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The influence of historical heritage on idea of Belarusian statehood in 1914–1918

Słowa kluczowe: białoruska idea narodowa; idea państwowa; Białoruska Republika Ludowa

Key words: Belarusian national idea; idea of statehood; Belarusian People's Republic

The place of Belarusians in the social structure before I World War

At the beginning of the 20th century, Belarusians lived mainly in five western governorates of Russian Empire: Grodno, Vilno (Vilnius), Minsk, Mogilev, Vitebsk and small parts of the neighboring and Smolensk Governorates¹. Statistical data collected during the First National Census in Russia in 1897 provides information about their position in the social structure in these areas. Questions about the native language and religion were asked in that census so it is possible to build an approximate picture of the national structure of society.

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The Belarusian-speaking population in the five governorates constituted 63.49% (5 408 420 people)². The second place was occupied by the Jewish population speaking in Ydisher – 14.11% (1 202 129 people). The third place fell to the Russian-speaking population – 492 921 people (5.79%). This group included both Russians and those Orthodox Belarusians who, after social promotion, identified themselves with Russian culture and Russian national identity, thus trying to cut off their rural roots. Poles in these areas constituted only 4.98% (424 236).

The Ukrainian population living in Polesie and in the southern part of the Grodno province had a slightly smaller percentage (4.43%, 377 499 people). Slightly above 3% in five governorates were Lithuanians (290 069 people) living mainly in Vilno governorate and Latvians (236 729 people) who inhabited the Vitebsk governorate. Germans and Tatars constituted less than 1% in these areas.

Most inhabitants of Belarus were of Orthodox faith and the second place in terms of the number of followers was taken by the Roman Catholic Church – in the Vilno Governorate there were almost twice as many Catholics as Orthodox people.

People who spoke Belarusian were mainly of two faiths but there were almost four times more Orthodox Belarusian-speaking people. There were almost one million Roman Catholics and over four million Orthodox people. The Orthodox people prevailed in the Grodno, Mogilev, Vitebsk, Minsk governorates. A different situation was only in the Grodno governorate, where more than a half of Roman Catholics in the Vilno Governorate gave the Belarusian language as their mother tongue.

Although in five governorates Belarusian speaking people had a quantitative advantage in political, cultural and social terms, they hardly mattered in the society. The reason for this was their social position. People who spoke Belarusian were mostly peasants regardless of the confession. As the table below shows Belarusian-speaking peasants constituted 92% of the society, the townspeople almost 6%, and the gentry only 1.5%³.

² In more detail about social structure see: D. Michaluk, *Białoruska Republika Ludowa 1918–1920. U podstaw białoruskiej państwowości*, Toruń 2010, p. 60–77; П. В. Терешкович, *Этническая история Беларусі XIX–начала XX в.*, Мінск 2004; *Гісторыя Беларусі*, т. 4, рэд. В. Яноўская, С. Рудовіч, Мінск 2005, p. 222–233.

³ E. Mironowicz, R. Radzik, S. Tokć, *Zmiany struktury narodowościowej na pograniczu polsko-białoruskim w XX wieku*, Białystok 2005, s. 13; *Гісторыя Беларусі*, т. 4, рэд. В. Яноўская, С. Рудовіч, Мінск 2005, p. 232.

Table 1. Religious structure of the inhabitants of Northwest governorates of Russian Empire in 1897

Governorates	Faith						Total
	Orthodox	Roman Catholic	Lutheran	Judaic	Old Believers	Other	
Vilno	415 295	935 849	4 463	204 686	25 673	5 241	1 591 207
Grodno	919 346	386 519	12 551	280 489	504	4 000	1 603 409
Vitebsk	825 601	357 309	46 654	175 629	83 022	1 031	1 489 246
Minsk	1 558 264	217 959	5 552	345 015	15 860	4 971	2 147 621
Mogilev	1 402 161	50 159	6 890	203 946	23 349	259	1 686 764
Total	5 120 667	1 947 795	76 110	1 209 765	148 408	15 502	8 518 247

Source: *Первая всеобщая перепись населения Российской империи, 1897*, вып. IV, тетр. 3, табл. XIV; вып. V, тетр. 3, табл. XIV; вып. XI, табл. XIV; вып. XXII, табл. XIV; вып. XXIII, табл. XIV. Quotation for: E. Mironowicz, S. Tokć, R. Radzik, *Zmiana struktury narodowościowej na pograniczu polsko-białoruskim w XX wieku*, Białystok 2005, s. 16.

