

Sexism vs. feminism through the mirror of media and advertising

In September 2017, the oldest independent Belarusian newspaper, *Naša Niva*, launched *Naša Nina* – a new spin-off project designed exclusively for women. With topics ranging from women's rights in childbirth to celebrity news, it aspires to offer a unique and modern product on the market of gender-oriented media in Belarus.

Yet critics point out that the new project supports a conservative vision of women in society. Its narrow focus on love life, family, entertainment, and beauty trends indicates a possible fear of being labeled as feminist media.

The majority of Belarusians still see feminism as a radical and [marginalised movement](#), not least because gender stereotypes, [patriarchal mentality](#), and sexism still dominate Belarusian media and advertising.

Our Nina – a modern product for women?



Source: hrodna.life

Naša Niva launched its daughter project, *Naša Nina* (“Our Nina”), in 2017. The project is an attempt to attract more female Belarusians, as its own statistics showed that majority of its readers (nearly 65 per cent) were male. It advertised the offspring project as a media outlet for Belarusian women available exclusively in the Belarusian language. Yet *Nina*—a popular name that rhymes with the newspaper’s title—took her first steps on shaky grounds.

Positioning itself as a modern website for women, *Naša Nina* announced it would cover all topics that interest female readers. How the newspaper interprets female interests becomes evident from the major sections on its new website: love, family, home, lifestyle, self-development, and celebrity news. At the same time, the editors consciously omitted covering politics and economics, explaining that these sections were already available in the main website of the newspaper.

The editor-in-chief of *Naša Niva*, Yahor Marcinovich, has recently shared some of his views on content priorities. Marcinovich stated the major aim of the newspaper was to popularise Belarusian language for the masses. As Marcinovich admitted, articles from the section Love and Sex were in highest demand. For this reason, the oldest Belarusian newspaper started drifting in the direction of popular consumption.

Critics of *Naša Nina*’s launch immediately branded it as a product spreading gender stereotypes. Lifestyle, entertainment, love, and family do not belong exclusively to the female domain and generally interest all readers, male and female likewise. As Tacciana Siacko noted on *budzma.by*, a website that promotes Belarusian cultural initiatives, the differing range of sections and topics create a context of gender-oriented media with discriminative practices and a conservative mainstream vision of women.

Sex still sells Belarusian business

Currently, global PR trends indicate the increased usage of feminist themes in advertising. It appears the trend has yet to arrive in Belarus. Belarusian businesses are still using women's bodies to extract profits. In Belarus, gender stereotypes still go hand-in-hand with aggressive marketing campaigns, from lingerie and clothing to drinking water and finding cheap flights.

In July 2017, vandrouki.by, a travel deals website, published an ad on Facebook with following wording: “[prices] as small as your ex-girlfriend’s breasts, but honest deals: \$8.5 to book any flight or \$25.5 for hotel bookings.” Social network users reacted with outrage and the post was deleted. Later, the editor of vandrouki.by Andrei Miranchuk explained that the post was a “social experiment” that his friends were conducting, yet he did not provide any further details and did not express any regrets in conducting his “experiment.”



Feminists protesting against Mark Formelle sexist advertising, spring 2017

Clothing company Mark Formelle has produced some of the most scandalous examples of sexism, designing lingerie ads with

erotic contexts. Belarusian feminists from the Center for the Protection of Women's Rights—Her Rights interpreted the ads as offensive and submitted a formal complaint to the company.

Yet instead of apologising, Mark Formelle accused the NGO of self-promotion at the company's expense and in February 2017 responded with a video, where half-naked, athletic men were sewing bras and panties. Apparently, the company failed to see any irony in multiplying sexist contexts.

“Without signs of feminism on the face”

At the same time, a negative image of feminism is omnipresent in public discourse. In July 2016, an HR company from Minsk was seeking to hire a real estate company representative to deal with luxury properties. The job description included detailed requirements as to the appearance and age of the potential employee, who had to be a young girl “with a nice, Slavic smile” and “without any signs of feminism on the face.”

