

Artículo de investigación

Comparative characteristics of the images of Russia and Belarus in the minds of students of both countries

Сравнительная характеристика образов России и Белоруссии в сознании студенческой молодежи обеих стран

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Abstract

The article presents the results of an ethnopsychological study of the perception of their national characteristics by Belarusian and Russian students and the formation in their minds of the image of both countries. The modern relations of the two Slavic countries of Russia and the Republic of Belarus are at a new stage of development, which consists in creating a single union state. The level of mutual understanding between the two independent states largely depends on how young generations adequately represent each other's national character, value priorities and worldview positions of their peers living in a neighboring country. The problems of establishing mutual understanding of young people are complicated by the fact that both countries are the heirs to a unified Soviet past, but experience certain difficulties in the process of its modernization. On the other hand, representatives of the "z" generation, born at the turn of the millennium, form their own values and development guidelines, which also affects the search for mutual understanding between the two countries.

Keywords: Image of the country, self-identification, auto-stereotypes, heterostereotypes, students, ethno-nationality.

Аннотация

В статье приводятся результаты этнопсихологического исследования восприятия белорусскими и российскими студентами национальных особенностей друг друга и формирования в их сознании образа обеих стран. Современные отношения двух славянских стран России и Республики Беларусь находятся на новом витке развития, заключающегося в создании единого союзного государства. Уровень взаимопонимания между двумя независимыми государствами во многом зависит от того, насколько молодые поколения адекватно представляют себе национальный характер друг друга, ценностные приоритеты и мировоззренческие позиции своих сверстников, живущих в соседней стране. Проблемы установления взаимопонимания молодежи осложняются тем, что обе страны являются наследницами единого советского прошлого, но испытывают определенные трудности в процессе его модернизации. С другой стороны, представители поколения «з», рожденные на стыке тысячелетий, формируют свои собственные ценности и ориентиры развития, что также оказывает влияние на поиски взаимопонимания между двумя странами.

Ключевые слова: образ страны, самоидентификация, автостереотипы, гетеростереотипы, студенческая молодежь, этнонациональность.

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Introduction

The interstate relations of Russia and Belarus at the present stage are going through a difficult period of the formation of qualitatively new relations in the context of a search for full-fledged understanding and mutual trust. In this situation, the perception by the youth of both countries of the mental characteristics of neighbors is of great (if not decisive) significance; these countries, despite the long journey of a joint historical path, have developed on various ideological and economic platforms over the past two decades. During this period, a new generation has grown (the "z" generation), whose values have absorbed not only the principles of technocratic globalization, but also, perhaps, the principles of independent, sovereign states, guided by their own development path.

Formulation of the problem. The problem is how these new generations of two Slavic genetically and historically close to each other, separated by cataclysms of political events, will be able to find a common language with each other in the new conditions.

Purpose of the study. In order to find answers to this and similar questions, an academic study of student youth in the metropolitan universities of both countries (in Minsk and Moscow) was carried out in 2018-2019. The objectives of the study were as follows: 1) to identify the degree of awareness of Russian and Belarusian students about the characteristics of each other's national character; 2) the determination of ethnic stereotypes of Russian and Belarusian youth relative to each other, which allegedly could have developed over the thirty-year period of independent existence of two neighboring countries.

Research hypothesis. The main hypothesis of the study was the idea that both neighboring peoples formed not just similar values of the universal plan, but also similar patterns of behavior, world perception, traditions of everyday life, etc., which eventually acquired archetypal features over a long period of shared history and, especially, during the Soviet period (1920s - 1991). Perhaps the similarities and many ethnic stereotypes of the Russian and Belarusian peoples contributed to the common Slavic roots that determine the foundations of self-identification.