Table 2. Religious structure of the inhabitants of five Northwest governorates of Russia who gave the Belarusian language as their mother tongue in 1897

Governorates	Faith						Total
	Orthodox	Roman Catholic	Lutheran	Judaic	Old Believers	Other	
Vilno	366 310	522 076	51	209	1 548	1 709	891 903
Grodno	490 211	213 623	124	398	126	563	705 045
Vitebsk	685 159	82 995	213	85	20 123	24	788 599
Minsk	1 483 258	148 193	175	292	820	353	1 633 091
Mogilev	1 359 279	27 323	70	216	2 878	16	1 389 782
Total	4 384 217	994 210	633	1 200	25 495	2 665	5 408 420

Source: *Первая всеобщая перепись населения Российской империи, 1897*, вып. IV, тетр. 3, табл. XIV; вып. V, тетр. 3, табл. XIV; вып. XI, табл. XIV; вып. XXII, табл. XIV; вып. XXIII, табл. XIV. Quotation for: E. Mironowicz, S. Tokć, R. Radzik, *Zmiana struktury narodowościowej na pograniczu polsko-białoruskim w XX wieku*, Białystok 2005, s. 17.

Table 3. The social structure of Belarusian speaking people in Northwest governorates of Russian Empire in 1897

Governorate	Social strata							Total
	Gentry	Clergy	Free professions	Merchants	Bourgeoisie	Peasants	Other	
Vilno	23 579	284	251	5	43 155	823 859	770	891 903
Grodno	40	488	86	74	36 964	662 471	904	705 045
Vitebsk	8 507	1 646	825	104	47 093	729 652	772	788 599
Minsk	42 911	2 425	1 815	43	120 062	1463 356	2479	1633091
Mogilev	13 717	3 916	1 459	89	69 494	1299 367	1740	1389782
Total	92 772	8 759	4 436	315	316 768	4978 705	6665	5408420

Source: *Первая всеобщая перепись населения Российской империи, 1897*, вып. IV, тетр. 3, табл. XXIV; вып. V, тетр. 3, табл. XXIV; вып. XI, табл. XXIV; вып. XXIII, табл. XXIV; вып. XXIII, табл. XIV. Quotation for: E. Mironowicz, S. Tokć, R. Radzik, *Zmiana struktury narodowościowej na pograniczu polsko-białoruskim w XX wieku*, Białystok 2005, s. 13.

The social structure of the Polish-speaking population, which accounted for less than 5%, was completely different⁴. Nevertheless, the Polish-speaking group was dominated by peasants – 44%, but the gentry constituted 20% and townspeople 33% of the group. When comparing the amount of nobility in both groups, it is also important that the Belarusian-speaking population constituted as much as 63.49% and the population who listed the Polish language as native in the census – only 4.98%. In such a statement the disproportion can be seen more clearly. The elite of Belarusians in this period was mostly the first and second generation of the intelligentsia. It was recruited from among peasants, families of Orthodox clergy and poor gentry⁵.

