MODERNIZATION PROCESSES IN BELARUS IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE XIX – THE BEGINNING OF THE XX CENT.:
GENERAL TRENDS AND NATIONAL FEATURES

Summary. The article examines the modernization processes in the territory of the Belarusian governorates in the second half of the XIX - beginning of the XX century. The author draws attention to the distinctive features of the Belarusian modernization, stipulated by the historical background, as well as economic and socio-cultural peculiarities, that were deeply rooted in the traditions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The author goes on to show the measures of the Russian authorities aimed at the legislative unification and neutralizing of the Polish influence. Kohanovsky A. concludes that Belarus had a fragmentary modernization that was developing irregularly and penetrating the different spheres of life unevenly. The author pays attention to the fact, that society, economy, and culture were the objects of the transformation, but virtually never the foundation for the realization of the reforms. In Belarus the social changes were preceded by the economic and technological modernization. The inconsistency of the unfolding processes became obvious in the regional peculiarities: in many respects the western part of Belarus was much more involved in the processes of the formation of the industrial society.

Key words: Belarus, Belarusian governorates, the Russian Empire, the processes of modernization, unification, the regime of restrictive legislation, industrial development.

The second half of the XIX – the beginning of the XX century is an intricate and contradictory period in the history of Belarus. It is the initial stage of systemic changes in economy and Belarusian society and one of the most important stages of its transition from the traditional type of the development to the industrial one. It was a period of reforms which had some peculiarities in the territory of Belarus due to the governmental policy of the Russian Empire aimed at limiting the Polish influence. The pointed out policy direction left its mark on socio-economic measures, handling of the peasant issue. Belarus used to be among those regions of the Russian Empire where the national issue was rated as acute concern, but actually the Belarusian aspect was of minor importance in it. In the second half of the XIX century the social system of the Belarusian
society which had been formed on the basis of old gentry traditions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was completely eliminated.

The article analyzes general tendencies of unfolding of modernization processes in Belarus in the second half of the XIX– the beginning of the XX century, highlighting their distinctive features and national peculiarities. Modernization is considered here as a long historical process associated with the transition from the traditional society to the industrial one. This process had a cyclical pattern, included technological, economic, political, ethnic, socio-cultural, socio-psychological, demographic changes and the transition to an open social stratification of society with a high level of social mobility. These are changes of various levels, differed in dynamics and complexity. There is no universal type of modernization processes, each country or region has its own type stipulated not only by general laws and tendencies, but also by a specific historical background, as well as economic, socio-cultural peculiarities.

Study of matters, concerning unfolding of modernization processes in the second half of the XIX– the beginning of the XX century, mainly subjected to the tasks of studying socio-economic, socio-political and ethnocultural processes. Nevertheless, many aspects of these processes without recourse to the terminology of the modernization theory are reflected in researches of Belarusian historians of different times M. Dovnar-Zapolsky [6], M. Beach [2], Z. Shibeko [30], V. Panyutich [16] and etc. At the present time the priority in the articulation of this research issue as an independent subject matter of the study belongs to the researchers of the Faculty of History of the Belarusian State University.

The first traits of proto-modernization in Belarus can be observed in the XVI century, when the ideas of Renaissance and Reformation with their corresponding ideals and values got widespread use and influence. In the XVI century a new work ethics has been developed in the cities of Belarus, as well as the perception of work as a value, a positive attitude to enterprise and thrift, the desire to make a profit also including usurious enrichment. These changes occurred in spite of medieval stereotypes of the depravity of making a profit. But new ideas have not stricken root in Belarus. The evolution of the Third Estate, which had shown its economic potential in the cities, was suspended by the imposition of extortionate customs tariffs for benefit of the gentry and the magnates.

At the beginning of the XVIII century first manufactories appeared in Belarus. With the advent of them pre-industrial modernization is usually associated. However, economic advances, particularly of the second half of the XVIII century, were not supported by the government, which had an intention to reform society, but not strong enough will to fulfil it.

After divisions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and incorporation of Belarus into the Russian Empire, the tendency and dynamics of processes development were changed in Belarus. First factories and plants were opened in the 1820s in Belarus, and the beginning of the industrial revolution is usually associated therewith. Nevertheless, in this case, industrialization, which initially
formed the basis of modernization, is more likely meant here as the first step towards it. The emergence of manufactories and factories in Belarus, as well as in Western Europe took place in small towns and settlements where the handcrafted corporates competition was less tangible.

