



# Belarusan society's solidarity potential

Research report (abridged version)

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Belarusian Institute  
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### Introduction

During the last few years, in Belarusan society's public and political life, we can observe a decrease in citizens' ability to organize joint effective political and public actions, to demonstrate publicly and actively their own position, and to defend common interests. In spite of the increasing number of petitions, public statements, and signatures gathering campaigns, we can see not only the absence of any influence of these tools on the life of the country, but their weak mobilization potential as well. More often than not, they just remain a way of revealing one's own personal position and do not result in either a launch of further joint actions, or a change of a situation. The general tendencies of the public-political life give evidence of not simply a decrease in political activity, but also of a change of the structure of social connections and relations, which solidarity activity can be built on. Thus, since 2006, after the reduction of the mass character of support rendered to the traditional forms of displaying civic and social activity (rallies, protest actions), there appeared several "new" forms, e.g. silent protest actions, campaigns to collect aid for detainees and political prisoners, all possible kinds of flash mobs, etc. These flares of one-time actions demonstrate a potential possibility of such behavior, but every time any attempts to repeat this or that successful practice and to disseminate it meet with failure. Explanatory versions and concepts that appeal to the "new media" or "new majority" are wide open to both practical and empirical criticism. At the same time, the practice of work of public associations and civil initiatives which activities are aimed at changing Belarusan society requires answers to the question — What can one count on and what can one lean on when it comes to mutual support and solidarity displays?

What can unite and mobilize the activity of Belarusan citizens (for the sake of what are they ready to get united and to act extensively)? Who (what social groups, strata, communities) is the most capable of demonstrating solidarity? In search of answers to these questions, we have to study the fabric of public relations as a material and a basis of these or those solidarity actions.

This research does not assign a task to conceptually study the question of solidarity, but to analyze empirical material.

At the first stage, which was implemented in **September 2013 — June 2014**<sup>1</sup>, the **object** of our research was not all Belarusan society, but only the part that can be considered the nucleus of solidarity displays, which can set the beginning of social movements, i.e. **organized civil society** (the NGOs sector, the "third sector"). At the second stage (**January-October 2015**), we studied Belarusan society as a whole, correcting only some details in the toolkit of our research, taking into account the change of the object of research. The preservation of the conceptual bases and the research technique allows us to analyze the solidarity potential in Belarusan society and to carry out a comparative analysis of the results of these two stages.

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<sup>1</sup> See: **Research into Belarusan organized civil society's solidarity potential**. Research results report [Electronic resource] // Center for European Transformation. — Website of the CET. — 03.05.2015. — Access date: 20.11.2015. — Access mode: [http://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/userfiles/5/CET/2014\\_Solidarity\\_NGOs\\_Belarus-EN.pdf](http://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/userfiles/5/CET/2014_Solidarity_NGOs_Belarus-EN.pdf), free. — Title screen.

## Tasks and research method

The **goal** of this research is to evaluate and to substantially interpret **the potential of public-political solidarity**<sup>2</sup> in Belarusian society. We understand **solidarity** as a manifestation of connections and relations between people, which is expressed in joint informal and emergent actions (support, assistance, joining) of a public (non-production) character that lead to the defense of common interests and achievement of overall objectives.

The important characteristic of solidarity actions is their situational (one-time) character, i.e. solidarity appears and can be pinpointed in its concrete displays, but it does not exist as a permanent kind of employment and activity, or as a constant characteristic of this or that community, group, society as a whole. In this regard, the **subject** of our research is the **solidarity potential**. We understand the solidarity potential as such a quality of connections and relations between people, which allow them to carry out solidarity actions in the public-political sphere and which are the basis for solidarity displays.

The preconditions and bases for solidarity displays (the solidarity potential) will be considered at several levels:

**1. Level of subjective semantic spaces.** Subjective semantic spaces are such a system of categories of individual consciousness with the help of which various objects and notions are evaluated and classified<sup>3</sup>. This evaluation is based on affective, extramental guidelines. The similarity of subjective spaces and of the arrangement of various significant “objects” (values, symbols, persons, etc.) in these spaces attests indirectly to the similarity of possible reactions to a situation, to the potential of understanding and supporting each other with regard to public-political events and problems that have to do with these “objects”, and, accordingly, to the predisposition to demonstrate solidarity.

**2. Level of self-consciousness and social relations** (in particular, social identification and trust in various groups, subjects, and institutions). The realization of the belonging to a certain circle can be a basis for actions of supporting the people who are thought to belong to the same circle and to have the same interests, purposes, values, points of view, etc. — “we are workers”, “we are intelligentsia”, “we are citizens”, “we are democrats”, etc. The substantial bases of this belonging can act as signs or objects of solidarity. Trust characterizes a positive predisposition to act and to expect solidarity manifestations with regard to oneself (Who can I rely on? Whose support can I count on?). The type of groups which a person identifies him/herself with and which seems credible

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<sup>2</sup> In this case, public-political solidarity means that it is objects, events, or problems of public-political life that act as the cause, reason, and purpose of solidarity actions. In this research, professional, cultural, and other kinds of solidarity are not within the framework of our analysis.

<sup>3</sup> More details (in Russian): *Petrenko V. F. Psychosemantics of Consciousness*. — Moscow, 1988. [Electronic resource] // Ethnopsychology. — On-line Educational Center. — Access date: 20.11.2015. — Access mode: <http://ethnopsychology.narod.ru/libr/P/petrenko.htm>, free. — Title screen.