⁴ *Гісторыя Беларусі*, т. 4, р. 222–233.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

Table 4. Social structure of Polish-speaking people of five Northwest governorates of Russian Empire in 1897

Governorate	Social strata							Total
	Gentry	Clergy	Free professions	Merchants	Bourgeoisie	Peasants	Other	
Vilno	38 417	149	101	83	36 369	53 989	946	130 054
Grodno	11 574	106	113	45	58 325	89 936	1 563	161 662
Vitebsk	13 952	56	61	36	16 766	19 106	400	50 377
Minsk	21 057	33	69	30	21 918	18 927	2 583	64 617
Mogilev	7 253	26	55	9	5 162	4 826	195	17 526
Total	92 253	370	399	203	138 540	186 784	5 687	424 236

Source: *Первая всеобщая перепись населения Российской империи, 1897*, вып. IV, тетр. 3, табл. XXIV; вып. V, тетр. 3, табл. XXIV; вып. XI, табл. XXIV; вып. XXII, табл. XXIV; вып. XXIII, табл. XXIV. Quotation for: E. Mironowicz, S. Tokć, R. Radzik, *Zmiana struktury narodowościowej na pograniczu polsko-białoruskim w XX wieku*, Białystok 2005, s. 14.

Most of Russians, living in the Northwest governorates, were intelligence (teachers, clerks, etc.), Orthodox clergy, entrepreneurs, merchants and landowners. They were also military – not included in the census. The Russians in this area were partly the population that settled here after the incorporation of Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Lithuanian and Belarusian lands) into Russia. Partly they were local people – mostly Orthodox, who acquired Russian national consciousness and considered themselves Russians.

This – generally exposed – social and religious structure of Belarusians at the beginning of the 20th century was a distant consequence of the political, national and religious processes that took place in these areas for several centuries. At that time, starting from the mid-seventeenth century, the process of separating Belarusians and distinguishing them from Rus' population began. Extremely interesting, but little known, is the process that led to the separation of Belarusians and Ukrainians, two nations that have been culturally close, with a similar historical past.

The contribution of the past and the effects of the official national policy

Until the 20th century Belarusian lands (in contemporary borders) had been a part of other states. In the early Middle Ages the area belonged to Rus' states: Duchy of Poltsk, Turov, Smolensk, Galicia-Volhynia, Grodno. In the 13th–14th century the Belarusian land became the part of Lithuanian state. In this way, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania became a huge state with a multi-ethnic composition. It stretched from Samogitia to the Ukrainian borderland in the south, Smolensk in the east and Drohichyn at the border with Mazovia in the west. In this country the Giediminids dynasty played a political role, but the Ruthenians dominated in the socio-cultural sphere. They belonged to the Christian sphere, thanks to which they had contacts with both Byzantine and Latin circles. The political and cultural role of the Ruthenians in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was shattered by the political choice of duke Jagiello – a personal union with the Kingdom of Poland concluded in 1385 in Kreva. This step was necessary then for the defense of both countries against the Teutonic Order. The baptism of Lithuania two years later in the Latin rite changed religious and national relations. Ruthenians who wanted to belong to the state elite had to give up Orthodoxy and convert to Catholicism.

Close relations with the Kingdom of Poland after the Union of Lublin (1569), entry of the ruling home into the world of Latin culture, and the attractiveness of Polish culture influenced the Polonization of the Ruthenian and Lithuanian elite. This process was deepened in the 16th century during the Reformation, when Ruthenian and Lithuanian magnates eagerly converted to Calvinism, whose religious propagation in this area took place in Polish⁶. For national relations, the conclusion of the church union in 1596 and the fight to preserve the rights of the Orthodox Church were equally important. The process of assimilation of Polish culture by Ruthenian and Lithuanian nobility – lasted few generations – deprived Lithuanians and Belarusians of the upper class and pushed the nations into the group of nations described by sociologists as “peasant nations”. Not only a social

⁶ See more: M. Liedke, *Od prawosławia do katolicyzmu. Ruscy możni i szlachta Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego wobec wyznań reformacyjnych*, Białystok 2004.

but also a religious difference arose between the upper and lower layers, and ultimately, at the time of the formation of modern nations, serious national differences arose due to the adoption of different national identities. At the end of World War I, there will also be a selection of different state orientations.

