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Russia in the representations of young Belarusians: The image of the country and attitudes towards integration cooperation

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Abstract

Context and relevance. The significance of preserving cooperation between Russia and Belarus dictates the need to study young people's attitudes towards this cooperation with the aim of identifying possible socio-psychological barriers to its development. **Objective.** Examining young Belarusian students' perceptions of Russia and their attitudes towards closer relations between the two countries. **Research question.** What are the preconditions of Belarusian youth's attitude towards integration cooperation between Russia and Belarus in the current context, and to which psychological factors might they be related? **Methods and materials.** In May 2025, an online survey was conducted among 106 Belarusian students ($M = 19,0$, $SD = 1,72$, 57% male) aged 18–25 using open-ended questions developed by the authors. **Results.** Most of the students interviewed had a positive image of Russia. While a positive attitude towards closer relations between the two countries prevails, awareness of the scope of cooperation between Belarus and Russia is low among many students. Most respondents view Russia as a non-threatening state for Belarus. However, one-tenth of the students think that a threat does exist. **Conclusions.** The results of the study show that there are favorable socio-psychological grounds for maintaining a positive attitude towards closer relations between Belarus and Russia among most young Belarusians. At the same time, most students are unaware of the extent of cooperation between the two countries, and many do not consider it to be significant. Some students express fears about Belarus potentially losing its sovereignty as a result of closer ties with Russia. All of these factors could hinder the development of effective cross-country engagement between Belarus and Russia.

Keywords: representations of Russia, attitudes towards cooperation between Belarus and Russia, Belarusian student youth, online survey

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Россия в представлениях молодых белорусов: образ страны и отношение к интеграционному сотрудничеству

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Резюме

Контекст и актуальность. Значимость сохранения сотрудничества между Россией и Беларусью диктует необходимость изучения отношения молодежи к данному сотрудничеству с целью определения возможных социально-психологических барьеров на пути его развития. **Цель.** Изучить представления молодых студентов-белорусов о России и особенности их отношения к сближению двух стран. **Исследовательский вопрос.** Какие существуют предпосылки отношения белорусской молодежи к интеграционному сотрудничеству России и Беларуси в текущем контексте и с какими психологическими факторами они могут быть связаны? **Методы и материалы.** В мае 2025 г. проведен онлайн-опрос среди 106 студентов-белорусов в возрасте от 18 до 25 лет ($M = 19,0$, $SD = 1,72$, 57% — юноши) с использованием разработанных авторами открытых вопросов. **Результаты.** Образ России в сознании большинства опрошенных студентов позитивен, преобладает положительное отношение к сближению двух стран, однако осведомленность о направлениях сотрудничества Беларуси и России у многих студентов низкая. Россия рассматривается большинством респондентов как государство, не несущее угрозу для Беларуси. Однако десятая часть студентов считают, что угроза присутствует. **Выводы.** Результаты свидетельствуют о благоприятных социально-психологических основаниях сохранения положительного отношения к сближению Беларуси и России у большинства молодых белорусов. Однако их слабая осведомленность о сотрудничестве двух стран и низкая личная значимость этого сотрудничества могут выступать барьерами на пути эффективного межстранового взаимодействия, как и опасения отдельных респондентов относительно возможной утраты Беларусью суверенитета в результате сближения с Россией.

Ключевые слова: представления о России, отношение к сотрудничеству Беларуси и России, белорусская студенческая молодежь, онлайн-опрос

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Introduction

Living in an era of rapid social change, digital transformation, rising interstate tensions, and armed conflict naturally expands the scope of research problems that cannot be solved without taking into account the characteristics of the current social and historical context. In these conditions, cultural-historical psychology provides a theoretical and methodological basis to achieve various relevant research goals (Maidansky et al., 2023). The scientific analysis of psychological factors and pros-

pects for effective interstate cooperation between Belarus and Russia is no exception.

