

# Textbook Narratives and Patriotism in Belarus

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This chapter analyzes history textbooks narratives in a specific context: Belarus—a post-totalitarian and authoritarian state. School history teaching has always been a powerful instrument for patriotism and identity building. Political authorities tend to control the school history textbook writing and the transmission of sentiment of loyalty to the motherland (Noizet and Caverni 1978). History teaching is often used for identity-building processes, because history is relating to the continuity and stability, fundamental notions for identity building according to social psychologists, historians and sociologists (Erikson 1950, 1959; Dubar 2000; Wodack 2004; Weber 1995; Gellner 1983).

This chapter will provide a chronological analysis of the evolution of history textbooks writing in Belarus and the transmission of patriotism discourse through the history textbooks through the prism of the construction of the dividing line between “us”: patriots, belonging the nation and the “other”: “the strangers” (Cote and Levine 2002; Michaud 1978).

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History textbooks narratives and patriotism model in Belarus are constantly changing and balancing between openness to global tendencies, European heritage, democracy on the one hand, and isolation, links with Russia and totalitarian tendencies on the other hand. This fact explains why the extremely fluctuant and contradictory official discourse on patriotism, identity devotion to the country transmitted by the educational system and especially by history textbooks is not socially efficient, because this discourse is deprived of a fundamental characteristic—stability. Textbooks in Belarus were rewritten considerably (radical change of the identity and history matrix) three times from 1988 to 1994, and after 1994, the history textbooks globally remain loyal to Soviet and Russian-orientated tradition (Loukashenko 2003), but are still rewritten every two years. In this context, textbooks cannot be a stable instrument in identity and patriotism matrix building. The major opposed traditions in history interpretation, patriotism and identity building are nationalist tradition on the one hand and Soviet-styled and Russian-orientated on the other hand. The terms “Soviet” and “Russian-orientated” are used as synonymous. Even during the Soviet period the dominant Republic, the “oppressor,” the obstacle for the national development of Soviet republics was Russia.

### HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PATRIOTISM

The definition of patriotism is deeply connected to the concept of nationalism. French writer R. Gary maintains: “Patriotism is the love for the ‘us’ and nationalism is the hate of ‘the other’” (Kaufmann 2014). Patriotism as a set of allegiances, loyalties, the emotion of “national pride” and “a sense of shared national identity” (Nussbaum 1996) and emotional attachment for a country is orchestrated by state actors with the objective to maintain and legitimate social order, the frontier between “us” and “the other.” Architects of patriotism model, mainly sovereign states, make extensive use of history to promote those historical narratives that embody the politically correct teleology of the state. It has been suggested by many scholars (Bassin 2012) that the historiographies of the new independent states, like Belarus, engaging in nation-building process of a new sovereign state continue to be essentially monolithic and monopolized by political power. In different contexts, but especially in transition contexts (from Soviet totalitarian regime to democracy under perestroika and shift to authoritarianism after perestroika), governments

are too ready to use history education to promote a new sense of nationhood through a “ready-made” vision of history and national identity and frontiers between “us” and “the other” (Hajjat 2012). School history textbooks as instruments of ideological transmission and nation building are closely monitored by the state (Schissler 2005).

The idea of patriotism commonly refers to the discourse on links between members of the nation and a sense of a nation as a cohesive whole separated from “the other,” “the foreigner,” “the stranger” (Wodack 2004). Patriotism, sense of attachment to the motherland, which is constructed in interaction and relation with “others,” requires mental (Erikson 1959) and physical borders (Hajjat 2012). Scholars who insist on the discursive mechanism of identity and patriotism building maintain that “border is an artefact of dominant discursive process that have led to the fencing off chunks of territory and people from one to another” (Foucher 2007). Notions or even organizations like the EU are defined as a “bounded communicative space” (Sierp 2014). Identity building is a “spacialization” and “territorialization” of allegiance matrix, and the management of the sense of belonging to a nation, its territory and identity, passes “upon its territorial management” (Rey and Saint-Julien 2005).

