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Social Structure of Belarusian Society through Perspective of Transformational Processes

Transformation of Belarusian society at the end of XX – early XXI century caused substantial changes in Belarusian social structure. Within the framework of Belarusian society the stratification of population occurs by the level of income, material wealth and the whole set of criteria forming social inequality. This problem is especially relevant for the employees with fairly high socio-professional status they acquired before the changes of the 90s. Another important aspect is the increase of marginal layers resulting in huge number of poor and mendicant people.

Socio-economic changes taking place in Belarus in late XX – early XXI century affect the characteristics of social structure. Social structure is a set of relatively stable links between the elements of social system reflecting its essential characteristics in all spheres of social life (economic, socio-political and spiritual) on both macro and micro levels. Social structure of modern Belarusian society is characterized as extremely unstable both on the level of processes within social groups and between them as well as on the level of a person perceiving its place in the system of social hierarchy. In the conditions of transforming socialism the process of its structural changing occurs in the form of structure breaking down into some sort of relatively independent dimensions. It means that changes in the material status of an individual do not necessarily result in changing its place in socio-professional structure, while changing the conception of administrative system and authoritative relationships is not always conditioned by status changing.

Consequently, it is necessary to take into account the demographic situation in the republic that has developed in the 90s of the previous century and at the beginning of this century. The resident population of the Republic of Belarus according to 16th February 1999 census data made up 10 million 45 thousand people*. Urban population made up the number of 6 million 961 thousand (69%), while rural population was 3 million 84 thousand (31% of all population). There were 1 million 485 people in Brest region.

The process of depopulation that began in 1993 continued further after the census.

* Hereinafter Republic of Belarus 1999 census data.

The table below shows changes in the number of population in Belarus after 1999 census [2, p.134]

Age	1999			2003		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
Total	10045.2	10045.2	10045.2	9898.6	7036.4	2862.2
Under working age	2131.9	1509.4	622.4	1833.0	1302.4	530.7
Working age	5752.1	4330.8	1421.3	5966.1	4562.5	1403.6
Over working age	2160.1	1120.1	1040.0	2099.5	1171.6	927.9
Youth16-29 y.o.	2018.0	1556.3	461.7	2279.5	1794.2	485.3

According to census data the average density of population is 48 people per 1 sq. m. The lowest density was registered in Vitebsk and made up 34 people per 1 sq. m., while the highest density of population was in Grodno region with 45 people per 1 sq. m. The density of population in Minsk was 65 people per 1 sq. m., in Brest 59 people per 1 sq. m. The population registered in the course of 1999 census increased by 25% as opposed to 1959 census data. Population growth rate in the regions of the republic shows fluctuation from 3% in Mogilev region to 20% in Brest region. The most remarkable increase in population has taken place in the capital. During the period under review it grew by 3.3 times.

The table below shows changes in population of the regions and Minsk city:

Regions	Population (thousand people)					1989-1999 population growth (+) decrease (-)
	1959	1970	1979	1989	1999	
Republic of Belarus	8032	8992	9532	10152	10045	-107
Regions						
Brest region	1177	1293	1358	1449	1485	+36
Vitebsk region	1273	1369	1385	1410	1377	-33
Gomel region	1359	1531	1595	1668	1545	-123
Grodno region	1074	1118	1127	1163	1185	+22
Minsk region	1465	1538	1547	1575	1559	-16
Mogilev region	1176	1227	1247	1280	1214	-66
Minsk city	508	916	1273	1607	1680	+73

Current structure of population of the Republic of Belarus by age and sex has been substantially influenced not only by the events of the last 10 years but also by all the socio-political and economic events and wars of the previous century, Chernobyl disaster of 1986 and by the resulting changes in migration flows and the distribution of population between towns and the country side, in the structure and level of employment of men and women and in the level of birth rate.

In the post-war period up to 1994 the population had been constantly growing. However, in early 70s the growth rate began slowing down gradually.

During the period between the 1988 and 1999 censuses the population decreased by 107 thousand people (or 1%), which is caused by natural depopulation (death-rate exceeding birth rate), which is growing and not compensated by increase from migration.

Sharp decline in demographic situation has been the case since 1993. It's from that moment that the demographic response of the population to the crisis in economy and decline in the birth rate began to reflect on average duration of life span. The response is expressed in growth of death rate, decline in birth rate and average life span as well as in the substantial changes in the sphere of family building and its stability.