For a protracted period of time, until the middle of the XIX century, Belarusian (Vilna, Vitebsk, Grodno, Minsk, and Mogilev) governorates, the Belarusians have not been considered as an independent object of the government policy, but only as a part of the common policy first and foremost in regards to the former gentry of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The absence of their own non-Polonized nobility government authorities was taken as an evidence of the underdevelopment of high culture and language of Belarusians that could be taken into consideration. At the same time at the beginning of the XIX century some representatives of the highest Russian nobility, considering the development of the Russian Empire in conditions of modernization, proposed the western governorates as a kind of a pattern of modernization [7, p. 122]. However, relatively soon these western governorates became a source of threat. Local nobles launched a struggle against the imperial center not under estate or locally territorial slogans, but for national state emancipation. The uprising of 1863 was an important starting point for the evolution of the government policy in Belarus. After suppression of the uprising the Polish influence on social and cultural life became less noticeable. Belarusian and Lithuanian governorates were considered by the government authorities as a region where the toughest resistance to the spread of Polish influence took place. This factor became one of the main ones in determining the trend and specific features of the government policy towards Belarus in comparison with the European center of the Russian Empire. In this regard, the detachment of population of the Belarusian governorates from the historical traditions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the obtrusion of measures aimed to unify, first of all, the social and ethno-cultural spheres has become currently important. Russification and ethno-cultural unification were taken by the government authorities of the Russian Empire as a necessary element of modernization. However, Minister of Internal Affairs P. Valuev, for example, was aware that the complexity of the national issue in the western governorates was not limited only to confessional differences, but also became apparent in different degrees of maturity of civil society, unevenness of the development of the civil and political sphere [7, p. 150].

For a long time the government authorities were failing to complete the reconstruction of social organization of the Belarusian society according to the common Russian standard. The unbalanced remains of the former estates and corporate system, had been formed during the existence of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, put obstacles in this way. These remains could not fully fit into the new structure, gave numerous distinctive features to the local experience of social organization and were potentially holders of other, alternative ways of transformation of the Belarusian society.
Bourgeois reforms of the 1860-70s became a landmark in the development of the processes of modernization. But they virtually ignored peculiarities of the Belarusian governorates in socio-economic sphere. Concurrently with the implementation of reforms, the regime of restrictive legislation related to the Catholics, the Jews, and foreign citizens was introduced in Belarus. On 5 May 1864 people belonged to Polish origin and Jews were forbidden to buy state and private landed property sold for debts. The main purpose of that policy was to reduce the land possession of Catholic landowners. According to the decree of the emperor of 10 July 1864 Jews were deprived of the opportunity to acquire land from the peasants in the territory of Vilna and Kiev governorates-general [11, p. 573–574]. By the imperial edict of 10 December 1865 persons belonged to Polish origin were completely forbidden to buy estates in the territory of the western governorates with the exception of the possibility to acquire them hereditably. Owners of sequestered estates, who were expelled from the western governorates for the participating in the uprising of 1863, were obliged to sell their possessions within two years to people of Russian origin, Orthodox or Protestant confession or barter them for those estates which were in other regions of the Russian Empire [12, p 327]. On 25 July 1865 the Emperor approved the Instruction on the procedure for selling state-owned lands in western governorates to persons belonged to Russian origin [14, p. 34]. Acquired by them estates could be conveyed only to people of Russian origin and with the consent of the Minister of State Property.

Russian landowners, who had acquired forfeit estates and state lands on preferential terms in the territory of the Belarusian governorates, had not the right to conclude mortgage agreements with the Poles and the Jews, lease them their property or let them manage these possessions. This fact put Russian landowners in unfavorable economic conditions as they had small knowledge about the local specificity of rural economy. As a result, only a few of them stayed in their new possessions for a long time. For lack of a clear definition of the concept «people of Polish origin» often lead to the fact, that even those rights of the Poles were restricted, which in conformity with the law they were not deprived of [14, p. 122]. Moreover, restrictive measures contributed to price lowering of land, reducing the possibilities of its free purchase and sale, marginalization of a part of catholic landowners, the emergence among them persons who were engaged in intellectual work and inclined to accept pernicious to the Russian state ideas [14, p. 123]. Nevertheless, the imposition of restrictive measures did not take into consideration the entire diversity of land matters in the western governorates. The Catholics and the Jews found numerous workarounds for the acquisition of land. Country police officials monthly reported to the governorate authorities on cases of property rights conveyance [23, p. 1–10]. Cases of request for the right to purchase land by people who apparently did not have their own funds for real estate acquisition were of particular concern. Obviously, such applicants acted in the interests of people subject to imposed restrictions [29, p. 1–2].