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to him/her (family or a professional community, neighbors or representatives of local authorities) provides some additional information on the solidarity potential and its contents. A person's adherence to and trust in non-formalized groups and communities characterizes his/her readiness to independently define situations and purposes of solidarity actions. The prevalence of trust in formal institutions and abstract social communities characterizes society's high degree of fragmentation and its unpreparedness to carry out individual actions aimed at protecting and advancing its interests and values.

**3. Level of practice, experience, and behavioral patterns.** The available experience of implementing solidarity actions not only provides the grounds to extrapolate similar actions in the future, but also characterizes a certain way of life and the forms of forming social connections and relations. Today, researchers address to the strengthening of the role and meaning of communicatory connections and relations, in comparison with other forms of social coalescence. Therefore, the structure of communication of organized civil society's representatives does matter. The development of informational and communicational technologies considerably enhances the factor of the intensity of communication in regard to the collective social action. Forms, places, and contents of communication create certain behavioral patterns which characterize the potential of solidarity actions.

Within this framework, we set the following research **tasks**:

1. to evaluate and to substantially describe Belarusian society's solidarity potential:

- to define the specificity of social identification and trust as bases for solidarity actions;
- to evaluate a possibility of demonstrating solidarity on the basis of the similarity (difference) of the Belarusians' semantic fields;
- to mark out characteristics of Belarusian citizens' communicatory behavior and to designate the specificity of the experience of solidarity actions;

2. to determine the possibilities of stimulating and mobilizing the solidarity potential:

- the consolidating/disintegrating force of various objects of public-political life (events, persons, positions, values);
- the potential of leaning on opinion leaders, public and political persons.

This research was carried out by the **Center for European Transformation** and the **Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies** and initiated by Belarusian human rights defending organizations: Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House, Human Rights Center "Viasna", Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Legal Transformation Center (Lawtrend), Committee for the Protection of the Repressed "Salidarnasts", Belarusian Association of Journalists, and Assembly of Democratic NGOs in Belarus.

The information was gathered with the help of a **questionnaire**.

The research was implemented in **January-October 2015** (the field stage — in **May-June 2015**).

The authors of this research express their deep appreciation to **Nikolay N. Leonov**, candidate of physicomathematical sciences, for his substantial participation in the programming and analyzing of the research results, as well as the developing and implementing of the data mathematical analysis strategy.

The full version of research report is available in Russian<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> See (in Russian): **Belarusian society's solidarity potential**. Research results report [Electronic resource] // Centre for European Transformation. — Website of the CET. — 18.12.2015. — Access date: 18.12.2015. — Access mode: [http://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/userfiles/5/CET/2015\\_Solidarity-National-Belarus-RU.pdf](http://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/userfiles/5/CET/2015_Solidarity-National-Belarus-RU.pdf), free. — Title screen.

### The basic research conclusions

After the **first phase** of studying the solidarity potential in organized civil society, we concluded that the level of its solidarity is low. We assumed that Belarusan society would resemble civil society, especially its most amorphous part, which was conditionally called “Inhabitants” during the analysis and which was characterized by its indifference to objects and characters of both state and alternative discourse, by selective participation in the formats of collective actions that are widespread in the “third sector”, but also by its readiness to participate in positive (non-conflict) manifestations of solidarity. As a whole, this assumption was proved, but society (as a whole) appeared to be even less structured, even more passive, indifferent to values, less interested in the discussion of political and public topics, and more closed in the circle of interpersonal relations than activists of organized civil society. **Belarusan society's solidarity potential appeared to be essentially lower than the potential of solidarization in civil society.**

In many respects, such distinctions in the solidarity potential are influenced by the most basic characteristics that distinguish representatives of the third sector from Belarusan society as a whole. The third sector (the segment that we accepted as the general totality while studying the solidarity potential) is younger and more educated than the population of Belarus as a whole; it is more “masculine”, more urban, more socially mobile and active, and it has more varieties when it comes to the implementation of independent initiatives. It is necessary to remember it, while comparing and interpreting the results of researches of the solidarity potential in organized civil society and society as a whole, but per se they do not reveal the specificity of Belarusan society's low solidarity potential.

**The second phase of studying** the solidarity potential in Belarusan society **demonstrates that the existing structure of social identifications, the level and character of mutual trust, the contents of communication, the perception of significant axiological objects, and strategies of the Belarusan population's communicative behavior and civic participation do not spur the formation of stable bases for solidary actions of a public-political character.**



## Structure of social identifications

In the structure of social identifications of Belarusian society, the biggest group is one's belonging to the group of family and friends (77% of the population); less than a half of the population feel their belonging to those who share the same beliefs, to people of the same generation, and to people of the same trade, fellow workers. The affinity of views, which is often the basis of identification for 45,1% citizens of Belarus, does not necessarily mean the similarity of political views, which indirectly means the marginality of political problematics for the population. Even a smaller number of people is inclined to have the "we" feeling (26,3% — 33,8% of the population often identify themselves) with groups of national and civil belonging ("people of my nationality", "inhabitants of my city, settlement, village", "citizens of Belarus"), groups according to the level of incomes, as well as groups according to political-ideological and behavioral signs ("those who have not lost their faith in the future", "those who do not wait for manna from heaven, but create their own destiny and life", and "those who share political positions"). The block of the groups least popular for identification includes "the Soviet people", "people of the planet", "citizens of the CIS", and the "group of people not interested in politics" (only 14% — 18,3% people often identify themselves with these groups) (See Diagram 1).