Emotional and psychological components in building links to a nation should also be highlighted. It is part of human behavior for individuals to aspire to a valorizing collective identity within a group, belonging to which confers on them certain characteristics favored by the group in question (Reicher 2001). Thus, the affective component plays a very important role in the mobilization and appropriation of discourse on history and patriotism (Braud 1996). Emotions engendered by belonging to a group play a structural role in self-categorization and identification (Mackie 2009).

## THE CONTEXT OF BELARUSIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

In Soviet times (from 1919 to 1991), the history of Belarus did not exist, either as an autonomous academic discipline or as a school subject. The first and only school textbook on the History of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus (SSRB) was published in 1960 in Russian and went through eleven editions, remaining the only educational support on the subject until 1992. For every edition of this textbook, the number of printed books was 9000 copies (for a country with 9,000,000 citizens), which is an indication of the minor place accorded to the

History of Belarus as a school discipline during the Soviet period. From 1947 to 1991, the history of Belarus was incorporated into the curriculum of the history of the U.S.S.R., and only 27 h per year were devoted to it at the last year of the secondary school. For the Soviet historiography, the history of Belarus begins only in 1917. Belarus was able to start and consolidate its existence as a nation-state only within the framework afforded by the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR), a part of the USSR. Thus, Belarusian government is a Soviet creation, and the Belarusian people is fundamentally a Soviet people. The history of Belarus is accordingly the history of the BSSR.

Government policy on History Textbooks in the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic prescribed the denial of an independent Belarus and an independent Belarusian history (Abetsadarski 1968). The history of Belarus was merged into Soviet history. Identity politics transmitted through history textbooks aimed at the construction of a Soviet identity above all other identities. In Soviet period, patria-motherland was the URSS.

The most important historical event for patriotism and identity building for the Soviet period was the Second World War and the sacred victory over Nazism.

The following sentences quoted from the only history textbook on Belarus published during the Soviet period are an illustration of the extent to which Belarusian history was viewed as no more than a constituent part of Soviet history, inasmuch as a fundamental tenet of Soviet historiography was its articulation of the Second World War as the central event in the history of the USSR: "From the first days of the occupation, workers in Soviet Belarus began the People's War. Brigades of partisans were created everywhere. Their number increased daily. The organizer and leader of the partisan movement was the Communist Party" (Abetsadarski 1968). The semantic and stylistic construction of the text is revealing. Short sentences and a dogmatic tone meet the objectives of Soviet propaganda: to point out that the information provided by the textbooks is an ultimate and indisputable truth.

The Soviet patriotism and identity model was simple, binary: the "us"—Soviet people—and the "other"—Nazi enemy, and after the war, by extension the enemy was the Western world.

Textbooks on the history of Belarus became a propaganda tool underlining the superiority of the Soviet Communist model as against the Western capitalist model. History as an academic discipline was itself used as an important tool in the construction and legitimization of the

Soviet totalitarian state, claiming a specific place for it in world politics. The victory in the Second World War, called “the holy of holies” (Tumarkin 1995) was presented as a proof of the superiority of Soviet society over Western society.

### PERESTROIKA AND THE NEW PATRIOTISM MODEL

In the post-Soviet bloc, the period known as “Perestroika (1985–1991)” was a crucial moment for the building of states and their national identities. New political parties appeared to challenge the political monopoly of the Communist party of the USSR, claiming the right of the Soviet republics to an independent history, historiography and an independent future. Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the majority of post-Soviet countries have tended to articulate historical consciousness in opposition to Soviet and Russian interpretations of the past, seeking for European roots in their histories. For Belarusians, the USSR and Russia changed their category: from the “us” they become the “other” (Zaiko 1999).

In post-Soviet Belarus, political authority elected in 1994 started the search for the legitimacy through new national identity and patriotism building, as any new political authority regardless of the political regime.

