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Preserving the Myth, with the Politics in the Background: the Great Patriotic War in the Politics of History of Belarus

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Kamil Kłysiński

Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw, Poland.

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PRESERVING
THE MYTH,
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THE GREAT
PATRIOTIC WAR
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OF BELARUS

Abstract

Respect for the achievements of the USSR was one of the foundations of Belarusian politics of history even before the rule of Alyaksandr Lukashenka; this was also reflected in the identity of most Belarusians, who perceived themselves as “Soviet people”. A special place in the narrative about the Soviet period was occupied by the Great Patriotic War, which was also presented from the perspective of the enormous demographic and material losses that affected the territory of today’s Belarus. The timid attempts undertaken in the early 1990s to demythologise the cult of the war period did not lead to any significant changes in the narrative, especially since Alyaksandr Lukashenka’s rise to power in 1994 effectively blocked any further efforts to revise Belarusian historiography. For President Lukashenka,

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Abstract: Respect for the achievements of the USSR was one of the foundations of Belarusian politics of history even before the rule of Alyaksandr Lukashenka; this was also reflected in the identity of most Belarusians, who perceived themselves as “Soviet people”. A special place in the narrative about the Soviet period was occupied by the Great Patriotic War, which was also presented from the perspective of the enormous demographic and material losses that affected the territory of today’s Belarus. The timid attempts undertaken in the early 1990s to demythologise the cult of the war period did not lead to any significant changes in the narrative, especially since Alyaksandr Lukashenka’s rise to power in 1994 effectively blocked any further efforts to revise Belarusian historiography. For President Lukashenka, who has ruled ever since then, the Great Patriotic War was and continues to be one of the key periods defining the history of Belarus and its contemporary domestic and foreign policy. At the same time, in response to Russia’s interference in Ukraine in 2014 and Moscow’s desire to subjugate Minsk fully, the Belarusian president began playing World War II “memory card” that had hitherto been excluded from the current disputes, in order to strengthen his and his country’s own historical narrative as something separate from that of Russia.

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