This rejection of feminism has historical roots. In the 1960s, Belarusian Soviet society ignored the second wave of feminism, with its focus on social and cultural inequalities, reproductive rights and exploitation of sexuality. In the 1990s, the fall of the USSR and the ensuing economic crisis disadvantaged Belarusian women, forcing them into more traditional roles. Contemporary Belarusian feminism took shape in reaction to women's diminished position in post-Soviet society. At present, feminism is [still struggling to establish itself as a social movement](#) and a value system.

The majority of Belarusians equate [feminism to a swearword or a kind of stigma](#), even though Belarusian laws guarantee gender equality, with women represented in government, state bureaucracy, and business. Very few Belarusian women openly

identify as feminists: about 4 per cent according to a 2012 *NewsEffect* survey on feminism in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine—the lowest percentage among the three countries.

Even professionally successful Belarusian women do not openly support feminism. The news website *TUT.BY* organises the annual Lady Boss contest, which popularises stories of women pursuing careers in business and management. In 2017, contest participants did not speak favourably of feminism. Volha Grynkevich, co-founder of a custom framing business, said, “No, I am not a feminist and I consider being a feminist wrong. It weakens men.” Alla Kashkan, founder of a furnace repair and installation company, said, “No, I am not a feminist. I do not relate to it. You have to let others take care of you.”

These examples show a lack of familiarity with the feminist movement and its contributions to the protection of women’s rights, despite the fact that 20 years ago Belarus pioneered gender studies in the post-Soviet region. The first academic Center for Gender Studies opened at the European Humanities University (EHU) in 1997, launching its unique MA program in Gender Theory in 2000. Yet since 2005, the Center works in Lithuanian exile, where the university was forced to move after the authorities closed its Minsk location.

Currently, the number of initiatives supporting feminist causes in Belarus remains extremely low. Only [1 per cent of all NGOs](#) are feminist organisations. Online platforms such as [gender-route.org](#) or [makeout.by](#) contribute to gender education, yet do not have enough potential to reach out to the wider public and fight the demonisation of feminism, which is rampant in media and advertising. Belarusian society still has a long way to bring forward discussions on global issues that relate to women, such as inequality, the distribution of power, and women’s rights.

Feminism in Belarus: present but unpopular

This year the World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked Belarus 30th out of 144 countries in its Global Gender Gap Index.

According to its indicators, Belarus surpassed highly developed countries such as Canada (35) and the United States (45). However, unlike other countries at the top of the list, Belarus does not have any coherent strategy to achieve gender equality.

2016 also saw a record increase of activity at the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), where Belarus presented its 8th periodic report in October 2016. Independent NGOs and initiatives presented seven alternative, or 'shadow', reports disputing the celebratory official narrative on the state of women in Belarus.


They touched upon the issues of gender-based violence, labour rights for men and women, and reproductive health, as well as women with disabilities, and the LGBTQ community, among others. Only [1% of Belarusian NGOs](#) advance women's rights and among these even fewer identify themselves as 'feminist.'

Historical and social paradoxes

The official gender equality strategy in Belarus differs from the Western European pro-feminist approach, and focuses primarily on family policies. No politician has ever openly

called themselves a feminist in Belarus. Quite the contrary, while the West promotes individuality and women's rights in social, political, and economic spheres, Belarus continues to emphasise family values and maternity for women.

Feminism remains a taboo word in Belarus. Few women openly admit to being feminists, to say nothing of men or influential decision-makers. In fact, most public figures prefer to distance themselves from the feminist agenda. Neither mainstream nor oppositional political parties have a strong feminist or gender equality strategy.



Country	Global rank*
Slovenia	8
Latvia	18
Estonia	22
Lithuania	25
Moldova	26
Belarus	30
Poland	38
Bulgaria	41
Serbia	48
Kazakhstan	51

Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2016
Note: *2016 rank out of 144 countries

Women constitute 53% of the population in Belarus. They hold about 34% of seats in parliament, live on average 74 years ([11 years longer than men](#)), are well educated, and about 70% of them work outside their household. Is it possible that Belarusian women enjoy equal rights and opportunities and therefore do not relate to the global feminist movement as the WEF indicators suggest?