Soviet history writing changed completely during perestroika in all Soviet Republics, where history was used as a legitimizing authority for profound social change, the creation of an independent state in 1990, the establishment of a new sociopolitical system and the shaping of a new national identity matrix (Zaprudnik 1993). Under perestroika, numerous publications appeared in the media relating to the link between education, history teaching, this national renaissance and new patriotic allegiance: “Education—the Only Way to a National Renaissance,” “Give History Back to the People,” “History Education as a Source of a National Identity” (Lindner 1999). The first school programs on the history of Belarus were inspired by the National Front program, as was the new Constitution of the independent Belarus, which claimed that “the Belarusian people has a long history which can be traced back many centuries” (<http://www.pravo.by>). The coat of arms and “nationalist” flag dating back to the era of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, regarded by Belarusian nationalists as the “Golden age” of the Belarusian nation, were introduced after the proclamation of independence in 1991. New patriotism model appealed to new historical references like the Grand

Duchy of Lithuania, a state existed from the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries (Sahanovitch 2001).

Under perestroika, the communist period was frequently described in terms of invasion and occupation in historical work, but even in school textbooks (Sidartsou 1993). For the histories of the post-Soviet countries, Russia plays the role of “the other,” the “convenient” enemy to which it is possible to attribute all errors and all failures. During perestroika in all the post-Soviet countries, all contacts with Russia and Russians began to be described in terms of disaster. Russians were qualified as invaders, and all territorial divisions, whether unions or annexation, are described in very negative terms. The positive elements provided by annexation to the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union (administrative modernization, access to the infrastructure of the economy of a great empire) were ignored.

The gradual gaining of autonomy and the institutionalization of the history of Belarus as an academic discipline and school subject are also linked to perestroika. Until 1992, the total number of hours devoted to history of Belarus in school curricula was 27; in 1992, this number was 152 (education. gov.by).

The curriculum of the history of Belarus in a secondary school of 1991 emphasizes the fundamental changes in the teaching of history affecting content, methodology, structure and teaching. For the first time, issues of national consciousness were discussed in the school history curriculum, and new teaching principles such as historical humanism, democracy, and the rejection of dogmatism and stereotypes were introduced.

The books were supposed to educate patriots devoted to independent Belarus and awaken critical thinking skills, which was a novelty pedagogically speaking compared with Soviet-era thinking.

It was a new form of patriotism model, not dogmatic as under Soviet time, but pluralistic and critical. Pluralism as one of the most important requirements of a democratic society was an important element of perestroika politics of history textbooks.

Under perestroika, textbook authors and experts stressed the need to present multiple perspectives on historical events in the textbooks. Pluralistic tendencies are strongly reflected in the books of this period. The introduction that opens Ouladzimir Sidartsou and Vital ‘Famine’s textbook, published in 1993, clearly states the authors’ pedagogical point of view (Sidartsou 1993). Through the manual V. Sidartsau aspires “to explain the contradictory process of the development of our society, help

students to become aware of the history of Belarus as our history and as part of our everyday lives today” (Sidartsou 1993, 4). The authors invite young readers to study “the role of historical figures, to reflect on their actions” and “to put themselves in the place of historic characters to understand their motivations (Sidartsou 1993, 4).” The author draws attention to the diversity of opinion on the historical facts analyzed in the book: “Different points of view are represented in the textbook. You can accept them or defend your own opinion; however you should keep a respectful attitude towards those who have a different opinion from yours.” “I recommend that students take an active part in debates on controversial issues in order to learn how to defend their points of view” (Sidartsou 1993, 5). The author encourages reflection on historical events and personalities, and their book does not contain indisputable dogmas.

The experts who gathered at the beginning of the 1990s at the National Center for Textbooks of the Ministry of Education debated on the modalities of revision of the totalitarian Soviet period, which was a major step toward democratization. The condemnation of the Soviet heritage and the search for European roots in Belarusian history was a very important trend in the writing of history textbooks.