In the context of cultural-historical psychology, the study of young Belarusians' perceptions of Russia focuses on analyzing the social environment as a source of these perceptions, the verbal and symbolic expression of these perceptions (as a result of significant mediation), and the personal meaning and experience of young people's attitudes towards cross-country cooperation and their acceptance or rejection of it as a result of internalizing these perceptions. Per-

ceptions of another country are a cumulative product of the internalization of cultural, social, and personal meanings. These views are shaped by education, the media, the information environment, public policy discourse, historical memory, intergenerational and family interactions, daily communication, personal experience, individual needs, and the subject's own activity. These representations form part of a person's information-meaning field — a special system defined by domestic scientists as the process and result of a person obtaining, processing, and applying information, whereby the information becomes representative of the subject (Kudryavtsev et al., 2025). Within the framework of cross-cultural psychology, the information-meaning field is considered as “a dynamic system that unites the physical and mental spaces of individuals and influences how they perceive and reorganize information through their attitudes and behaviors” (Kudryavtsev et al., 2025, p. 79). Representations of another country, as an element of the information field and a form of social reflection of personality, are formed through the individual's participation in various social activities and practices. These representations, in turn, influence the activities and interactions in which individuals engage. In this context, analyzing the representations of Belarusian students about Russia is important for assessing and forecasting the potential contributions of young people to the development and maintenance of international cooperation. Symbolically, the representations of modern, educated Belarusian youth (as an active strategically important part of society) can be seen as a component of the zone of proximal development of cooperation between Belarus and Russia.

The Day of Unification of the Peoples of Belarus and Russia is celebrated every year on 2 April. This holiday is a testament to the close bond that the two independent states and peoples have maintained for over thirty years since the collapse of the USSR. Belarus and Russia share a cultural and linguistic space, as well as a media and communication space. Scholars view this as a unique case compared to other post-Soviet republics. As D. Plotnikov notes, “Belarus presents a unique example in the post-Soviet space, where sovereignty was not followed by cultural separation, and the value of an independent state did not entail distancing itself from Russia” (Plotnikov, 2025, p. 50). Statistics on registered marriages between citizens of Belarus and Russia attest to the close ties between the two peoples: “in 2025, more than half of marriages registered with foreign nationals were contracted with citizens of the Russian Federation”. In total, 2,035 such marriages were registered in Belarus in 2025: 1,029 marriages be-

tween Belarusian women and Russian men, and 1006 marriages between Russian women and Belarusian men. Belarus is the only state in the post-Soviet space (apart from Russia) where the Russian language has official status. Russia and Belarus are part of the Union State and form the core of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) — supra-state entities that presuppose the maintenance of a single economic space as well as the expansion and development of sociocultural integration (Karabchuk, Poplavskaya, 2019). Today, researchers consider Belarus to be Russia's most important strategic partner (Mezhevich, Shimov, 2024).

The maintenance and preservation of effective cooperation between the two countries is largely dependent on the positive attitudes of their peoples towards each other and towards the development of this cooperation. The most important basis and resource of international cooperation is young people, who embody a country's potential for development, particularly educated young people (Haurylik, 2025). Scholars define student youth as “a key resource and driver of future social transformations” (Barash, Tyurina, 2024, p. 431) and emphasize that, on the one hand, universities traditionally play an active role in international humanitarian cooperation and, on the other hand, they prepare staff to successfully implement this cooperation and form an appropriate communication space (Pevnaya, Minchenko, Gavrilik, 2025). However, the perceptions and attitudes of young people in both countries towards cooperation between Russia and Belarus may differ from those of older generations and the content of official state narratives (Karabchuk, Poplavskaya, 2019). This study therefore aims to examine the views of young Belarusian students on Russia and the specifics of their attitudes towards closer relations and cooperation between the two countries.