Some argue that the Soviet Union liberated women in Belarus; it provided them with all the opportunities and services which feminists in the rest of the world had to fight for. Not only did women in Soviet Belarus gain access to education and prestigious professions, they also enjoyed state healthcare, access to childcare, and the right to legal abortion. Most of these rights and services carried over into modern Belarus even after the USSR was dismantled. For instance, Belarusian women continue to enjoy [generous maternity benefits](#).

The flip side of this generous policy presented itself later. In the 1960s, the rest of the world was engaging in 'second-wave feminism'. Women in the US and Europe started to broach the subjects of domestic violence, marital rape, and the

exploitation and control of female sexuality. Meanwhile, the 'woman question' appeared to be solved in the USSR and Soviet Belarus. However, as women gained access to education and new professions, they also continued to bear [the brunt of housework and caretaking](#).

Who needs feminism



According to a 2012 sociological survey carried out by the agency NewEffector, neither men nor women in Belarus need feminism. Belarus displayed the [lowest level of tolerance towards feminist ideas](#) in comparison with Ukraine and Russia.

Only 4% of women in Belarus – compared with 9% in Ukraine and 7% in Russia – characterised themselves as openly feminist. Moreover, only 6% of men in Belarus claimed to support feminist ideas – compared to 11% in Ukraine and 16% in Russia.

Therefore, feminist ideas remain marginal for both state and oppositional politics. Since early 2000, Belarus has implemented four Gender Equality Action Plans, but all four lacked any measurable indicators or allocated budgets. The outcomes remained intangible and had to be taken at face value from the Ministry's reports.

I shied away from the word 'feminism' although I have been a feminist for most of my life

Non-governmental actors face backlash if they decide to use the word 'feminist' in their agenda. Irina Solomatina, a Belarusian feminist and activist, recalls a story when certain

publishing agencies refused to print their materials because they contained the word 'feminist'. *'A few years ago I attended an exhibit in Moscow entitled "Feminist Karandash." This is when I realised what tremendous pressure the curators and organisers faced for using the word. I decided to fight my inner stereotypes and use the word "feminism" more often.'*

The only international body capable of holding the country accountable for women's rights issues and gender equality is the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This is a forum where countries regularly report on their achievement in this sphere. Based on Belarus's official documents, along with shadow reports presented by NGOs and initiatives, the Committee came up with several recommendations.

This year the Committee recommended adopting comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, laws against domestic violence and gender-based violence, and comprehensive attempts to eliminate discriminatory gender stereotypes. As experience from previous years and reports has shown, Belarus adheres minimally to the recommendations, but still manages to look good and rank high in terms of gender equality.

Who are the feminists

The unfortunate reputation of the word 'feminism' seems to have scared many people away. But in reality everyone who believes in equal education for boys and girls, voting rights for women and men, and equal pay for equal labour should call themselves feminists, regardless of their gender or their interpretation of feminism. However, few women identify as feminists, and feminist men are almost nonexistent.



Belarusian women do not feel oppressed and men do not see how they propagate the patriarchy. While statistics show that every third woman and every fourth man in Belarus has experienced violence in their lives, no one seems to have connected this to gender inequality and discriminatory stereotypes. Few people have woken up to their oppression, either personally or politically. Abuse remains [widespread and tolerated](#).

Meanwhile, experts point to the emergence of new types of online initiatives in Belarus focusing on gender equality which lack the status of official NGOs. They promote a feminist and gender agenda through online resources. Examples include Makeout.by and gender-route.org. Most importantly, they also embrace LGBTQ communities who remain otherwise highly marginalised in Belarus.

The WEF has calculated that at the current pace of progress, it would take the world around 170 years to close the economic gender gap universally. In Belarus, the gap remains wide. The state reinforces the role of the traditional family, and Belarusian society has not yet identified the need for more equal power distribution among its individual citizens.