As a result of three partitions of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Rzeczpospolita), in the late 18th century Belarus and Lithuania were incorporated into Russia. In 1839 the Greek Catholic Church (formed in the end of the 16th century) was liquidated by Russian tsar Nicholas I, and Belarusians lost their exceptional spiritual leadership. After the unsuccessful January Uprising in 1863 in the Kingdom of Poland and the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania against Russia, the oppressed Catholic Church guarded Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's heritage and culture. The Orthodox Church implemented Russian state ideology and supported Russianization processes among Belarusians. At the end of the 19th century, due to their religion, Belarusians belonged to two civilization circles of the Latin West and the Orthodox East. Both churches represented the national interests of Belarusians to a small degree. It was, among others, an effect of rivalry between Poles and Russians for political and cultural influence in Lithuania and Belarus.

The second half of the 19th century was a period of national awakening in Lithuania and Belarus. Her nations, as happened in other parts of Europe, entered the path of building modern nations. However, the national situation in this area was particularly complicated. The territory was multi-ethnic therefore Lithuanian, Belarusian, Polish (socialist and national), Russian, Jewish ideas intersected here. From the point of view of Belarusian national idea, three ideologies are the most important: The first it was the idea of the Polish civilization mission in the East and the myth of Polish Eastern borderlands.

The first of these ideologies placed the hegemony of Poles above other nations of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania and by their attitude towards them, was in no way attractive to them. In the formation of the Belarusian (and Lithuanian) national idea, it played an important role. The slogans of the civilization mission and Polish domination caused fears of the incorporation of Lithuania and Belarus and the revival of the Commonwealth with the domination of the nobility. The result was better consolidation of Lithuanians and Belarusians around their own national programs, or the search for such ideologies that ensured equality of rights of these

nations with respect to others. This approach was ensured by *kraiova* ideology and “West-Ruthenian” ideology.

The supporters of *kraiova* idea were Vilno democrat’s of many nationalities. Its basis was the tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It assumed close connections of Lithuania and Belarus and equality of historical nations of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: Poles, Belarusians, Lithuanians and Jews. According to the ideology, at a time one could be of many nationalities (Belarusian, Polish, Lithuanian) and consider himself Polish, Lithuanian and Belarusian simultaneously identifying himself with many cultures at the same time. *Kraiova* ideology was popular among the some land owners (Roman Skirmunt, Magdalena Radzivil) and Vilno democratic social and political activists including the leaders of the Belarusian national movement – the brothers Ivan and Anton Luckievich. But these circles in relation to the peasants were quite elite, and their activities bore the features of anti-government opposition. One of the points on *kraiova*’s ideology program was, after all, obtaining political autonomy for Lithuania and Belarus from the Russian government.

From the end of the 18th century, i.e. from the partitions of the Commonwealth and the incorporation of Lithuania, Belarus and part of Ukraine to Russia, the “West-Ruthenian ideology” (*zapadnorusizm*) gained popularity. The more that this idea was supported by the official national policy of the Russian government – especially after the outbreak of the 1863 uprising and in subsequent years. According to the ideology, Belarusian and Ukrainian lands were considered as Russian Western borderland justly regained after many centuries. The basis of the “West-Ruthenian” ideology was Slavic Orthodox heritage and conviction that Orthodox Belarusians, Ukrainians and Russians constituted one common triune Russian nation⁷. One of the main ideologists of “West-Ruthenian” ideology was Mikhail Koialovich, whose works propagated the belief that Belarus and Lithuania are western parts of Russia not only in terms of nationality but also its historical heritage⁸. It is no wonder then that the official ideology was much

⁷ А. Цьвікевіч, „Западно-руссизм”. Нарысы з гісторыі грамадзкай мыслі ў XIX і пачатку XX в., Менск 1993, р. 7.