Research methods and respondents. The study was conducted by a joint research group of teachers of the Belarusian State University

(BSU) and researchers at the N.N. Miklukho-Maklai Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IEA RAS). The main methodological research tool was the questionnaire, which included 40 questions, such as topics such as stereotypes of perception of a neighboring people, identification of symbols of two countries, awareness of the similarities and differences between Russians and Belarusians, the awareness of students of Russia and Belarus about each other's cultural characteristics, an assessment of historical events during the existence of both countries as part of the USSR, an understanding of the processes of formation of the image characteristics of the country, etc. To obtain the most truthful information, several forms of questions were simultaneously used: questions-filters, questions-hooks, leading questions, direct questions, dichotomous questions, menu questions, closed questions. In total, 500 students were surveyed - 250 people at BSU and 250 people at several Russian universities in Moscow. So, in the survey participated such universities in Moscow as the Moscow State Technical University named after N.E. Bauman (MSTU named after N.E. Bauman); Moscow Engineering Physics Institute (MEPhI); Institute of Journalism and Literary Creativity (ILLT); Russian State University for the Humanities (RSUH); Institute of Social Engineering of the Russian Humanitarian University named after A.N. Kosygina (ISI RSU); Moscow Finance and Law Academy (IFLA); Moscow Technical Institute of Communications and Informatics (MTUCI); Moscow State University of Technology and Management named after K. G. Razumovsky (PKU).

In addition, ethnopsychological methods were used to identify the tolerance / intolerance of Russian and Belarusian students in relation to each other as carriers of a different ethnicity; for example, the method of K. Katz and K. Braille, which made it possible to determine the presence of auto- and heterostereotypes in the minds of students (Stefanenko, 1987). The modified test by M. Kuhn and T. MacPartland "Who am I" was used in the study for the same purpose. This test was developed by the authors in the middle of the last century as part of the direction of symbolic interactionism (School of Chicago), and it is allowed us to get an idea of the features of personal self-identification of modern students, including gender, civil and ethnic parameters (Kuhn, 1951).

Results: *Comparative characteristics of the images of Russia and Belarus in the minds of students of both countries*

Priorities of students in the field of status hierarchy. At the first stage of the study, a modified test by M. Kuhn and T. McPartland was used, following which Russian and Belarusian students were asked in a hierarchical order to fill in 6 positions relating to their self-concept (Kuhn). Each student had to determine the categories of his individual self-concept and the sequence of their location on the conditional scale of values for himself. The task of testing was to identify the value of status hierarchy in society for students and determine the choice of respondents' own categories of self-

identification. The six positions originally laid down in the test by M. Kuhn and T. MacPartland were used by our respondents in different ways. The most significant for students of both countries turned out to be such categories as universal status (that is, respondents formulated their self, first of all, as "I am a person"), gender status ("I am a girl", "I am a guy"), social status ("I am a student"), civil status ("I am a citizen of Russia" or "I am a citizen of Belarus"), religious status ("I am a Christian"), ethno-national status ("I am Russian"), personal status ("I am a person" or "I am an individual") and status in a family-related structure ("I am a daughter" or "I am a son"). The test results are presented in Figure 1, 2.