During perestroika the attempt of transformation from totalitarian Soviet system into an open and democratic society, the Second World War was subject to thorough historical reinterpretation. The myth of the crucial role played by the Communist Party in the victory was debunked, as was the myth of the struggle of the whole people against the Nazis: The whole people did not fight on the side of the Red Army and the partisans (Weiner 2002). Historians revealed instances of collaboration and crimes committed by partisans. Soviet-era glorification of the Second World War was significantly toned down. Europe became the part of “us”: Belarus aspired to identify with Europe and the USSR and Russia became the “other” (Zapрудnik 1993).

The particular attention paid to the Great Duchy of Lithuania, to which the Belarusian lands belonged between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, was the result of a search for a valid historical alternative to the idea of the Belarusian nation as a constituent part of the Soviet totalitarian state advanced by Soviet-era historiography. History of Belarus is a history of incorporations into empires, divisions, annexations. It is not easy to find glorious elements, which explain why perestroika

historiography mobilized the Great Duchy of Lithuania as an independent and glorious period.

In textbooks published in 1993, particular emphasis was placed on the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and on the wars between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Muscovy during thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as a historical proof of resistance to “eternal” Russian domination. Even the titles of the chapters underlined the link between Belarusian and European and world history: “Belarusian Culture in the Context of European Civilization,” “The Great Patriotic War in the Context of the Second World War.” The perestroika period used the same ideological weapons as the Soviet times propaganda: promoting positive identity matrix and glorious past. It is natural for individuals to want to join a group, which gives them a positive personal identity (Erikson 1959). The search for “the oldest and most glorious possible” history (Berger 1999) characterizes the majority patriotism models; the post-Soviet countries are not an exception. Perestroika offered an identity and patriotism model different from Soviet model. It was not more Soviet glorious references like the victory at the Second World War perestroika, but this model was very positive and glorious with other victories: victory over Muscovy during the Grand Duchy of Lithuania period.

### RE-SOVIETIZATION OF HISTORY AND IDENTITY POLITICS

The year 1994 witnessed a major shift in the liberalization of Belarusian society. The political forces that came to power in 1994 forged their victory by promising a people in disarray that they would restore the Soviet legacy, fraternal ties with Russia and the welfare state. The new government began to use methods inherited from Soviet leaders and differing from democratic methods. A referendum in May 1995 focused on changing state symbols, union with Russia and the status of the Russian language as the state language. After the 1995 referendum, nationalist symbols were again replaced by those of the Soviet era. The majority of the electorate voted for union with Russia and two state languages in Belarus: Russian and Belarusian. The referendum institutionalized a return to the Soviet era. This legalized Sovietization also affected history writing and teaching and official policy on Belarusian national identity. An edict of the President of Belarus Alexander Loukashenko of August 16, 1995, stated: “given the results of the referendum, it is necessary to replace the books published between 1992 and 1995 with new

textbooks” (Loukashenko 2000). Concerned to defend the Soviet legacy, history textbooks seen by the president as having a nationalistic content were condemned to be replaced by books that better met the aspirations of the new political authorities, who took the Soviet heritage as the basis of their political legitimacy and patriotism matrix.

The intervention of the political authorities in textbook writing provoked heated debates in society. Discussions in the academic and general press reflected the negative attitude of teachers and the intelligentsia toward the hardening of control on and manipulation of school history teaching (Lindner 1999). The round table on history textbooks organized by the Belarusian historical review was a response to the decision to remove all textbooks published between 1992 and 1995. Authors and teachers strongly criticized state intervention in textbook rewriting. The author Mikhas’ Bitch criticized the authoritarian ban on books edited in 1993: “The history curriculum was openly debated and discussed in 1991 and 1992. Where were the people who are now raising their voices to criticize our textbooks in 1992?” (Mikhas’ Bitch, Archives of National Center for Textbooks of the Ministry of Education of Belarus).