⁸ М. Коялович, *Чтения по истории Западной России*, Санкт-Петербург 1884; idem, *О расселении племен Западного края России*, Санкт-Петербург 1863; idem, *Народное движение в Западной России*, [w:] *Сборник статей, разъясняющих дело по отношению к Западной России*, Вильна 1887.

more attractive to Orthodox Belarusian peasants. And it was the pro-Russian “West-Ruthenians”, which won the ideological struggle for Belarusians. Since the November Uprising in 1830 Polish culture in the East had been losing its influence. The Russian state had many tools to limit its influence on the Belarusian population. In the 19th century the influence of Russian culture and its system of values won among the Belarusian people – especially Orthodox. But the most important aspect which was decisive in supporting the Russian cultural sphere among most of Belarusians was not only religious closeness but, first of all, abolition of serfdom by tsar Alexander II, and creating possibilities of social advance among peasants. Such a decision was also received as support of the peasants by the Russian state against the landowners – Poles.

“West-Ruthenian” ideology also influenced the formation of Belarusian historiography, born in the 19th century. It generally shared the opinion of Russian historians about the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a Lithuanian-Ruthenian state, and even a Lithuanian-Belarusian state. This political balance had only collapsed after the Kievan union. Belarusian historiography in a very negative light presented the period after the conclusion of the real union in 1569, the Brest Union, and the role of the Jesuit order in Lithuania and Belarus⁹. It emphasized the limitation of the role of the Orthodox Church in favor of the Catholic Church and the Polonization of Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Lithuania and Belarus) seen as conscious action directed by magnates from Kingdom of Poland. However, the period of Belarusian lands belonging to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was idealized. The most important achievement of the then Belarusian historiography was the creation of the myth about the beginnings of Belarusian statehood and national history. It was associated with the Ragvalodovich dynasty and Principality of Polatsk and its short independence from Kiev¹⁰.

The first manifestations of the Belarusian national movement were associated with the activities of the Belarusian faction Land and Liberty (Zem-

⁹ D. Michaluk, *Na unię lubelską spojrzenie historiografii białoruskiej XIX i XX w.*, [w:] *Między Zachodem a Wschodem*, t. 2, red. J. B. Dybaś, K. Mikulski, J. Poraziński, S. Roszak, Toruń 2003, p. 409–424.

¹⁰ „Кто были наши найдавніши діды і якая іх была доля до ўніі?”, [w:] *Заняпад і адраджэнне. Беларуская літаратура XIX стагоддзя*, укладанне У. Казберука, Мінск 2001, p. 320–326.

lia i Volia) in the 1880s and the person of its founder Ignatsy Gryniewicki. However, after his assassination of tsar Alexander II, the activity of Belarusian faction was not continued. The next stage in the development of the Belarusian national movement was associated with the 1905–1906 revolution and the tolerant manifestation of tsar Nicholas II. Until the outbreak of World War I, the center of Belarusian cultural life was Vilno, where the newspaper “Nasha Niva” (the political organ of the Belarusian Socialist Group) was published in the Belarusian language for a decade. Until the outbreak of World War I, the party did not formulate any idea concerned on the political future of Belarusians other than the postulate of political autonomy of Lithuania and Belarus with the capital in Vilno.

The idea of Belarusian statehood

In 1915 the Russian-German front ran through Belarus cutting it into two parts for almost three years. The Grodno and Vilno governorates were located on the German side, while central and eastern parts of Belarus were located on the Russian side of the front. Until 1918 the frontline had prevented Belarusian national activists in Minsk, on the Russian side of the front, from cooperating with the ones in Vilno on the German side. Because of the political and wartime situation, separate national programs had to be created. Conceptions regarding future statehood and alliances were formed under the influence of gained experience from the political past as well as from eastern and Latin cultural spheres in which individual activists were involved.

The greatest leaders of Belarusian national movements of that period – brothers Ivan and Anton Luckievič were supporters of the Vilno democrat’s ideology and would hardly imagine breaking the connection between Belarus and Lithuania, and division of historical Lithuania into national states. In 1915 they created the idea of rebuilding the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the Belarusian and Lithuanian lands occupied by the German army¹¹.