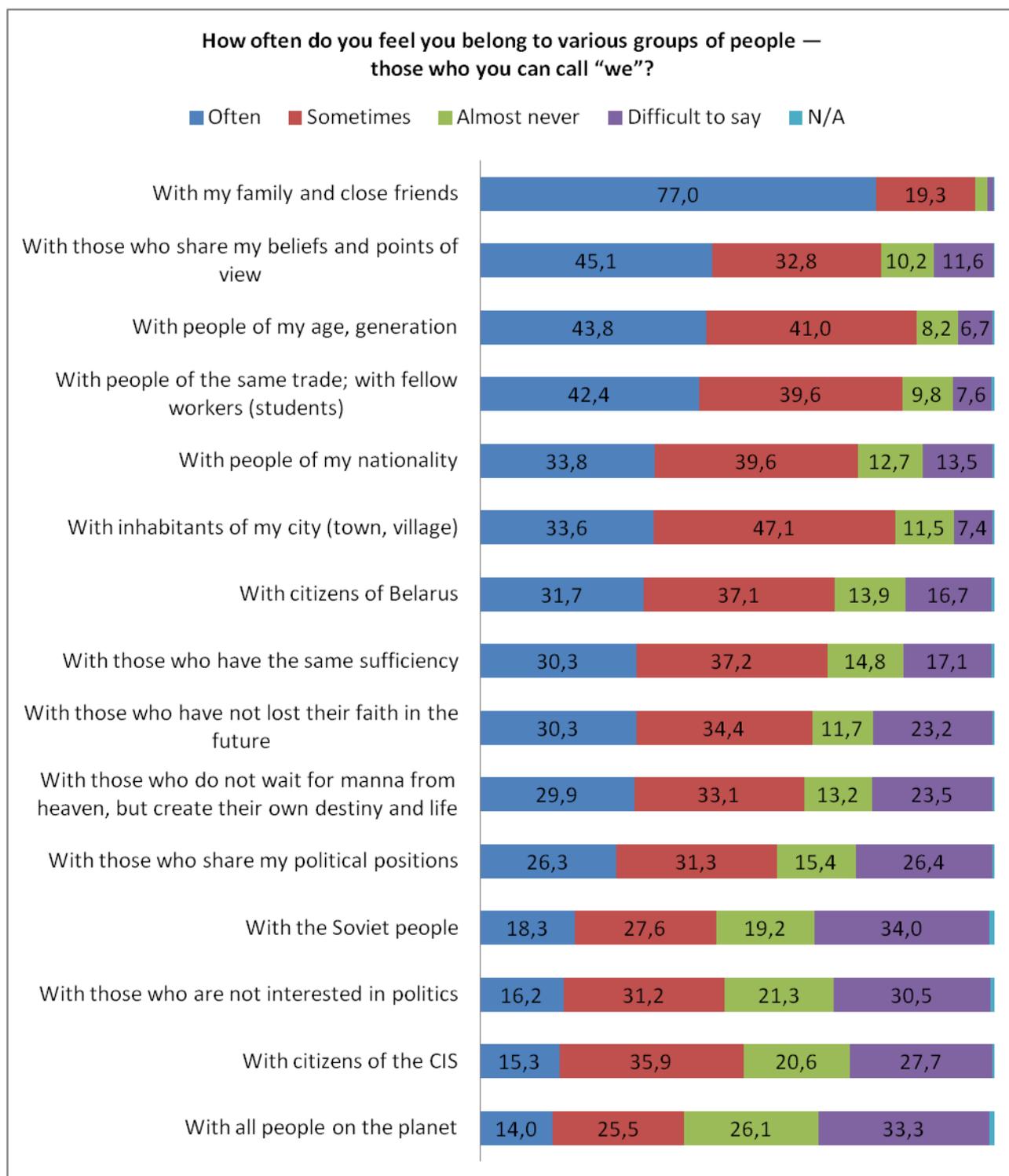
Thus, in Belarusian society, the dominating identification is with the close circle (i.e. the private sphere of life); all others are on the periphery. While there is such a structure of identifications, it is difficult to count on wide and stable solidarization of a public-political character, which presupposes the presence of a stronger identification with abstract (public) notions such as the nation, citizenship, and ideological and political groups. Under certain conditions, solidarity is possible within the framework of groups of a situational identification, for which the identification indicator "sometimes" is high: "inhabitants of my city, settlement, village", "people of my age, my generation", "people of the same trade, fellow workers", and "people of my nationality". At the same time, the question of what conditions are needed for this solidarity potential to appear requires additional research.

It is indicative that among representatives of civil society there is not such a visible gap; the structure of identifications is more balanced. The frequency of identification with "ideological" and "socially active" groups in the environment of civil society is much higher than in society as a whole. Among representatives of civil society, the frequency of identification with the group of like-minded fellows almost reaches the level of the frequency of identification with the family and close circle (76%). Besides, among representatives of civil society, identifications with the groups with political-ideological characteristics and behavioral strategies dominate (after the identification with the close circle). Except the identification with like-minded fellows, which is the same in the population, in the group of representatives of civil society the second place is occupied by the identification with "with those who share my political positions", "with those who have not lost their faith in the future", and "with those who do not wait for manna from heaven, but create their own destiny and life".