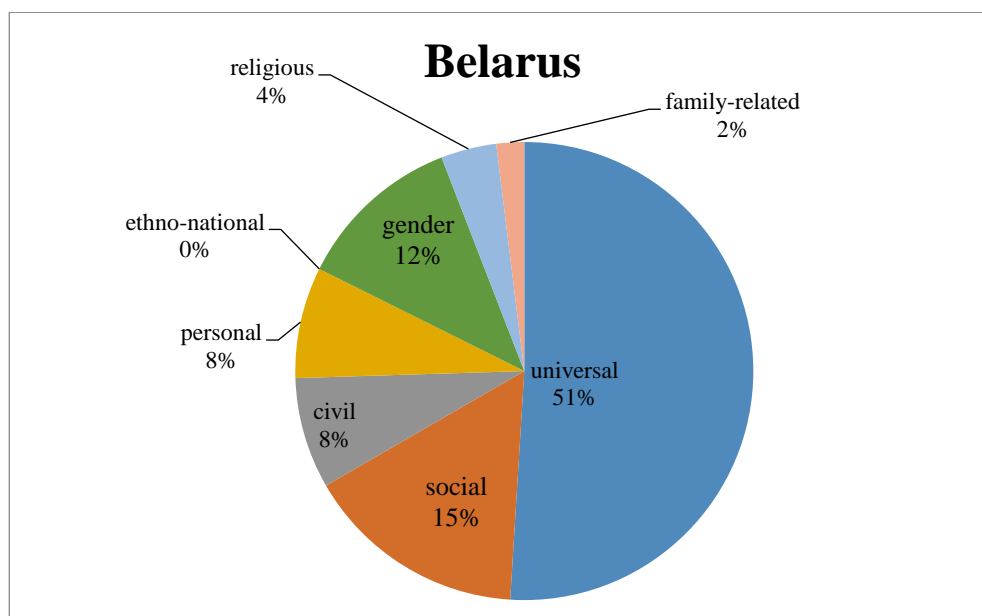


Figure 1. Priorities of students in the field of status hierarchy in Belarus (%)

For the majority of respondents of the Belarusian group, the most important definition of their "I-concept" turned out to be universal status ("I-man", 52%), in second place - social status ("I-student", 16%), in third place - gender status ("I am a young man" or "I am a girl", 12%), in fourth place - civil status ("I am a citizen of Belarus",

8%). The least significant positions of "I-concept" for Belarusian students were religiosity and a role in the family structure, which were preferred by 4% of respondents. Students of the Belarusian group did not allocate ethnic status ("I am Belarusian / ka") at all.

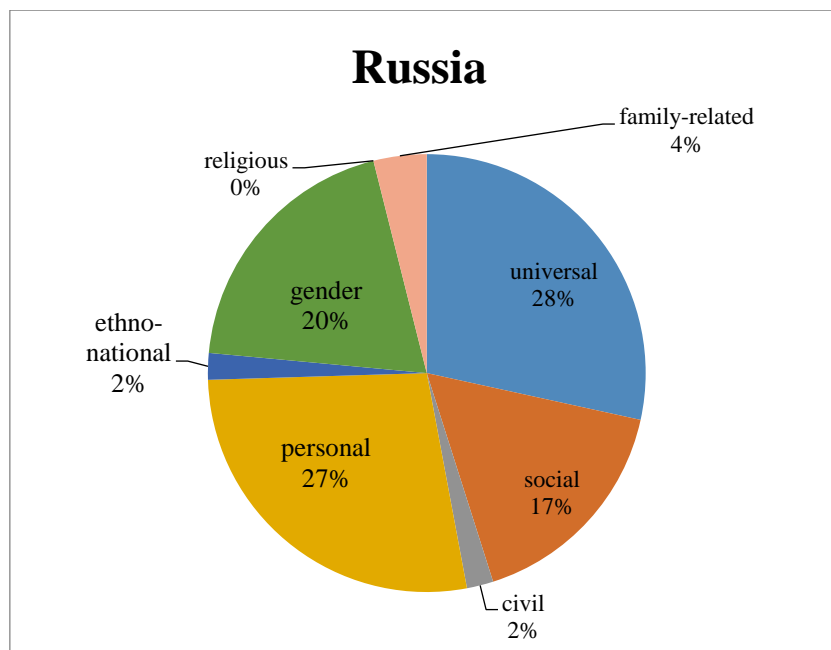


Figure 2. Priorities of students in the field of status hierarchy in Russia (%)

In the Russian group, when determining the “self-concept”, the first place also turned out to be the universal status (“self-man”, 29%), however, in second place, Russians, unlike Belarusians, put a personal status (“self-personality”, 28 %). Russian students, as well as Belarusian ones, also occupy the third place with a gender status, however, with a higher value (20%), the fourth place has a civil status and also with a higher value (“I am Russian”, 17%). The Russians did not mark religious status as significant for their “I-concept” at all, and ethnic status (“I-Russian”) and family status (“I-daughter”, “I-son”) were important only for an extremely small number of respondents (respectively 2% and 2%).

Thus, despite the differences in the ratio of status indicators, it is obvious that the most important position in the “I-concept” for both Belarusian and Russian students are indicators such as universal status, personal, social and gender. As can be seen from the figure, indicators of citizenship, religiosity and belonging to one or another nationality are not priority for the youth of both countries. In other words, the results of a survey of the youth of the two countries showed that specific universal values (family, love, friendship, etc.) in the value system of the youth of both countries are an absolute priority and in their significance surpass any abstract concepts related to ideas about ethnic affiliation, nationality, etc.