### POLITICS OF HISTORY AND IDENTITY UNDER POLITICAL CENSORSHIP

In the mid-1990s, the creation of the State Commission for the Control of School Literature in the Field of the Humanities and Social Sciences, called into being by a presidential order of August 24, 1995, and answering directly to the Presidential Administration, marked a new stage in Belarusian politics of history textbooks (Lukashenko 2000). This structure responded to the aspiration of the Belarusian political authorities to bring the writing of school history under their control. Countless mechanisms introduced in the procedure of textbook publishing stifled any attempt to go against the official government conception of history. The purpose of the Commission is to monitor and directly control textbook writing. Thus, the Commission remains the ultimate judge of textbook manuscripts. Before being monitored by the Commission, however, a manuscript must pass many stages of correction and review.

At first, a manuscript is read by two experts at the Institute of Education of the Ministry of Education. The experts appointed by the Institute check the didactical and ideological quality of the work. If the

manuscript corresponds to the pedagogical requirements of a textbook and is not openly opposed to official ideology, it obtains approval in the first instance. A manuscript can be subjected to number of criticisms, and the author is obliged to make corrections in response to the experts' objections. The secretariat of the Ministry can send the manuscript for "improvement" many times until it is accepted by the Commission. The next step is expert analysis and deliberation within the Section of History textbooks of the Ministry of Education. The Section verifies whether the work corresponds to the official curriculum, the didactical characteristics of the manuscript and the ideology expounded by the author in his book. The manuscript is submitted to new experts, and if there are points to rework, it is returned to the authors for corrections. The officials of the Ministry of education know which points to "polish" so that the manuscript can be analyzed first by the Presidium of the Academic Council of the Ministry of Education and then by the Commission. Points relating to political history, the Soviet period and the Second World War are considered to be sensitive. After the approval of the Section of the Ministry, the manuscript is submitted to the examination of the Presidium of the Academic Council of the Ministry of Education. Its members are appointed by the Ministry of Education, and it is chaired by the Minister of Education. Before deliberation in the Council, the manuscript is submitted to the experts of the Commission, and although it does not form part of official procedure, their opinion carries much weight during deliberations. It is the Academic Council which gives the greatest number of negative verdicts to manuscripts. This makes sense, because the next step is the Commission, which takes a final decision on manuscripts, so they must correspond to official ideology by the time they reach this stage. The Commission controls politically important school subjects such as world history, geography and the literature and history of Belarus. These are the most controversial and politicized academic disciplines, so the political authorities control how they are taught with particular vigilance. The file concerning each manuscript considered by the Commission includes nearly ten expert conclusions, the authors' responses to the corrections made on the basis of objections and the reports of all the meetings of all the bodies that have analyzed the manuscript. The Commission issues the final verdict. If the script gets the approval of the Commission, the Ministry sends the manuscript to the publisher (only state publishing houses can publish school textbooks) specifying the number of copies to be printed.

## SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF POLITICS OF HISTORY TEXTBOOKS IN BELARUS

The preeminence of Soviet historiography over other discourses in Belarus is an exception in the post-Soviet area. According to numerous research projects devoted to historical, identity and patriotism discourse and history textbooks in the post-Soviet countries, Belarus is the only country not to describe relations with Russia and the Soviet period in negative terms. Belarus is the only former Republic of the USSR which experienced a turning point in its historiography in the mid-1990s. If the historical narrative of Belarus at the time of perestroika was formed in opposition to Soviet and Russian imperial discourse, the mid-1990s marked a return to a Soviet interpretation of history.

Political control of the writing of school textbooks is reflected in mistakes, contradictions and omissions affecting the quality of the books. The rewriting of the school textbooks resulted in a contradictory amalgam between nationalist, Russian-orientated and Soviet-style references. Nationalist references have no open place in public discourse and are pushed to the margins of the system of political discourse and school education without, however, being completely eradicated. Indeed, the Soviet and nationalist conceptions of the historical development of the Belarusian people are inherently incompatible with one another.

