat in Kuibyshev Street."

Praškovič was single, so to meet at his place - in the room, and later in the flat - was advantageous, and sometimes with no alternatives. Young scientists, mostly recent migrants from rural areas, had simply no other opportunity to meet outside of work. And then "*someone often intentionally began political fantasies: like who will be which minister when we come to power. Most of us took it as a game.*" But it was quite a risky game for that time: "*And Praškovič as the owner was sitting and listening, sometimes naively echoed, not realizing that someone needed this to get promoted. And from above came the pressure...*"

Dismissed, for long time Praškovič had no work, and "*to have something to eat, he sometimes visited the Karatkievičs and us. Then he somehow got a job as a proofreader. Praškovič died tragically: he lit a cigarette in his native house in Biarezina region, lay down on bed and burnt...*" (Maĺdzis, 2003).

Samizdat of the 1970s: Formulation of Political Objectives

The tragic story of Mikola Praškovič not only illustrates the hard choice of the humanities scientist, but also shows us what weight the written word and bravely expressed - despite the circumstances - thought of the researcher had at the time. During the debate of the mid 1960s those abstracts of the Belarusian historiography were clearly voiced, which will continue to be the target of propaganda campaigns - particularity of the history of Belarus, its difference from the Russian and Polish visions of history; cultural - including religious - distinctiveness of Belarus; the importance of presence of the Western (Latin) civilization for the socio-cultural space. For more than a century, these virtually neutral points of view remain the irritant points for the followers of West-Rusism and its modern primitive versions (we shall note also that the founders of West-Rusism in the middle of the 19th century wrote exactly about the cultural distinctiveness of the region).

But such public debates on historiographic matters, as occurred in mid 1960s, could not get into the pages of legal publications in 1970s, after the pogrom at the Academy of Sciences and other intellectual circles. Therefore, samizdat starts to circulate actively, determining the specificity of social activity of the period. The turning point in this were the events of the first half – mid 1970s: the pogrom of the "Academic environment" and the public reaction to repressions. As a result, political samizdat - including the periodic one - appeared in Belarus. The peculiarity of spreading of these uncensored, socially significant texts lies in the fact that their reproduction takes place outside of the author's control, in the course of their circulation in the readers' environment. While copying of the uncensored literature became possible through introduction of a typewriter into the life of the Soviet man (Daniel, 2005: 29).

The analytical review "The Situation in Belarus. 1974" signed by Hienrych Rakutovič - a pseudonym behind which was Zianon Paźniak - can be evaluated as a real information explosion. The analytical review began with a request: *"Destruction of our intellectuals by KGB takes place in utter silence. If these pages fall into the hands of our brothers and confederates from other Soviet republics who possess greater opportunities of communication and information, we hope for their solidarity and support."* The author of the text describes the situation in Belarus in the early 1970s with the help of strong images: *"The policy of violence and deception is carried on in Belarus, almost unabatedly, since the 1930s. In the times of so-called 'Khrushchev's democracy' we were not able to fully rehabilitate the majority of our national political figures, writers and poets. Violence and lies have formed a very specific situation in the country. As such, we are still neck-deep in the blood of the 1930s. Physical and moral losses were total and so significant that our generation feels them constantly."* Reprints and photocopies of the review were spread across Belarus and abroad.

In 1975, Mikola Jermalovič also starts regular production of his underground periodical "Hutarki" ("Conversations"). In fact, "Hutarki" were continuation of a handwritten magazine "Padsnieżnik" ("Snowdrop") published by Jermalovič during 1963-1964 (four issues published), but suspended after Nikita Khrushchev's dismissal from power, when a climate of suspicion and reveal was established in public life.

