

Salmygina E. D.

# THE PAN-SLAVIST COMPONENT IN THE FOREIGN POLICY IDENTITY OF BELARUS

## Introduction

At the present stage of development Belarus has faced a large number of acute problems related to political and public administration, with the development of relations in the international arena, the impact of sanctions imposed by the European Union and the United States on the country's economy and future development, as well as the fading of moral and spiritual guidelines of modern Belarusian society, the lack of common values that leading to a split in the views of the perception of the Republic of Belarus in the international arena. It can be argued that after the presidential elections in Belarus (2020), as well as after the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine (February 2022), there is a strong shift in relations between Russia and Belarus, the work on the creation of a union state of Russia and Belarus, which began in the 90s, deepens and intensifies, which, undoubtedly, is caused by external factors affecting the further development of the two countries.

Today, Pan-Slavism as a factor in the formation of the foreign policy identity of the Republic of Belarus plays an important role. The significance and role of Pan-Slavism are described in the works of such scientists as V. A. Boldin, A. A. Lukyanchik, A. A. Grigorieva, L. P. Lapteva, Hans Kohn, Donchev Stoyan Dimitrov, and many others. The relevance of this scientific article is that it examines the influence of Pan-Slavism on the identity of the Republic of Belarus. The novelty of this work is an attempt to analyze the impact of pan-Slavism on politics and society in Belarus. The main scientific problem that is raised in this study is the influence of Pan-Slavism on the identity of Belarus. Thus, the purpose of this article is an attempt to analyze the role of Pan-Slavism in the politics and public life of the Republic of Belarus.

## Pan-Slavism

Slavic peoples are one of the largest ethno-language communities in Europe, which has a long and rich history. Peoples of this community interact not only with each other but also with other nations. Therefore, we can say that any processes that took place in the Slavic world, political, economic, or social, played an important role in world history, and also influenced many processes not only in Europe but also in the whole world [5]. Initially, Pan - Slavism arose as an attempt to resist oppression from Western European countries and peoples [6, p. 37].

Pan-Slavism is «a movement based on the conviction that

all speakers of Slavic languages belong to a single nation. This was a starting point for the activities that aimed to bring Slav cultures and languages closer» [11]. The historical past, namely traditions, and customs, everyday life, language, religion, national cuisine, holidays, traditional costumes, etc., undoubtedly shape and determine the further development of the state and society itself. The term «Pan-Slavism» appeared in the early XIX century and had both positive and negative connotations. Lapteva L.P. argues that exactly at the end of the XVIII – beginning of the XIX century, under the influence of historical and political events of that time, Pan-Slavism forms its main idea – «the possibility of uniting all Slavs on the basis of: the kinship of languages originating from a common root; the proximity of individual elements of everyday life, traditions, and customs in antiquity; the kinship of folklore and folk culture, as well as the similarity of some features of literature in the early Christian period» [9; p. 5].

However, Hans Kohn argued in his research that similarly to Pan-Germanism «Pan-Slavism was primarily a movement for the expansion of great Russian power by the incorporation of other Slav-speaking peoples, even against their will, into a greater Russia, which in population and economic resources would afford a sufficient basis for Russian world domination. Or, as it was called in the nineteenth century, a Russian universal monarchy» [8, p. 71].

Boldin V. A., in his monograph, believes that the most complete definition of Pan-Slavism is given by Shirinyats A. A. and Myrikova A.V. in which they reveal all the features and characteristics of Pan-Slavism – «Pan-Slavism is an ideological and political complex, including a variety of doctrines, theories, concepts, and ideas, at the head of which there is the task of cooperation and unity of actions in cultural and/or political relations of related (by blood, language, religion, everyday culture, historical memory, territory) Slavic and close to them peoples and nationalities» [4, p. 83]. Thus, Pan-Slavism stands for the unification of the Slavic world in order to preserve the traditions and peculiarities of Slavic culture and civilization, as well as for mutually beneficial economic and political cooperation.

## Pan-Slavism and Belarus

According to Lukyanchik A.A.'s research, one of the factors contributing to the revival of the Pan-Slavic idea, and especially to the integration process, is the common goals of states, for example, such as common economic, foreign policy goals and others [10, p. 269-274].