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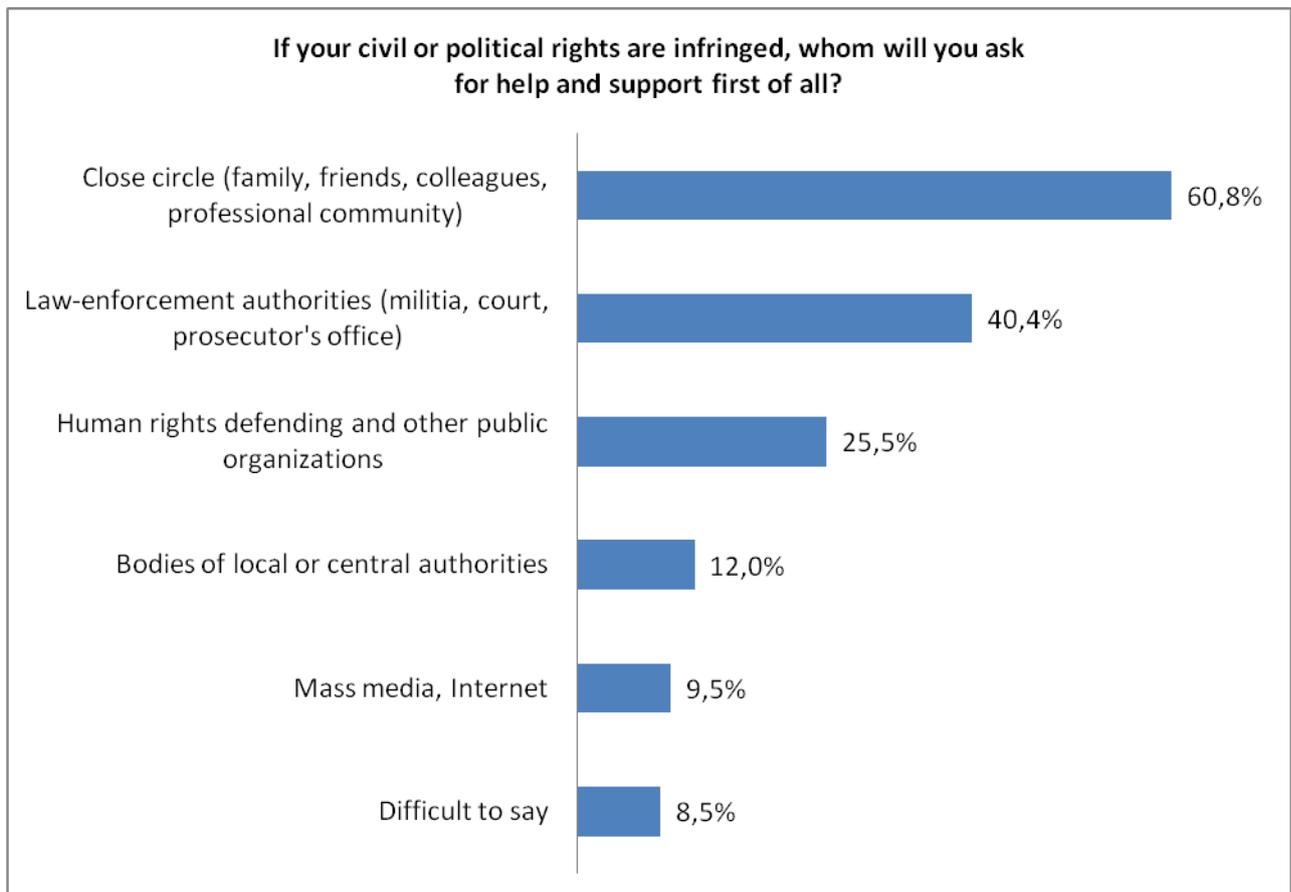
**Diagram 1.** Structure of social identifications, %



## Structure of trust in social institutions and communities

The structure of social identifications is almost completely reflected in the structure of trust in social institutions and communities, which does not create any strong bases for solidarization either. It is possible to speak about autonomization of society from the sphere of public institutions, when people prefer to lean on their personal connections while solving any complicated questions and do not trust all public institutions. The circle of Belarusian society's potential solidarity is actually limited by the close circle of family and friends; the Belarusians do not especially count on solidarity from other groups and communities. The potential of mutual trust and solidarity of the population in relation to public and state institutions is very low. The population does not trust them and does not count on their help and support, which also means that it will hardly respond to their appeal for support in case of need. An essential part of society is inclined to rely on law enforcement bodies, but even they are not trusted by the majority. Human rights defending and other public organizations are trusted by not more than a quarter of the population (See Diagram 2).

**Diagram 2.** Degree of trust in various social institutions and communities in a situation when rights are infringed, %



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The state and public institutions are not trusted, which questions their ability to implement their socially useful function. Indirectly, such a situation means that in the eyes of Belarusian society the institutions of central and local authorities and the public sector in Belarus do not do the things that are expected of them. In many respects, it is explained by the fact that the Belarusian authorities force all institutions to perform functions unusual for them (as a rule, ideological ones). While there are generally low indicators of trust in any institutions, among those who “trust in state institutions” there are often inhabitants of the capital and cities, people of a senior generation (45+), more socially active (participants of subbotniks, humanitarian actions; those who sign petitions), “passive” users of information. Among those who “trust in non-state institutions”, there are often inhabitants of regions, rural areas, younger people (especially the group of 25-34 years old), more educated, more socially active, discussing political and politics-related topics, “active” users of information.