¹¹ M. J. Karp, *W poszukiwaniu współpracy między narodami byłego Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego podczas I wojny światowej*, [w:] *Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine. The Foundations of Historical and Cultural Traditions in East Central Europe. International Conference Rome, 28 April–6 May 1990*, red. J. Kłoczowski, Lublin 1994, p. 411–414.

This was also an answer to the German concept of *Mitteleuropa*, the outlines of which had been presented by Friedrich Naumann¹².

In 1916 Luckievič brothers developed another plan: to create United States from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea as federation of Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia and Ukraine. Such a structure was supposed to counterbalance the influences of Poland and Russia in the region¹³. Their idea of the dualistic Lithuanian-Belarusian state made up of two autonomous territories was supported by members of the Belarusian conference organized in Vilno in January 1917¹⁴. However, the participants of the conference agreed that the Belarusian part would consist of all lands considered ethnically Belarusian, including those located on the Russian side of the front. This happened under the influence of Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski, who in 1917 was the first to claim unity and independence of Belarus in its ethnic borders¹⁵.

On the Russian side of the front, up till 1917 the only popular program had been more or less close connection with Russia. Even at the Belarusian Assembly in December 1917 in Minsk, full independence of Belarus from Russia was not discussed¹⁶.

Subsequent fast chain of events forced Belarusian politicians to verify their views on the future of Belarus. Among others, the events were: proclamation of independence by Lithuania, Ukraine and Latvia, the October Revolution and consolidation of Russian Bolsheviks who dispersed the Belarusian Assembly in the December of 1917, preventing the Belarusian delegation from participating in conference in Brest, the fear Belarus would be divided into neighbors, and unification of both parts of Belarus after the extension of German occupation in February 1918.

On March 9, the Belarusian People's Republic was proclaimed. On 25 March 1918 the independence of Belarus was proclaimed and all ties

¹² F. Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, Berlin 1915.

¹³ *Relacja ab zjezdzi u Lozannie*, „Номан” nr 52, 11.08.1916, p. 2–3 (part 1); nr 53, 15.08.1916, s. 3 (part 2); А. Луцкевіч, *Злучаныя штаты ад Балтыкі да Чорнага Мора. Рэфэрат беларускае дэлегацыі на Лёзанскай канфэрэнцыі народаў Расеі*, уступнае слово А. Сідарэвіч, „Свабода” 1990, № 2, p. 6–7.

¹⁴ А. Сідарэвіч, *Сувязь Незалежнасці і Непадзельнасці Беларусі*, [w:] *Энцыклапедыя Гісторыі Беларусі*, t. 6, Мінск 2001, p. 439.

¹⁵ Беларускі дзяржаўны архіў – музей літаратуры і мастацтва (Belarusian State Archive – Museum of Literature and Art), ф. 3, оп. 1, сп. 256, p. 29–30.

¹⁶ Езавітаў К., *Першы Усебеларускі Кангрэс*, „Беларуская Мінчушчына” 1993, № 1, p. 25–29; Я. Варонка, *Беларускі рух ад 1917 да 1920 году: Кароткі огляд*, Коўна 1920.

with Russia were severed¹⁷. The decision to announce independence and to sever ties with Russia was supported by the Council of Belarusian Assembly representing mainly Belarusian socialists, and Belarusian Council from Vilno including Anton Luckievič. Voices against came from pro-Russian representatives of municipal and landowner self-government, representatives of the Jewish Bund, and members of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionist Party. Abstained from voting were Jewish socialists and Zionists¹⁸. Thus, although it was agreed to form Belarusian self-government or even the Belarusian People's Republic, the political elite of the time was not ready to sever ties with Russia. In that moment even the Polish Council of Minsk Region was enthusiastic about severance of relations with Russia and supported the Belarusian People's Republic government provided it would cooperate with Poland¹⁹.