During the period of 1989-1998 1244 thousand people died in the republic, while only 1163 thousand children were born. Natural depopulation made up 81 thousand people.

According to 16th February 1999 census data the resident population of Brest region made up 1485.1 thousand people. There were 902.2 thousand people living in towns (60.8%), while 582.9 thousand people lived in the country (39.2%).

Furthermore, as of the census date there were 2.4 thousand permanent residents in the region.

The changes in population of Brest region as per census data are characterized by the following:

	Thousand people
1959 (as of 15 th January)	1177,3
1970 (as of 15 th January)	1292,8
1979 (as of 17 th January)	1357,9
1989 (as of 12 th January)	1449
1999 (as of 16 th January)	1485,1

After the census the population of the region decreased further, though not significantly

	Thousand people
1999 16.02	1485,1
2000 0.01	1484,1
2001 1.01	1481,9
2002 1.02	1477,2

According to 1999 census data there are people of more than 130 nationalities living on the territory of the republic and more than 100 nationalities on the territory of Brest region. The nationality was specified by the respondents on the basis of their self-consciousness. The nationality of children was determined by their parents.

The majority of the population (81%) consider themselves Belarusian, 11% are Russian, almost 4% are Poles, 2% are Ukrainians and 0.3% are Jews.

The highest relative density of Belarusians is in Minsk region (87%), while the lowest is in Grodno region (62%). Russians make up the highest

percentage of 16% in Minsk and the lowest of 9% in Brest region, Ukrainians are around 4% in Brest and 2% in Vitebsk region, Poles are 25% in Grodno region and 0.2% in Mogilev respectively.

In Brest region 85% of the population considered themselves representatives of indigenous (Belarusians) nationality, almost 9% were Russians, 3.8% were Ukrainians, almost 2% were Poles and 0.1% were Jews.

The following table shows changes in population of major nationalities during the period between 1989 and 1999 censuses.

	thousand people		1999 in % to 1989	in % to total	
	1989	1999		1989	1999
Total population	1449	1485	102.5	100	100
Belarusians	1199.5	1262.6	105.3	82.8	85
Russians	145.9	128.7	88.2	10.1	8.7
Ukrainians	60.7	57.1	94.2	4.2	3.8
Poles	31.7	27.1	85.7	2.2	1.8
Jews	3.2	1.1	34.9	0.2	0.1
Other nationalities	8	8.5	104.4	0.5	0.6

In 1990 the share of incomes generated from officially unaccounted business made up 2% of all incomes of the population of Belarus. In 2001 this number was 13 times higher and exceeded 26%.

Also, we have to take into account the fact that during the same period of time the decrease in actual incomes of the population of the republic on the whole (property differentiation of the population not being accounted for) exceeded 4%, i.e. 100% physical decrease in incomes. In 1990 the share of population in the republic having the income lower than the minimal consumer budget was 3%, while in 1995 it grew up to 80.4% and made up 76.8% in 2001. At the same time the ratio of average income of 10% richest families opposed to average income of 10% poorest families changed from 3 times in 1990 up to 9.8 times in 1995 and made up 6.9 times in 2000.*

In the course of nationwide sociological poll carried out in 1997 by „Schyrast” group (sampling of 1030 respondents), when asked: „Please, specify the approximate income per one member of your family”, the following results were registered:

Belarusian rubles	Belarus	Brest region	Brest	Pinsk	Kobrin	Ivatsevichi
1. under 2000000	4.4%	6.9%	1.6%	2.8%	4.3%	10.3%
2. 200001-400000	16.8%	18.8%	6.3%	6.4%	13.8%	17.9%
3. 400001-600000	25.8%	32.6%	10.9%	9.7%	34.5%	21.4%
4. 600001-800000	19.6%	18.8%	14.1%	15.3%	27.6%	21.4%
5. 800001-1000000	10.1%	4%	14.1%	2.5%	10.3%	4%
6. 1000001-1200000	5.5%	2%	17.2%	10.6%	3.4%	10.7%
7. 1200001-1500000	3.9%	1%	4.7%	11.6%	6%	7.1%
8. over 1500000	3.3%		1.6%	1%	-	-

* As per 02.01.1997 exchange rate of 1 US dollar equaling 20050 Belarusian rubles.