On the proposal of the Committee of Ministers on 3 May 1882 the Provisional Rules for the Jews were approved. These Rules prohibited the Jews to take up
their residence in the governorates of the «pale of settlement» outside the towns and settlements, as well as rent, manage and dispose of the immovable property [13, p. 181]. Regarding the adopted restrictive measure, a large landowner of Minsk governorate E. Voinilovich noted that after 2 May 1882 landowners had to either evict the Jews, who often rented wastelands and drinking establishments under written agreements, or flout the law. Finally, they chose the second way and allowed the Jews to reside on estates on the same terms as they often depended on the Jews financially and, furthermore, weigh themselves down to wasteful long-term judicial proceedings [27, p. 90–91]. Not the least of the factors was the fact that Jews who were innkeepers often for several generations have served several generations of landowners. According to the decree of Nikolai II of 11 August 1904, the Provisional Rules were abolished [28, p. 331].

The established regime of restrictive legislation relating to the Catholics and the Jews had not only ethno-confessional context aimed at strengthening Russian influence in the Belarusian and Lithuanian governorates, but was intended to destroy traditional and fairly steady system of economic ties. It should be emphasized that the Russian government has failed to fully achieve set objectives in this direction. One of the most conservative Russian officials, the notorious governor of Minsk during the revolutionary events of 1905-1907 P. Kurlov noted the inadequacy and ineffectiveness of restrictive measures [9, p. 64]. These measures forced catholic landowners hold on tight to patrimonial estates [15, p. 7]. The existing system of economic and social relations demonstrated the ability to modify, adapt to new conditions of existence. But at the same time the regime of restrictive legislation to a great extent petrified the economic initiative of the Catholics and the Jews. In fact, the policy of the government of the Russian Empire during the second half of the XIX – the beginning of the XX century in the territory of Belarus was predicated upon restrictive measures in the socio-economic sphere or those that adjusted its economic and social development towards unification with the central governorates of the state.

The industrial development of Belarus at the initial stages of modernization was correlated in accordance with the own region’s needs and based on the traditional structure of its economy. Simultaneous existence of craft producers, manufactories and factories was not the evidence of the backwardness of the industrial development of Belarus. But it was stipulated by the orient towards the use mainly agricultural raw materials, which processing did not require the creation of large industrial facilities; as well as the structure of local labor forces, the presence of a great amount of low-cost labor. It was more profitable even for owners of a big capital to set up relatively small production facilities for forestry and agricultural raw materials processing. Saving of transport expenses and salary at such production facilities exceeded the advantages of large-scale production compared with the small one.

Modernization and industrialization are inextricably linked, but these processes do not substitute each other. The impact of industrialization in different countries and regions was unequal. In the Belarusian governorates this process
was tardy and not sufficiently developed. The dynamics of industrialization is estimated by an indicator which set labour forces proportion involved in agricultural production [22, p. 40]. At the end of the XIX century 76.3% of population of Belarus was engaged in this economic branch [17, p. 107–109; 18, p. 165–170; 19, p. 195–199; 20, p. 152; 21, p. 172]. Over the first two decades after the reform of 1861 industrial development was retarded here. The period of the 1880s was quite difficult and unfavorable in economic development. The process of industrial production development in the Belarusian governorates significantly hastened in the 1890s. Over the last decade of the XIX century the average annual increase of industrial production grew to 8.2%, that was two times higher than in past decades [4, p. 98]. The industrial revolution in Belarus ended mainly before 1900, that was a decade later that in the Russian Empire on the whole [4, p. 86]. At the beginning of the XX century Belarus distinguished by higher rates of industrial development than the average rates were in the Russian Empire. Furthermore, there was a tendency to expand the raw materials processing, as the market had been supplied with unprocessed raw materials before. Also the development of woodworking became more intense [1, p. 36]. Since 1910 in Belarus had begun an intensive upsurge of industrial production; its growth was in 1.9 times higher than in the previous eight-year period. However, despite the significant economic growth, industrial production proportion of the Belarusian and Lithuanian governorates in the total industrial production volume of the Russian Empire for 1908-1912 decreased from 1.9 to 1.7% [3, p. 85]. According to the industrial census of 1908, there were 9.9% of the industrial enterprises of the Russian Empire located in the territory of the Belarusian and Lithuanian governorates; 2.6% of the workers employed there and 2.2% of the production was made [10, p. 429].