Political control of the writing of school textbooks is reflected in mistakes, contradictions and omissions affecting the quality of the books. P. Loïka's textbook was considerably rewritten under political pressure. The editorial surface of the chapters devoted to the Russian–Belarusian war of the fourteenth–sixteenth centuries was reduced. The section titles were changed in order to “soften” its nationalist emphasis. The Battle of Orsha that pitted Russian and Belarusian troops against each other in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) has already been mentioned as a major revelation of the historiography of perestroika and an important chapter of eight pages in textbooks of 1993 (Loïka 1993). However, in the 2002 edition, the same author has not been able to introduce a reference to this battle, which occupies an important position in Belarusian nationalist lore, in the body of the manual, although he still presents it briefly, as follows, in a chronological table at the end of the book:

1512–1522: War between G.D.L. and Muscovy. 1514, 8 September: the Battle of Orsha. The victory of the army of G.D.L. (Loïka 2005)

This shift is characteristic of the rewriting of school history: Nationalist references have no place in public discourse and are pushed to the margins of the system of political discourse and school education without, however, being completely erased.

The Soviet heritage is imposed by the political authorities as a dominant discourse. In textbooks on the Soviet period, the very term “totalitarian” is deleted and replaced by the euphemism “the Soviet administrative system” as a result of a direct Belarusian Presidential prohibition expressed during a meeting with textbook authors (Lukashenko 2000). Some authors even completely rehabilitate the Soviet period. For them, “the magnitude of J. Stalin” is indisputable, V. Lenin was a “political genius” and Soviet reprisals were necessary because they “allowed the U.S.S.R. to achieve staggering results” (Trechtchenok 2005). Another textbook author asserts that “the huge and unrealistic figures of the number of victims of political reprisals published during the last decade by nationalists is nothing but a myth, whose purpose is to discredit the socialist system” (Novik 2010). Other authors partially bow to political pressure. Thus, analyzing the 1917 revolution in the 1993 edition of their textbook, the authors O. Sidartsov and V. Famine use the term “the events of 1917,” while in subsequent editions, we find the “October Revolution” formulation, which is a sort of compromise between the Soviet tradition, where this event was known as “the great October Socialist Revolution,” and the nationalist tradition, for which they are “the events of October 1917.”

The re-Sovietization of policy on history teaching can also be seen in a return to the sacralization of the Second World War as the fundamental event of Belarusian history. In 2004, when Belarus celebrated the sixty anniversary of victory in the Second World War, a special course on this event was introduced for students in the final year of high school and the first year of university. A new textbook was published as a didactical support for these courses. The title of the book is revealing, *The Great Patriotic War of the Belarusian people in the context of the Second World War*, which is an attempt to link Belarusian and world history. The content does not reflect the posted affiliation. The textbook presents a Soviet version of the war and barely evokes the crimes of Soviet leaders and the complex issue of collaboration, and reduces the role of the Allies in the victory to a minimum. The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and its secret protocol are mentioned, but without explanation: “On August 23, 1939, a German-Soviet agreement of non-aggression was signed

(the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact). At the same time a secret protocol was signed” (Kovalenia 2004). In the same textbook, a preface written by the Belarusian president (who has a degree in history) reads:

Some pseudo-academics try to rewrite the history of the Great Patriotic War, diminishing the role of our grandfathers and rehabilitating traitors, collaborators, and slaves of the Nazis. Young people are the main target of these lies. I have confidence in your clear minds and the honesty that allow you to distinguish between truth and falsehood. The living memory of the past will help us to build the future. To know the history of our homeland is a sacred duty of every citizen. Patriotism is the foundation of the courage and heroism with which the Belarusian people has survived all its wars and defended its independence. (Kovalenia 2004, 35)

