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Piotra Murzionak: Civilizational reasons for Russia-Ukraine war and position of Belarus. *Belarusian Institute of Arts and Sciences, Canada*

Abstract. Provided in this article are comments on the book entitled “Belarus: Prospects of a Middle Power,” published in March 2022 immediately after the start of Russia’s war of attempted conquest against Ukraine. They primarily relate to the coverage of the causes of the inter-civilizational war by Eurasian Russia against Ukraine, a country that, together with Belarus, according to the author, represents the Western Ruthenian civilization (both civilizations were formed by the Eastern Slavs back in the 13th-15th centuries). The dualistic role of the leadership of Belarus in relation to this war, both before and after its start, is discussed. And finally, possible ways of reconstructing the system of collective security on the planet are presented, including the acquisition of a neutral status for small and medium-sized nation-states.

Пётра Мурзёнак: Цывілізацыйныя прычыны расейска-ўкраінскай вайны і пазіцыя Беларусі. *Беларускі Інстытут Мастацтва і Навук, Канада*

Анатацыя. У гэтым артыкуле прыводзяцца каментарыі да кнігі «Беларусь: перспектывы краіны сярэдняй сілы», выдадзенай у сакавіку 2022 года, адразу пасля пачатку ў лютым 2022 года новай захопніцкай вайны Расеі супраць Украіны. Яны перш за ўсё тычацца асвятлення прычын міжцывілізацыйнай вайны Еўразійскай Расіі супраць Украіны — краіны, якая разам з Беларуссю, на думку аўтара, рэпрэзентуе заходнерутэнскую цывілізацыю (абедзве цывілізацыі былі сфарміраваны ўсходнімі славянамі яшчэ ў 13-15 стст.). Абмяркоўваецца дуалістычная роля кіраўніцтва Беларусі ў дачыненні да гэтай вайны як да, так і пасля яе пачатку. І, нарэшце, прадстаўлены магчымыя шляхі перабудовы сістэмы калектыўнай бяспекі на планеце, уключаючы набыццё нейтральнага статусу для малых і сярэдніх нацыянальных дзяржаў.

Good evening, Dear friends!

My recent book “Belarus: Prospects of a Middle Power” was published by Lexington press in March 2022. One part in this book and other publications are devoted to the concept of two civilizations formed by Eastern Slavs, Belarusian-Ukrainian or Western-Ruthenian, and Eurasian civilizations.

I wrote my concluding lines to the book in January 2022 and a month later Russia launched a wider military escalation against Ukraine. In this regard, the scope of my presentation today will be comments to main statements in the mentioned book, specifically:

- a) civilizational reasons for the military Russian extended war against Ukraine;
- b) position of Belarus - the partner of Ukraine in the Western-Ruthenian civilization - in this war;
- c) just to designate possible outcomes for this war.

In actual fact, this war has been going on over the previous eight years, beginning in 2014 when Russian aggressor annexed Crimea and grabbed parts of Donetsk and Lugansk regions from Ukraine. Over the last eight years (2014-2022) Moscow has intentionally been preparing for current escalation. During this period Russian propagandists were portraying Ukraine as a state that represses Russian-speaking people and terrorizes the population in eastern regions of Donbass. Prior to the beginning of today's war, the leader of Russian aggression, V. Putin, conceptually decried the artificiality of Lenin's creation of Ukrainian nation in the 20th century.¹ He followed typical Russian narratives about the existence of one Russian nation which is represented by Great Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians, thus denying that the Ukrainian nation have any right to self-determination. The similar is true for Belarusian nation as well. The aspect of military preparedness was obvious from maneuvers that began in February 2022 by Russian and Belarusian military forces near Ukraine borders, which ~~in our thinking~~,² was nothing more than a dangerous game that led in fact to the start of World War III as Ukraine is supported now by weapons and finance from 53 countries of the world.

During his statement of February 24th, 2022, V. Putin did not announce the war but only a "special military operation", as an act that would lead towards "denazification and demilitarization" of Ukraine. Justification for these goals was not delineated, and how could it be! Already after the beginning of war it became obvious that there were no Nazis in Ukraine and that the glorious Russian soldiers could not, in fact, "find and arrest Stephan Bandera."

So, what are the actual reasons for the war enacted by Russia?

It appears that invented motives of denazification, demilitarisation and preservation of the Russian language exist only to hide the subjugation of Ukrainians and to make them slaves for the purpose of strengthening of Eurasian empire building.

¹ V. Putin «*Ob istoricheskoy yedinstvie russkikh i ukrayntsev*». Official site of President of Russia. 12th of June, 2021. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>

² P. Murzionak *Belarus: Prospects of a Middle Power*. Lexington Press, 2022, p.12.