The prerequisite for the emergence of any integration associations is primarily economic factors, as well as the territorial proximity of states. The new economic reality of the Republic of Belarus pushes it to closer and even deeper cooperation with the Russian Federation. The common interests of the two Slavic peoples – Russia and Belarus – are also manifested in foreign policy. Alexander Lukashenko, speaking «speaking about the Russian military operation, said that Minsk supports Moscow, but for Belarusians, the clash of Russians and Ukrainians is a tragedy» [1]. Today we are witnessing how the economic cooperation between Russia and Belarus is strengthening, how cooperation in all spheres is deepening, and how the work on the Union State of Russia and Belarus is progressing. According to official data, Russia and Belarus plan to develop new integration programs for the Union State in the near future. «They should complement the 28 existing programs, the implementation of which is in full swing. Joint projects to date have made it possible to achieve the historically maximum volume of mutual turnover of goods and services. While maintaining the existing approaches to integration processes, the development opportunities of Russia and Belarus are almost limitless» [7]. Of course, the common historical memory, the kinship of languages, the similarity of traditions and customs, the kinship of folklore and culture, as well as common economic and political goals – all these confirm that the Pan-Slavic component plays an important role in the foreign policy agenda of the Republic of Belarus. Today Belarus and Russia intend to deepen and expand mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries, based not only on the common interests of the two countries but also on the common prosperity of the two close Slavic peoples. At the end of 2022, the Secretary of the Union State Dmitry Mezentsev said that Belarus and Russia intend to expand their cooperation in various fields. «The package of 28 union programs was approved by the decree of the Supreme State Council on November 4, 2021. By the beginning of 2023, it has been implemented by almost 68% (671 out of 989 events). Seven programs related to the traceability of goods, the financial industry, accounting, nuclear energy, as well as currency, transport, veterinary and quarantine control have already been fully implemented. The implementation of 21 programs continues, including in the field of agriculture, industrial production, energy, and transport» [7].

The President of the Republic of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, adheres to the idea of Pan-Slavism, namely close cooperation among Slavic countries, and the strong friendship of Slavic peoples. In his interview with a journalist for the France-Press news agency, he said that «since the 90s he has always said that there are Slavic states». In it, he «saw Poles, Slovaks, Bulgarians and others» [2]. According to the Belarusian President, we «cannot lose the connection between the Slavic peoples, although each of them live in

their own state» [13], unfortunately, «the expansion of NATO to the east has scattered the Slavs on different sides of the barricades» [1]. At his speech in honor of the opening of the festival of arts «Slavic Bazaar in Vitebsk», the President of the Republic of Belarus touched upon an important topic related to the fraternal Slavic country – Ukraine. According to Alexander Lukashenko, when «the country's politicians abandoned the Slavic identity», then Ukraine «was lost» [1]. This happened long time before the start of the Russian military operation.

Educating the younger generation on Slavic values, and knowledge of the history and traditions of the Republic of Belarus is one of another important tasks aimed at forming the identity of individuals and the country as a whole. In addition to various cultural events related to the traditions and customs of Belarusians, various optional classes are held in Belarusian schools, which are aimed at deepening knowledge about their homeland and educating a person with high moral values. So, in the 2023-2024 academic year, such electives as «Shrines of the native land» and «Spiritual Heritage of Belarus (IX century – 1569)» [12] will be added to the school program. Of course, knowledge of one's origins, culture, and the ability to learn a lesson from one's history is necessary for a modern Slavic state, and for the preservation of Slavic identity.

## Conclusion

Today it can be clearly observed that the political agenda is the confrontation of values and worldviews of the Western and Slavic worlds. Pan-Slavism is a kind of response to the challenges imposed by Western values and worldviews. «Being under constant oppression, cultural and religious pressure, the threat of complete assimilation and disappearance, the Slavs were able to develop a unique ideological response to the threats of their existence — pan-Slavism» [4, p. 23]. Today, Pan-Slavism emphasizes the need for the unity of related Slavic peoples for mutual cooperation and unity of action in cultural, political, and economic relations, as well as for the preservation of unique traditions and values of Slavic culture. The Republic of Belarus is committed to preserving Slavic identity, culture, traditions, and language, which undoubtedly reflects the presence of a Pan-Slavic component in Belarus' foreign policy. Pan-Slavism in the identity of the Republic of Belarus is expressed in its choice in the political arena, and its behavior in various economic and political situations.

The big impetus for strengthening and deepening work on the Union State of Russia and Belarus is primarily economic factors, as well as the territorial proximity of the two states. Mutually beneficial cooperation in all spheres is also an important factor in strengthening relations between fraternal peoples. Two close peoples – Russian and Belarusian, of course, will stand by each other against modern challenges

to preserve Slavic identity, cultural traditions, values, and worldview.

It is worth noting that the union state of Russia and Belarus is not a way of «absorbing» the Republic of Belarus, but on the contrary, is a new type of cooperation between the two states. «In April, Lukashenko said that the Union State, the agreement on the creation of which Russia and Belarus signed in 1999, is built on new principles so that «no one is

offended». «I am sure that other republics of the former Soviet Union will join such a union», he expressed his opinion» [1].

In the conditions of today's political and economic confrontation between the United States and the countries supporting them, on the one hand, and China, on the other hand, it can be assumed that the balance between them may be Slavic states that can become a unifying factor in the geopolitical arena. And vice versa.

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## Информация об авторе:

**Салмыгина Евгения Дмитриевна**, магистр международного права SAIAS (ECNU, Шанхай), аспирант SPIR (ECNU, Шанхай).  
E-mail: [Evgeniya\\_salmygina@mail.ru](mailto:Evgeniya_salmygina@mail.ru)

## Author:

**Salmygina Evgeniya Dmitrievna**, Master of Law International Relations, SAIAS (ECNU, Shanghai), PhD Student at SPIR (ECNU, Shanghai).  
E-mail: [Evgeniya\\_salmygina@mail.ru](mailto:Evgeniya_salmygina@mail.ru)