In comparison with society as a whole, civil society is characterized by a higher level of institutional trust. At the same time, the circle of this solidarity is limited by colleagues in the “third sector” and does not cover even related public sectors of territorial (neighbors’) communities and church communities. Trust of civil society in state institutions is lower than that of the population as a whole.

The crisis of institutional trust in society is supplemented with the absence in public consciousness of vivid leaders whose opinion can act as a reference point for joint actions. 83,1% respondents of the national poll have no political persons who they can be guided by in their actions; A. Lukashenko acts as a reference point only for 9,1% of the population. All other public figures — sportsmen, officials, oppositional politicians, cultural figures — are on the periphery of public consciousness.

Underlining the fact that trust in Belarusian society covers only the close family and friends circle, we cannot speak about any high interpersonal trust in society as a whole. Other studies (see, in particular, IISEPS) prove that people are not inclined to trust each other<sup>5</sup>. The low level of both horizontal and vertical trust generates a whole complex of social illnesses that can be seen in many respects in Belarus: providentialism, corruption, excessive suspiciousness, excessive barratry, “ghettoization” and self-isolation of groups, xenophobia, paternalism and hopes for strong authoritarian leadership, hopes for foreign help in the solution of national problems. Thus, the structure and character of trust in Belarusian society essentially limits its solidarity potential.

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<sup>5</sup> See (in Russian): **Paradoxes of public trust**. September and December 2010 [Electronic resource] // Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies. — Website of the IISEPS. — Access date: 20.11.2015. — Access mode: <http://old.iiseps.org/12-10-06.html>, free. — Title screen.

## Subjective semantic space: similarities and distinctions in the perception of significant events, values, and positions

The analysis of subjective semantic spaces, with the help of which various objects, concepts, and characters are evaluated and classified, does not allow us to find any stable bases for manifestations of solidarity. Among the objects offered for evaluations (events, dates of national pride: “March, 25<sup>th</sup>” — “July, 3<sup>rd</sup>”; reference points of cultural and axiological identification: “Belarus” — “Europe”; reference points of actual axiological-political self-determination: “Ukraine” — “Russia”; values: “Human Rights” — “Stability”; social positions: “the Businessman” — “the Official”), none of them has a high solidarity potential because respondents’ evaluations do not show any unequivocal and emotionally painted perception of a significant part of the pollees. The absence of the solidarity potential in relation to the offered objects can have different reasons: first, the lack of the importance of the object for the respondent and expressiveness of the attitude (without a high emotional charge, the object cannot expect any manifestation of solidarity); second, the division of all set of respondents in several groups, whose attitude to the evaluated objects has essential distinctions. Simplifying the situation a little, it is possible to say that society can be either indifferent in relation to axiologically and substantially loaded objects, or divided into groups with opposite opinions in relation to them. In both cases, there is an erosion of the bases of possible solidary actions.

In public consciousness, all objects can be divided into three groups as for their potential of integration and disintegration that they possess:

- “Ukraine” and “Europe” have the highest disintegrating potential. These categories receive extremely different evaluations and cannot obviously unite people for joint actions;
- The integrating potential that covers a considerable part of the population (more than 50%) is: “Russia”, “Belarus”, “July, 3<sup>rd</sup>”, and “Businessman”;
- A number of objects can be described more likely by the absence of potential, in connection with the low significance value of these objects: “Stability”, “Human rights”, “the Official”, “March, 25<sup>th</sup>”.

A special place among the objects is occupied by Ukraine and Russia; the attitude towards them is being reformatted right now. And if in case of Ukraine the attitude is full of contradictions, Russia preserves the potential of similar attitudes at least for a half of the population of the country (See Diagrams 3-4)<sup>6</sup>.

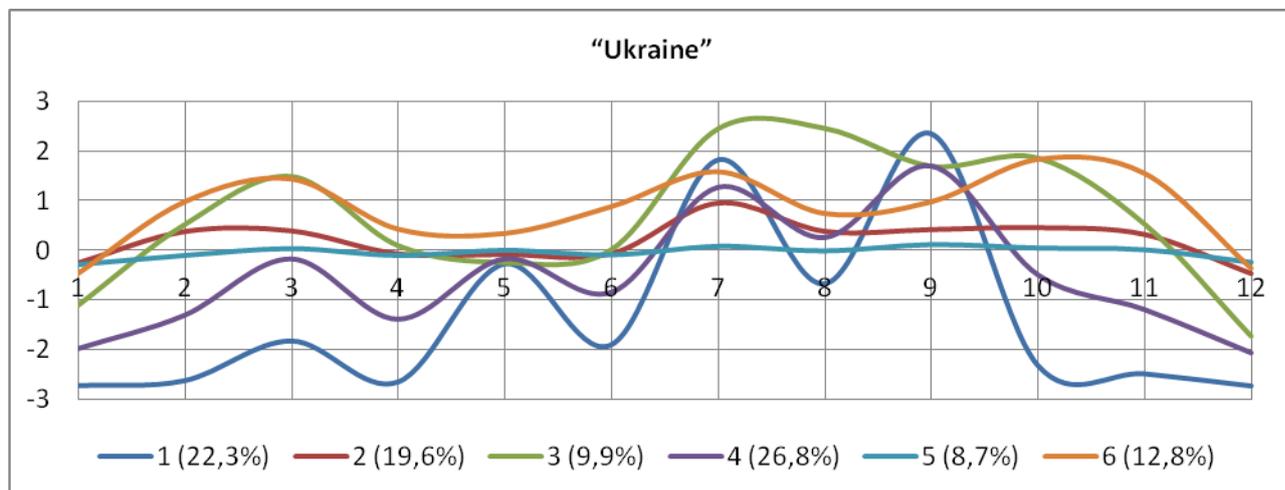
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<sup>6</sup> In diagrams 3-4, the horizontal scales are: 1 — “Difficult — Easy”, 2 — “Evil — Kind”, 3 — “Cold — Hot”, 4 — “Dirty — Clean”, 5 — “Old — Young”, 6 — “Silly — Clever”, 7 — “Quiet — Loud”, 8 — “Slow — Fast”, 9 — “Simple — Complicated”, 10 — “Cowardly — Courageous”, 11 — “Weak — Strong”, 12 — “Unhappy — Happy”; average arithmetic values for each scale are presented vertically.