"Hutarki" were published by Mikola Jermalovič under the pseudonym of Symon Bielarus during 1975-1976 (for technical specifications of the publication see: Laŭryk and Androsik, 1998: 25-30). As of today, in total 48 issues are known to have been published.[3] The publication's motto was "On everything that hurts". This motto was sometimes perceived by the readers as a parallel name of the publication. In addition, the first page contained an epigraph from Janka Kupala "Only such conversation goes around…"

Both in the title of the publication and in its structure and principles of presenting information, Jermalovič directly appealed to the tradition of a particular category of works in Belarusian literature of the 19th century. "Hutarki" at that time were publicist and agitation, often anonymous works, which covered topical social problems or issues of public morality. Written in a fictionalized form or as a conversation of two or more persons, the 19th century "Hu-

[3] "Hutarki" both as separate editions and as preserved and available package, were reprinted several times. The first publication was carried out by Mikola Jermalovič himself in a magazine of the Belarusian Association of the Blind (M. Jermalovič was visually impaired himself and was a member of the Association): Jermalovič, 1993-1994. Further publications of the available packages Jermalovič, 2001b: 151-183; Jermalovič, 2007a: 195-273; Jermalovič, 2010: 525-550 (this edition was reprinted after "Skryžali Spadčyny" (Jermalovič, 2007a), but omitted the numbering and precise dating of "Hutarki"). Publication of separate editions: Jermalovič, 2001a; Jermalovič, 2007b.

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tarki" focused on dialogue with the readers (Marcheĺ and Čamiarycki, 2007: 292-299). Similarly in Jermalovič's "Hutarki", confidential conversations on topical issues alternate with poems and historical essays.

Not by genre, but thematically "Hutarki" can be divided into two thematic clusters. One of them is what concerns the Belarusian intellectual, or, as signalized by Jermalovič himself, something "that hurts." In both metaphorical and humorous "Hutarki" No. 3 titled "*Why Would a Pig Need Horns*", the author sarcastically displays the image of his companion: "*We live in the age when not only things that were in fairy tales come true, but even what was not in them. For example horned pigs! ... I have long been puzzled over why such an unusual breed spawned specifically with us in Belarus. But once, I heard one such pig grunting...*"

Further, Symon Bielarus bitterly describes what he heard and tries to engage it in discussion:

"Soon there will be none of your Belarus, as there will be no Belarusians, and your language. Such is the program given to us."
"But is that all that is written in the program?"
"I don't know, maybe there's something else there, but I read only that."
I contradicted humbly:
"There will be people who will not let you..."
The pig was not even embarrassed, but grinned and hinted menacingly:
"Why would we need horns then?"
Then I understood what the horned pigs were bred for."[4]

This issue of "Hutarki" is dated November 28, 1975. And a little later, in "Hutarki" "*Language is People's Flag*" (No. 5, December 12, 1975), the author comes up to a broader understanding of the issue of freedom in the USSR: "*The freedom of denial of our language is so far the only freedom that is provided to us and which we can use unopposedly. Perhaps that is why there are people who, due to the lack of other freedoms, hurry to take advantage at least of this freedom*" (Jermalovič, 2001b: 156).

But at the end of 1975, Mikola Jermalovič passes from complaints to the current state of the region, freedom, culture, and language in the form of "Hutarki" No. 7 (December 26, 1975). He prints a text which can actually be called a manifesto of Belarusian national intelligentsia "To the One Who Woke Up." This document is so important for the formation of public position that it should be widely quoted:

"Dear friend! You have already opened your eyes and see the world correctly. But you are still frightened, you feel lonely, weak, and even unwanted.

[4] Here and further quoted from the publication of "Hutarki" in "Polymia" magazine made on the basis of personal archive of artist Aliaksiej Maračkin: Jermalovič, 2001b: 154-155.

Well, of course. The new always scares and generates uncertainty. Some have a treacherous thought: 'Why should I follow an unknown narrow path if I can go with many others along a wide road.' And there is nothing to hide here – others, having taken a few steps into the unknown, are coming back and turn to the trampled way."