In Belarus, young people aged 14 to 31 make up 17.9% of the population. The modern student population in Belarus shares many similarities with that in Russia, bringing students from the two countries together (Snezhkova, Shalygina, 2020). These characteristics include elongated adulthood; prioritizing family values; striving for self-fulfillment and self-development; valuing education; focusing on maintaining health; being motivated to take socially meaningful action; focusing on factuality rather than interpretation when searching for sources of information; and having a low orientation towards television and a high orientation towards the Internet and social networks as the main sources of news and information (Andreev, Lashuk, 2019; Barash, Tyurina, 2024; Haurylik, 2025; Kruchek et al., 2023; Pevnaya et al., 2025; Selivanova, 2020; Snezhkova, 2024; et al.). On a daily basis, 99,1%

of Belarusian youth aged 14–30 use the Internet. Analysis of the results of the project “European Values Study” (2018 data) shows that young people in Belarus are highly sensitive to social injustice and violations of rights and freedoms. They also have a strong desire to play an active role in solving current problems and shaping their own future (Danilov, Rotman, 2021). This makes it important to study Belarusian youth's perception of Russia and their attitude towards integration and cooperation with Russia, in order to forecast and evaluate the potential of such cooperation. We would like to emphasize that socio-psychological approaches — which focus on psychological factors of effective intergroup interaction and take contextual conditions into account — are important for such studies.

There are scientific papers that reflect the attitude of Belarusian youth towards cooperation with Russia. However, these papers tend to analyze data collected more than five years ago. The intense local and global geopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociocultural changes of recent years necessitate intensifying such research and comparing results with past data. The current socio-historical context (prolonged armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine, sanctions restrictions, and an economic crisis) makes it necessary to monitor how Belarusian youth perceive Russia, in order to predict future prospects and identify potential barriers to cooperation between the two countries.

Previous studies have shown that Belarusian youth have a positive attitude towards Russia and Russians (Snezhkova, Shalygina, 2020; Snezhkova, 2024). However, an analysis of the heterostereotypes held by Belarusian youth reveals that they attribute negative traits to Russians, such as a “propensity for imperial consciousness and sometimes aggressive behavior” (Snezhkova, Shalygina, 2020, p. 351). Ambiguity in the perception of Russians has also been observed among a sample of young Belarusian schoolchildren (Brazhnik et al., 2016). Summarizing the data from two polls conducted by Belarusian and Russian scientists between 2018 and 2019 among Russian and Belarusian students, I.A. Snezhkova notes: “On the issue of creating a Union State, young people are cautious. Russians worry that the de facto accession of an entire state could worsen the country's economic situation. Belarusians cherish their country's independence and fear its absorption by a large neighbor. However, both groups welcome the increase in political, economic, and cultural interaction between the two countries' peoples” (Snezhkova, Shalygina, 2020, p. 351). The results of this study also show that, unlike the Russians, who generally view the Union State positively as a “gathering of lands”, “Belarusians see the poten-

tial danger of losing sovereignty and being drawn into all wars and conflicts that Russia is involved in” (ibid, p. 352). The research paper also states that, according to Belarusian respondents, “Russia is a strong military power with significant scientific and technological achievements, a rich history and culture, and great opportunities for young people. However, the country is not fully democratic or comfortable for ordinary people due to the insufficient level of economic development and unresolved social problems” (ibid, p. 353). The researchers emphasize that young Belarusian and Russian students envisage a shared future for their countries as a collaboration between two independent states (ibid).

Meanwhile, despite the high level of readiness among students from Russia and Belarus to cooperate in the context of the Union State's humanitarian diplomacy, scientists have noted limited participation by young people from both countries in cross-border projects and events. Students also have a weak understanding of “personal and national perspectives in the Russian-Belarusian sociocultural space” (Pevnaya, Minchenko, Gavrilik, 2025, p. 97). According to the annual Integration Barometer, researchers recorded the decline in the percentage of young people in Belarus who rated the EAEU positively between 2012 and 2017, as well as an increase in the number of young people who noted their indifference to this organization (Karabchuk, Poplavskaya, 2019). The same study also found that young Belarusians are more oriented toward Western countries than toward Eurasian countries in their future plans (Karabchuk, Poplavskaya, 2019). However, as the scholars emphasize, the question of the formation and stability of these orientations remains open.

