

4

Rationale and Incentives for a Reform

Conservation of the present-day educational system would lead to poorer quality and greater provincialism of education. Inevitably, an unreformed system would have adverse effects on the Belarusian society and its consequences will extend beyond the educational system.

Reform disincentives

The existing stagnant and retrospective educational system coupled with importation of post-Soviet and post-imperial models from Russia would fuel tensions between the ruling 'colonial' elite and national culture, as well as between the ruling elite and new generations of the Belarusians. As is, the educational model will destroy the system of cultural reference points and aggravate the ethnic identity crisis. As a result, the Belarusians will lose their historic roots and historic prospects.

The authoritarian educational system produces conformists and hampers the formation of new generations of the national elite and civil society. In the long run, this implies that Belarus may turn in a Third World country, supplier of low-skilled labor force to more developed neighboring countries.

The domination of Russian education theories, techniques, standards and information resources breeds a colonial-type asymmetric culture, thus increasing the country's informational and ideological dependency on Russia. The educa-

tional system would not be conducive to establishing a national identity and forming civic conscience; it will rather continue to replicate 'aboriginal' mentality of a 'small and imperfect nation' ready to follow orders of representatives of 'big' (meaning 'alien') culture.

Unwillingness or inability to bring the educational system into line with European standards would increase the cultural gap between Belarus and Europe and lead to a decline in the overall level of education and functional skills. In long term, due to potential lack of a real link between education and social success, this might impair the quality of provision and reduce the value of education in the eyes of the Belarusians and the European Community given potential incompatibility of Belarusian tertiary education with foreign opposite numbers, and ultimately lead to ghettoization of Belarusian education.

The authorities' extreme reluctance to accept new-generation education theories and techniques, lack of funds for raising efficiency in education, and disintegration of the postgraduate and retraining system may turn Belarus into a country of incompatible education certificates or into an un-reformable country of no interest to the international community as an economic or cultural partner or political ally.

If the current educational system remains as is, the gap may widen between the society's real life priorities and those taught at school. This condition may be dubbed 'progressive cultural schizophrenia' or loss of national culture and identity. On the one hand, the general public would be encouraged to look for new ideas (some may choose radical and socially dangerous ideas in the end) while, on the other, the distance between real life and the education content will grow, thus leading to a complete mystification of the latter.

If Belarus' educational system will continue copying various European models and practices without due assessment of their advantages and disadvantages, the system may lose its cultural distinction, erode and assimilate.

Therefore, conservation of the present-day educational system would aggravate the cultural crisis and would not contribute to social stability. This represents a real threat to social, political, economic and cultural development of the Belarusian society.

Reform incentives

Interaction of the educational system with European, rather than just Russian practice will intensify cultural identity process and open the society.

More specifically, the educational reform is needed:

- to restore the disrupted link between generations, implant national cultural and historical traditions in the minds of new generations, develop national feelings and civic self-consciousness.
- as a means of integrating Belarusian education facilities into the European educational system. The integration would change the content and methods radically and allow for recognition of Belarusian education certificates, allowing the Belarusians to access the European labor market, with new opportunities open for business and cultural contacts. The education sector would be more appealing for those who seek to realize their potential or pursue a career.
- as a means of helping new generations of Belarusians in tapping into their creative potential. Instead of conformists, the educational system should rear individuals with the energy and will to realize their goals in this country. The reform that may trigger a cultural outbreak that would spur the society towards development.
- to raise young ambitious intellectuals. The reform would enable them to create decent jobs for themselves in Belarus and become major players in the country and impact its future image.
- to set the stage for developing the civil society based on personal responsibility and free personal choice. It would help convert the ‘electorate’ into people who can decide on their own fate.
- to encourage competition of education services and practice, which would help to improve education quality and enable the educational system’s competitiveness on an international scale.

The educational reform should help the Belarusians to overcome their cultural inferiority complex and become equal partners in the European and international communities. An educational system based on national values would dispel the myth of integration [with Russia] rooted in the collective mindset and the political elite.