Having caught this feeling of uncertainty of the Belarusian intellectual, Jermalovič tries to find arguments for strength: *"But do not give in to this mood, defeat it. First of all you must always remember that you live on your land and nobody else but you are the owner of it. If you never forget it, you will always be confident in your action."*

Further, a program of individual behaviour is formulated: *"Also know that no one will bring happiness and order to your Motherland except yourself, so take the destiny of your Homeland into your hands. Having woken yourself, wake the others to deliberate national life. If you make even one person join the patriotic work – you will make a great deed. And you can do much more. Never abandon your native language, especially while living in your home country. Always use it for speaking and writing, fight for it. Know that the one who preaches denial of our native language, does not abandon his own language, but also dictates it to others."*

The quoted above would already be enough for this Jermalovič's "Hutarki" to enter the history of the Belarusian thought. But the author made a bigger sensation; he voiced those political goals which at that time seemed unreal: *"Remember firmly that salvation of your Motherland is in its freedom and independence. Therefore, fighting for its freedom and independence, you are fighting for its future. Your greatest wealth is your Motherland. If you lose it, you will become poor yourself, and poverty will be conveyed by inheritance to your children. Therefore, give your entire life to the Motherland. Be with it in all of your thoughts; each word must be in its defense, each of your actions has to be in favour of the country. Let every step of yours be a step towards the freedom of your Homeland!"*

However, Mikola Jermalovič himself understood the totalness of the situation: *"We live in a terrible time, during a pitch-dark night. We are totally robbed. All that is ours is in foreign hands. Everything became not ours. Deprived of all, powerless slaves and labourers of a heartless treasury, we are doomed to a miserable existence. We do not know when the end of this terrible night will come. Anyway, there is no glimpse of light yet."*

Though here is his recipe for salvation: *"But if today it is not yet possible to free our hands from the chains, we still can release our soul. If today we can not get our wealth back from the foreign hands, let our hearts be free from the fear of a monstrous force of the power, let our minds cast off the chains of lies that entangled them. May the New Year give us free songs, free thoughts and free words. Of course, that is not all, but here is where real FREEDOM begins!"*

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In this text, we see very harsh evaluations of the Soviet reality: *"We live in a terrible time, during a pitch-dark night. We are totally robbed. All that is ours is in foreign hands."* But the programme of action is already formulated: *"Having woken yourself, wake the others to deliberate national life... But if today it is not yet possible to free our hands from the chains, we still can release our souls."* What is extremely important is that in this manifesto, virtually for the first time in the post-Stalin Soviet Belarus, appears the concept of independence: *"Remember firmly that salvation of your Motherland is in its freedom and independence. Therefore, fighting for its freedom and independence, you are fighting for its future."* Thus, the key word "independence" was pronounced and written.

In the next issues of "Hutarki", Mikola Jermalovič developed his thesis of independence. In the second issue of 1976 (January 9) titled *"The Cause of Our Wounds and Misfortunes,"* the author outlined the existence of historical and political stereotype regarding Belarus: *"Widely spread became an idea that Belarus has never been and can not be independent, and that it necessarily has to form alliances with other states and - it goes without saying - to take a subordinate place in these alliances. It will not be a big difficulty to confute this lie, but the fact that it is firmly driven into our heads and took the position of indisputable truth there shows how hard our enemies have worked on clogging our consciousness and how careless we were to allow the unhampered expansion of such ideological weed among us"* (Jermalovič, 2001b: 159).

At the end of this issue of "Hutarki," Mikola Jermalovič states: *"...unions and alliances have never saved Belarus from the danger of war and destruction. But although wars brought the biggest losses to Belarus, they were not the main reason for its decline. Many European countries suffered no less from wars, but despite that they have achieved a great economic development and equally high political and cultural growth. This resulted from them being independent countries which decided their destiny themselves, built their economy and developed the culture at their own discretion and need. But Belarus was deprived of all that."*

And the final paragraph sharply identifies the problem: *"Once Janka Kupala appealed: 'Let's start digging into the causes of our wounds and misfortunes ourselves.' So, this many-centuries dependence on the neighbouring states that plundered and are plundering the material and spiritual wealth of Belarus, that destroyed and are destroying its national life, that suppressed and are suppressing its culture, was and is the main cause of the national decline of Belarus"* (Jermalovič, 2001b: 160 - 161).