Many scientists have discovered the mobility and multi-vector nature of Belarusians' foreign policy orientations (toward the East, the West, or both), as well as the duality of Belarusian national identity (Mezhevich, Shimov, 2024; Plotnikov, 2025; White, Biletskaya, McAllister, 2014; Shanshieva, 2014; Shimov, 2010). This is partly explained by the fact that “historically Belarus has been at the crossroads of various national-political projects, generating antagonistic and competing attempts at self-determination” (Mezhevich, Shimov, 2024, pp. 66–67). L. Shanshieva notes that “the life of Belarusians on the cultural frontier was constantly accompanied by periodic 'migration' from their culture to neighboring cultures and back” (Shanshieva, 2014, p. 8), creating conditions for cultural symbiosis and cultural heterogeneity. Some young Belarusians have ideas about “reformatting Belarus from an East Slavonic country to a Central European country at the crossroads of East and West” (Snezhkova, Shalygina, 2020, p. 352). Belaru-

sians also have a dual perception of Russia as both an ally and a guarantor of security, as well as a potential limiter of Belarus's sovereignty (ibid). At the same time, scientists emphasize the importance of abandoning the monopolization of one discourse in Belarusian society, and of “recognizing the multiplicity of cultural traditions as a natural attribute of Belarusian society, which is located at the intersection of geopolitical blocs, cultural-civilizational areas and religions” (Shimov, 2010, p. 83).

The identity of modern Belarusian youth is closely related to their planned emigration behavior (Selivanova, 2020; Murashchenkova, Gritsenko, Yefremenkova, 2023). At the same time, many Belarusians often regard Russia as an attractive country in which to live temporarily or permanently (Andreev, Lashuk, 2019; Selivanova, 2020; Muraksenkova, Grytsenko, Efremenkova, 2023). This can serve as an indicator of Belarusian youth's attitude towards cross-country cooperation. Additionally, significant markers of attitudes towards national convergence include representations of the country, the frequency and valence of contacts with representatives from a neighboring country, awareness of similar interactions among others, and the perceived threat from an outgroup (Pettigrew, Tropp, 2011; Geppert, Leonhart, Maes, 2025, Stephan, Ybarra, Morrison, 2009).

Based on the study's objectives and the results of the theoretical analysis, we developed a list of open questions to determine how young Belarusians perceive Russia and their attitude towards integration cooperation. The main research question of our study is: what are the preconditions of Belarusian youth's attitude towards integration cooperation between Russia and Belarus in the current context, and to which psychological factors might they be related?

Materials and methods

The sample included 106 Belarusian citizens (60 male and 46 female aged between 18 and 25, $M = 19,0$, $SD = 1,72$, predominantly Belarusian – 95%) from Vitebsk, Braslav, Polotsk, Novopolotsk, Gomel, Zhlobin, Mozyr, Petrikov, Mogilev and Bobruisk. The respondents were students at higher education institutions specialising in the humanities (9%), economics (39%) and technology (50%) (2% of respondents did not specify their field of study). We conducted the empirical study using qualitative methodology. The list of main open questions formulated for the study is presented in Appendix A. In addition to answering these questions, the respondents also provided information about their gender, age, nationality, educational background, and place of residence. Data were collected in May 2025

through an anonymous online survey using snowball sampling. All respondents signed an electronic informed consent form to participate in the study.

We processed the data using content analysis and thematic analysis, and engaged two independent psychologist experts. We read the entire dataset in detail. To analyze how respondents perceived Russia in the form of associations, we grouped the data by conceptual categories and subcategories using content analysis (see Appendix B, table.). To analyze the respondents' attitude towards integration and cooperation between the two countries, as well as the prerequisites of these attitudes, we used a structured tabular thematic analysis (Robinson, 2022). This method is suitable for brief texts, and combines inductive and deductive approaches in code and topic searches. It can be used for both quality analysis and for to obtain frequency data.