The growth of cities of Belarus was restrained by the territorial distinctive features and specialization of local industry, as well as the government policy (toughening of the Jewish «pale of settlement», artificial way of containment of granting the city status to settlements, etc.) During the second half of the XIX - the beginning of the XX century city population of Belarus increased 2.8 times. Its growth insignificantly exceeded the rate of the entire population which increased 2.66 times as well [24, p. 8, 9, 12, 13, 16–19, 25, p. 33–36, 39, 47]. The number of Belarusian citizens in 1863 was 347.9 ths. (10.4% of the total number of inhabitants), and in 1914 - 974.6 ths. (10.9%). In Belarus urbanization was distinguished by its relatively significant rates in the 1860s - the first half of the 1880s. In the second half of the 1880-90s growth rates of cities slowed down, connected with their overpopulation, the difficulties of refocusing of trade and industrial specialization to the general Russian market. The processes of urbanization were of varying intensity in the late 1890s – the beginning of the XX century [30, p. 58–59]. Urban development had regional specific features in Belarus. At the beginning of the 1860-s the level of urbanization processes differed in the eastern and western parts of Belarus. The most significant city in terms of population was Mogilev. In subsequent decades, particularly after the
The peculiarity of urbanization processes in Belarus in the XIX – the beginning of the XX century consisted in the absence of large urban centers here. One of the reasons hindered the development of cities was the system of land matters existed at that time. In comparison with the central governorates of the Russian Empire landed property of the Belarusian citizens characterized by large dimensions. In accordance with the Russian legislation the terms of the land lease usually did not exceed 12 years and it was not necessary to extend the lease agreement. This made tenants dependent on landowners. Tenant builders needed the additional expenses for the purchase of land, which price was high in the cities.

The city influenced on public awareness of peasants by birth. Changes in the world perception became obvious among young peasants who were heavily involved in the city life. However, simultaneous influence of the peasantry on the mentality of the citizens was severely limited due to the fact that migrational exchange between cities and the countryside was negligible. Those of the peasants who permanently resided in the cities, preferred not to break off their ties with the countryside. In 1866 in the cities of Belarus there were 12.1 ths. peasants, who accounted for about 3.4% of the total urban population and almost 0.5% of the peasantry. By the year of 1897 the number of peasants among the citizens of Belarus increased to 123.9 ths. and its proportion among the urban population amounted to 19.1%. The peasants of Belarus who permanently lived in the cities accounted for 2.5% of their total number [16, p. 48]. Population of the Belarusian cities was multiethnic. As of 1897, the Belarusians among the citizens of the Belarusian governorates accounted for 13.2%, the Russians – 17.8, the Poles – 11.8, the Jews – 53.2, the others – 4.0% correspondingly [17, p. 56–59; 18, p. 76–79; 19, p. 102–105; 20, s. 80–83; 21, p. 96–99]. The proportion of the urban part of the Belarusians which was 2.5% of the total population of its ethnic group was the evidence of the low degree of urbanization rate of the Belarusians.

According to M. Dovnar-Zapolsky, there was a turning point in the socio-economic development of Belarus at the turn of the 1880-90s. At that time, an average provision of peasant households with land was reduced [6, p. 233]. The amount of surplus labor force significantly increased in rural economy, and the interest of village inhabitants in seasonal works enhanced. Land prices rapidly were going up, acquiring speculative features [6, p. 234]. The relatively slow growth of the urban industry had no chance to take away excessive labor force from the countryside [6, p. 235]. In the post-reform period processes of wealth disparity of the peasantry were accompanied by reducing size of rural families, spreading of divisions of the family property. Women played a significant role in these processes [26, p. 281-282]. M. Dovnar-Zapolsky argued that in respect to the post-reform decades it was not correct to estimate the position of a Belarusian peasant woman in the family as oppressed. She had the right to own property.
The husband’s cruel treatment of his wife was a rare occurrence in the Belarusian family [5, p. 20]. Predominantly well-to-do families remained undivided. The reasons for family divisions were difficulties connected with property, shortage of land, bad harvests, difficulties in finding work, high taxes [5, p. 63].