In contrast to Putin who sees the war as noble and inevitable in accordance to his false goals, we consider that the first and main reason for this war stems from other roots, namely, those roots are intercivilizational ones.³ Our proposed argumentation denotes the existence of two distinct civilizations which were created by Eastern Slavs in the 13th to 15th centuries, namely, Belarusian-Ukrainian or Western-Ruthenian and Eurasian civilizations. This historical process has been determined by various factors, such as:

- the distinctive features of their tribes
- assimilation with the local tribes
- internecine wars between the lands and principalities of that time
- influence of the Mongol Empire
- effects of the Great Lithuanian principality, which saved part of Eastern Slavs from the “Eurasian influence”.

The existence of Western-Ruthenian and Eurasian civilizations and their fighting due to cultural, psychosocial, political differences were in constant controversial dynamics. As an example, there were 9 major wars where Ruthenians (which represented more than 90% of GDL population) were fighting immediately against Muscovites (wars between the GDL and Muscovy and after Lublin Union (1569) between Rzeczpospolita and Muscovy):

- 1st Muscovy-Lithuanian War: 1492–1494
- 2nd : 1500–1503
- 3rd : 1507–1508
- 4th : 1512–1522
- 5th : 1534–1537
- 6th Livonian War: 1558–1583
- 7th : Muscovy-Rzeczpospolita War: 1605–1618
- 8th : Smolensk War: 1632–1634
- 9th : Northern War: 1654–1667

In fact, Eurasian movements have never stopped: 1) continual subjugation of many Eurasian nations by Muscovy can be easily seen starting with the 15th century due to the break up of the Mongolian Empire; 2) Within the 20th century we find the group of socialist countries known as the Warsaw Pact; 3) Following the break up of the Soviet Union, Russia engaged in war with Georgia and took land from Northern Ossetia (2008); 4) and now we are witnesses of aggression against Ukraine - since 2014 to current escalation in 2022.

³ Murzionak *Belarus*: p.83.

Today's war between Ukraine and Russia or between two civilizations serves as further evidence originating from their separate realities and past histories and this is the continuance of an unbridled movement of Eurasian Civilization encroaching upon the West. Ukraine is first line of defence against such aggression!!! Through heavy sacrifices and incredible efforts, Ukrainians' blood is being poured out for their own freedom and in relation to the whole world at large.

The difference between Western-Ruthenian and Eurasian civilizations (cultural, psychosocial, political, etc.) today is evidenced by the barbaric methods that were brought into the war against a peaceful population and the actions of Russian military personnel and by Russian imperial colonial rhetoric. The barbaric methods seen by the world today on Ukrainian soil, all clearly reveal the mental and psychological face of a Eurasian aggressor. This face can easily be called out as Fascist which is visible not only in brutal unhuman actions taken by the occupiers but also in descriptions of such hideous acts earlier and in the present day by such people as A. Dugin,⁴ D. Medvedev,⁵ T. Sergejtsev.⁶ According to D. Medvedev: "The goal (of Putin's special operation) is for the cause of peace for future generations of Ukrainians [that will be created] by the possibility of finally building an open Eurasia, from Lisbon to Vladivostok."

In summary, we believe that Russia's declaration of war against Ukraine in 2022 has inter-civilizational nature. The current war is the real clash of civilisations. We are witnesses of a protracted battle between light and darkness, justice in opposition to evil, freedom from enslavement, by other words we become witnesses to a prolonged chronological war between two opposing civilizations.

What is Position of Belarus in this war?

The role of Belarus which, according to our concept, is a Ukraine partner in the Western-Ruthenian civilization, prior to the war and also during the war, continues to be dual in nature. Having come under heavy economic and military pressure from Russia and having been provoked by the political course taken by Lukashenka from the beginning of his rule to the present (1994-2012), Belarus was forcibly pulled into the war by the aggressor-

⁴ Aleksandr Dugin, "Comments on the events in Odessa, May 2, 2014," interview with ANNA-News, May 6, 2014. Posted to YouTube, July 17, 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwgn3JGNrUo.

⁵ Dmitrij Medvedev: «Preobrazivshuyusia mental'no v Tretij rejkh Ukrainu evo zhe sudz'ba i postignet ». Istochnik: <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/246686-medvedev-napisal-post-o-feykah-i-nastoyaschey-istorii>. 5 aprelija 2022 goda.

⁶ Timofej Sergejtsev. Chto Rossiya dolzhana sdelsats s Ukrainoj. RIA novosti. 03.04.2022. <https://ria.ru/20220403/ukraina-1781469605.html>

Russia as her ally but not directly involved into the war. Prior to the war A. Lukashenko had promised two presidents of Ukraine, P. Poroshenko and U. Zelensky, that they can be rest assured and not expect any attack from Belarus' side. In spite of that, Russian forces entered Ukraine's Chernigov, Kiev and Zhytomir Oblasts from Belarusian territory.