Results

The associations that Belarusian students expressed when answering the first question of the questionnaire have been grouped into thematic categories and subcategories (see Appendix B, Table). The Belarusian students' perceptions of Russia are multifaceted, but predominantly positive (see Appendix B, Table). Some responses included stereotypical cliches such as “bear-balalaika-matryoshka”. Other individual associations present in the responses included “corruption”, “propaganda”, and “tsarism”. However, the most common responses were those containing positive descriptions of Russia emphasizing its strength and power (see Appendix B, Table). Overall, the associations reflected Belarusians' views on the characteristics of Russians, their relations with Russians, the political and legal aspects of the manifestation of Russian statehood, Russian cities and infrastructure, and the country's economy and resource opportunities. There were also associations related to ethno-cultural and natural-climatic features, as well as the current socio-political context. Specific figures representing Russia named included V. Putin, A. Pushkin, and A. Usmanov.

In response to the second question of the survey (“Is there anything in Russia that interests you? If so, what?”), 83% of respondents identified appealing aspects of Russia. Their preferences were distributed according to the following topics: cities of Russia (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Smolensk, Yekaterinburg, Murmansk); nature; culture and history of the country; music; architecture; opportunities for professional self-fulfillment and employment; possibility of earning a living; places for rest and entertainment; similarities with Belarus; standard

of living; friendly people; mentality; multi-nationality of Russia. Some Belarusian students noted that they would like to live in Russia or travel there, while 17% of respondents answered “no” or “nothing interests” to the question about Russia’s interesting and attractive features.

When asked the next question, most respondents (72%) gave a different answer, indicating that there were no unattractive or discouraging aspects of Russia. However, 21% indicated an unattractive side of Russia. They responded as follows: the large size of country; crowds; high numbers of migrants; traffic jams; litter and mud in the streets; the state of military conflict; instability; sanctions; economic isolation; ineffective public administration; corruption; the mentality of the people; their anger and incivility; difficulties in small towns and villages; poverty; and high prices. Some respondents left the question unanswered (7% of respondents).

Just over half of the respondents (58%) have visited Russia for various reasons, such as tourism or visiting relatives and friends. Around 36% of respondents talked about young people they knew who had moved from Belarus to Russia. The reasons for moving were to access better education and/or more promising job opportunities and to be reunited with family. There were fewer examples of young people moving from Russia to Belarus, with only – 22% of respondents showing similar awareness. The goals of moving were cited as building a personal life, studying, working, or reuniting with family.

When asked to describe the current relationship between Belarus and Russia, the vast majority of respondents (90%) gave a positive evaluation: these included terms such as “good”, “friendship”, “brotherhood”, “friendly, strong”, “trustful”, “favorable” and others. However, some individual responses highlighted: (1) the complex nature of the relationship (“I would describe the relations between Belarus and Russia as allied but complex. On the one hand, there is close economic and political cooperation, but on the other hand, there are certain contradictions and dependencies”); (2) the greatest benefit for one of the countries (“mutually beneficial, more for Belarus”); (3) the involuntary nature of cooperation (“forced relations”); and other parameters – “tense”, “too close”, “acceptable”, “normal”, and “neutral”. Two respondents found it difficult to answer: “I don’t know, I don’t understand politics”, “no idea”.

About 57% of respondents are aware of an organization like the EAEU. However, most students are only aware of the existence of this union. Fewer than half of those who were aware of EAEU activities (22%) could provide any details, such as individual goals and/or participants. A significant proportion of Belarusian students surveyed (42%) had not heard of or knew anything

about the EAEU. One respondent confused the EAEU with the European Union.

The majority of respondents (63%) rated the level of integration and cooperation between Belarus and Russia as “positive” or “good”, 5% rated it as “normal”, and 16% as “neutral”. Three respondents (3%) provided detailed responses, emphasizing the importance of preserving Belarus’s sovereignty in cooperation processes and rejecting integration as a merger. One respondent wrote, “I support the integration processes that develop economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and good-neighbourly relations. However, I consider it important to preserve the sovereignty and independence of Belarus, as well as to take into account the interests of the Belarusian people”; “I regard integration processes between Belarus and Russia as positive if they contribute to economic growth, stability, and the preservation of sovereignty”; “Cooperation is fine, but integration would certainly be unnecessary”. Eight percent of respondents found it difficult to answer the question “How do you view the integration processes and cooperation between Belarus and Russia?” There were negative answers: “skeptical” (1%), “preferable integration with EU countries” (1%), “dual” (1%), and “negative” (2%).