Ethnic auto and heterostereotypes of Russian and Belarusian youth. Ethnic autostereotypes, according to a concept first developed by Princeton University researchers D. Katz and C. Braille (USA), are understood as images of an ethnic group formed by its carriers about themselves, and ethnic heterostereotypes as images of representatives of one ethnic group about other ethnic groups (Katz, 1933). As a rule, ethnic autostereotypes (AS) are more information rich and, most often, positive, while heterostereotypes (HS) are somewhat simplified and may be less positive or even negative. The task of the research group at this stage was to, firstly, determine the nature of the representations of Russian and Belarusian youth about themselves as carriers of a certain culture, and, secondly, to determine the degree of awareness of the youth of both countries about each other. For this purpose, open questions were included in the questionnaire, allowing respondents to formulate those qualities that, in their opinion, most characterize the Russian and Belarusian peoples.

When analyzing the answers to the questionnaire, the matrix structure of characterological characteristics of the personality was used, developed by the Soviet and Russian researchers V.N. Panferov (Panferov, 2000). The essence of this structure is that the general array of characteristics obtained as a result of the questionnaire is divided into several semantic categories, allowing to achieve the most accurate

and adequate comparison of stereotypical representations of respondents. Each semantic category highlighted in the array of stereotypical representations of respondents, according to the task, has both positive and negative connotations. Using the principles of creating a matrix personality structure, we were able to compare

the stereotypical representations of Belarusian and Russian youth both about ourselves (AS - autostereotypes) and about each other (HS - heterostereotypes) in several ways. The results are reduced to dichotomous values and are presented below with a plus sign or with a minus sign.

Table 1. The main categories of stereotypical representations of Russian and Belarusian students about the national character of each other.

Characteristic Behavior

	Russians		Belarusians	
	plus	minus	plus	minus
AS	The pursuit of justice	Irresponsibility	Altruism	Reliability
HS	Determination		decency	unpretentiousness

Active Behavior

	Russians		Belarusians	
	plus	minus	plus	minus
AS	Adaptability	Uncertainty The principle of "maybe"	hard work	Excess obedience
HS	Activity	Feeling of permissiveness	hard work	Propensity for submission

Dominant personality characteristics

	Russians		Belarusians	
	plus	minus	plus	minus
AS	Soulfulness Generosity	Helplessness	Peacefulness	Excessive patience
HS	Wide soul	Imperial consciousness	Peacefulness	Passivity

The style of building interpersonal relationships

	Russians		Belarusians	
	plus	minus	plus	minus
AS	Friendliness	Weak character	Conflict free	Shyness
HS	Friendliness Responsiveness Sociability	Impulsiveness	Goodwill	Excessive calm

The presence / absence of volitional qualities

	Russians		Belarusians	
	plus	minus	plus	minus
AS	Courage	Bitterness	confidence	timidity
	Power			
HS	Bravery	recklessness	equilibrium	Unwillingness to assert their rights

Socially significant characteristics

	Russians		Belarusians	
	plus	minus	plus	minus
AS	Patriotism	Irascibility	Patriotism	Strong subordination to power
	Cohesion			
	Self-sacrifice			
HS	Pride	Conceit	Devotion to traditional values	Lack of desire for change

Emotional characteristics

	Russians		Belarusians	
	plus	minus	plus	minus
AS	Openness	Love for freebies	Calm	Submissiveness
	Responsiveness		Friendliness	
HS	Friendliness	Categorical	Calm	Lethargy
			Softness	

Based on the values given, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the degree of awareness of Russian and Belarusian students about each other is quite high, as evidenced by the diversity of areas that form the opinion of young people about each other. The respondents of both groups in their answers touched upon an almost complete range of meanings that make up the emotionally active portrait of the neighboring people. Secondly, the coincidence of most values (both positive and conditionally negative) indicates a high potential for mutual understanding of young people, as opposed to political and economic differences in the power structures of both countries. It can be added that the fact that both the Russian and Belarusian respondents who participated in our study has a large number of relatives (45% и 37%) with whom the youth support active relationship to date.