#IamNotAfraidToSayIt: Belarusian Women Speak out against Sexual Violence

In July 2016, Belarusian Facebook users showed support for the initiative [#IamNotAfraidToSayIt](#) ([#янебаюсясказаць](#) in Belarusian). Originally a Facebook post by a Ukrainian journalist against gender-based violence, it quickly grew into

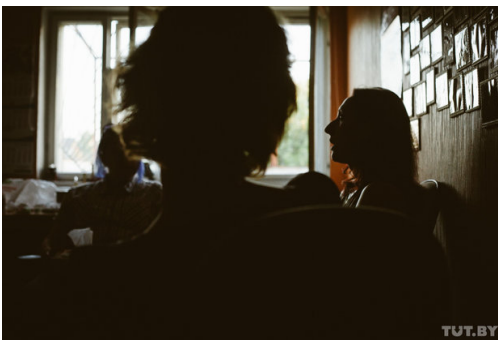
a spontaneous online phenomenon which transcended borders.

The campaign addressed the sexual assault, abuse, molestation, and harassment regularly faced by women of all ages in the post-Soviet world.

As well as revealing the extent of gender-based violence, it also highlighted the indifference of Belarusian society to female victims, who are often neglected after traumatising experiences of assault and harassment.

#IAmNotAfraidToSayIt

On 5 July 2016, Ukrainian civil society activist Anastasiya Melnychenko wrote a public post on Facebook with the hashtag “IAmNotAfraidToSayIt,” in which she shared her views on the lenient attitudes in society towards sexual assault and abuse against women.



Many other women also felt the need to draw attention to the hidden problem of gender-based violence. A Facebook post thus sparked a large-scale phenomenon on social networks across borders, as women in Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus joined the

initiative.

An unexpected flood of personal stories brought numerous cases of hidden violence against women and children in Belarus to light. These were not usually reflected in official crime statistics.

Almost immediately, this initiative became controversial on social networks. Some criticised women for going public with this topic, arguing that it might re-traumatise victims and open up old wounds among members of its intended audience, who

could not always find the strength to speak out publicly about their traumas.

Other reactions revealed that the problems of sexual violence and abuse still remain a taboo in patriarchal post-Soviet societies, which often blame women themselves for the violence. From this angle, appearing in public in a mini-skirt, wearing make-up, or walking alone at night can be interpreted as provocative behaviour.

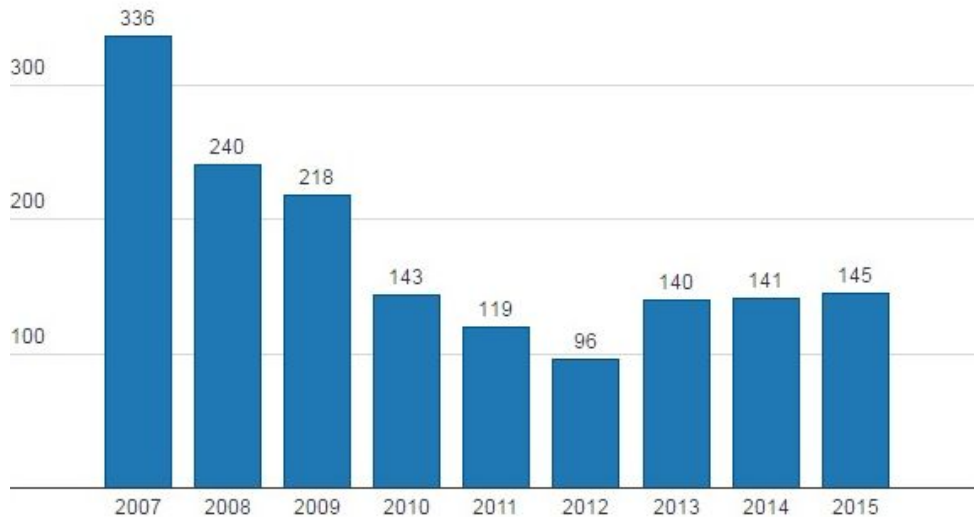
These stereotypes force victims to feel guilty and suppress their trauma, as a result of which they often choose not to come forward and report offenders. #IAMNotAfraidToSayIt targeted precisely these stereotypes, raising awareness and encouraging women to speak up and stop feeling ashamed. Finally, it helped many victims recognise that they are not alone.