However, any measures taken to bring cooperation with Poland were considered as treachery by the majority of Belarusian activists. As an example may serve the attitude of Belarusian politicians, socialist-revolutionaries in particular, to Roman Skirmunt²⁰. He was a talented member of the Duma and a supporter of the Vilno democrat's option, but he was also a rich Catholic landowner with Polish and European affinity. He considered himself a Belarusian but his social origin, faith, pro-Polish attitude and, first of all, his dismissal of the postulate of a radical agricultural reform and total expropriation of landowners caused distrust from most Belarusian socialists. In 1917 he failed to consolidate the Belarusian movement on the Russian side of the front. In spring 1918 he was appointed the Prime Minister but was forced to resign immediately. The cause were accusations of a pro-Polish attitude.

After the withdrawal of the German Army in early 1919, Belarusian lands was occupied from the east by the Red Army and from the west

¹⁷ *Архівы Беларускай Народнай Рэспублікі*, ред. С. Шупа, Вільня–Нью Ёрк–Менск-Прага 1998 (АБНР), т. 1, ч. 1, № 85, р. 62–63: III Устаўная Грамата Рады Беларускай Народнай Рэспублікі.

¹⁸ Нацыянальны Архіў Рэспублікі Беларусь (НАРБ; National Archives of Republic of the Belarus), ф. 325, оп. 1, сп. 21, л. 118–119. Рада БНР, Сэсія II, паседжаньне 3, 24.03.1918.

¹⁹ АБНР, т. 1, ч. 1, № 167, р. 72: Варункі, на якіх Рада Польская Зямлі Менскай хоча ўвайсьці ў склад Рады БНР.

²⁰ See more: А. Смалянчук, *Раман Скірмунт (1868–1939): жыццiнiс грамадзянiна Краю*, Мiнск 2018.

by the Polish Army. The next Prime Minister of the Belarusian People's Republic Anton Luckiewič, slightly influenced by Polish Prime Minister Ignacy Paderevski, a supporter of federation, worked out a project of a federation of the Belarusian People's Republic with Poland²¹. This move, as well as his negotiations with Józef Piłsudski, the main creator of Polish policy in the east, were received very negatively by other members of the Belarusian government. Soon Belarusian socialists-revolutionaries formed competitive structures: a new Belarusian Council and Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski's new government. Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski was not accepted by the Polish administration and had to leave Minsk for Kovno²². The fall of Anton Luckiewič government shattered the chance for the formation of Belarusian state or denied Belarusian minority to play more important role in Poland.

The establishment of the Belarusian People's Republic and the activities of its government on the international stage were not in line with the plans of Soviet Russia. Most Russian Bolsheviks ignored the existence of Belarusians as a separate nation and its state aspirations. Belarusian communists were of a different opinion, who were in favor of creating a Belarusian state as a Soviet republic closely associated with Soviet Russia. Ultimately, such a solution was agreed. The Belarusian Socialist Soviet Republic (proclaimed first time on 1 January 1919) with a small territory was to oppose the concept of the Belarusian national movement – the Belarusian People's Republic and any Polish plans in the East and towards Belarus.

Conclusions

1. Although Belarusian land was previously strongly connected with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Kingdom of Poland, the influence of Russian culture had strengthened since the mid-19th century. Cultural tradition and historical remembrance influenced political attitudes and national programs. Russian culture influenced historical outlook

²¹ D. Michaluk, *Premier Białoruskiej Republiki Ludowej Antoni Luckiewicz wobec polskich i litewskich aspiracji do Wileńszczyzny i Grodzieńszczyzny*, „Europa Orientalia. Studia z dziejów Europy Wschodniej i państw bałtyckich” 2010, t. 2, p. 29–54.

²² А. Цвікевіч: „Ліквідацыя БНР не была манеўрам”, оргас. Э. Ліпецкі, У. Міхнюк, „Маладасць” 1993, № 1, p. 215; the V. Lastoŭski's government in Lithuania was well described in the work: T. Błaszczak, *Białorusini w Republice Litewskiej 1918–1940*, Białystok 2017.