Thirdly, the number of positive characteristics of the neighboring people, both among Belarusian and Russian students, is at least 2 times higher

than the number of negative ones, although the question in the questionnaire was formulated quite neutrally: "What do you like and do not like in Russians / in Belarus ? " It is also important that the offensive tonality of characteristics (for example, "all Russians are drunkards") as a stereotype of the perception of another nation is not found among the answers of our respondents. The evaluative negativity of Belarusian students against their Russian peers in the most extreme cases is as follows: "sissy, stubborn, too loud, pretentious, prone to domination, etc.). On the contrary, Russian students, noting the traits that they do not like in Belarus, in some cases wrote "excessive calm, fear of telling the truth, dependence, etc". In our opinion, such answers only indicate that the youth of both countries are not indifferent to each other and are capable of subtly capturing the characteristics of their national character.

Perception by Russian and Belarusian students of the image of both countries. According to today's ideas that have developed in the field of

imageology, the formation of the country's image is influenced by at least two groups of factors that are most often divided into "conditionally static", that is, those remaining in the past, and "conditionally dynamic", i.e., affecting the process of forming the country's image at present. The questions of the questionnaire proposed to be filled in by Russian and Belarusian students in our study focused on the two above-mentioned groups of factors. In turn, in each of the groups of factors, the possibility of both positive and negative answers was mandatory taken into account. The survey results are presented below.

Perception of historical events with the participation of Russia and Belarus (conditionally static factors). To the question "How do you assess the role of Russia in the

history of Belarus?" 41% of Belarusian students answered in the positive, 12% in the negative, and 47% found it difficult to answer. A large percentage of Belarusian respondents who found it difficult to answer this question is explained, first of all, by the fact that representatives of this generation (generation Z, born in 2000) learn history from textbooks written during the destruction of the ideological unity that existed between the republics of the former USSR almost 70 years, and the creation of new, so-called, alternative versions of historical events. The formation in the minds of generation Z of new versions of cause-effect relationships in the history of Russia and Belarus turned out to be rather confusing and not always reflecting the real state of affairs. The table below shows how exactly today, students in both countries evaluate their shared history.

Table 2. The attitude of Belarusian and Russian students to the events of their joint history

Major historical events	Belarusian students			Russian students		
	Plus	Minus	I do not know	Plus	Minus	I do not know
Kievan Rus	75%	14%	11%	79%	2%	19%
Muscovy	32%	57%	11%	75%	2%	22%
Belarus as part of the Russian and	29%	68%	3%	83%	1%	16%
Belarus as part of the USSR	75%	25%	-	80%	3%	17%;
The Great Patriotic War	85%	11%	4%	90%	1%	9%

The relative uniformity of the answers of Russian respondents on this issue is due to the fact that the history of relations between Russia and Belarus is not only not included in the curriculum of today's history textbooks, but was not adequately represented in Soviet training programs on the subject of history. The reason is simple: school curricula and most university programs viewed Russian history as unified for all the peoples of the USSR. The mention of the heroes of Belarus, as well as the heroes of other republics of the Soviet Union, as well as any achievements and victories of representatives of the republics were considered part of the general history of the country. We can say that Russian youth knows almost nothing about the events directly related to Belarus. Nevertheless, the vast majority of answers of Russian respondents with a plus sign regarding these historical events, firstly, indicate that everything related to Belarus in the common history of both countries is perceived by Russian youth unambiguously positively, but, in secondly, does not raise any

additional questions, no matter how it is evaluated. A different picture can be seen in the Belarusian group of our respondents. Students' answers to the question posed in the questionnaire ("Indicate your attitude to historical events in the process of interaction between the Russian and Belarusian peoples"), not only differ significantly from each other, but are also accompanied by fairly lengthy comments. Among those respondents whose answers are given with a plus sign, there is a desire to explain why the alliance with Russia for Belarus in various historical eras was very beneficial. During the period of the existence of Kievan Rus, for example, as 75% of our Belarusian respondents believe, in the territory of the future state of Belarus "... there was an active development of cities ... that received not only economic incentives for development, but also protection from the princes of Kievan Rus from enemies." However, the assessment by Belarusian students of the features of that historical period is far from any embellishment