There are different approaches to determination of social groups and their financial position. Specifically, Institute of socio-political research attached to administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus (ISPR) carries out social layers welfare analysis on the basis of self-identification of residents of the republic. The answer to this question below contains comparison of numbers for the respondents of 1993-2002 polls.

	Periods								
	4 th quarter, 1998	2 nd quarter, 1999	4 th quarter, 1999	2 nd quarter, 2000	4 th quarter, 2000	2 nd quarter, 2001	4 th quarter, 2001	2 nd quarter, 2002	4 th quarter, 2002
	Percentage of Respondents								
1. Rich	0.7	0.4	0.6	0.9	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.4
2. Middle class welfare	27.3	28.7	31.6	33.5	32.3	37.4	35.7	34.1	37.1
3. Poor	52.0	54.3	51.2	47.4	50.3	47.1	47.5	50.8	48.6
4. Below the poverty line	12.8	9.6	9.5	12.0	10.6	9.0	8.1	7.8	7.2
5. Don't know	7.2	7.0	7.1	6.2	6.3	6.0	8.2	7.0	6.7

ISPR case studies in the first half of 2004 showed that 48.6% of the respondents included themselves in the group with middle class welfare. At the same time we have to take into account the differentiation of the approaches to the notions of „middle class, middle class welfare, the poor and beggars”. Thus, according to U.N.O. definition, a person is considered poor if he/she makes no more than 1 US dollar a day. World Bank sets the poverty line as a daily income of 2 dollars, which is 60 dollars monthly. In the USA they consider a person middle class if he/she makes 18 dollars an hour. Under the version of World Bank a Belarusian claiming to be a middle-class person must earn over 6 dollars a day, which makes up approximately 200 dollars monthly net of taxes, social security and other compulsory payments. Following the numbers of the same official statistics the average wage in Belarus in the middle of 2004 was 160 dollars.

In the context of crisis transition from one socio-economic system to the other the deconstruction of stratification criteria occurs in post-soviet societies. In this framework the crucial role is referred to:

- a) owing capital that generates revenues;
- b) involvement in redistribution of social wealth as a result of property denationalization and privatization;
- c) level of personal income and consumption.

Generalization of statistical materials and sociological research data makes it possible to conclude that actual distribution of the population of Belarus into different social layers that takes into account the income factor can be made as follows:

1. Rich people account for approximately 1.5% of all the population.
2. Wealthy people that can afford many expensive purchases, traveling, recreation in health centers, etc. (approximately 6%).
3. Well-to-do people (8-9%) experiencing restrictions in buying expensive things, the likes of cars, computers, going to restaurants, traveling abroad, etc.
4. Middle class people (14%) characterized by the fact that occasionally they have free money and according to the priorities of their family the number of money spending variants increases, i.e. they have to make a choice: buying household appliances or expensive clothes or good food, but very seldom everything at once.
5. Disadvantaged people (17%) that cannot afford buying household appliances and other expensive devices or delicatessen, seriously restricted in money when buying clothes, going to theaters, concerts, cinemas, cafés, etc.
6. Poor people (around 46%) that only occasionally can afford buying meat, fruit and clothes and in no financial position to pay for their children's education in commercial colleges, going to theatres, cafés, etc.
7. Mendicant people (7%) that are on the verge of survival, unable to buy meat, sweets, new clothes for children and especially for themselves, often live on alms, quite often become frequenters and consumers of scrapyards [1, p. 192].

Especially interesting is the problem of mendicant people. Mendicancy research reveals the following picture. Mendicancy group in the wide sense is presented by the marginal layers, while in the narrow sense the understanding of this status is first of all connected with the appearance of beggars on the streets of Belarusian cities in the 90s. However, this phenomenon is not much written of. The problem is paid attention to only by those, who understand the social danger of beggary. In Belarus there are fewer beggars as compared to the Ukraine and moreover Moscow and other regions of CIS, but still there are some. They are young and old, as a rule sober, men and women, elderly people and children, physically challenged people and women with infants in arms and two or three other children pottering around them, old ladies able of standing for a number of hours in one and the same pose with their hands extended forward constantly keeping on thanking. Their 'legends' are uniform: 'got robbed', 'no ticket money to go home', 'refugees', 'burnt out', 'the child is ill', 'need money on operation'. Their clothes are regular, so you won't see any dirty clothes or rags on them. People begging money to help homeless dogs and others have recently joined them. Traditional places of beggars in Brest are the areas around central and other markets, auto and railway terminal, confessional establishments, city center, etc.