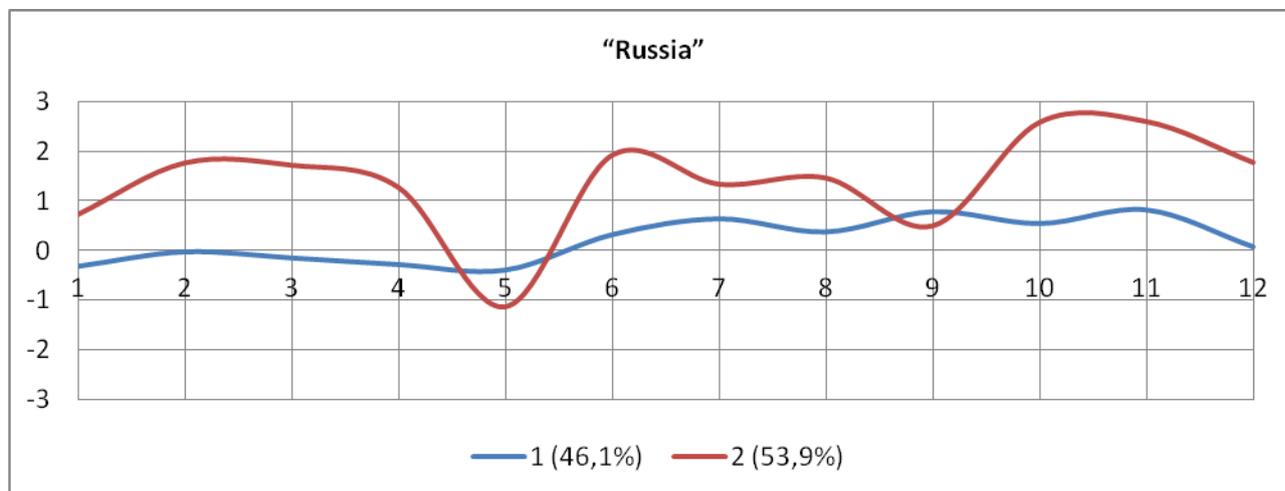
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**Diagram 3.** Perception of Ukraine: six groups of the population with emotionally-loaded and different perceptions



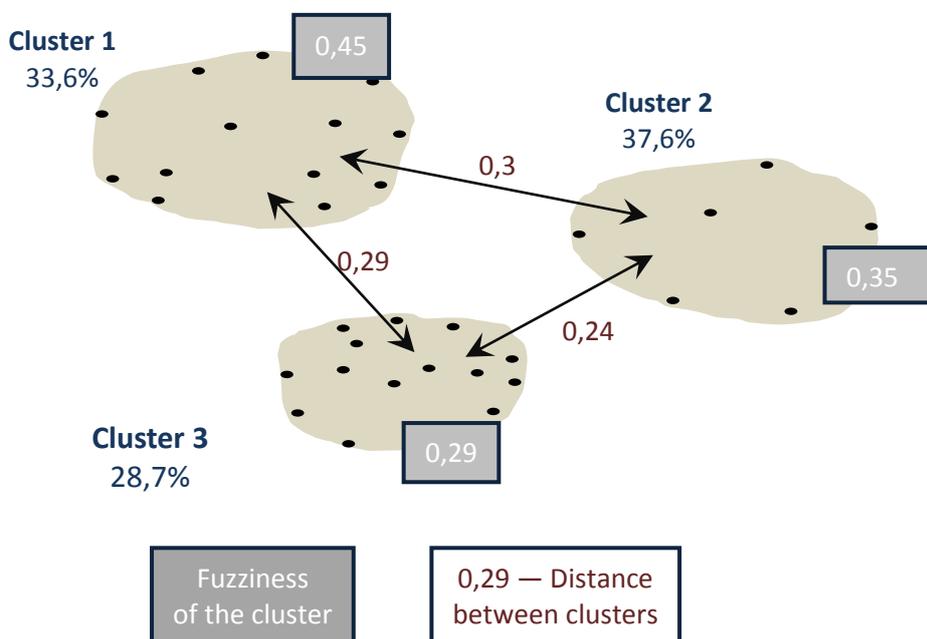
**Diagram 4.** Perception of Russia: two groups of the population; one is stable and positive in their evaluations, the other one is neutral and doubting



## Subjective semantic space: groups of potential solidarity

On the basis of the comparison of respondents' evaluations of all objects, it is possible to allocate 3 groups in Belarusian society, which consist of people who have a similar system of evaluating the offered objects: significant events, values, characters and objects of cultural identification. The similarity of evaluations and of the general perception of reality allows us to assume that such groups have an internal solidarity potential. The people of these groups understand each other and are more often ready to support each other. All three groups are characterized by various perceptions of the world and the Belarusian situation: the first one (33,6%) is focused on active support of the system, the second one (37,6%) — on the creation of a comfortable world for their individual development, and the third one (28,7%) — on the ignoring of the whole public context. Thus, these groups, first, are rather uncompact and blurry; second, the distinctions in their attitudes to the objects of semantic space cannot be called radical — they accent these or those features of perception more likely, rather than part respondents. Thus, even within the scope of these groups, it is impossible to call the solidarity potential high (See Picture 1).