Isolation of victims

#IamNotAfraidToSayIt illustrated that violence and abuse of women remain both invisible and omnipresent in post-Soviet societies. The online campaign also succeeded in highlighting the scope of the problem, especially as official statistics fail to reflect gender violence in full.

For instance, in 2015 the Belarusian Ministry of the Interior reported only 145 criminal cases (or 0.15% of all crimes) of rape or attempted rape. The majority of convicted rapists received prison sentences from 5 to 8 years.

Rape and attempted rape in Belarus



Data on [domestic violence](#) in Belarus appears more comprehensive. According to a 2014 assessment by the UNFPA, over 77% of women experienced various forms of violence: physical, psychological, and economic. Over 18% became victims of sexual assault. Yet these numbers reflect only those cases where victims chose to seek help outside.

Current Belarusian legislation lacks clear definitions for sexual harassment and abuse, along with procedures for prosecuting crimes. In 2015, The Belarusian Ministry of the Interior started drafting a law on prevention of domestic violence, yet it still remains in development. At the same time, current Belarusian legislation does not provide full protection of victims of less serious cases of molestation and harassment.

Besides the inadequate legislation, complicated procedures in reporting and proving sexual crimes to the police discourage many women from coming forward and speaking out against offenders. These women are mostly left alone with their traumas.

This is especially common for cases of groping on public transit or sexual assault in the workplace. So far, only one article of the Belarusian Criminal Code addresses sexual

harassment, [failing to provide clear definitions](#) and guidelines for prosecuting such crimes.

Why does “no” not mean “no”?

Data gathered from a UNFPA sociological survey indicate that in over 86% of cases, men are the ones perpetuating acts of gender violence. This is on par with the level of aggression against women in Russia and Ukraine. The findings also revealed that [consumption of alcohol](#) was the leading cause of violence.

Currently, a number of campaigns are attempting to raise public awareness and sensitivity to various forms of violence, similarly to #IamNotAfraidToSayIt. For instance, in 2016 the Belarusian web portal Tut.by put out a series of publications entitled “Home and Violence.” UN agencies also assist Belarusian authorities in implementing initiatives on preventing violence and transforming public views about masculinity. In 2015, they launched the so-called “orange campaign,” focused on prevention of gender-based violence.

As of 2016, 109 crisis rooms for victims of domestic violence operate throughout Belarus. However, this initiative [lacks true commitment](#) to protecting victims. For instance, to use these crisis rooms, a woman must report an assault to the police, which prevents many from seeking help there.

Last but not least, the success of these campaigns rests on the readiness of Belarusian society to abandon its condescending attitude towards feminism. Currently, the public perceives it as a movement of militant male-haters, rather than a struggle for basic human rights. In other words, society refuses to rid itself of the gender stereotypes which are the root of the violence .

For instance, in June 2015, the leader of the party Belarusian

Christian Democracy [Paviel Seviaryniec](#) rashly commented that feminism was a pastime for unhappy people. Even though in practise Belarusian conservatives do not object to female leadership in their ranks, such public statements clearly attest to the longevity of gender stereotypes.

This summer, Belarusian women showed that they will not remain silent about crime, no matter how traumatic and psychologically difficult it is for them. It is up to the state to respond to them with the same level of trust and support.

Besides amending the legislation, Belarus needs an effective long-term strategy to guarantee greater protection against all forms of violent behaviour. In particular, it should introduce comprehensive education strategies to promote a change in the people's mentality.

Belarusians Do Not Want Feminism – Digest of Belarusian Analytics

Belarusian analysts discuss recent foreign policy developments, the failure of the government to attract investors and two realities created by the state and independent media in Belarus among other issues.

[In Belarus neither women nor men want feminism](#). A sociological survey of people's attitudes towards feminism, undertaken in early August, shows that Belarus has the lowest level of tolerance towards this movement among the CIS countries. Head of the international Association on Gender Perspectives Alyona

Alkhovka says that such attitudes of Belarusians towards feminism are caused by the distorted understanding of its core idea, which is differentiation between the biological and the social roles of genders.