Following the research results, women use verbal methods of begging more often, while men mostly make use of non-verbal tricks. Especially often women were expressing their good wishes and gave explanations why they

were begging, addressed the passers by and used disguised begging. Also women try to be at a closer distance to the addressed people. They look into your eyes and extend a begging hand more often than men.

Begging men behave as one would expect them to, taking into consideration their sex. They just sit or lie. Women are more active and brave (approach passers by, look into your eyes and extend a begging hand). Similar kind of behavior can be noticed in our reality.

The case study carried out in February 2005 in Brest under the direction of the author (sampling of 280 respondents by sex, age, social status and education) has shown that depending on self-identification, social status, family status, and, more importantly, on incomes the respondents refer themselves as belonging to the following groups:

1. Rich	1.4%
2. Wealthy	5%
3. Middle class	25.9%
4. Disadvantaged	37.1%
5. Poor	24.2%
6. Living under poverty line	6.4%

Income criteria of the citizens of Brest are the following: a) rich – over 3 thousand dollars monthly per capita, b) wealthy from 3 thousand to 250 dollars monthly per capita, c) middle class – from 250 to 150 dollars monthly net of taxes, social security and other compulsory payments, d) disadvantaged and poor (150-70 dollars net of taxes), e) under poverty line (60 dollars and less).

The above shown social structure, as a matrix based on the differentiation of incomes of population, corresponds to the matrix of social status. Social status is a relative position that an individual or a group of individuals occupies in the society according to profession, socio-economic status, political opportunities, sex, origin, family status. The notion of social status characterizes the place of an individual in social structure and can be expressed in different qualitative and quantitative factors like reputation, prestige, privileges, level of income, wages, awards, titles, fame, etc.

Academician E. Babosov proposed the following subordination range:

1) on top of stratification pyramid is a higher layer - the new elite that consists of rich entrepreneurs (bank owners, the owners of big private companies, etc.), chief executive officials in minister ranks and higher. This is actually new bourgeoisie and highest rank state bureaucracy;

2) highest middle class – representatives of medium-sized and small businesses, directors, popular artists, actors, television reporters, leading scientists, owners of private hospitals and private dentists, etc.;

3) middle class – professors, layers and doctors that have private practice, heads of departments at effectively functioning enterprises, senior officers, etc.;

4) lower middle class – teachers, regular engineers, employees of cultural establishments, junior officers, employees with qualification, etc.;

5) lower class - semi-skilled workers, peasants, clerks, army and police sergeants, etc.:

6) parasite layers – mafia groups, racketeers, robbers, bandits, wizards, fortune-tellers, prostitutes, etc.;

7) marginal layers – beggars that fell down to the bottom of social structure from other social groups, homeless people, refugees, forced migrants, street adolescents, etc.

Thus, within the framework of Belarusian society the stratification of population occurs by the level of income, material wealth and the whole set of criteria forming social inequality. This problem is especially relevant for the employees with fairly high socio-professional status they acquired before the changes of the 90s. Another important aspect is the increase of marginal layers resulting in huge number of poor and mendicant people.

Literature

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Struktura społeczna białoruskiego społeczeństwa z perspektywy procesu transformacji

Streszczenie

Transformacja społeczeństwa białoruskiego w końcu XX i na początku XXI wieku doprowadziła do głębokich zmian w strukturze społecznej. W sytuacji społecznej, jaka panuje na Białorusi, zachodzi proces rozwarstwiania się ludności pod względem poziomu dochodów, bytu materialnego, stosownie do kompleksu czynników, które tworzą zróżnicowanie społeczne. Zmienia się sytuacja społeczna wielu grup aktywnej zawodowo ludności. Problem ten ze szczególną ostrością dotyka robotników, którzy jeszcze na początku lat 90., u zarania przeobrażeń, uzyskali stosunkowo wysoki status społeczno-zawodowy. Drugi najważniejszy problem to wzrost liczebności warstw marginalnych oraz adekwatne do niego zwiększenie populacji ludzi ubogich i żebraków.