**Picture 1.** Characteristics of the allocated clusters: size, density/fuzziness, distance between clusters



Comparing the received results with the results of the research into the solidarity potential in the organized civil society of Belarus, it is possible to say that the groups allocated on the basis of evaluations according to the semantic differential in the “third sector” and in society as a whole do not coincide as for their characteristics. The



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group of “inhabitants” of civil society is close to the description of Belarusan society as a whole. The most consolidated and potentially solidary part of Belarusan society in a broad sense is aimed at reproducing the Belarusan system, while the same consolidated part of civil society — at changing it. We shall notice that the group of active opponents of the regime in civil society has no implicit referents among the country population.

The greatest consolidating potential in Belarusan society belongs to the group aimed at the basic values and signs of today's public-political system. A characteristic feature of this potential solidarity is the orientation on the actual embodiment and preservation of this system, instead of any ideal and institutional constructions. Thus, it is impossible to predict here what exactly can cause solidary actions.

## Experience of participation and behavioral strategies

The population's experience of participation in collective actions and events does not speak about any high solidarity potential either. As a whole, the Belarusians' participation level in any collective actions and events is low enough. The most widespread form of participation is predictably the participation in "subbotniks" organized by local or central power — more than a half of the Belarusians take part in them regularly (26%) or from time to time (32,1%). However, it is impossible to call this type of activity a completely voluntary and independent kind of activity. As for self-organized forms of participation, more than a quarter of respondents (27%) marked that they have no experience of participation in none of the offered kinds of joint actions. The most widespread form of expressing solidarity is charity (gathering donations or humanitarian aid); more than 40% of respondents have a more or less regular practice of participating in such actions. All other forms of joint actions are demanded in a much lower degree, while the share of those who at least "sometimes" take part in the forms with an obvious "protest character" (public statements in protection, protest actions and street actions) are near the level of statistical error (See Table 1).

**Table 1.** Experience of participation in solidary actions, %

Participation forms	Participation in "subbotniks" organized by local or central power	Participation in actions of gathering donations or humanitarian aid	Signatures gathering for petitions and collective appeals	Participation in cultural, environmental, or other public actions and initiatives	Public statements in support of someone or something	Participation in protest actions, street actions
I participate regularly	26,0	13,5	3,3	4,3	1,2	0,4
I participate from time to time	32,1	27,4	13,5	11,5	3,8	1,9
I participated once or twice	22,8	24,1	20,2	18,1	8,0	3,0
I have not participated	18,8	34,6	62,2	65,3	86,1	93,7
N/A	0,3	0,5	0,8	0,8	0,9	1,0
<b>Total</b>	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Thus, as a whole, it is possible to speak about a quite low intensity of the Belarusians' participation in solidary actions; every fourth inhabitant of our country has never participated in any self-organized forms of activity during his/her life. Only a quarter of the Belarusians has a practice of some periodical participation in various forms of displaying solidarity: from charitable actions to protest actions. The analysis of the data shows that the group of "periodically participating" does not have strongly allocated socially-demographic characteristics and is similar to a more passive part of Belarusian citizens ("sporadically participating") when it comes to the structure of identifications as for the majority of "demographic" and "economic" criteria (age, income level, territorial community, etc.). Still, those who more actively participate in various collective actions identify themselves more

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often with the national and civil community, with citizens of the CIS, and almost never identify themselves with the Soviet people. These distinctions cannot be explained by the factors of age or education — the group of “periodically participating” is on the average “younger” and more “educated”. Among the world outlook and political-ideological identifications, there are inconsistent tendencies as well: on the one hand, more active respondents identify themselves more often with adherents of active outlooks on life, with like-minded fellows, and those who share their political views; on the other hand — their desire to be separated from politics is also pronounced strongly enough. Bigger socialization of this group is also revealed in the structure of trust — as a whole, they are more inclined to trust various kinds of institutions in comparison with a more passive part, which prefers interpersonal trust. However, there is a certain discord here as well: due to the perception of symbolical objects and the structure of identifications, this group of more active citizens can be considered to be gravitating to “supporters of stability”, while the level of their trust in non-state institutions, human rights defending and other public organizations, in situations of infringements of political and civil rights, is almost as twice as high (39,2% of those who “periodically participate in solidary actions” would address to human rights defending or other public organizations in situations of infringements of civil or political rights; among those who “sporadically participate” — it is only 21,3%). Thus, the tendency of more active participation promotes the growth of the solidarity potential. At the same time, it is necessary to underline the absence of direct transition from active participation to trust and solidarity. It would be extremely naive and even erroneous to believe that only by involving people in various forms of civil activity (from actions of gathering garbage to protest actions), without work with other factors, it will be possible to spur the growth of political solidarity in the near future.