Psychologist Vladlen Pisarev, on the other hand, explains the lack of sympathy towards feminists by their apparent harshness and aggression, as well as by the fact that a strong tie between the woman's biological and social role is the natural order of things.

[□Diplomatic War Would Erupt Even Without the Teddy Bears.](#)

Aleksandr Klaskovsky discusses different sides of the teddy-bear scandal, its background and consequences. The journalist dismisses the version that the incident was planned by the European authorities, suggests that firing the two military generals was in Lukashenka's plans anyway, and reaches the conclusion that the diplomatic war would have happened even without the teddy-bear scandal.

[Lukashenka plays the Makey card.](#) President Lukashenka has appointed the former head of Presidential administration Vladimir Makey as the new head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Despite the fact that Makey is on the EU's black list, experts see this step as an attempt to restart relations with Europe with a new person at the head of the diplomatic corps, and also release the pressure of strengthening geopolitical ties with Russia. But do relations between Belarus and Europe really depend on the figure of the Minister of Foreign Affairs? Meanwhile, the EU is going to work with Makey in the same way as it worked with Sergei Martynov, [says](#) the EU diplomacy head's press-office representative Sebastien Braban.

[The teddy bears turned out to be geopolitical bombs – Artyom Shraibman](#), an author from [naviny.by](#), is analyzing how the teddy bear incident has triggered a serious geopolitical game between Russia and Belarus. The reporter

implies that Russia will not hesitate to benefit from the upset of relations between Belarus and Europe, using it to deepen Belarus' dependence on Russia as its only geopolitical partner left in the international arena.

[BISS Trends for January-June 2012 are released.](#) The report covers the following areas: political democratisation and liberalization; economic liberalisation; good governance and the rule of law; geopolitical orientation and cultural policy. While the first three remain mostly stagnant with few changes (e.g. few, though reversible, liberating measures implemented in the fiscal policy, while the old opaque privatisation schemes returned), in the geopolitical sphere noticeable progress has been traced in relations with Russia, while relations with Europe have deteriorated greatly. Last but not least, the cultural sphere demonstrates political polarization and a devaluation of the cultural product as itself.

NGOs and media

[ACT presents the 2011 NGO sustainability index of Belarus.](#) An assessment of the sustainability level of NGOs has been carried out in Belarus since 2000. Despite the fact that Belarus currently has the lowest position in the NGO sustainability index among 61 countries, experts point out the great resilience of Belarusian CSOs and their willingness to act. The legal environment and financial sustainability remain the most problematic areas for Belarusian CSOs, while organisational development is the strongest component.

□ [First issue of the LawTrend Monitor is published.](#) The Legal Transformation Centre has issued the first edition of the LawTrend Monitor magazine. The online publication, which is available in Russian and English, is dedicated to problems of freedom of assembly and fair trials in Belarus.

[Two media realities: cause or consequence?](#) – Journalist Andrei Alexandrov (mediakritika.by), on the basis of an analysis of

state and independent news feeds and newspapers, captures the existence of two media realities which are created respectively by the state and independent media. "The different journalisms" in their focus provide different news and use different principles of information presentation. The expert is concerned about whether the two media realities are a natural by-product of a split society or its root cause.

[Half of Belarusians want to leave the country.](#) The recent opinion poll of IISEPS showed that half of the citizens of Belarus want to leave the country. *Deutsche Welle* interviewed experts who explained that the desire of Belarusians to leave the country is a result of low salaries. The majority of potential migrants would like to move to Germany.

[Will Ales Bialiatski get a Nobel Prize?](#) Andrei Eliseev tries to predict the chances of human rights activist Ales Bialiatski winning the Nobel Peace Prize. The expert notes that the list of nominees for the 2012 Nobel includes many famous personalities, but there are some positive factors that increase the chances of the Belarusian for the Award. In particular, chairman of the current Nobel Committee, Thorbjørn Jagland, knows Ales Bialiatski *absentia* quite well.

Governance and politics

[The investment plans of the government have failed](#) – Dmitry Zayats from Naviny.by presents an overview of the investing situation in Belarus in the first half of 2012, tracking the major investing sources and trends, analyzing their chances of fulfilling the government's plans. In the article, the experts say that without any changes to the privatization policy and investment climate in the country, there should be no expectation of considerable economic growth.