of reality: "... separately Belarusians and Russians at that time did not exist ..."; "... all state entities that Belarus was a part of helped the country become such, despite the difficulties that it had to endure when entering these state entities ..."; "... where without Russia?", Etc. The eriod of the existence of the Grand Duchy of Moscow (14-15 centuries) was described by 32% of Belarusian respondents as the time of formation of common traditions and customs. However, when characterizing Belarusian students of this historical period, negative assessments still dominate in terms of the influence of the Moscow principality on the development of Belarus (57%). Thus, some respondents regret the introduction of Orthodoxy, the forced participation of Belarus in wars that ruin the country, and note signs of cultural confrontation etc.

Assessment of the development of Belarus as part of the Russian Empire (19th century), from the point of view of 29% of Belarusian respondents, was quite positive. Students indicate the importance of the reforms carried out by Russia (giving the school a secular character, introducing the Belarusian educational district, introducing public schools, etc.). Nevertheless, the largest number of negative assessments in Belarusian profiles (68%) marked this historical period. This situation is explained, apparently, by the fact that during this period Russia significantly increased its participation in the development of the socio-economic sphere of Belarus, in order to prevent the spread of Polish influence (Karev, 2014). Given that Poland is considered by the Belarusian opposition today as the most significant "agent of influence" in promoting Euro-Atlantic values on the territory of the Republic of Belarus (Budkevich, 2014; Komorowski, 2011; The EU Policy, 2015) the historical precedent is quite perceived by the youth as biased and can directly influence its attitude to modern Russia.

The Soviet period, on the contrary, causes mostly positive associations among Belarusian youth (75%). With this period, our respondents attribute the rapid development of industry in Belarus, a high level of education and, in the words of one of the students, "a good standard of living". One of the answers with a negative assessment of this period, however, was accompanied by comments about the poor attitude of Russia to Belarus, but we found this answer still not completely thought out, although we included it in the general statistics of the questionnaires. The vast majority of Belarusian students attribute victory in the Great

Patriotic War (1941-1945) to the category of historical events that the country can and should be proud of (85%). Moreover, the comments of Belarusian respondents demonstrate a conscious perception of the victory in the Great Patriotic War and a full understanding of the significance of this event: "pride for our ancestors", "joy for our two peoples", "power of a united people", "this Great victory secured the future for my country and my generation", "this is one of the most significant events in the history of the Belarusian people", etc.

We note that a fairly large number of answers of Belarusian students to questions related to the historical past of both peoples (especially before the 19th century) are listed by us in the column "I don't know". Respondents marked "50x50" in the comments about a historical event about which they have not yet formed their own opinions. In relation to, for example, such answers to the Great Patriotic War were accompanied by the following comments: "victory is victory", "yes, victory, but too much loss", etc.

From all that has been said, at least 2 conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the joint history of two neighboring peoples is of much more interest to Belarusian youth than to Russian. Secondly, the historical events for Belarusian students, apparently, are a field of ideological disagreements and have an ambiguous effect on the formation of the image of Russia as a whole. However, conditionally static factors (that is, representing a certain constant, constant value) that influence the formation of the country's image are not limited to historical events. Such factors include, for example, the geopolitical position, and the potential of the country's natural resources, and cultural heritage. In order to get the most free answers about the competitively authentic advantages of Russia and Belarus, an open question was included in our questionnaire on the creation of an advertising image of each country. Moreover, both groups of respondents were given the opportunity to create advertising content for the image of both their and the neighboring country.

Belarusian version of advertising content (Belarusian students about the symbols of Belarus and Russia)

Belarus

- *natural benefits ("blue-eyed lake country", clean air, "storks fly", beautiful landscape, "cornflower country", untouched nature);*

- sights (*medieval castles, knightly battles, cult battles, partisan territory*)
- craft art (*ceramics, embroidery, linen*)
- recreational systems (*motels, recreation centers, etc.*)
- lifestyle (*happy family, stability, low prices*)

Russia

- natural benefits (*huge natural wealth, immense taiga, rivers, oceans*)
- Attractions (*Kremlin, architecture of St. Petersburg*)
- lifestyle (*culture of various nations, huge opportunities for self-realization*)