This quotation proves that the interpretation of the Second World War as a glorious and victorious event is a source of pride for the people of Belarus. No alternative vision is tolerated. The Holocaust issue is not totally absent from the textbooks, but its explanation is minimalized. The term Holocaust is used in the single textbook for the special course on the Great Patriotic War *The Great Patriotic War of the Belarusian people in the context of the Second World War* in one short sentence: “The Holocaust is the extermination of the Jewish population of Europe by the Nazis during the Second World War” (Kovalenia 2004). Even on the maps showing the sites of ghettos, extermination camps and killing sites in Belarus and in the Soviet Union, no spatial link is established with Europe or the Soviet Union. In the textbook for the special course on the War, in spite of the maps of Europe showing the sites of camps, the text does not explain the geopolitical dimensions of the Holocaust, but rather presents the event only insofar as it affected Belarus.

Moreover, while the textbooks edited under perestroika aimed to promote civic education, a pluralistic presentation of historical interpretation and critical thinking skills, current textbooks follow the educational traditions of Soviet totalitarianism. Students are not encouraged to think. The number of assignments and questions accompanying chapters is extremely small compared to the books of perestroika. Homework is often reduced to a mechanical committing to memory of “dogmatic truths.” In a textbook edited in 2002 at the end of the chapter on the U.S.S.R. in the 1930s, we find the following question: “Why political reprisals became possible in the U.S.S.R.?” (Novik 2010). In order to be able to answer this question properly, students are in fact forced to

make apologies for Soviet reprisals, as the author does in his text. The authoritarian turn that Belarus has taken since the mid-1990s explains the similarities between Soviet and current textbooks. Political logic that orchestrates the production of school literature has the same objective as during the Soviet period: to legitimize a political regime, where textbooks become tools of propaganda aimed at legitimizing an authoritarian regime claiming historical links with Russia and rejecting openness to global tendencies.

Belarus's Democracy Index rating continuously ranks as the lowest in Europe. The country is labeled as "Not Free" by Freedom House, "Repressed" in the Index of Economic Freedom, and is rated as by far the worst country for press freedom in Europe in the 2013–2014 Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders, where Belarus is ranked 157th out of an overall total of 180 nations. For these reasons, the country is referred to as the "Last Dictatorship in Europe." In this particular context, the education system plays a fundamental role in legitimizing the Belarusian regime.

It is interesting to recall the results of research into the assessment of the system of education that the sociology laboratory "Novak" conducted in March 2010. Positive assessment of the education system by 44.4% of the people interviewed was widely discussed by experts in the article "The Belarusian school makes robots" published on "[www.naviny.by](http://www.naviny.by)," a Belarusian Web site. A. Vardamatski, Director of the Laboratory of Sociology, "Novak," Y. Ramantchuk, president of the analytical center "Strategy," A. Kazuline, former Minister of Education, were deeply impressed by the difference between expert opinion and public opinion on the Belarusian education system. According to experts, the education system has achieved its goal that according to A. Kazuline is "to produce people who need nothing and are not interested in the sociopolitical processes in the country." In the opinion of Y. Ramantchuk, "Belarusians do not need education in society; there is no link between the level of education and the quality of life of a person." A. Vardamatski believes that "the current government does not require citizens capable of thinking." ([www.naviny.by](http://www.naviny.by)). This survey proves the idea of an imposed low level of education which corresponds to the identity and project power promoted by political authority and realized through its politics of history textbooks.

The current Belarusian political authorities aspire to disseminate a Soviet, Russian-orientated version of Belarusian national identity and

patriotism model in the interests of justifying their own legitimacy, and they need an interpretation which can be accepted without discussion by the population. In this specific context, any interpretation of national identity and patriotism must be as simplistic and dogmatic as possible. The result of mixing Soviet and nationalist references in history textbooks is weak and contradictory books, unfit to be consistent and stable referents for the construction of national identity, for fostering a sense of belonging to a national community, and for justifying the place of a nation in the global system.

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