□ [Top 10 failed investment projects](#) – [TUT.BY](#) analyses the most famous cases of failures of big projects with foreign investors in Belarus. The experts come to two obvious conclusions: half of the projects were the victims of a

"bubble" that inflated before the global economic crisis, and the Belarusian authorities could not find a common language with other investors.

[Government lobbyists do not have reform fever](#) – Despite the deeply-rooted image of the sole ruler standing at the steering wheel of the country, some of the events which have taken place over the last two years in the politico-economic arena show that there are other internal forces close to the government that are able to influence the decision-making process in the country. Nikita Belyaev compares the Belarusian lobby with that of other Eastern European countries, explaining how these differences influence reform movements in the country.

[Sergei Matskievich: authorities do not feel any responsibility for the country](#). Belarus Partisan interviewed the Chairman of the Working Group of the NGOs Assembly, Sergei Matskevich, on the following issues: why there is no "fresh blood" in civil and political activities; why official Minsk hinders the implementation of European programmes of the "Eastern Partnership" and "European Dialogue with Belarus", etc.

[What will it take to get people out in the streets?](#) – Tatiana Gurinovich from BISS explains the lack of protest potential in major groups of Belarusian society. The author suggests that the only solution to such situation is diminishing the role of the state in the economy and growth of private sector, which would lead to establishing a fair situation on the market and release it from the government's control.

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories already available in English-language media.

The Women's Unfeminine Holiday



March 8 in Belarus: a celebration of emancipation has turned into its opposite. An article by one of this website's authors on the occasion of the Women's Day.

Some countries of the former Soviet Union and Africa celebrate March 8 as the International Women's Day. This is perhaps the most "innocent" Soviet holiday which has not yet disappeared from our calendar. February 23 (originally Day of the Soviet Army), which in recent years actively establishes itself as a male counterpart of March 8, or, even more, November 7 (Day of the October Revolution) are highly politicized holidays. Therefore the tradition of celebrating them will disappear as soon the government takes a rational view on what should be celebrated as the Day of the Belarusian army. An even bigger question is whether it is worth for Belarus to celebrate anniversaries of the October revolution at all. March 8 is the only holiday which has no blood on it. It does not carry all these second-thoughts like holidays associated with the liberation of Belarus from Nazi occupation and the restoration of the Soviet dictatorship after that.

Nevertheless, the modern tradition of celebrating March 8 is an excellent example of how the Soviet government has been able to indoctrinate socialist ideology and system of symbols in the people's everyday life. The struggle against religion plus a massive urbanization caused the rapid loss of many folk traditions in Belarus. To replace rural traditions there came official Soviet holidays: New Year, the eighth of March, twenty-third day of February, the Seventh of November. March 8 originally arose as a day of women's emancipation. It was a celebration of women's struggle for their rights and against their traditional role in family and society. Instead of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* women demanded things that are obvious today: the right to participate in elections, better working conditions, better wages. On the other hand, after eight decades of celebrating March 8, the people's culture has indeed transformed the feminist holiday into a patriarchal one.

The modern image of a woman you congratulate on March 8 is no way the image of an emancipated courageous female proletarian. 8 March is an occasion to congratulate your mother or your loved, but not a battle comrade. According to the tradition of the last decades, on March 8 men promise to protect women and care for them. Women, in turn, should kindly allow them to do so. Men demonstrate features of knights and gentlemen, and women demonstrate those of noble ladies. A completed patriarchal idyll. As a celebration of emancipation March 8 has turned into its opposite – a celebration of femininity and motherhood. Such is the irony of fate. Post-Soviet feast of March 8 counters the views of both conservatives (as a secularized and communist holiday) and feminists (as day of knighthood and care for the ladies).

Day on March 8 became something like a Soviet version of Valentine's Day. After the collapse of the communist dictatorship it has become one more traditional shopping race for members of the consumerist society and just an other cause

for good of human emotions. Maybe it is better this way.

by Alexander Čajčyc for Naša Niva

[Read the original story in Belarusian](#)