Russian version of advertising content (Russian students about the symbols of Belarus and Russia)

Belarus

- natural benefits (*pure nature, lakes*)
- Attractions (*Belovezhskaya Pushcha*)
- lifestyle (*calm life and confidence in the future*)
- country symbols (*potato pancakes*)

Russia

- natural benefits (*Lake Baikal*,
- Attractions (*Moscow, St. Petersburg, parks*)
- symbols of the country (*brown bear, sweets of the factory "Red October", matryoshka*)

The above examples of the perception of all the best that is in their own and in the neighboring country indicate that both Belarusian and Russian respondents have ideas about the national achievements of both countries that do not go beyond the standard advertising cliché. This circumstance can be explained by the fact that the so-called "soft power" at the level of conditionally static factors in relation to both countries, in fact, does not work - young people do not receive sufficiently positive information about life in a neighboring country (both in Belarus and in Russia), and as a result does not have the ability to form an adequate image of either his or her neighboring state.

The perception of Belarusian and Russian youth of current events of the present (conditionally dynamic factors). The factors that are capable of exerting a corrective influence on this process — economic, political, social, etc. — fall into the category of conditionally dynamic factors in shaping the country's image. Our questionnaire was set to determine the degree of media influence on youth perception of the image of Belarus and Russia. Respondents from both

groups were asked what role the media play in shaping the image of Russia and Belarus. In addition, the questionnaire also included the question of which media students trust more - Russian, Belarusian or Western when it comes to Russia and Belarus. This wording was not chosen by chance. According to Igor Buzovsky, deputy head of the presidential administration of Belarus, Russian content in Belarusian media reaches 65% today (Runkevich, 2019), which is a serious competition for the country's national media.

According to the results of our survey, 53% of Belarusian youth do not trust any media. The Russian media as the main source of information (34%) prefer a slightly smaller percentage, while less than 13% of Belarusian students trust the Western media. Activization of oppositional online publications (Charter-97) on Belarusian portals, according to the comments of our Belarusian respondents, also does not cause them keen interest. A survey conducted in Minsk a year ago (December 2018) by the Russian sociological service Levada Center of Belarusian students about their involvement in the discussion of political issues showed that the bulk of Belarusian students are apolitical - less than 10% of students would like any political change (Levada Center 2018). Commenting on questions about the impact of the media on them, our Belarusian respondents wrote that they generally do not understand politics well, that they are much more interested in the opportunity to just go to Lithuania for the weekend, rather than attend politically minded youth groups (for example, the Fialt youth educational center).

As for the Russian youth, the influence of the official media on their attitude to their Belarusian peers and to Belarus as a whole, according to the results of our survey, also turned out to be minimal: 83% of Russian students answered that they were not interested in political issues of relations between Russia and Belarus.

Conclusions

Summing up the study, we came to the following conclusions.

1. The fundamentals of the mentality of Russian and Belarusian students have a common foundation, focused on specific universal values (family, love, friendship, etc.). The issues related to belonging to one or another nationality, as well as the development of these issues in discussions (including

- discussions in the blogosphere) for both groups of young people are much less interesting than communication at the level of pressing problems of the z generation (study, travel, entertainment, etc.). P.).
2. Stereotypes of Russian and Belarusian students' perception of each other are mostly positive. In the process of our study, it was noted that the students of both countries quite accurately formulate the characteristics of the national character of each other, which indicates a high potential for mutual understanding between them.
 3. The process of perceiving the image of a neighboring country by Russian and Belarusian youth is significantly influenced by historical events that are presented to student youth (both at school and in higher educational institutions), often in a politically engaged manner. The reasons for the biased interpretation of historical events with the participation of Russia and Belarus lie both in the policies pursued by both sovereign states and in external factors related to the desire, first of all, of European states to strengthen their influence on Belarus.
 4. The media policy pursued by Russia and Belarus (including specialized Internet portals) has virtually no effect on relations between Russian and Belarusian youth. The reasons for the "informational neutrality" of students in the process of forming the image of both countries lie in the initial apoliticality and rejection of the confrontation of modern power-political structures.

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