In response to the question “Are there any areas of cooperation between Belarus and Russia that you find attractive and promising?” 25% of respondents found it difficult to answer, 7% of respondents left the question unanswered, and 27% of students said that there are no such areas. In other words, 59% of those surveyed do not understand the personal significance of cooperation between the two countries. Of those who indicated spheres of cooperation, 41% of students included areas such as education and science, culture, creativity, migration, space exploration, the economy, industry, technology, energy, freight transport, marketing, tourism, and agriculture. However, the single responses of respondents provided concrete examples of attractive forms of cooperation: “exchange of students, joint cultural events and preserving historical heritage”, “taking a paid summer internship at a Russian university”, and “obtaining citizenship”.

Eighty-seven per cent of respondents agreed that there are common grounds for integration between Belarus and Russia, with 85% of these providing concrete examples. The full range of these common grounds is reflected in the following concepts: “culture”, “mentality”, “tradition”, “language”, “people”, “some similarity in politics and arrangement in the country”, “common interests”, “political agreements”, “geographical location”, “history”, “common past”, “USSR”, “trade relations”, “creativity”, “friendly and single relationships”, “Slavic origin”, “Orthodox

faith”, “long-term economic and family ties”. Nine percent of respondents found this question difficult to answer, and 4% of respondents noted that there was no overall basis for integration.

Young Belarusians identified several potential barriers to integration: economic and bureaucratic difficulties, political disagreements, war, sanctions, opposition, intervention by other countries, incitement of ethnic strife, fear of losing sovereignty, differences in national identity, the perception of integration as an imposed process, conflicts and differences of opinion, disrespect for Belarusian traditions and language, a utilitarian view of Belarus' labor and natural resources, and differences in language, history, and values. These barriers were noted by 34% of respondents. The question proved difficult to answer for 31% of respondents, while 27% said there were no barriers, and 8% left the question unanswered.

The vast majority of students surveyed (82%) said that Russia does not pose a threat to their country. However, 10% of respondents answered yes when asked whether Russia poses a threat to Belarus. When asked to elaborate, they cited economic dependence on Russia, the possibility of being drawn into NATO conflicts, participation of Belarusians in military actions, the unequal nature of integration, and the subsequent loss of Belarus' national identity and independence. Eight percent of respondents found it difficult to answer.

Discussion

In this study, we analyzed the perceptions of Russia among young Belarusian students and their attitudes towards closer relations and cooperation between the two countries. We also addressed the main research question, identifying psychological factors that can contribute to positive and negative attitudes among Belarusian youth towards the integration and cooperation between Russia and Belarus in the current socio-historical context.

Our results are consistent with survey data from previous years, which revealed predominantly positive attitudes towards Russia and Russians among Belarusians, albeit with some negative aspects (Brazhnik et al., 2016; Snezhkova, Shalygina, 2020; Pevnaya, Minchenko, Gavrilik, 2025; Snezhkova, 2024). Our study revealed the ambivalence of young Belarusians' foreign policy orientation, a phenomenon previously noted by other researchers (Karabchuk, Poplavskaya, 2019; Mezhevich, Shimov, 2024; Plotnikov, 2025; White, Biletskaya, McAllister, 2014; Shanshieva, 2014; Shimov, 2010). However, the results of the study show that, under current conditions, a preference for