## Structure of communication and communicative strategy

The structure of communication (places of communication and topics of communication) correlates in many respects with the structure of public identifications and the structure of trust, demonstrating once again society's tendency to get closed in a narrow circle of private (family, friends, colleagues) relations. In the agenda of communication of the Belarusians in a close circle, personally-household themes prevail. The first three in the rating of discussed themes are "family and private affairs" (75,2%), "salaries and prices" (74,8%), and "health" (68,2%). About a quarter of respondents discuss in a close circle "culture and sports news" (25,2%) and "problems of their city's development" (23,8%). Questions of Belarus' political life, European and world politics, as well as economy and government, are on the periphery of the Belarusians' attention; the most marginal topics are human rights, Belarusian culture and national consciousness, as well as environmental problems (See Table 2).

**Table 2.** Level of actualization of various topics in communicatory practices of respondents, %

What topics and problems do you discuss most of all in the close circle (relatives, friends, co-workers)?*	% in the sample
Family and private affairs	75,2
Salaries and prices	74,8
Health	68,2
News of culture and sports	25,2
Problems of development of one's city, town, village	23,8
Political life in Belarus	19,8
Questions of European and global politics	16,9
Economy and state administration in Belarus	16,9
Questions of defending human rights and interests	12,1
Questions of Belarusian culture and national self-consciousness	10,3
Environmental problems	8,6
Other	1,3

\* The question was not alternative, i.e. it was possible to choose more than one variant of the answer.

The analysis of "places" where communication on public-political questions is concentrated demonstrates that this communication is the most intensive in the circle of friends, fellow workers or students and in the family circle, i.e. in the "close circle" we have mentioned in the previous question. It means that the Belarusians discuss public-political questions in the close circle not often, but in other circles and places they discuss them even less. The Internet and public actions (as places of discussion of public affairs) occupy marginal positions.

The circle of family and friends is not only the most intensive as for the degree of communication, but also the most consolidated as for the points of view and evaluations. It is in this circle where people meet like-minded fellows and almost never meet opponents or people with other points of view. The circle of co-workers is more

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balanced in this respect — a third of respondents find there an almost equal number of “like-minded fellows” and “opponents” while discussing public-political questions (See Table 3).

**Table 3.** Level of actualization of various topics in communicatory practices of respondents, %

Where you meet ... in conversations about public-political problems in Belarus most often?	Like-minded fellows	Opponents
In the family	60,5	24,7
In the circle of friends	59,2	26,9
There where I work, study	31,5	29,2
In public transport, department stores, queues, etc.	5,6	17,3
During public events (meetings, presentations, cultural events)	2,6	7,4
On the Internet (forums, social networking services)	8,0	10,1
Other	0,3	1,3
I do not participate in discussions of this sort of problems	17,6	30,6

According to the research, among sources of information on the life in Belarus, the television occupies the first place — the overwhelming majority (85,5%) prefers it. The second place is occupied by the Internet (57,5%); the third place is such a source of information as communication with the close circle (friends, relatives, acquaintances) (See Table 4).

**Table 4.** Popularity of various sources of information on the life in Belarus

What sources of information on the life in our country do you use?*	Absolute frequency	% in the sample
TV	870	85,5
Internet	585	57,5
Communication with friends, acquaintances, relatives	433	42,5
Newspapers, magazines	404	39,7
Radio	354	34,8
Official information there where I work, study	80	7,9
Other	6	0,6

\* The question was not alternative, i.e. it was possible to choose more than one variant of the answer.

In spite of the fact that television obviously dominates over all other sources of information, the fact that more than a half of the Belarusians use the Internet to obtain information on the life in our country is worth attention. The data on the use of the Internet demonstrate its potential as a source of public-political information: 43% respondents said that they use the Internet every day; 29% — from time to time. A quarter of the Belarusians does not use the Internet.



On the Internet, Belarusian news sites (38,6%) and social networks (35,6%) are almost equal information sources, which confirms the recently popular thesis of the growth of popularity of social networks and their use not only as places of building contacts and realizing interests, but also as an information source. Among demographic characteristics, the strongest factor influencing a choice and intensity of using different sources of information on the life in the country is age. In younger age groups, the Internet obviously forces out more traditional information channels — television, radio, newspapers and magazines; the only “channel”, which is used almost equally by respondents of all ages, is communication in the close circle as a source of information on the life in the country. It is necessary to notice that age is in general the only factor (among those that we had a possibility to supervise) that influences TV consumption.

The comparison of characteristics of experiences of solidary actions and communicative behavior of respondents of the national poll and activists of public organizations and initiatives shows an essential difference between them. Only the criterion of participation in charitable actions and initiatives is almost the same for Belarusian society as a whole and for representatives of CSOs. All other forms of displaying solidarity, which are spread among activists of public organizations and initiatives, are almost absent in experiences of respondents of the national poll. There are significant differences in the agenda of communication, used sources of information, and channels and places of communication concerning public-political topics. The overwhelming majority of the Belarusians does not go to public space (even virtual one) to discuss these topics and prefers non-conflict communication, discussions with adherents, but not with those who have other points of view, opinions, and attitudes. The fact that communication concerning public-political topics is closed in a narrow circle of family and friends is one of the serious difficulties interfering with the development of relations and rapprochement of positions of the most active part of Belarusian society, i.e. activists of CSOs, with a wider circle of the Belarusians.

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