Having noticed that Russia's blitzkrieg did not succeed and the whole world enacting both political and economic sanctions against Belarus as well, "cunning" Lukashenko and his elite within a month's time after the start of the war began expressively backing away. It was noticed that Belarusian authorities launching a new appeal to the European Union (much like it did following the Lukashenko's repressive acts of 2006 and 2010), expressing the authorities' desire for cooperation and, at the same time, presenting themselves as "victims of a whole set of circumstances that began back in 2020."⁷

I believe that the antiwar stance taken by Belarusians has played out its role (through ordinary Belarusians picketing, engaging in sabotage on Belarus' rail lines, also the participation of many Belarusian people joining Ukrainian army and fighting against Russian aggressor).⁸

Russian skewed thinking lives by its own values and its own cynical truths which do not concur with the values of the world's democracies. The existence of substantial difference between two civilizations is supported by recent survey results where more than 80% of the population supports Russia's war effort with the goal to see the attainment of full victory over Ukraine, while quite opposite, more than 85% of Belarusians do not want their military to take part in this war and approximately 2/3rd of them oppose the idea of allowing Belarusian territory to be used as a launching pad for attacks on Ukraine while Belarus is Russian ally.

The Revolution of Hope 2020 was brutally squelched by Lukashenko's dictatorial anti-nationalistic regime with support of Russia's government. Some 1200 political prisoners filled Belarusian jails. Belarusians failed to free themselves from Russian skewed thinking by peaceful means. It is clear that just by "expressing concern" which was the main reaction

⁷ In a letter to Europe Makey complains about "the unfortunate flow of events following 2020" and calls for dialogue: . <https://nashaniva.com/288346>. Nasha Niva. 14.04.2022.

⁸ A representative of Belarusian cyber-partisans informed the world of their number and described the nature of their operations. Part of that included activities on Belarusian rail lines: <https://nashaniva.com/288926>. Nasha Niva 26.04.2022. The majority of Belarusians feel compassion for Ukraine, not for Russia, as shown in: <https://nashaniva.com/289029>. Nasha Niva 27.04.2022.

Map of anti-war movement in Belarus. More that 1500 persons in Belarus are being repressed and experience violent beatings because their opposition to the war in Ukraine, as was reported by the Belarusian Service of Radio Liberty on the 15th of April 2022.

of the western world is absolutely not enough which is evidenced by Belarusian failure to free themselves from Russian skewed thinking by peaceful means during Revolution. The soft colonization that Russia continues to foist on Belarus has not stopped and the threat of drawing Belarus into “the united Russian world” continues to be very real. Thus, the subjugation of Belarus by Russia continues in yet another form, not through military means, as it is taking place in Ukraine.

What are possible outcomes for Belarus, Ukraine and for the world?

Those outcomes will be defined by the results of battlefield in Ukraine. I believe the war has stirred the elite of many countries to think about the possibility of restructuring international relationships and establishment of new system of collective security, including: to stop Russia’s threat of nuclear war; admittance of Ukraine to the EU and NATO; neutrality and more rights for small and mid-sized countries as a truly collective security approach; nullifying the *veto* rule for permanent members in the UN, invitation such countries like Japan, Germany, Indonesia and Brazil as permanent members of the Security Council.⁹

I am personally a supporter of neutrality for Belarus. However, realization of this idea requires certain strong protective and supportive conditions from democratic and mindful society; the recent decision of Finland and Sweden, typically considered as neutral countries, to be enrolled into the NATO is a serious counter-argument regarding neutrality.¹⁰ Nevertheless, we feel that no matter how circumstances have affected Belarusians, they continue to remain a nation that is a part of the Western-Ruthenian civilization the future of which remains in the hands of not only Belarusians themselves, but also to a greater degree in the hands of Ukrainians today. Our hopes for the further development of our Western-Ruthenian civilization will be determined over a protracted period of time, as we often observe in histories of civilizations.

Other disputable outcomes in the end of the war, in case, Ukraine will defeat the aggressor and tear herself from under the paws of Russian imperialism:

- Would Ukrainian victory bring democratic changes to Belarusians and to Russians too?
- Will Ukraine be admitted to the European Union more quickly than it has been prognosticated.
- Can such a possibility come about in terms of Ukraine becoming a member of NATO?

Time shows.

⁹ Murzionak *Belarus* p. 201.

¹⁰ Murzionak *Belarus*, p. 193

One would wish that humanity would stand on the cusp of decisive acts to change the present system of security, as this principle is presently being applied for outbreaks of COVID infections or in the matter of lessening the effects that lead to climate change.

Thank you.

Пётра Мурзёнак: Цивилизационные причины российско-украинской войны и позиция Беларуси. *Белорусский институт науки и искусств, Канада*
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Резюме. В статье приводятся комментарии к книге «Беларусь: перспективы средней державы», изданной в марте 2022 года, сразу после начала в феврале 2022 года новой захватнической войны России против Украины. Прежде всего они касаются освещения причин междоцивилизационной войны между евразийской Россией и Украиной, страны, которая вместе с Беларусью, по мнению автора, образуют западнорутенскую цивилизацию (обе цивилизации сформировались восточными славянами еще в 13-15 вв.). Обсуждается дуалистическая роль руководства Беларуси по отношению к этой войне как до, так и после ее начала. И, наконец, представлены возможные пути перестройки системы коллективной безопасности на планете, включая приобретение нейтрального статуса для малых и средних национальных государств.