There remains a task to find out how widely spread were "Hutarki"? It is totally impossible to say of any quantitative estimates now. But it is possible to name the environment in which "Hutarki" were copied, circulated, and from where they were distributed. It is a non-conformist informal art group

"Na Paddašku" ("In the Attic"). But, as noted by one of the leaders of "Na Paddašku" Jauhien Kulik, if in such categories we can talk about any informal circles, their circle was only one of several plausible environments of expansion of "Hutarki". Mikola Jermalovič himself also distributed his part of the typescript. Jaŭhien Kulik recollects: *"Mikola Jermalovič came to us to 'Na Paddašku' on various occasions and brought his 'Hutarki'. The first time it happened in early November 1975… Do not think that we were a strictly conspiratorial group that met for secret gatherings and switched on a copier. Everything was done in a much simpler way: we gave the materials to the colleagues to read, and then everyone was multiplying according to his possibilities. Only when it concerned the most important materials, we started the equipment: a juice squeezer converted to a multiplying machine, which we did not show to anyone... I believe that he did not type them himself, as it is unlikely that he could do that. Probably his wife was typing..."*

It is not known how many copies Jermalovič made himself. Obviously, in addition to "Na Paddašku", "Hutarki" were distributed in other circles, since, as noted by Kulik, *"...our group could print not much, but there was an impression that there were many more 'Hutarki' around."*

Regarding the area of the circulation of samizdat, Kulik notes the cautious tactics of the participants in this environment: *" 'Hutarki' were somehow spread by themselves from my workshop. It happened so that they contained some important material. In such case, it was published in a bigger number of copies. If we were still more active in that, we would have hardly survived for those 20 years of existence of 'Na Paddašku'. We totally trusted each other, but were a rather closed circle. It is our successors, the 'young league' who came after us that make boast of the fact that their activities were directed outwards, but it was a totally different time in the 70s"* (Kulik, 2001).

But not only "Hutarki" became a symbol of the uncensored press in Belarus in the 1970s. At the same time when Mikola Jermalovič approached the finish line of his samizdat project, an author with a very different biography started to work on the text which became symbolic for the independent thought. We are talking about the *"Letter to a Russian Friend"*, known in those days as anonymous.[5] The author of the text was Aliaksiej Kaŭka. Here we need to say at least a few words on the biography of this man, for better understanding of the context of writing the "Letter".

Aliaksiej Kaŭka was a graduate of the Faculty of Philology at the Belarusian State University (1961), and the prospects of the service career in the Soviet system opened in front of him, particularly in the Komsomol sphere. He was an instructor, and in 1959-1963 worked as the first secretary of the

[5] Recent publications of the text: Kaŭka, 1991a: 153-174; Kaŭka, 1991b: 370-391; Kaŭka, 1998: 162-169). Quotations in our article are provided in accordance with the Belarusian translation by Uladzimir Arloŭ for the book "Being Polite to History": Kaŭka, 1991b).

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Červien district committee of LKSMB (LCUBY, Lenin Communist Union of Belarusian Youth); since 1963 appointed as the secretary of the Minsk regional committee of Komsomol, since 1968 was the responsible organizer of the International Department of the Central Committee of Komsomol (All-Union Lenin Communist Union of Youth), where he "supervised" the Polish Komsomol. In 1971 he graduated from the Academy of Social Sciences under the CPSU Central Committee, simultaneously becoming a candidate of historical sciences.