cooperation with Russia dominates among young Belarusians. The study also shows that a positive attitude towards integration and cooperation between the two countries among Belarusian youth can be promoted by encouraging visits to Russia, personal experience of staying in the country, positive interaction with Russians, and sharing information about such experiences among acquaintances. Additionally, friendly ties with Russian citizens, positive perceptions of the relationship between the two countries and their peoples, and beliefs about the basis for integration and mutual understanding are also factors in fostering a positive attitude towards cooperation. A key indicator of the high probability of Belarusian youth maintaining a positive attitude towards integration with Russia is the low level of perceived threat from Russia. However, the study shows that one-tenth of the respondents sees Russia as a threat. Additionally, some participants reported a negative (5%) or neutral (16%) attitude towards cooperation between Belarus and Russia, while 8% were unable to answer the question. At the same time, more than one-third of the students surveyed reported possible barriers to integration between the two countries. These data suggest that factors contributing to negative attitudes towards intercountry cooperation exist. These factors may include negative views of Russia and Russians, fears among students about possible restrictions on Belarus's sovereignty, and concerns about Belarusians' national identity in the context of integration. There are also fears about Belarusians' potential involvement in the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine. A lack of awareness of current and potential areas of cooperation between countries and international unions and associations may indirectly contribute to negative attitudes towards cooperation with Russia among young Belarusians. More than half of the respondents reported difficulties with their vision and definition of personal meaning and prospects for cooperation between Belarus and Russia, which may also be a barrier to the development of cooperation between the two countries. Therefore, Belarusian youth appear to have a weak understanding of the information needed to form an attitude towards cooperation between the two countries.

From the standpoint of cultural-historical psychology, attitudes towards intercountry integration can be viewed as an aspect of an individual's value choice. These choices are made as they develop their information-meaning field, which is influenced by various sociocultural and individual psychological factors. At the same time, the willingness (or lack of readiness) of Belarusian students to cooperate with Russia essentially involves sense-making, which is regulated by rep-

representations about Russia and mediated by processes of fusion, internationalization and the understanding of information in modern cultural-historical contexts. Cultural-historical psychology, as a heuristic theoretical-methodological lens, provides ample opportunity to carry out a detailed analysis of the process by which a personality forms its relationship with interstate interaction. In summary, the results of the study show that, for young Belarusian students, the idea of Russia as a fraternal, friendly state is compatible with the value of their own country's sovereignty. Taking these representations into account and developing them can help to define the personal meaning of interstate cooperation based on the national values of Belarusian youth, forming the basis for a positive attitude towards integration cooperation with Russia.

Conclusion

The results of the study showed that many Belarusian students have a positive image of Russia and a positive attitude towards integration and cooperation with Russia. This is a favorable factor for further rapprochement between Belarus and Russia. However, a significant proportion of Belarusian students surveyed do not perceive any personal significance in the cooper-

ation between the two countries. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the students surveyed do not find the cooperation between the two countries personally meaningful. This could hinder effective interaction between the two countries in the future. Some young Belarusian students fear that Belarus may lose its national sovereignty and economic independence as a result of cooperation with Russia. The study used a qualitative approach, which does not allow us to quantify this factor's contribution to the attitudes of Belarusian youth towards cooperation with Russia, but does allow us to acknowledge its presence.

We assume that the views of Belarusian students may be closely related to their sense of belonging to the Belarusian people and their emotional attitude towards their fellow citizens. Therefore, we believe that a quantitative study examining the links between types of social identity and the attitudes of Belarusian youth towards the development of cooperation between the two countries would be fruitful. We plan to conduct this study in the future.

Limitations. The use of an online survey restricted the ability to monitor data collection. Responses may have been subject to social desirability bias. The sample is limited in size and is not geographically representative.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Questions included in the research questionnaire (<https://doi.org/10.17759/pse.2025300>)

