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Data: 23/11/2026 12:46:31

DOI:10.17951/sb.2019.13.403-405
Studia Białorutenistyczne 13/2019

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***Sąsiedztwa III RP – Białoruś. Zagadnienia społeczne*, eds. Maciej Dębicki and Julita Makaro, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo GAJT, 2019, 240 pp.**[1]

The collective research paper on Belarus reviewed here in is the sixth in the series of the *Neighborhood of the Third Republic of Poland* devoted to our neighbours. This series is the effect of regular conferences organized by the editors of the current volume (as well as previous ones) within the Institute of Sociology of the University of Wrocław. Previous volumes, also published by the GAJT Publishing House, were devoted to Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Russia and Slovakia respectively.

The paper contains an introduction and twelve texts divided into three parts according to the issues they address. It begins with the editors' foreword entitled Belarus as a context for reflection on Polishness which introduces the reader to the subject of the volume. Its authors briefly present the articles in the book, point out how Belarus is perceived in Poland, list nine phenomena 'which can be distinguished within the issues presented in the book', i.e. the main topics of work (p. 9). The first part is called *Our Common Minorities*. It contains four articles on the Polish minority in Belarus and the Belarusian minority in Poland. It starts with an article entitled *Belarusians in Poland – Poles in Belarus. Mutual relations from the perspective of the passing century.* The author briefly and skillfully outlines the Polish-Belarusian relations in the past, up to the period after World War II. The next text is by Andrzej Sadowski, a well-known researcher of the Orthodox community of the Bialystok region and the Polish-Belarussian borderland. It is entitled *Belarussians in Poland – the drama of the borderland identity.* In an intriguing and competent manner, the author describes the various identities of the Orthodox community in the Bialystok region (currently the Podlasie Voivodeship), which *currently has over 120 thousands residents* (p. 54). While presenting the five national-religious types of the local Orthodox community, Sadowski employs estimated quantitative proportions between Belarusians, Poles,

[1] *Neighborhoods of the Third Republic of Poland – Belarus. Social issues*, eds. Maciej Dębicki and Julita Makaro, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo GAJT, 2019.

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Ukrainians and Russians (with the last two communities being clearly minorities in the area). He writes:

> Orthodox Poles are the most numerous category with over 50% of all the total Orthodox categories, The second largest group are Orthodox Belarussians in Poland (about 30% of the total Orthodox), the Belarusian Orthodox ethnic group (about 10% of the total right-famous), and the other categories include numbers not exceeding 10% of the total (p. 56).

The next text written by Tadeusz Gawin, the first chairman of the Union of Poles in Belarus, is entitled *Polish national minority in Belarus and Belarusian opposition parties (1991–2017)*. The author exhibited vast knowledge of Belarusian realities and took up a subject which is not always analysed objectively as it evoked many sentiments in both sides, especially when it comes to the language in churches. He refers to a number facts which are of importance to the subject of the text. The article is equipped with numerous footnotes. Presenting the relations between the Belarusian opposition and Poles in Belarus, this publication is worth recommending to researchers of contemporary Belarusian society, especially in the context of Polish-Belarusian relations in the Republic of Belarus. The last article in the first part of the work is entitled *Contemporary inter-civilization relations in the area of the 'Ruthenian gap'*. The author of this paper, Zdzisław J. Winnicki, is a well-known and recognized researcher of contemporary Belarusian issues and current ideological trends in the neighbouring society. His view of Polish-Belarusian relations is slightly different from what was presented in the previous text and it is rightly so. The idea of a civilization gap introduced in this article is partly his original contribution to this subject, which calls for scientific consideration.

The second section of the book, entitled *Transborder behavior*, begins with a text by Marcin Dębicki called *Destination à rebours. The absence of Belarus on the destination map of Polish tourists.* The paper shows a frank and straightforward image of Belarus as a country not very attractive for Poles, even for those who visit it due to their sentiment to Kresy. The author presents Belarus as an area of poor infrastructure and a country which will inconvenience a potential tourists by requiring visas, although these provisions have admittedly been limited recently. The next text, *Belarus from the perspective of Polish tourists,* was written by Michał Lubicz Miszewski. It contains numerous quotes, i.e. accounts and opinions of people who travel to Belarus, which are available on several Internet portals. The article *Belarus for tourists? Yes, but... Reflections (from the Polish experience)* by Jacek Dębicki concerns travel issues. It is a brief (less than 9 pages) report of a short trip to the Belarusian side of the Polish-Belarusian borderland. Another text, written by Aneta Uss-Lik, is entitled *Activities of smuggling groups on the Polish-Belarusian border as an example of using social capital*. The article was based on interviews conducted with 30 people in 2012–2013, including two Belarusians (p. 149). It addresses rather fairly well-known facts. The problems described in the text are difficult to examine, but they have been often reported in the (inter alia) Lublin press with outrage.

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The third part of the book is entitled *Literature and Media*. It opens with a text by Renata Rozbicka *The image of Belarus in the 'Polityka' weekly in 1994–2017*. The author conducted a thorough and valuable research work, although the results were not referred (or compared) to analogical texts presenting the Polish view of Belarus in the press of over the recent decades. In the text, the author claims:

> a negative image of Belarus, Belarusian politicians and Belarusian society dominates (...) in the content of the weekly. Most publications emphasized that the very notion of a Belarusian identity nowadays is problematic, since it is more of a Soviet identity. At the same time, the frequent trips of young Belarusians to the West may initiate the process of the evolution of their political and national identity (p. 185).

Marta Cobel-Tokarska's article was entitled *The Belarusian character of a Nobel Prize winner. Svetlana Aleksijewicz and her work in the reception of Polish readers.* Devoted to the Belarusian identity, the article focuses on the perception of Aleksijewicz's work among Polish readers, elaborating on the interesting issue of her identity. The article has is based on a rich list of sources and numerous references to Poles' online statements. It was well-designed and written in a very good Polish. The latter is, in fact, characteristic for the large part of the book. *Belsat TV as an element of the Polish-Belarusian neighborhood*, a text by Julita Makaro, is primarily factual. It reconstructs the process of the emergence and operation of Belsat, a television channel broadcast from Poland for Belarusians in the Belarusian language, financed mainly by Poland. This article can be considered as very useful due to relatively comprehensive presentation of the issue, valuable to Polish journalists, Belarusian scientists, and people not just occasionally and superficially interested in Belarus. The last article, written by Agnieszka Goral, is entitled *Visions of Polish-Belarusian relations in terms of the ambassadors of the Republic of Poland in Minsk*. It discusses the diplomatic (and other) activity of two Polish ambassadors to Belarus: Elżbieta Smułkowa (1992–1995) and Leszek Szerepka (2011–2015). The text explicitly refers to Belarusian realities, especially during the ambassadors' terms of office. This is highly beneficial from the point of view of a potential reader. The author collected the statements of ambassadors on political, social and cultural topics and addressed the issue of the Polish minority in Belarus, the national identity of Belarusians, and the presence of the Belarusian language in that society.

The book in its entirety indisputably expands our knowledge about Belarus. Its first part is particularly noteworthy as it discusses important problems in a relatively holistic approach. The third part (and the paper '*Destination...*' within the second part) are also remarkable. Few researchers have addressed the question of Belarus and Belarusian issues, but this has been changing recently, with an increasing number of texts of mainly political, but also historical nature. The work is largely (but not only) sociological, which I find particularly valuable

Translated into English by Marek Robak-Sobolewski