The dynamism of social processes, occurred at the end of XIX - the beginning of the XX century, became apparent in increased migration activity of population, primarily the peasantry. Migratory movement of population had an undulating nature. The regional peculiarities of migration flows from the Belarusian governorates appeared in recent decades of the XIX century and became more noticeable since the 1880s. Internal migration within the bounds of the Russian Empire from the territory of Vilna and Vitebsk governorates was directed mainly to the north-west of the state – to the St. Petersburg, Livonia, and Pskov governorates. From the Grodno governorate almost a half of the migrants went to the governorates of the Kingdom of Poland. Natives of Minsk and Mogilev governorates preferred to resettle to the south – to the territory of the Ukrainian governorates [8, p. 147]. Emigration embraced mainly the Jewish population at that time. Leaving abroad of the peasants from Vilna and Grodno governorates has not become widespread yet. At the turn of the XIX – XX centuries directions and volume of migration flows changed. First of all, this was stipulated by the structural changes in the formation of the labor market in the Russian Empire, as well as approaches to determining priorities of the migration issue in the government policy. Migration abroad of the Belarusian peasantry, which embraced mainly Vilna and Grodno governorates, became mass and seemed to be a temporary removal aimed at searching for earnings. The low demand of the Belarusian industry for labor force, increased number of landless peasants and peasants who were lack of land and agricultural overpopulation correspondingly, a government policy turnabout to encourage peasant resettlements to the east of the Russian Empire, which combined economic interests with military-strategic plans, reduction of migrations beyond the Urals of rural people from industrial centers and close to them Russian regions lead to Mogilev and Vitebsk governorates to the first positions in terms of volume of floating population to Siberia. Population movements to the south of the country and to the governorates of the Kingdom of Poland fade into the background. Statistical data analysis, taking into consideration its fragmentariness, as well as calculations performed by Belarusian researchers allow determining the migration balance of the main directions of resettlement of population of Belarus in the second half of the XX – the beginning of the XX century. Within the bounds of the European part of the Russian Empire except for the territory of the Belarusian governorates, about 600–800 ths. inhabitants of Belarus migrated, 420–450 ths. moved to Siberia. At the same time, labor emigration of the Belarusian peasantry to the Western countries is estimated at about 600–800 ths. [8, p. 148]. Territorial removals of population are very closely related to the social mobility. These phenomena often became a direct consequence of each other.
The most significant examples of the social mobility during the second half of the XX – the beginning of the XX century were a procedure associated with the necessity to documentary proof by the representatives of the nobility of the times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth their belonging to the upper estate and caused an ascription to commoners of tens of thousands nobles who did not pass the test; the land issue settling and social unification of certain groups of rural population; processes of social differentiation and property disparity of the peasantry; the change of confessional affiliation by the representatives of dissimilar confessional groups as a result of the implementation of restrictive measures against the Catholics and the Jews.

Thus, Belarus had a fragmentary modernization, developing irregularly and penetrating the different spheres of life unevenly. The policy of the Russian authorities aimed at neutralizing of the Polish influence. The established regime of restrictive legislation relating to the Catholics and the Jews had not only ethno-confessional context aimed at strengthening Russian influence in the Belarusian and Lithuanian governorates, but was intended to destroy traditional and fairly steady system of economic ties, which, nevertheless, demonstrated the ability to modify, adapt to new conditions of existence. But at the same time the regime of restrictive legislation to a great extant petrified the economic initiative of the Catholics and the Jews. The Russian Empire had an exclusive role in initiating, determining the trend and limits of the processes of modernization. However, in the territory of the Belarusian governorates, the state restrained the implementation of modernization prospects. Society, economy, and culture were the objects of the transformation here, but virtually never the foundation for the realization of the reforms. In Belarus the social changes were preceded by the economic and technological modernization. The inconsistency of the unfolding processes became obvious in the regional peculiarities: in many respects the western part of Belarus was much more involved in the processes of the formation of the industrial society. In contrast to many other regions of the Russian Empire, cities of the Belarusian governorates apparently less affected the modernization of society. In Belarus the majority of industrial enterprises were located in the countryside, most of them belonged to the local nobility, retaining the socio-economic initiative for a long time. The Belarusians were distinguished by the largest proportion of those who were engaged in agriculture and minimal proportion of population involved in industrial production among peoples of the European part of the Russian Empire.

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