- on life of Orthodox Belarusians of the time and their social consciousness. Polish culture influenced the outlook on life of Catholic inhabitants of Belarus.
2. Orthodox inhabitants of Belarus, who were in majority, could support Belarusian People's Republic provided the connection with democratic Russia remained. Poles and Catholic Belarusians were positive about severing ties with Russia and they did not fear cooperation with Poland. Attitudes towards Poland and Russia were formed by social, national and religious relations in Belarus and by the influence of the "West-Ruthenian" ideology.
 3. National and social conflict was one of the reasons for the reluctance to pro-Polish political orientation and possible political cooperation. Cultural and religious dualism influenced Belarusian circles fighting for independence which were unable to consolidate around one national program and to bind all social strata around it.
 4. It seems the inhabitants of Belarus of the time (no matter which nationality) were not ready for the division by political borders two regions – Lithuania and Belarus. The failure of the idea of independent Belarusian statehood had many internal and external causes. In this part of Europe, chaos caused by the outbreak of WWI did not stop until 1921, when after the Polish-Soviet war of 1920, peace was concluded between Poland and Russia in Riga. The Belarusian lands were not treated as a separate ethnic unite and were divided between Poland and Soviet Russia.

Summary

At the beginning of the 20th century, Belarusians were over 5 million people and lived in the five western governorates of the Russian Empire. Most of them (92%) belonged to the low educated peasant class. Only a very small of Belarusians formed the upper classes. Belarusians belonged mainly to two churches: the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic, but neither of them supported the Belarusian national idea. The lack of an national elite was a consequence of cultural and religious processes from the past. In consequence the upper classes were gradually Polonized and Russified, especially under the influence of the ideology of the Russian state known as "Western Russianism". Under the influence of the past experiences, the Belarusian state idea was formed (references were made to the previous statehoods in Belarus: the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Russia, from the other

side the tradition of the Commonwealth was reject). Before World War I, the Belarusian Socialist Group were formulated a postulate to establish an autonomy of Lithuania and Belarus in the Russian Empire with the National Sejm in Vilno. In the years 1915–1919 the following concepts have been put forward: the restitution of The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, The Baltic-Black Sea Confederation, political autonomy of Belarus, the proclamation of The Republic of Belarus with strong relation with democratic Russia, the proclamation of an independent Belarus, and the declaration of The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Streszczenie

Na początku XX w. Białorusini liczyli ponad 5 mln osób i skupiali się głównie w pięciu zachodnich guberniach Cesarstwa Rosyjskiego. Większość z nich (92%) należała do warstwy chłopskiej, słabo wykształconej. Tylko bardzo niewielki odsetek Białorusinów tworzył warstwy wyższe. Białorusini należeli głównie do dwóch Kościołów: prawosławnego i rzymskokatolickiego, ale żaden z nich nie popierał białoruskiej idei narodowej. Brak elity był następstwem procesów kulturalnych i wyznaniowych, które sięgały daleko w przeszłość, a zadecydowały o tym, że wyższe warstwy uległy stopniowej polonizacji, a następnie rusyfikacji, szczególnie pod wpływem ideologii rosyjskiego państwa, określanej mianem zachodniorusizmu. Pod wpływem doświadczeń przeszłości formowała się białoruska idea państwowa (odwoływano się do poprzednich rodzajów państwowości powstałych na obszarze Białorusi: Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego i Rosji, a ignorujących tradycję Rzeczypospolitej, a przez to i ewentualne związki z Polską). Białoruska Socjalistyczna Gromada przed I wojną światową sformułowała jedynie postulat utworzenia w Cesarstwie Rosyjskim autonomii Litwy i Białorusi z Sejmem Krajowym w Wilnie. W latach 1915–1919 po obu stronach frontu niemiecko-rosyjskiego powstały koncepcje: restytucji Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego, konfederacji bałtycko-czarnomorskiej, autonomii politycznej Białorusi, utworzenia republiki białoruskiej w związku z demokratyczną Rosją, proklamacji niezależnej i niepodległej Białorusi, utworzenia Białoruskiej Republiki Radzieckiej.

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