1. Could you please tell me what you associate with Russia?
2. Is there anything about Russia that interests you? What exactly?
3. Is there anything about Russia that you dislike? What exactly?
4. Have you ever been to Russia? How often? What was the purpose of your visit?
5. Do you know any young people you know who have moved from Belarus to Russia? If so, could you briefly explain why they moved and what they hoped to achieve? Did they achieve their goals?
6. Do you know any young people among your acquaintances who have moved from Russia to Belarus? If so, please briefly explain why and what were they looking for? Did they achieve their goals?
7. How would you characterize the current relations between Belarus and Russia?
8. Are you aware about the existence of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)? What do you know about it?
9. How do you view the integration processes and cooperation between Belarus and Russia?
10. Are there any areas of cooperation between Belarus and Russia that appeal to you? If so, which ones?
11. What do you think connects the peoples of Belarus and Russia? What might be the basis for integration processes between Belarus and Russia?
12. What could separate and alienate the Belarusian and Russian people? What might hinder integration processes between Belarus and Russia?
13. In your view, does Russia pose a threat to Belarus? Does Russia pose any danger to Belarus? If so, in what way?

Appendix B. Table showing the results of the study of the representations of Belarusian student youth about Russia (<https://doi.org/10.17759/pse.2025300>)

Table

Associations, categories and subcategories of associations reflecting the image of Russia among young citizens of Belarus who participated in an online survey (answers to the question “Could you please tell me what you associate with Russia?”)

Category of associations	Subcategory of associations	Association (respondents' answers)
The population of Russia	Concrete people	<i>A. Pushkin, V. Putin, A. Usmanov</i>
	Representations about the population of country and about specifics of relationship with the population	<i>Asians, brother, brotherhood, heroism, bravery, friendship/friends/friend, friendly relations with my country, protection, beautiful girls, love, courage, reliable ally, nation, courage, patriotism, support, connection, family, sister, Slavs, commonwealth, neighbors, cooperation, union, ally, good protection</i>
Objective and subjectively perceived political-legal aspects and manifestations of the Russian statehood	State symbols, attributes, designation	<i>Power, country, tricolor, federation</i>
	Respondents' perception of state status and borders of country	<i>Great country, great state, great federal state, great power, friendly state, the largest country in territory, the world's largest country, superpower, tsarism</i>
	Representations of the negative aspects of statehood	<i>Corruption, propaganda</i>
	Representations about the current socio-political and socioeconomic context	<i>Wagner contractors, war, sanctions, SMO</i>
Military sphere	-	<i>Army, military power, belligerence, one of the strongest military states</i>
Economy of Russia	National currency and prices	<i>Money, cheap goods and services, rubles, weak ruble</i>
	Automobile industry	<i>Lada, car brand “Moskvich”</i>

Category of associations	Subcategory of associations	Association (respondents' answers)
	Resource	<i>Rich natural resources, large reserves of natural resources, gas, many useful resources</i>
Work and career prospects	-	<i>Opportunity, success, innovation, education, job</i>
Cities and infrastructure	Russian cities and regions	<i>Vladivostok, Moscow, St. Petersburg/Peter, Siberia</i>
	Architectural objects	<i>Golden bridge in Vladivostok, beautiful architecture, Red Square, Kremlin, mausoleum, Moscow City, bridges</i>
	Infrastructure and environment	<i>Endless lands, infrastructure, beautiful cities, crowdedness, space</i>
Russia's natural and climate characteristics	Description of nature and natural objects	<i>Volga, boundless forests, birch trees, land, bear, field, taiga, nature, diversity of nature</i>
	Features of climate	<i>Cold, cold Siberia, winter</i>
Ethnocultural sphere	Features, objects, achievements of culture and history	<i>History/close history, delicious food, sights, famous writers, Kazan/Nizhny Novgorod Kremlin, cosmos, culture, museums, music/beautiful music</i>
	Religion	<i>Orthodox Church</i>
	Stereotypical associations, cliché	<i>Balalaika, birch, vodka, mattress, bear, samovar, earhat, coats</i>
Overall positive representations	Describing the country's strength and power	<i>A great country, beautiful, scale, mighty, strength, might, invincible country, developed country, native, strong, modern, country with unique history and bright future, civilization</i>

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Viktor V. Kiriyenko — data collection; control over the research.

All authors participated in the discussion of the results and approved the final text of the manuscript.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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