Gradually, two features of his biography - a clear sense of national identity and wide for a Soviet man knowledge of the realities outside the Soviet Union - led Kaŭka to rethinking of his personal role in the life of society. During November 1976 - April 1977 he writes a "Letter to a Russian Friend." Written in the form of an appeal to the Russian intelligentsia, this text was devoted to understanding of the historical path of the Belarusians, defending the distinctive character of this culture, arguing for the right of Belarusians to self-determination. In the "Letter", the cultural policy of the communist authorities in Belarus was clearly defined as assimilatory: "*we are now witnessing in Byelorussia a process of wide-scale assimilation*" (Kaŭka, 1991b: 371; Kaŭka, 1979: 34). Equality of the Belarusian and Russian languages in the BSSR was compared to equality of the Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf. And the thesis about a similar to colonial status of Belarus was later one of the most important for the independent Belarusian thought. In historiosophic sense, the author followed the concept of a pulled-apart destiny of Belarus between Russia and Poland. Despite the fact that one can feel a "mild" influence of Marxism in the "Letter", the communist perspective is described with irony and scepticism.

In 1977, Kaŭka began to distribute the anonymous text of the "Letter" in Moscow, Belarus and Poland. The "Letter" was translated by James Dingley into English and published in 1979 in London as a "document of the Belarusian samizdat" – "*Letter to a Russian Friend: A 'samizdat' publication from Soviet Belorussiya*" ([Kaŭka, 1979]). The "Letter" became widely known, and was read in Belarusian and Ukrainian editions of Radio "*Liberty*", published and cited in Belarusian, Polish ([Kaŭka, 1986]), Ukrainian, Russian emigration publications ([Kaŭka, 1980]).

As later noted by Kaŭka, the idea to write such text and get engaged in its distribution was born spontaneously. "*It was in autumn of 1976, during one of the regular 'table-talks' with a Russian friend, a former colleague in the international activities in VLKSM Central Committee (he was from St. Petersburg, a philologist, Balkanologist, great intellectual, one of those 'guardians and martyrs' of Rus', a bearer and creator of the Russian idea in its 'single, collective', of course Orthodox, essence). In the context of a conversation about Belarusians, my companion naturally noticed, not without cynicism: 'Well,*

you are not like the Chochols[6] *(but allegedly ours, blood-related), we can rely on you. And if you value your 'mova' (language) so much, well, keep your 'ў', pronounce 'Uladzimir' instead of 'Vladimir' (say, we will not be offended).' This case became an impulse: 'There was no way to be silent, and the work on the "Letter to a Russian friend" began.'"*

This text was a very interesting attempt to break through to the consciousness of the Russian intelligentsia in the search for mutual understanding of the national interests of Belarusians: *"I ought not therefore to drag out this already not exactly 'tidy' letter. But it I not my fault that, as I agonized over the letter, I thought not only of my friends. I also thought about those who are not well disposed towards us. As is well known, the Lord omitted to give them the gift of being quick-witted"* (Kaŭka, 1991b: 390; Kaŭka, 1979: 57). Simultaneously with the "Letter" appeared the Belarusian samizdat, the uncensored texts published outside the country. Belarusian problems gained wider publicity in the world.

Final Thesis

This review allows us to understand how hot the degree of public debate among the Belarusian national intelligentsia was. Of course, one can remark that the theses pronounced in public debate or brave ideas published in samizdat reached only a tiny part of the population of the BSSR.

But at that stage, it was very important to develop the concepts and visions that would be widely circulating in the era of perestroika. Anyhow, it can be stated that many basic provisions of the Belarusian debates - the problems of self-identity and the status of the Belarusian language - had been clearly defined in the publications of the 1960s-1970s. Moreover, in the mid 1970s, a requirement of independence for Belarus was put on paper, which at that time looked absolutely fantastic. It appears that some things have to be pronounced first, while their implementation will be carried out in a way not completely foreseen by the authors and protagonists of these concepts.

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[6] "Chochly" is disparaging or ironic Russian name of Ukrainians.

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